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Just and Grave Causes: Decline as Religious Change in Catholic Philadelphia

Gambino, Madeline

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JUST AND GRAVE CAUSES:
DECLINE AS RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN CATHOLIC PHILADELPHIA

Madeline Gambino

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the history of Catholic decline and change in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia from the 1970s through the first decade of the twenty-first century. It proposes religious decline as an analytical lens for interrogating not only quantifiable markers of religious change—the number of attendees at Mass, clergy or vowed religious, or sacraments—but also the types of diocesan policies and community responses that Catholics have developed in response to these markers. Employing archival, ethnographic, and digital humanities methods, this study argues that Catholics have actively participated in shaping the institutional presence of the Church in the metropolitan area, with profound implications for the racial and spatial composition of the region's Catholicism. It presents this argument in two parts: first, by examining the history of the Archdiocese's practice of closing parishes as a policy of decline starting in the 1970s; and secondly, through an analysis of the practical, narrative, and affective strategies that Catholics have developed in local sites—what this project terms *repertoires* of decline—to respond to decline and contest archdiocesan authority in the 2010s.

This study demonstrates that demographic changes do not tell the whole story of the institutional history and lived experience of Catholic decline. In Philadelphia, although the decreasing numbers of white, European-descent Catholics play a role in shaping the twenty-first century Church, the racialization of religious decline as Black and urban has deep roots. This dissertation thus calls for scholars of Catholic studies, as well as American religious studies more broadly, to consider decline not as a linear process of secularization. Rather, it proposes decline as a lens for examining institutional systems of support and divestment, as well as practices and narratives that create meaningful interpretations of religious change, challenge, and sustainability.

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Introduction | Making Sense of Religious Decline

Edmund "Ed" Rafferty paused for a moment over the phone. Then, equivocating, he continued, "Well, I had *heard* there was a story where a priest had a sidewalk sale of church items. But I have no idea what [those items] were. But that was a story that, I remember, was mentioned."[1]

I had reached out to Ed several weeks earlier, initially hoping to meet him in person in Springfield, Pennsylvania, directly west of Philadelphia. That was the beginning of March 2020. By the time we had established communication, the tide of the Covid-19 pandemic was rising in the United States, and Ed and I cautiously agreed to a phone conversation instead. We spoke for about an hour about the Ecclesiastical Exchange, an office of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and Ed's work as coordinator of the program.

With this rueful nod to rumor, Ed finished explaining the origin story of the Exchange. Established in 1992 by Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua (1988-2003), the Exchange was the first program of its kind to offer parishes and priests guidelines for the removal and sale of sacred items following the closure and deconsecration of a church—or what, in Roman Catholic canon law, is known as a *relegation*.[2] First, Ed explained, he worked with the parish priest to remove "particularly blessed items, sacred items, anything like that…the most important chalices, the tabernacles, anything like that, the Stations of the Cross." Next, the Exchange cataloged and offered these items for sale to other parishes in Philadelphia, or to any parish nation- or even worldwide. "[Bevilacqua's] idea, as it was related to me from the [Exchange's] first director," Ed

[1] Edmund Rafferty, telephone conversation with author, March 19, 2020.

[2] In Roman Catholic canon law, a *church* is a legally distinct entity from the institutionally-recognized community, or *parish*, that gathers for worship. Canon law abbreviations: c. (canon); cc. (pl.); § (paragraph); §§ (pl.); CIC (*Codex luris Canonici*, Latin title for Code of Canon Law). The 1983 (current) CIC replaced the previous 1917 CIC.

told me, "was that…there was no real control over what was happening with items from a church." As coordinator of the Exchange, Ed worked to handle these objects in a manner the Archdiocese of Philadelphia deemed more appropriate than a priest's sidewalk-sale, whether factual or fictitious. The Exchange's founding mission, "above all, was to place the items in the same respectful settings that they came from and are due."[3]

Two years after my first conversation with Ed, the Exchange offered a robust inventory on its website.[4] Under "Statuary/Stations," the Exchange listed 40 results, ranging from an eleven-inch "Weeping Madonna Bust" ($180) to a 51-inch Saint Charles Borromeo ($6,500). "Church Furniture" included several ambos, and "Metalware" offered numerous candlestick sets, tabernacles, and chalices. According to Ed, the Exchange also worked with a studio of artisans for the preservation of stained-glass windows, as well as a vendor for the removal of large marble pieces. Although the Exchange permitted non-Catholic Christian clergy to purchase some items ("Mostly, a candlestick's a candlestick; a piece of cloth is a piece of cloth," summarized Ed crisply), items of distinctly "Catholic identity," such as tabernacles or chalices, were available only to Catholic clergy, vowed religious, or laypeople with a letter of consent from their parish pastor. As Ed noted, barring curious collectors from purchases kept these sacred items out of "a restaurant or a bar or somebody else's home. And I do believe," he added gently, "it takes a lot of the sting out of it."[5]

Just and Grave Causes: Decline as Religious Change in Catholic Philadelphia takes as its subject the history and experience of this "sting." As Ed well knows, many Catholics across

[3] Rafferty, March 2020.

[4] "Ecclesiastical Exchange," http://archphila.org/archdiocesan-offices/the-ecclesiastical-exchange/, accessed March 2, 2022. In 2022, the Exchange operates under the Office for Property Services of the Archdiocese. Although Ed has worked for the Exchange since 2000, the Archdiocese has outsourced its operational management since the late 2010s, first the Ohio-based Henninger's, Incorporated, and, in 2022, to the St. Jude Liturgical Arts Studio, which operates in Havertown, west of the City of Philadelphia.

[5] Rafferty, March 2020.

the Archdiocese of Philadelphia—and indeed nationwide—have become familiar with the experience of closure in recent years. In the Catholic Church, both a parish (a community of believers) and a church (a physical building) can be closed, in separate processes known respectively as parish closure and church relegation. Between 1950 and 2020, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia closed 130 parishes. Nearly half of this remarkable number of closures—48 percent—took place in the last decade alone, largely during the episcopate of Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. (2012-2020). Under Chaput, the Archdiocese also relegated 33 churches, deconsecrating the buildings to pave the way for their demolition or sale and redevelopment. For the parishioners, clergy, and neighbors impacted by these policies, each closure or relegation has raised financial, social, theological, and often profoundly emotional questions about memory, heritage, and loyalty, as well as urban, religious, and ethnic belonging.

Table A: United States Total and Catholic Population, 1970-2020

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Catholic Population	54.1 million	56.4 million	61.4 million	71.7 million	78.3 million	72.4 million
Total Resident Population (a)	203,211,926	226,545,805	248,709,873	281,421,906	308,745,538	331,449,281
Catholic Percentage of Total Resident Population (b)	26.6%	24.9%	24.7%	25.5%	25.4%	21.8%

(a) Total "Resident Population," U.S. Census
(b) Self-identified, survey-based estimate of Catholic population

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Population Change Data (1910-2020)," April 26, 2021, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html; Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," Georgetown University, https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/, accessed April 11, 2022.

Nationwide, Catholicism remains the single largest religion in the United States. The percentage of the country's population that identifies as Catholic has stayed relatively consistent

in the past fifty years, particularly in comparison to some mainline Protestant denominations.[6] Between 1970 and 2010, the Catholic population claimed roughly a quarter of the total resident population, only falling to approximately 21.8 percent in 2020 (Table A).

As the closures in Philadelphia indicate, however, these statistics obscure more complex patterns of Catholic growth and decline. Popular, news, and academic sources alike have recognized that the growth in the Latinx population—40 percent of the American Catholic population by 2020—has been the reason for the consistent growth of the total Catholic population.[7] In other areas, the Church has shown sharper patterns of decline. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University reports that the number of parishes in the United States has fallen from 18,224 in 1970 to 16,703 in 2020, and that the number of parishes without a resident priest pastor rose from 571 to 3,544 in the same period.[8] Decreasing Church membership and adherence, the aging of laypeople and clergy, diminishing numbers of clergy and vowed religious, and diocesan and parish financial precarity have all plagued dioceses across the country. The growth of the so-called "Nones" has also affected the American Church, as former Catholics comprise a large share of those disaffiliating from religious institutions. As religion scholar Julie Byrne has quipped, "If ex-Catholic was a religion, it'd be the third-largest in the United States."[9] The large numbers of disaffiliating Catholics are commonly attributed to several factors, including the shortage of priests, the polarization of

[6] Pew, "America's Changing Religious Landscape."

[7] Timothy Matovína, "Becoming Latino: The Transformation of U.S. Catholicism," in *The Future of Catholicism in America*, edited by Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019): 74-107; Pew, "America's Changing Religious Landscape;" David Crary, "US Hispanic Catholics are future, but priest numbers dismal," *Associated Press,* March 14, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/az-state-wire-phoenix-tx-state-wire-race-and-ethnicity-in-state-wire-0cd91a02ad1bfe947d77c3e1a2c313a8.

[8] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," Georgetown University, accessed April 14, 2022, https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/.

[9] Jess Rohan, "If ex-Catholic was a religion…'; Why independent catholic churches are flourishing," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* April 22, 2019.

laypeople and clergy over issues such as abortion or birth control, and the clergy sexual abuses crises. Together, these concerns have made references to the "crisis" of the American Catholic Church commonplace.[10]

The Church in northeastern and midwestern urban centers like Philadelphia, Boston, or Chicago has grappled with the complexities of this religious change since the late twentieth century. In 2014, Pew Research Center reported that while "Catholics are fairly evenly dispersed throughout the country," the so-called Hispanicization of the Church "is gradually shifting the geographic center of U.S. Catholicism from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and the West."[11] Even as these northeastern and midwestern dioceses experienced growth or stability in some suburban areas, they announced the mass closures of urban parishes, starting in the late 1980s and bursting into the national awareness in the 1990s and early 2000s. The standard explanatory narrative for these closures has traced the problem to the postwar decades, long before the disaffiliation of Millennials and the widespread awareness of clergy sexual abuse in the early twenty-first century. Decline began, this narrative contends, with the suburbanization and Americanization of the children and grandchildren of earlier generations of European immigrants. As these Catholics pursued the tri-faith American Dream, they left behind their former ethnic enclaves in deindustrializing cities in favor of White suburbia. These emptying

[10] Thu T. Do and Mary L. Gautier, *The Class of 2019: The Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, March 2019), https://www.usccb.org/resources/Ordination%20Class%20of%202019-FINAL_0.pdf; Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow," May 12, 2015; David Carlin, *Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (Nashua, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2013); Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

[11] David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, "7 facts about American Catholics," last modified October 10, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/10/7-facts-about-american-catholics/.

parishes, usually burdened with oversized properties, were those the dioceses closed shortly thereafter.[12]

Alongside the Church's Hispanicization in the twenty-first century, the narrative of White Catholic suburbanization undergirds a central assumption about Catholic decline, namely that it is a story of *White* Catholic decline. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Church officials and Catholic laypeople in the Philadelphia metropolitan area have indeed leveraged this narrative to understand many of the region's parish closures. The same explanation has also served as a dominant framework for scholars of American Catholicism. In 1998, sociologists Jeffrey C. Bridger and David R. Maines, for example, described the 1988 parish closures in Detroit as a challenge facing "a typical rust-belt city characterized by years of economic decline and white out-migration to the suburbs. Many traditionally Catholic neighborhoods," they continued, "that were once populated primarily by ethnic whites were now severely depressed and composed of a mix of racial and ethnic groups—many of whom were not Catholic."[13] More recently, John C. Seitz framed the Boston closures similarly, writing, "[M]any Catholics left the city of Boston for commuter communities in the second half of the twentieth century. Some of these neighborhoods became homes for new, predominantly non-Catholic communities. Naturally, Catholic parishes in these new communities often suffered during this transition."[14] These remarks framed the

[12] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew. An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1955). On the construction of "White" and "ethnic White" identities in the United States: Stefano Luconi, *From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (Summer 2001), 29-58; James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants' in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 3-33.

[13] Jeffrey C. Bridger and David R. Maines, "Narrative Structures and the Catholic Church Closings in Detroit," *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 3 (1998): 327.

[14] John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdown* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.

decline of urban parishes as "typical" and "natural," the inevitable—if perhaps lamentable—results of late twentieth century urban changes.

Robert A. Orsi has examined the roots of this narrative, noting that it situates the arrival of Latinx and especially Black communities as the fulcrum upon which urban parish change teetered. Studying the nostalgia with which Italian American Catholics narrated these changes, he wrote, "[T]he great lament of many in the old neighborhoods—that 'they' took 'our' cities away—obscures the more complex reality that many things led to the passing of the old neighborhoods in the 1960s, including decisions made by the children and grandchildren of immigrants and disastrous schemes hatched by politicians they had elected and trusted."[15] Orsi's observation, published in 1999, suggests that the narrative of suburbanization-driven parish closures has a history profoundly laden with twentieth-century racial politics.[16] With his focus on the construction of Italian American identity, however, he did not interrogate the long-term impact of these Catholic narratives and political choices on local patterns of religious and urban change, including on the communities of color blamed for parish decline. Nor does he locate the institutional Church as a participant in this process. Instead, the explanation of demographic change became embedded in the history and historiography of Catholic religious change.

Just and Grave Causes presents the Catholic Church in Philadelphia as an opportunity to demonstrate what the study of decline reveals about the history of parish closures. I propose religious decline as a lens for understanding not only certain quantifiable markers of Catholic

[15] Robert A. Orsi, "Introduction: Crossing the City Line," in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 33.

[16] On Catholicism, race, and desegregation, see: Matthew J. Cressler, "'Real Good and Sincere Catholics': White Catholicism and Massive Resistance to Desegregation in Chicago, 1965-1968, *Religion and American Culture* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 273-306; Andrew S. Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien: Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); and Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).

change in the region from the 1970s through the 2010s —numbers of Mass-goers in suburban or urban pews, clergy or vowed religious, or sacraments performed—but also the types of diocesan policies, parochial and community strategies, and narrative and affective frameworks that Catholics have leveraged to *actively* interpret these changes. These lived and institutional responses to decline have, moreover, *influenced* patterns of religious change, kneading and molding systems of support such that decline and growth have become more likely in particular places and among particular communities over the past half-century. The history of these policies and responses reveals that suburbanization and deindustrialization alone do not account for the changes Philadelphia's Catholic Church began to undergo in the late twentieth century. A more complicated story of Catholic religious change emerges.

In the chapters that follow, I examine the racialization of Catholic decline in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Decline was not always interpreted as a problem confronting White Catholics. Philadelphia's racial record has long been dominated by its Black and White populations, contested as these identities have been throughout the city's history. Antebellum Philadelphia claimed the largest free Black population in the North, and by 1920, the percentage of the city that was Black was the third largest in the country.[17] A century later, the 2020 Census found that 41.4 percent of Philadelphia was Black, slightly larger than the White population, figuring at 39.3 percent.[18] In comparison, in the latter half of the twentieth century, Philadelphia's foreign-born population was smaller than American cities of comparable size.

[17] Theodore Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia: A Study of Ex-Slaves, Freeborn, and Socioeconomic Decline," *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1971-1972), 183-209; Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867-1933* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 115.

[18] U.S. Census Bureau, "Philadelphia County, PA: Race," 2020, https://data.census.gov/, accessed March 30, 2022.

"Unlike other major cities in the country," write Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim in a study of immigrants in Philadelphia, "Philadelphia largely remained Black and White."[19]

The racialization of the region's Catholic decline has reflected this racial history. As this project shows, lay Catholics and politicians were not alone in framing urban parish closures as the result of the movement of Black communities into previously Irish, German, Italian, or Polish neighborhoods. The Archdiocese, under successive generations of archbishops, also played an active role. In the late twentieth century, the Archdiocese's policies for confronting early signs of stress identified religious decline as an offshoot of so-called "urban decline," a racialized category that depicted Black urban neighborhoods as dangerous sites for institutional investment. These early archdiocesan interpretations of Catholic decline scapegoated Black urban communities for the demographic and economic challenges facing the region's Church. This interpretation, however, was always contested. Black Catholics, both lay and clergy, joined White clergy and women religious in challenging this framework of decline, keenly protesting the oversimplification of the many forces that divested in urban neighborhoods of color in the postwar decades—including the Archdiocese's own policies of parish and school closures. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, how the Archdiocese and local Catholics have responded to decline has continued to have racialized implications for the composition and presence of the Church in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Consequently, Black Catholicism has also played a key role in the story of Philadelphia's Catholic decline, and it therefore holds a central place in this project.

[19] Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim, "Philadelphia's Immigrant Communities in Historical Perspective," in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, ed. Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 1.

Just and Grave Causes rewrites the narrative of Catholic decline in Philadelphia as the natural result of the postwar suburbanization and Americanization of White Catholics or the arrival of new, non-Catholic communities of color. The decisions of archbishops, archdiocesan officials, clergy, vowed religious, and lay parishioners have been influencing the composition and presence of the region's Catholicism for the past fifty years. Put simply, the trends charted in this project show that, despite opportunities to approach decline differently, the Church's policies have oriented it to favor a White, suburban demographic. Such a future would have a profound effect on the ideological orientation—both politically and theologically—of the Philadelphian Church in the twenty-first century.

Policies and Repertoires of Religious Decline

Unlike *growing* or *emergent* religion, religion in decline has escaped much sustained scholarly attention. Religious studies, along with sociology and political science, has been attentive, for example, to the emergence of the Nones as a demographic. But attention to the rise of the Nones, including quantitative studies on religious disaffiliation, often leaves underexamined what gets "left behind"—the people and institutions negotiating the effects of this decline on their religious communities, practices, and identities.[20] The dramatic heft of statistics can obscure what these changes look or feel like in specific communities. What decline signals practically, theologically, and socially, remains ripe for exploration and analysis.

[20] The 2012 Pew report, "'Nones' on the rise" prompted scholarly attention to disaffiliation, largely from sociologists like Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, who have considered the demographics of the "nones." Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "Explaining Why more Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012," *Sociological science* 1 (October 2014): 423-447; Michael Hout, "Religious Ambivalence, Liminality, and the Increase of no Religious Preference in the United States, 2006-2016," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56. no. 1 (2017): 52-63.

Just and Grave Causes offers such an analysis of religious decline. It first and foremost encourages scholars in the field of religious studies to take up decline not as a model trending inevitably towards extinction, but rather as a form of dynamic religious change. Religious practitioners already view decline in this way. They engage the challenges of decline, broadly defined, with strategies and practices intended to make meaning, community, and order out of difference, crisis, and uncertainty: in short, many of the central concerns of the field of religious studies. As my interlocutors in Philadelphia have frankly admitted, decline can be a source of deep social and theological anxiety. But many have simultaneously framed it as a possibility for religious innovation. One interviewee, a Sister of Mercy, described the difficulty of watching another local order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, sell its motherhouse in Bensalem, Bucks County, in 2017: "You know, we use this word 'transformation' so lightly," she told me, "But it is dying. There is a resurrection, there is a new life, but it's a dying."[21] With decline, some forms of community die while new forms emerge or adapt. Decline, like other forms of religious change, creates possibilities for religious innovation in new forms of community, practice, and institutional structure. Rarely does decline signal a total erasure of what existed before.

In the history of Catholic Philadelphia, the study of religious decline takes place at the intersection of institutional *and* lived religion, two "subjects," writes scholar Kathleen Sprows Cummings, "not often well integrated in scholarship on American religion." As Cummings explains in her study on the canonization of American Catholic saints, the advancement of lived religion as a lens has inspired a wealth of studies on the everyday religious practices and lives of practitioners. At the same time, "many scholars of popular or lived religion overcorrected and ignored church structures in a way that also distorts the experience of the U.S. Catholic faithful,

[21] R.S.M., interview with author, Philadelphia, May 17, 2019. This source asked not to be named.

who engaged with those structures repeatedly and in a variety of ways."[22] The study of religious decline, particularly for the American Catholic Church, necessitates integration of institutional and lived religion lenses. The issue of decline is, after all, one that animates strategies and conversations at multiple levels of the Church, from the business of the Vatican to that of local diocesan officials, from the focus of Catholic media and business elites to the everyday mechanisms of neighborhood parishes. In practice, Catholic decline is understood, navigated, and narrated in the give and take *between* these sites, not in isolation. Moreover, as my interviews with clergy, men and women religious, and Archdiocesan officials indicate, religious decline is not religion *lived* only by lay parishioners. Officials who work for the Archdiocese are also parishioners at local churches, clergy and vowed religious may express ambivalence towards archdiocesan policies, and the disputes covered in local news often involve non-Catholics as well as Catholics. The study of religious decline by necessity challenges an overemphasis on the difference between lived and institutional religion.

Balancing the lenses of lived and institutional religion, my analysis examines the intersection of the three frames: the quantifiable, concrete changes, such as decreases in Church membership, that we may call *markers of decline*; the *policies of decline* the Archdiocese implements to manage these changes at an institutional, regional level; and the narrative, affective, and practical strategies—what I call *repertoires of decline*—that lay Catholics and others develop to respond to decline in specific, local sites.

The first component, markers of decline, constitutes the backdrop of *Just and Grave Causes*. The Catholic Church has historically had a strong presence in Philadelphia and the four surrounding counties that comprise the Archdiocese, with a robust network of territorial and

[22] Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own: How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2019), 4-5.

ethnic parishes and the pride of the American Catholic school system. Like other urban dioceses in the Northeast and Midwest, however, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has struggled with several challenges since the mid- to late twentieth century: declining rates of Mass attendance, financial precarity at parish and diocesan levels, and low youth and young adult engagement. As this study will show, these markers of decline are attributed variously to the pressures of costly aging properties, demographic changes in the neighborhoods that once housed ethnic enclaves of European Catholic immigrants, flagging financial and leadership resources, and two Grand Jury reports on clergy sexual abuses crises.

The Archdiocese's policies of decline constitute the second component of this three-part equation. As Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will show, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has implemented various policies to mitigate institutional decline. While these chapters focus primarily on parish closures, school closures, and church relegations, other policies of decline examined in this project include the Archdiocese's decisions to provide or deny financial support to struggling parishes, to outsource Catholic education in urban neighborhoods of color to private entities, and to establish an institutional position opposing the historic designation of Church properties. In providing or withdrawing institutional support to particular Catholic communities, these policies have had profound consequences for the spatial presence and demographic composition of the local Church. This study emphasizes, moreover, that the Archdiocese has leveraged these policies in ways that actively managed and interpreted the challenges it faced. Policies of decline have not simply been a *reaction* to decline in a passive sense. The Archdiocese has justified and announced its policies through discursive frameworks that have, variously, cast decline as racialized, aged, gendered, and urban.

If archdiocesan policies engage decline at an institutional and often regional level, the third component of this study focuses on consequences and responses at the local level. Thanks to the work of lived religion scholars like Robert A. Orsi, Jennifer Scheper Hughes, and Kristy Nabhan-Warren, it is by now a truism in Catholic studies that Catholicism transcends the work, boundaries, and positions of the institutional Church hierarchy.[23] The *placed* study of Catholicism in local sites like parishes has revealed the important religion-making work of lay practitioners. Repertoires of decline leverages a similar claim. As the following chapters illustrate, Catholics *and* non-Catholics, longtime neighborhood locals *and* newcomers, Church *and* civic officials have all wrestled with how to interpret the changing nature of Philadelphia's Catholicism in their own backyards. I contend that they have developed practical, narrative, and affective strategies to do this work. Practical strategies have included financial and organizational plans like fundraising and restructuring, as well as organized protests consisting of marches, picketing, and letter-writing campaigns. Narrative strategies have often forwarded certain interpretations of a community's historical past and meaning. Lastly, expressions of anger, nostalgia, grief, optimism, and sometimes ambivalent loyalty to the Church have accompanied these practical and narrative strategies, weighing them with affective meaning.

When these practical, narrative, and affective strategies have coalesced into common approaches for engaging decline, they formed repertoires upon which Catholics throughout the region have drawn to make sense of the changes taking place in their communities. For example, Chapter 4 introduces legacies of the sacred, a repertoire of strategies contesting archdiocesan

[23] Jennifer Scheper Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1986)

authority to define the sacred. In response to the relegation, or deconsecration, of former Catholic churches, Catholic and non-Catholic Philadelphians alike appealed to legacies of the sacred to claim ownership over the buildings. Some sought traction in civic arenas of historic preservation, while others focused on Church theology and history. Despite their varying approaches, what these actors shared was an effort to craft narratives in which generations of family and neighborhood commitment imbued their properties with a sacredness that transcended archdiocesan control.

Repertoires have no rigid boundaries: they are variable, layered, multivalent. The precise combination of strategies may be unique to the community or individual leveraging it. But they are necessarily social and interrelated. Repertoires develop as communities bounce successes and failures, innovations and variations off one another in overlapping spaces. They are organic, living constellations of archdiocesan policies and narratives, parish responses and plans, media coverage, and national and international Catholic events and trends. Throughout the past fifty years, certain combinations of strategies have merged into dominant repertoires, becoming increasingly accessible as ways to understand and respond to decline. These repertoires have shaped how Philadelphia's Catholics have managed religious and urban belonging, identity, and space. The successes and failures of these repertoires thus reflect the changing class, religious, and racial and ethnic identities of both the Church and the metropolitan area.

While this project focuses on the Philadelphia region, its local repertoires of decline must also be understood in broader contexts. The policies of other American dioceses, the international scandals of the clergy sexual abuse, and papal mandates have all influenced how certain policies, narratives, and other strategies became efficacious in Philadelphia. Consequently, while I distinguish the "Church" (the international Roman Catholic Church under

the pope) from the "Archdiocese" (the institutional, hierarchical organization headed by generations of archbishops) from the "parish" or Catholic "community" at a microlevel, this shorthand suggests harder boundaries between institutional and lived religion than tend to exist in practice, as noted earlier.[24] For this project's historical actors and contemporary interlocutors, the slippages and boundaries between these levels of Catholic belonging are often fluid.

I draw here upon Kevin Lewis O'Neill's invitation to consider *affective spaces* instead of *broken spaces* as a methodological starting point for religious studies. While broken space assumes emplaced disconnection and differentiation (local versus global, sacred versus profane, Eastern versus Western), O'Neill's concept of affective spaces invites critical attention to "moments when affect serves as the medium through which spatial divisions and interconnections become legible."[25] Affective spaces charge the body with the interconnected and felt differences between *us* and *them*, *here* and *there*, and, I would add, *now* and *then*. Repertoires of decline produce this type of interconnectedness between past, present, and future; parish, Archdiocese, and Church; and even Catholic and non-Catholic identity, triggering nostalgia, fear, or optimism. It is because of this collapsing and coalescing of affective spaces that appeals to memory, heritage, legacy, and time in repertoires of decline are so potent.

[24] A note on terminology: In this project, I frequently use "the Archdiocese" to refer to the source of archdiocesan policies. In cases where a particular individual is responsible for the authorship of a policy—frequently an archbishop, but occasionally another official—I use this person's name and/or position. That said, archdiocesan policies of decline develop through the interaction of various offices and officials, often over the course of multiple episcopates. For this reason, I use "the Archdiocese" to indicate the complexity of "policies of decline," which include concrete strategies, as well as implicit and explicit discursive frames.

[25] Kevin Lewis O'Neill, "Beyond Broken: Affective Spaces and the Study of American Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (December 2013): 1103.

"Golden Age" to Restructuring: The Catholic Parish

The parish has long functioned as a central category of analysis in Catholic studies. In a now familiar periodization, scholars have defined American Catholicism between the 1840s and the 1920s as the period of the "immigrant church," as Catholic immigrants from southern and eastern Europe followed earlier waves of Irish immigrants into the United States. This period ushered in the proliferation of "national" or "ethnic" parishes, which organized Catholic belonging by language and heritage, alongside territorial parishes founded on geographic boundaries. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) also decreed that every parish with the means to do so should have its own parochial school, giving impetus to the Catholic school system and the growth of a Catholic subculture grounded in these institutions. Catholics in Philadelphia, like other metropolitan dioceses, undertook the construction of hospitals and orphanages, parochial schools and universities, and parish after parish, shaping the region.[26] This so-called "brick-and-mortar Catholicism" was not only physical and material, but also spiritual, cultural, and social. As Ann Taves has argued, the "obsession with building" that occupied late nineteenth century American Catholics, "viewed from a devotional angle, reflected the immigrant Catholics' desire to create a distinctly Catholic space."[27] The local heart of this subculture beat in the physical, social, and spiritual spaces of the parish, such as churches and schools, convents and rectories, societies and socials, feast days and festivals.

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[26] Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006); Paul M. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994); James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996).

[27] Taves, *Household of Faith*, 124-125.

In the second half of the twentieth century, parish life changed in the United States. Scholars of American Catholicism have considered how interracial encounters, White flight, and deindustrialization increasingly shaped urban parish life in the late twentieth century.[28] Others have examined how the opportunities and limitations of the Second Vatican Council challenged earlier models of Catholic parish organization.[29] Fewer studies, however, have tackled the long history of parish closure in more recent decades. Aside from several small-scale projects, John C. Seitz's *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns* offers the most thorough consideration of diocesan policies of decline, focusing on the 2004 announcement of Catholic parish closures in Boston.[30] Seitz's study, however, focuses on the minority of Catholics who protested closures with the radical action of occupying their churches. Most Catholics experiencing decline, therefore, fall beyond the scope of his analysis.

The impact of the 2002 *Boston Globe* coverage of clergy sexual abuse, a subject in Chapter 3, is also worth noting here. Several scholars, including Tricia Colleen Bruce, Brian J. Clites, and Robert A. Orsi, have examined the personal, theological, and social dimensions of the crisis among Catholics and former Catholics.[31] The relationship between parish health and the

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[28] Matthew Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Karen J. Johnson, *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[29] Catherine R. Osborne, *American Catholics and the Church of Tomorrow: Building Churches for the Future, 1925-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2018); Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[30] Bridger and Maines, "Narrative Structures"; Thomas Rzeznik, "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 73-90; Seitz, *No Closure*.

[31] Tricia Colleen Bruce, *Faithful Revolution: How Voice of the Faithful Is Changing the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brian Clites, "Our Accountability to Survivors," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no.2 (Summer 2019): 4-7; Robert Orsi, "What is Catholic about the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis?" in *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader*, edited by Kristin Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 282-292.

crisis, however, has been less studied. In Philadelphia, the focus of two Grand Jury reports in 2005 and 2011, many Catholics have interpreted the ongoing coverage, the legal suits, and efforts for litigation reform as exacerbating the problems already facing dioceses and parishes. Matthew Gambino, the well-known editor of *CatholicPhilly.com*, articulated this relationship during a 2020 Lenten series at Christ the King Parish in Morrell Park, a neighborhood near the Northeast Philadelphia Airport.[32] After a twenty-minute Mass in the church basement, Gambino addressed "some areas of church life today in 2020." He considered the sexual abuse crisis a major factor in the "big dip" in Mass attendance. Referencing the 2005 and 2011 Philadelphia Grand Jury reports on clergy sexual abuse, he noted that with "each of these episodes, Mass attendance drops." The crisis, he argued, was driving Catholics from the Church. As of March 2020, the Archdiocese paid $39 million to sexual abuse survivors through its Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program, with 216 additional offers awaiting acceptance and over 400 cases not yet investigated. As Gambino mused aloud, "Where does this money come from? I don't know."[33]

Still, Gambino's address was not fatalistic. Although he admitted "there's no going back" to the parishes of his youth, he invited the congregants of Christ the King to envision with him a "parish of the future." Such a parish would need imagination, flexibility, and courage to recognize that structures and systems that once worked might require significant changes for sustainability. Gambino argued that the decreased numbers of clergy and men and women

[32] Matthew Gambino has no relation to the author.

[33] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, March 11, 2020. In "Half of Catholics attending Mass 28 years ago no longer do, figures show," from September 5, 2019, Gambino argued the same on *CatholicPhilly.com*: "With each revelation of clergy sexual abuse, either locally, in Pennsylvania, nationally or globally, the trauma among the body of Christ manifested in a drop in parish Mass attendance in the Philadelphia Archdiocese."

religious required that laypeople "start taking more responsibility." "We have to value Christ more than the ecclesiastical structures," he announced, "We are going to be forced to change."[34]

Many Catholic parishes *have* indeed changed, and many will continue to do so. As Michael Weldon, O.F.M., remarked in his study of closures, "the skylines of our cities are marked with the spires of an age of Catholic church life now gone, shattered by history and social movements beyond all of our control."[35] If so, I argue that greater consideration must be given to parish closure as a crucial component of contemporary lived Catholicism. While *Just and Grave Causes* considers religious decline in other sites as well, the parish has long been a central feature of both Catholic life and Catholic scholarship. The visibility of parish closures as both a marker and a policy of decline—not only in Philadelphia, but nationwide—makes it a central feature of this project, too.

Outline, Scope, and Methods

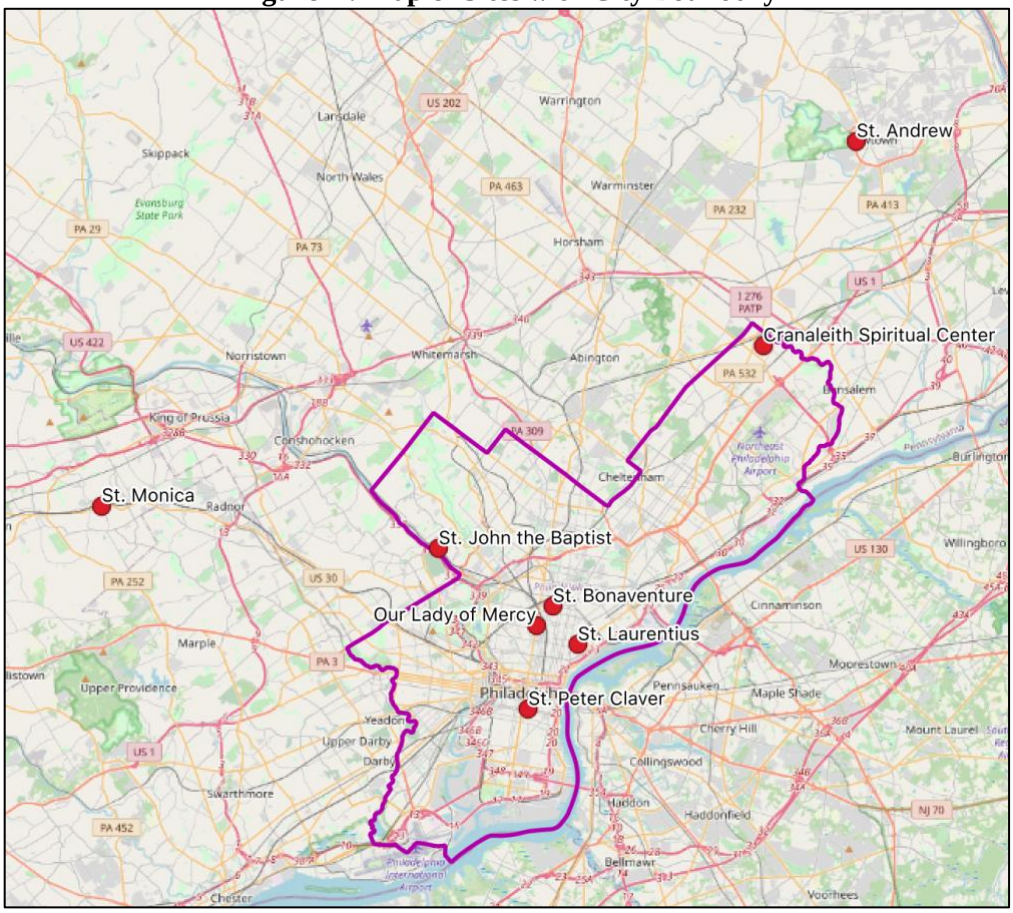
Just and Grave Causes traces the roots of Catholic decline in Philadelphia—its markers, policies, and repertoires—from the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first. In pursuit of a study employing both institutional and lived religion lenses in historical and contemporary contexts, I have used a multi-method approach including archival historical research, ethnographic participant observation, interviews with parish and archdiocesan leaders, and digital humanities methods. Community and archdiocesan archival materials, as well as news media and statistical data depicting Catholic change and decline, constitute the historical sources. The participant observation in Catholic communities and interviews with laypeople, clergy,

[34] Fieldnotes, March 2020.

[35] Michael Weldon, O.F.M., *A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), xviii.

women religious, and archdiocesan officials give voice to the contested and layered narratives and practices that comprise repertoires of decline.[36] Lastly, given the deeply *placed* nature of this project, I have created and included Geographic Information System (GIS) maps to demonstrate the effects of archdiocesan policies of decline on the region.[37]

Figure A: Map of Sites with City Boundary



City of Philadelphia boundary in purple.
Source: Map by author.

[36] Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Catholic sites—Masses, Bible studies, and other events—were cancelled or took place online after March 2020. The fieldwork in this study took place largely between January 2019 and March 2020. The interviews after this date took place on Zoom or over the telephone. These details are included in footnotes.

[37] All maps in this dissertation were created by the author on QGIS. Parish data for all maps, including founding and suppression/closure dates, ethnicity of national parishes, and addresses of churches and/or rectories, was compiled by the author through the Parish Directory (https://archphila.org/parish/) on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's website. Using the church addresses listed on the Directory, I determined the latitude and longitude for each parish on Google Maps to create geographic points for QGIS to read and map.

Part One, "The Making and Unmaking of Catholic Philadelphia: Archdiocesan Policies of Decline," shares the histories of St. Laurentius, St. John the Baptist, and St. Peter Claver to tell the story of archdiocesan policies of decline from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries. Because the very nature of *decline* orients us in part to the past, Chapter 1, "'Ever Anxious to Improve': Making Catholic Philadelphia in the 1880s and 1890s," examines the institutional growth of Catholic Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century. This chapter introduces St. John the Baptist (c. 1831), one of five parishes that the Church would establish in one square mile in its neighborhood; St. Laurentius (c. 1882), Philadelphia's first Polish parish; and St. Peter Claver (c. 1886), the first parish for "colored Catholics" in the Archdiocese. In addition to mapping the institutional growth of the Church, this chapter first situates St. Peter Claver, as much as the Irish St. John the Baptist or Polish St. Laurentius, as a bellwether of archdiocesan policy regarding urban change and Catholic belonging. Rather than exceptional or anomalous, the Black Catholic parish participated in many of the conversations regarding the meaning of parishes, much as it would in later eras. Centering this history reveals the importance of debates about Catholic universalism, racial equality, and ethnic difference in the institutional development of the nineteenth century Church. In attending to these racial and theological considerations about institutional and parochial belonging, this chapter maps how Catholic Philadelphia developed its physical footprint in the urban space of the city.

The second chapter, "'Justify the Expense': Race, Urban Space, and Parish Closures, 1970s-1990s," investigates an early era of parish closures to analyze the relationship between religious decline and race. In the late twentieth century, the Archdiocese first began to close urban parishes and schools as a method of combating declining parish and diocesan resources across the region. GIS maps of closed parishes and schools, when overlaid with demographic

data from the U.S. Census, illustrate the racialized nature and consequences of this policy of decline. Closures disproportionately impacted urban, largely Black neighborhoods, a finding that complicates a narrative of Catholic decline as a White ethnic story. Although urban Black parishes and schools were the primary targets for closure from the 1970s through the 1990s, the Archdiocese maintained that this policy was not about race. The findings of this chapter challenge this insistence. Focusing on the closure of St. Peter Claver parish in 1985, as well as of other Black Catholic parishes and schools in this era, I argue that this policy of decline is better understood as a mechanism by which the Archdiocese replicated the deindustrializing policies that divested in Philadelphia's Black urban neighborhoods. Far from a race-neutral policy, the Archdiocese used closures to synonymize religious decline with contemporary, racialized discourses about urban decline.

Chapter 3, "Just Cause: Clergy Sexual Abuse, Parochial Restructuring, and the Church in 'Crisis,' 2000s-2010s," examines the maturation of the archdiocesan policy of parish and school closures, or "restructuring" initiatives, after the protests of parishioners, clergy, and vowed religious in the late twentieth century. It does so in relation to the 2005 and 2011 Grand Jury reports investigating clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese. While the abuse crisis is frequently framed as *the* defining issue for the twenty-first century Church, this chapter contends that the Archdiocese interpreted the Grand Jury reports as a threat to the future of parishes. As parish and school closures gained increasing favor as policies of decline under Cardinal Justin Rigali (2003-2011) and especially Archbishop Charles Chaput (2011-2020), the "twinned" crises of the abuse and closures decoupled the earlier framework of religious decline as predominantly an urban Black problem. The Archdiocese's new policies "universalized" closure and decline, making it a growing cause of anxiety for White urban and suburban parishes, too. Together, Chapters 2 and 3

demonstrate the racialization of decline, first as a problem for urban (read: Black) neighborhoods and, later, as a "universal" (read: White) problem.

Chapter 4, "Grave Cause: Church Relegations and Legacies of the Sacred," bridges Parts One and Two. While both parts include considerations of institutional policies of decline and broader repertoires of decline, Part One leans more heavily upon the former. Part Two, "'A State of Good Preservation': Repertoires of Decline," introduces three repertoires to feature the lived experience of decline in contemporary, local sites. Chapter 4 considers how parishioners, neighbors, and civic and Church officials grappled with the policy of relegation, or the deconsecration of former Catholic churches, during Archbishop Chaput's episcopate. An increasingly common policy of decline across the country, relegation allows for the sale of the church building or property, often to developers, for a profit. This process raises questions about ownership of the Catholic built environment and about what makes a space sacred. This chapter introduces the repertoire of legacies of the sacred, a multivalent repertoire offering affective, narrative, and material claims to historic church buildings. Philadelphians have drawn upon legacies of the sacred to express ownership over relegated churches, describing an obligation of care pressed upon them by previous generations of familial and community commitment to the building. This sense of obligation imbues the building with a sacredness that transcends the parameters of Catholic sacred space as defined in canon law, empowering locals to contest archdiocesan authority over these spaces.

The fifth chapter shifts away from archdiocesan policies of decline. "'Where Your Spirit Can Grow': Older Age in and Beyond Discourses of Catholic Decline" focuses on the invocation of older age and aging in discourses of decline. The aging of communities is frequently framed as a marker of decline, as Catholic communities, including parishes and orders of men and

women religious, lament the absence of young people and families. Older age often serves as a marker of religious decline. This shorthand is problematic, in that equates aging *as* decline, often collapsing religious decline, older age, and death. This framing of decline privileges the religious activity of the young, while obscuring and minimizing the lived religion of older adults. In pursuit of a more nuanced perspective, this chapter examines uses of older age in two discursive frameworks making sense of decline, before turning to ethnographic fieldwork at a retreat center to engaging age as a meaningful category of analysis, like religion, race, and gender. Unlike the chapters bookending it, "'Where Your Spirit Can Grow'" does not examine different manifestations of *one* repertoire. Instead, it examines older age across several repertoires of decline, before seeking an analytical framework for it beyond decline.

The final chapter, "Waking the 'Sleeping Giant': Catholic Devotional Media and the Repertoire of Revitalization," considers local and national repertoires oriented toward Catholic renewal. It highlights one renewal repertoire I call the repertoire of revitalization. In the past decade, Catholic laypeople—mostly businessmen—have founded numerous media companies aiming to combat religious decline through parish revitalization. A massive production of Catholic materials has shifted the media landscape for devotional and parish materials, including Bible studies, small group programs, phone apps, email subscriptions, and YouTube and podcast channels. This chapter examines how the materials of several companies reorient the conversation about religious decline to imagine a revitalized Church that appeals to the personal, social, and theological hungers of twenty-first century Catholic parishioners. These products reflect the New Evangelization, a papal-initiated movement targeting "disengaged" Catholics as a site for Church growth. In this chapter, I situate the uptake of the New Evangelization of

Catholic parishioners as an approach to parish revitalization, before concluding with a brief comparison of two additional renewal repertoires.

Epilogue

On the morning of May 22, 1991, a crowd of 150 people gathered beneath plumes of black smoke to watch a fire consume St. Monica's Church in Berwyn, Chester County.[38] Despite the best efforts of four fire crews, the flames destroyed the 102-year-old church, leaving salvageable only the altar, the bell, and, perhaps miraculously, the stained-glass window of St. Monica. Fire Chief Frank Pitts later blamed roofers for causing the accidental fire, determining that they had ignited the church's wooden roof with a portable propane torch.[39] As a parish retrospective grimly summarized, "A torch, a momentary distraction by a worker repairing the roof tile and 'poof[,]' ninety-plus years of accumulated dust explodes in the church rafters."[40]

St. Monica's pastor, the Rev. George G. Hagenbach, undertook the parish's rebuilding efforts. His first act: purchasing an old set of stained-glass windows and other furnishings from Corpus Christi, a former Catholic church in North Philadelphia. Corpus Christi (c. 1912) had closed in 1983.[41] Like most of North Philadelphia, Corpus Christi's neighborhood, known as Swampoodle, had once been predominantly Irish, then Irish and Italian, and then Black in the postwar years. In the early to mid 1980s, the Archdiocese identified Corpus Christi, along with several other neighboring Black parishes, as an ideal site to institute parish closures, which was, at the time, a relatively new policy of decline. After the parish's closure, Corpus Christi's church

[38] Susan Feather, "Fire Destroys St. Monica's Church in Berwyn," *The Suburban*, May 23, 1991.
[39] "Metropolitan Area News in Brief," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 31, 1991, B02.
[40] Saint Monica Parish, *1897-1997: Saint Monica Parish* (Devon, PA: Cooke Publishing Company, 1997), 19. Loaned to author by Saint Monica Parish.
[41] Clark DeLeon, "The Scene—in Philadelphia and its Suburbs," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 11, 1989, B02.

on 29th Street and Allegheny Avenue was relegated, preparing its sale to a non-Catholic Christian denomination.

Figure B: St. Monica Bell, Berwyn



Source: Photograph by author, April 27, 2021.

When Father Hagenbach bought Corpus Christi's windows, the Stations of the Cross, and millwork for St. Monica, some parishioners and locals looked on skeptically. But his proposal to design the new church around these historic items was cheaper than commissioning new work, and the building quickly took shape around them. Two years after the fire, on September 12, 1993, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua dedicated St. Monica's new church, alongside a gymnasium and meeting center. Like the bell that stands as a monument to the original parish church, the new build incorporates Philadelphia's Catholic history, blending the region's past in a church for the twenty-first century.

When I visited St. Monica in late April 2021, Father Charles Zlock first showed me the patron saint's stained-glass window, which had survived the devastating fire almost exactly thirty years earlier. Father Hagenbach had commissioned its refurbishment and relocation into the narthex of the newly-constructed church, where the harrowed saint now gazes on the suburban streets of Berwyn. Next, from the nave, Zlock and I surveyed the Corpus Christi windows, set low in St. Monica's crisp white walls. The week of my visit, Zlock told me, the Archdiocese was sending someone from the Ecclesiastical Exchange to take a look at the windows. Everyone wanted to make sure the antiques were still in good shape. Ed Rafferty was likely involved in the coordination of the visit—perhaps he even came along.

Figure C: St. Monica Interior, Berwyn



Source: Photograph by author, April 27, 2021.

The windows of St. Monica Church serve as an illustration of religious decline, as I use the term. Decline is change, complex and dynamic: it encompasses loss *and* opportunity, if not always in equal measure. It prompts institutional responses to balance resources, and narratives that collapse here-there, now-then, with appeals to nostalgia, belonging, and meaning.

Insofar as *Just and Grave Causes* examines these aspects of decline, the motivating goals of this project are not to assert or assess the causes of Catholic decline. Moreover, far from reifying decline as a linear process of secularization, I introduce policies and repertoires to emphasize religious decline as a dynamic, multivalent frame for understanding broader processes of religious change. I do not seek to add my voice to any "doom and gloom" declension narratives—or their counternarratives—about the future of American Catholicism in relation to the debates about secularization theory.[42] In short, my interests are less the *markers* of decline than the policies and repertoires that seek to make sense of them. I aim to reconfigure the conversation about religious decline to explore the ways in which institutions, communities, and individuals across the Philadelphia region have, themselves, defined and responded to changes they perceive to be *decline*. Religious decline—imagined and feared, anticipated for the future, or quantifiably proven—has shaped and continues to shape the lived Catholicism of the Philadelphia Church.

[42] As Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altinordu write, "Debates about the meaning of the secularization concept or the implications of secularization theory are often thinly veiled debates about the reality of secularization and the future of religion." Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altinordu, "After Secularization?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008): 62.

PART ONE |
The Making and Unmaking of Catholic Philadelphia: Archdiocesan Policies of Decline

Part One charts the lives of three Philadelphian parishes: St. John the Baptist (c. 1831) in Manayunk, St. Laurentius (c. 1882) in Fishtown, and St. Peter Claver (c. 1886) in the Old Seventh Ward. These parishes have been a bellwether of archdiocesan policies toward the urban Church, from the proliferation of ethnic parishes at the turn of the twentieth century to the racialization of decline at the turn of the twenty-first. Chapter 1 attends to the racial and theological justifications for parish development in the late nineteenth century as the growing Church shaped the city's religious and architectural landscape. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce closure as a key archdiocesan policy of decline and chart this policy's racialization from the 1970s to the 2010s. Taking as a case study the closure of St. Peter Claver, the second chapter examines closures in the 1970s through the 1990s, when this policy targeted urban Black parishes and schools as the source and solution for Catholic decline. Chapter 3 examines the parish and school closures of the 2000s and 2010s. As these "restructuring" initiatives exploded across the region, the simultaneous crises of clergy sexual abuse and closure "universalized" this policy of decline. This universalization was, in effect, a whitening of decline. Rather than locating the sources and solutions of decline in Black urban neighborhoods, the maturation of the Archdiocese's closure policies began instead to frame decline as a danger to White parishes like St. John the Baptist and St. Laurentius. Nonetheless, these policies in the twenty-first century continued to have significant implications for the presence of the Church in Philadelphia's neighborhoods of color.

Chapter 1 |
"Ever Anxious to Improve": Making Catholic Philadelphia in the 1880s-1890s

Midmorning on January 3, 1892, guests crowded into what would, that day, become St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church in Philadelphia. The building had a seating capacity of five hundred, but accounts reported twice that number gathered inside on the cloudy, freezing Sunday. Those with access to complimentary tickets filled pews and aisles and packed the space before the altar rail to observe the ceremony that would dedicate the former Protestant building to its new sacred purpose as a Catholic parish church.[1] "The quaint sacristies on either side of the altar were scarcely able to accommodate the clergymen who were to take part in the services," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, "while the rear gallery was entirely taken up by a choir of seventy voices and an orchestra of fifteen pieces."[2] Although the exterior of the church, which was designed by renowned architect Thomas U. Walter in 1842 for Fourth Presbyterian Church, reflected the staid Protestant aesthetics of its former owners, the interior was "handsomely decorated" for the day's dedication, with its galleries "festooned with evergreens."[3]

Such a description from the late nineteenth century is a familiar one. In northeastern American cities like Philadelphia, the Catholic Church was entering a period of unprecedented institutional growth, largely as eastern and southern European immigration swelled and diversified what had previously been a predominantly Irish and German population. Within the city limits of Philadelphia, the Church had tripled its number of parishes from fewer than 30 in 1859 to 93 in 1909.[4] While many of these were territorial parishes, growing European immigrant

[1] Photograph of ticket, SB-3, Folder 393-394, Scrapbook Collection 1864-1970, Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (hereafter, Scrapbook Collection).

[2] "A New Church for Colored Catholics," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 4, 1892; "Third Catholic Congress," *New York Age*, January 16, 1892.

[3] "For Colored Catholics," *The Public Ledger*, January 4, 1892, Scrapbook Collection.

[4] Philadelphia's limits expanded to the current city and county boundaries in 1848. I use these boundaries when referring to the city or county.

communities also established separate, "ethnic" parishes as a theologically and socially productive pathway toward greater Catholic belonging in the United States. Parishes for Germans, like St. Mary of the Assumption (c. 1849) in Manayunk; Italians, like St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi (c. 1852) in South Philadelphia; and Poles, like St. Laurentius (c. 1882) in Fishtown grew out of the mid to late nineteenth century. At the same time, the Archdiocese would establish skyrocketing numbers of Catholic schools, universities, hospitals, and asylums. With this growth, Catholics in Philadelphia, as elsewhere in the United States, were poised on the cusp of what scholars of American religion recognize now as a national eruption of Catholic institution building. Because of the influx of European immigrants, this era has historically been characterized as "the immigrant church" in Catholic studies, with an emphasis on the parish as a repository for ethnic and linguistic heritage.[5]

St. Peter Claver was one of these many new ethnic parishes in Philadelphia, but it was, in some ways, also unusual. The community was not German, Italian, Polish, or Irish, like most of the parishes in Philadelphia. The new parish at Lombard and Twelfth streets was instead the first in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to be established for the specific use of "colored Catholics."[6] The development of St. Peter Claver parish illustrates that the desire for ethnic parishes and parish schools was not uniquely an immigrant experience. Both the resonances and the

[5] Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006); Paul M. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994); James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010; Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996).

[6] Philadelphia's Black population included African Americans and a Haitian community. When not referencing the historical language of the sources (i.e., *colored* or *Negro*), I refer to this population as Black Catholics.

dissimilarities between St. Peter Claver and other parishes established at this time offer a glimpse into the nature of Catholic institution building at the turn of the twentieth century in Philadelphia.

The goals of this chapter are twofold: to literally *place* the development of Catholic institutions in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as to examine, through several examples, the racial, ethnic, and class concerns embedded in the theological, institutional, and physical foundations of these buildings and their communities. St. Peter Claver is one of these examples, alongside an Irish parish, St. John the Baptist, and a Polish parish, St. Laurentius. In the development of these ethnic parishes, Catholics and the Archdiocese not only shaped the city footprint. They also established patterns of belonging in the city and the Church, reflecting and shaping the identities of White and Black Catholics alike. Many of the concerns embedded in this era of Catholic institutionalism would take new shape as the Archdiocese's footprint began to shift in significant ways nearly a century later.

The City and the Church in the Nineteenth Century

The metropolitan area of Philadelphia expanded rapidly over the course of the nineteenth century, in a recognizable tableau of urban demographic change in the northeastern United States. With the discovery of anthracite coal in the region, the establishment of first canal and then railway networks, and the development of textile, metalworking, and construction industries in the first half of the century, Philadelphia grew to be the fourth largest city in the world by 1860. Its boundaries expanded geographically when, in 1854, an act of consolidation incorporated Philadelphia County's other municipal authorities into the city, increasing its territory from two square miles between the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers to over 130 square

mile.[7] Over the course of the century, the city's population rose from 68,000 residents to nearly 1.3 million in 1900.[8]

Throughout the nineteenth century, the nature of the city's spatial and industrial development created distinctive neighborhoods. In the early decades of the century, Philadelphia was home to a substantial Black population, both free and enslaved, reflecting the city's long—and checkered—history of abolitionism. The Black Philadelphian community included a substantial Haitian community, counting within it many Catholics. While Philadelphia's Black population was, as a result, always significant, Philadelphia was also a major port of entry for immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century. The largest immigrant groups at midcentury were Irish and German, with the former rapidly outpacing other newcomers after the Potato Famine.[9] The residential distribution of Philadelphia's immigrants and their descendants was more ethnically and socioeconomically heterogenous at midcentury than it would be by the end of the century. The exception, however, was the Black population. In 1860, 64 percent of the 22,185 Black residents were concentrated in the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth Wards, roughly east to west between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers and north to south between Chestnut Street and Fitzwater Street.[10]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Italians and Russians (predominantly Jewish, but also Christian Poles) were also entering the city at rising levels. These newer communities of

[7] Philadelphia Consolidation Act, "Act of February 2, 1854," P.L. 21, No. 16.

[8] Theodore Hershberg, Alan N. Burstein, Eugene P. Ericksen, Stephanie Greenberg, and William L. Yancey, "A Tale of Three Cities: Blacks and Immigrants in Philadelphia: 1850-1880, 1930 and 1970," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 441, no. 1 (1979); Thomas F. Rzeznik, *Church and Estate: Religion and Wealth in Industrial-Era Philadelphia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013); Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1987).

[9] The Irish constituted 17.6 percent of the total population in 1850 and 11.9 percent in 1880, as compared to the German 5.6 percent and 6.6 percent in the same years.

[10] Hershberg, "A Tale of Three Cities," 61-62; Warner, Private City, 56-57.

immigrants settled in more highly concentrated ethnic neighborhoods. As the city expanded with the rising tide of industrialization and immigration, therefore, so too did the segregation of its neighborhoods increase. Not only ethnicity but also class and local industry defined neighborhoods. Historian Gary Nash has described nineteenth-century Philadelphia as "a city of loosely connected factory-based urban villages."[11] Industries drew workers with appropriate skill and experience, while transportation technologies, such as trolleys, allowed laborers to commute from neighborhoods lined with Philadelphia's distinctively affordable row homes. For example, as the number of Italians in Philadelphia rose from 1,656 in 1890 to 45,308 in 1910, smaller numbers of northern Italian stoneworkers settled in Chestnut Hill to work in stone quarries in the 1890s and early 1900s; in comparison, southern Italians sought jobs in construction, street cleaning, and textiles. This larger population settled in South Philadelphia, where Italian regional dialects defined neighborhoods down to the residential block.[12] Meanwhile, the wealthy population of the city shifted from downtown to an outer ring of more spacious neighborhoods, anticipating the suburbanization that would follow less than a century later.

During the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in Philadelphia also grew territorially and expanded demographically. When the Diocese of Philadelphia was established in 1808, its territory encompassed Delaware, Pennsylvania, and parts of New Jersey. By midcentury, the Catholic population had grown such additional dioceses were erected from this territory, including the dioceses of Newark in 1853 and Scranton, Harrisburg, and Wilmington in 1868. In

[11] Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 287.

[12] Cynthia J. Shelton, *The Mills of Manayunk: Industrialization and Social Conflict in the Philadelphia Region, 1787-1837* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 95; Joan Saverino, "Mapping Memories in Stone: Italians and the Transformation of a Philadelphia Landscape," in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, ed. Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 52-76; Richard N. Juliani, *Priest, Parish, and People: Saving the Faith in Philadelphia's "Little Italy"* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2006).

1875, the Diocese of Philadelphia became a metropolitan archdiocese, encompassing its current territory of the counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery, as well as what would become the Diocese of Allentown, to the north of Philadelphia, in 1961.[13] The Catholic population of Philadelphia expanded from roughly 50,000 shortly before the influx of Irish immigrants in 1842 to over 525,000 in 1910.[14]

In response to this growth, the Church's institutional footprinted expanded throughout region. By 1899, the Archdiocese oversaw 112 schools, which served more than 40,000 students. These schools included what is commonly considered the country's first parochial school, established in 1782 at St. Mary, as well as the country's first free Catholic high school, Roman Catholic High School, founded in 1890. Among other well-known institutions, Philadelphia's Catholics also established St. Charles Borromeo Seminary (1832), St. Joseph's Hospital (1849) and the Sisters of St. Francis' St. Mary's Hospital (1860), and the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul (1864) within the city limits, alongside several orphanages, other asylums such as for widows, and private Catholic schools and institutions.[15]

Perhaps the most striking evidence of Catholic institution building in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, however, was the proliferation of parishes across the region.[16] The *parish* is a community of believers that meets in the physical building of a *church*. In the eighteenth century, Catholics first established churches in Pennsylvania. The first church within today's

[13] I use the "Diocese of Philadelphia" to refer to the historical period between 1808 and 1875, and the "Archdiocese of Philadelphia" after 1875. Both terms will refer to the different territorial boundaries associated with these historical entities. Before the establishment of the Diocese of Philadelphia in 1808, these territories were within the Diocese of Baltimore.

[14] Thomas J. Donaghy, *Philadelphia's Finest: A History of Education in the Catholic Archdiocese, 1682-1970* (Philadelphia: The American Catholic Historical Society, 1972), 122.

[15] Dennis Clark, "A Pattern of Urban Growth: Residential Development and Church Location in Philadelphia," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 82, no. 3 (September 1971): 164; Donaghy, *Philadelphia's Finest*, 132; Gail Farr Casterline, "St. Joseph's and St. Mary's: The Origins Catholic Hospitals in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108, no. 3 (1984): 289-314.

[16] Juliani, *Priest, Parish, and People*, 10.

archdiocesan boundaries was St. Thomas the Apostle, established in 1729 in Delaware County's Glen Mills, approximately 25 miles west of Philadelphia. By 1800, the territory claimed seven churches (Table 1.1), four of which were clustered within the original city limits near the Delaware River: St. Joseph (1732), St. Mary (1763), Holy Trinity (1788), and St. Augustine (1796).[17] On April 8, 1808, Pope Pius VII erected the Diocese of Philadelphia (along with the dioceses of New York, Boston, and Bardstown) from the Diocese of Baltimore. The new diocese began to divide its territory into parishes, smaller geographic units under the supervision of a priest. By the end of the century, the Archdiocese included one hundred and fourteen parishes in total, with the establishment of Ascension of Our Lord (West Philadelphia), Holy Trinity (Pottstown), Our Lady of Victory (Kensington, Philadelphia), and St. Francis of Assisi (Germantown, Philadelphia) in 1899 alone.

Table 1.1: Churches, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Before 1800

Parish	Date Established	Location
St. Thomas the Apostle	1729	Glen Mills
(Old) St. Joseph	1733	Philadelphia
St. John the Baptist	1743	Ottsville
(Old) St. Mary	1763	Philadelphia
Holy Trinity	1788	Philadelphia
St. Agnes	1793	West Chester
St. Augustine	1796	Philadelphia

Source: "Parish Directory," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, https://archphila.org/parish/.

The majority of these parishes were territorial, or established to encompass all Catholics residing within a bounded geographical territory. Throughout the century, the Church established a patchwork of territorial parishes to cover the country, to which all Catholic faithful were assigned by virtue of their residence. As the Catholic population swelled in the nineteenth century, the number of territorial parishes multiplied, allowing each to encompass a smaller territory with a higher concentration of Catholics.

[17] Prior to the elevation of the Apostolic Prefecture of the United States to the Diocese of Baltimore in 1789, there were not canonical "parishes" but instead churches.

Yet, differences in language, culture, and even Catholic practice and identity complicated the territorial method of organizing Catholics, particularly in dense and diverse city neighborhoods. As Tricia Colleen Bruce has argued, "a purely territorial model of parish proved an awkward fit for American religion," which privileged voluntary religious association.[18] Thus, the establishment of *personal parishes* allowed Catholics to organize by measures other than place of residence. In the twenty-first century, personal parishes would come to include those providing ministry to university campuses, for example, or for those wishing to celebrate the Latin Mass.[19] Yet the most recognizable personal parishes remain national or so-called "ethnic" parishes, which began to multiple rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States.

Philadelphia occupies a pioneering place in the history of ethnic parishes in the United States. The city became home to the country's first ethnic church when the German-speaking community established Holy Trinity in 1784. The Germans, as elsewhere in the country, were among the strongest proponents of ethnic churches in Philadelphia. After Holy Trinity, several more German parishes followed in the nineteenth century, distinguishing themselves culturally and linguistically from the Irish Catholic community, which dominated the region's Church by the latter half of the century. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Germans had established five national parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Philadelphia was also home to the first Italian parish in the country, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, when early northern Italian immigrants complained of their exclusion from other local parishes. With their petitions, the Archdiocese established St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi in 1852, in the heart of the growing Italian

[18] Tricia Colleen Bruce, *Parish and Place: Making Room for Diversity in the American Catholic Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

[19] In 2021, Pope Francis limited the establishment of personal parishes for the celebration of the Latin Mass. See Chapters 5 and 6.

community in South Philadelphia. In comparison to the Germans and Italians, the Irish had a different relationship with ethnic parishes. After Irish immigration rose sharply following the famine of the 1840s, they claimed such a high proportion of Catholic leadership positions in Philadelphia that territorial parishes were often by default majority Irish. There were no specifically Irish ethnic parishes, however. Even St. Patrick (c. 1839), although steeped in Irish heritage, was technically founded as a territorial parish.[20]

Although these early instances of Italian and German parishes laid the diocesan—and indeed national—groundwork for establishing ethnic parishes, there existed only a handful of ethnic parishes until the end of the century. By the 1880s, however, as the Italian, Polish, and Lithuanian populations began to increase, the establishment of their parishes followed. With different languages, worship styles, and forms of community, the newcomers often found themselves unwelcome in local Irish and German parishes. Rather than attend these parishes—where differences often provoked hostility and demotion to worship in the church basement—many immigrant communities sought instead to establish their own parishes. By the early 1890s, at least three Polish, one Lithuanian, one Slovak, and one "colored" parish, St. Peter Claver, had joined the pioneering German and Italian parishes in forging a new institutional network of Catholic presence across the Archdiocese (see Table 1.2).[21] The first decade alone of the twentieth century (1900-1910) saw the establishment of at least seventeen personal parishes. As Catholic communities concentrated in particular neighborhoods, these parishes allowed their religious engagement to reflect their language, nationality, and heritage. In so doing, they developed in an increasingly dense, overlapping Catholic network across the city.

[20] Clark, "Urban growth," 166.
[21] Juliani, *Priest, Parish, and People*, 3.

Table 1.2: Personal Parishes, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1788-1899

Parish	Date Established	Ethnicity	Location
Holy Trinity	1788	German	6th and Spruce, Washington Square (Phila.)
St. Mary of the Assumption	1849	German	172 Conarroe Street, Manayunk (Phila.)
St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi	1852	Italian	714 Montrose Street, Queen Village (Phila.)
St. Laurentius	1882	Polish	Memphis and E. Berks Streets, Fishtown (Phila.)
Our Lady Help of Christians	1885	German	2437 E. Allegheny Ave., Port Richmond (Phila.)
St. Peter Claver	1889	Colored	12th and Lombard Streets, Old Seventh Ward (Phila.)
St. Ludwig	1891	German	28th and Master Streets, Brewerytown (Phila.)
St. Stanislaus	1891	Polish	240 Fitzwater Street, Queen Village (Phila.)
St. Casimir	1893	Lithuanian	324 Wharton Street, Queen Village (Phila.)
St. Aloysius	1894	German	26th and Tasker Streets, Grays Ferry (Phila.)
St. Josaphat	1898	Polish	124 Cotton Street, Manayunk (Phila.)
Holy Trinity	1899	Slovak	366 South Street, Pottstown

Source: "Parish Directory," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, https://archphila.org/parish/.

Manayunk, a neighborhood northwest of downtown Philadelphia, epitomizes this growth. First established as a village of Roxborough Township in the County of Philadelphia, Manayunk was incorporated into the city with the 1854 Act of Consolidation. The area developed into a manufacturing center in the middle of the nineteenth century when the construction of a new canal in 1828 allowed for the development of textile mills. Manufacturing in Manayunk "took off at a feverish pace."[22] In these early decades, the laborers who arrived to work in the village mills were predominantly English, Irish, and German immigrants. The village's first Catholic church, St. John the Baptist, was founded in 1831 for a predominantly Irish congregation. As in much of the country, the Germans were the first in Manayunk to establish their own national

[22] Shelton, *Mills of Manayunk*, 95.

parish, St. Mary of the Assumption. By 1885, the neighborhood's population had grown in response to the industrial opportunities, such that a second territorial parish, Holy Family, formed in 1885, only ten blocks from St. John the Baptist. But the Irish and the German communities would not long dominate the neighborhood. In 1898, Poles established St. Josaphat, purchasing a former Protestant church located across the street from St. John the Baptist. About a quarter-century later, the Italians' established St. Lucy several blocks away. By 1925, the neighborhood of Manayunk claimed five parishes, all within approximately a mile of one another.

Although the density of parishes in Manayunk was noteworthy, the proliferation of ethnic parishes to bypass local Irish dominance started to become par for the course in Philadelphia, as elsewhere, by the 1890s. The establishment of St. Laurentius, a Polish parish in the neighborhood of Fishtown, in 1882 offers another example. As Polish immigrants began to settle in other regions of Pennsylvania, the community in Philadelphia founded the Polish National Alliance in 1880. Two years later, Polish Philadelphians began to organize and advocate for the establishment of a Polish parish. 47 families from Philadelphia, Camden, and Phoenixville collected $31.50 and sent Archbishop James F. Wood (1860-1883) a petition requesting a Polish priest in 1882. The new parish, originally named Holy Cross, was first directed by Reverend Julian Dutkiewicz, a priest from Brooklyn; he was quickly succeeded by a German-descent, Polish-speaking priest, Reverend Emil Kattein, who renamed the parish St. Laurentius (St. Lawrence).[23]

[23] Father Kattein's name is also recorded as Emile. St. Laurentius Parish, "100th Anniversary: Saint Laurentius Parish, 1882-1982," (Philadelphia, 1982), available on https://savestlaurentius.wordpress.com/church-history/, accessed January 10, 2022.

Under Rev. Kattein's direction, the parish first gathered in the basement of St. Boniface in the Kensington neighborhood of eastern Philadelphia, before turning its attention to acquiring its own property. Doing so, however, was not a simple process. According to the parish's centenary anniversary retrospective, "[i]n seeking a place for the erection of a church, various obstacles at that time were placed in the way, especially by the Orange Men [sic] who were very strong in this vicinity."[24] The Protestant Irish Orange Order had a long and contentious history in Philadelphia by the 1880s. Prior to largescale Irish immigration at midcentury, the majority of Philadelphia's Irish were skilled and semi-skilled Protestants, some of whom would take issue with the influx of Irish Catholics following the Potato Famine. On July 12, 1831, members of the Orange Order clashed violently with Catholics during a parade commemorating the Battle of the Boyne and William of Orange's victory for the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. In the decades that followed, political and sectarian divisions between the Orange Order and local Catholics continued to foment tensions in eastern neighborhoods like Kensington and Fishtown.[25]

The Polish parishioners were nonetheless able to purchase a property at Berks (formerly Vienna) and Memphis Streets in Fishtown in 1885. St. Laurentius parish hired Edwin Forrest Durang (1829-1911), an architect renowned for his ecclesiastical designs in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. As Durang designed a Gothic brownstone church for St. Laurentius, the parishioners simultaneously worked to develop a parish school. Polish students first gathered for instruction in a blacksmith shop, before Rev. Adalbert Malusecki, Rev. Kattein's successor, brought four sisters from the Felician Order in Detroit to host classes in 1890.[26] That same year, on the morning of September 21, Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan (1884-1911) dedicated St. Laurentius

[24] Ibid.
[25] Bryan Patrick McGovern, "Andrew Jackson and the Protestant Irish of Philadelphia: Early Nineteenth-Century Sectarianism," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 87, no 2 (Spring 2020): 313-337.
[26] "100th Anniversary: Saint Laurentius Parish."

Church to a crowd including members of Polish Catholic Societies, such as the Knights of St. Casmere, who participated in a silent drill during the Mass. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Archbishop Ryan praised the Polish "by saying that they stood alone with the Irish race as the greatest defenders of the Catholic religion."[27]

The histories of St. Laurentius in Fishtown and the parishes of Manayunk illustrate the roles of ethnic and Catholic identity in defining the growing nineteenth-century city. Parishes provided an outlet for specific modes of organization, celebration, and gathering, shaping ethnic identities that would, later, become White. At the time, however, the Archdiocese encouraged the ethnic differentiation of Catholic institutions, using difference to pave the way to inclusion in the "universal" Catholic Church. This process of inclusion—at times an ambivalent one—shaped the city's built environment. Parishes shared overlapping urban spaces, marking streets and skylines with signs of ethnic belonging and boundaries. Alongside diocesan institutions, the presence of parish churches, schools, convents, and rectories defined the character of a neighborhood.

Given the high numbers of southern and eastern European immigrants that built these sacred and urban spaces, scholars of American Catholicism have long characterized this era of institutional growth as "the immigrant church." In a chapter tellingly entitled "The Immigrant Church," for example, scholar James O'Toole wrote, "By the beginning of the twentieth century, the American Catholic landscape was crowded with" Catholic buildings and spaces, "organized along ethnic lines and sustained by immigrant and their families. Even a casual observer could see this infrastructure just by walking around the Catholic neighborhoods of almost any city."[28] Yet, although the influx of European immigrants certainly drove the rise in parishes, the division

[27] "St. Laurentius Church," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 22, 1890.

[28] O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 96. See also: Dolan, *American Catholic Experience*; Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hokins University Press, 1975); Juliani, *Priest, Parish, and People*.

of the Catholic city into territorial and ethnic parishes was not unique to these communities or their descendants. As the example of St. Peter Claver demonstrates, this increasing institutionalization of the Church through the proliferation of distinct parish communities—and thus the construction of the Catholic urban environment—was also deeply entangled with nineteenth-century questions of racial identity and inclusion.

St. Peter Claver: Philadelphia's "Colored" Catholics and the Nineteenth Century Church

In Philadelphia, as in the United States more broadly, the 1880s and 1890s saw a flurry of Catholic efforts to build institutions specifically serving Black populations. Although the Second Plenary Council of American bishops had rejected a national effort for the evangelization of African Americans in 1866, the Third Council in 1884, at the behest of the Vatican, wrote of the need to establish missions "[a]mong our own Indian tribes, for whom we have a special responsibility" and among "our colored populations…a very multitude [of whom] stand sorely in need of Christian instruction and missionary labor."[29] Toward this end, the Council established an annual collection to be taken up on behalf of Native American and Black missions. Funds from this collection would eventually find their way to parishioners in Philadelphia.[30] Indicative of the growing interest in Black Catholic institutions, Philadelphia's own Katharine Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People in 1891, establishing her community in Bensalem Township, Bucks County, north of the city. This emphasis on the missionary needs of Black (and Native American) communities, however, at best reflected their ambivalent inclusion in the American church; at worst, many Catholic

[29] Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, "The Pastoral Letter of 1884," in *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy (1792-1919)*, edited by Rev. Peter Guildary (Westminster, MD: the Newman Press, 1954), 263.

[30] James Gibbons, Patrick Ryan, and John J. Kain, *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians* (Baltimore, 1893), 22.

institutions, including the majority of orphanages, schools, and even hospitals, operated with strict policies of segregation during the late nineteenth century.[31]

Table 1.3: 1893 "Negro Missions"

Diocese	Negro Pop	Catholic Negroes	Churches	Priests	Children Baptisms	Adult Baptisms	Schools	Pupils	Institutions	Sisterhoods
Baltimore	218,000	36,000	4	14	460	170	10	1,200	St. Joseph's Seminary, Epiph'y Apostolic College, Two Orphanages, Academy, St Joseph's Guild	Notre Dame, Oblates, St. Francis, Holy Cross, Charity
New Orleans	-	80,000	2	--	3,218	292	36	2,309	Orphanage, Aged People's Home	Mercy, Perp. Adoration, Mt. Carmel, St. Joseph, Sacred Heart, Holy Family, St. Francis (col.), Holy Cross
New York	80,000	3,000	2	4	58	22	4	200	Orphanage	Charity, St. Dominic
Philadelphia	60,000	1,500	1	1	40	10	2	140	---	Notre Dame

Source: James Gibbons, Patrick Ryan, and John J. Kain, *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians* (Baltimore, 1893).

The early history of St. Peter Claver—and, indeed, its longer history, as later chapters will illustrate—reflects these unique challenges Black Catholics faced in a largely European-descent Church. As Table 1.3 illustrates, Philadelphia's Black Catholic community by the 1890s was not as large as the those of neighboring New York City or the Catholic centers of Baltimore

[31] On nineteenth century Catholicism and race, see: Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious At the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002); Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Shannen Dee Williams, "Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 19th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life," *The Journal of African American History* 101, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 231-260.

and New Orleans. It was, however, an active community. In advocating for and supporting their own parish and schools, the community that built St. Peter Claver participated in—and thus shaped—the institutional growth of the Church in Philadelphia in ways usually attributed only to European immigrants.

Scholars of Black Catholicism have lamented that Black Catholics are rarely considered representative of Catholic history. "At best," writes Shannen Dee Williams, "black Catholics are presented as historical anomalies. At worst, they are altogether erased."[32] Matthew J. Cressler has likewise argued, "Black Catholics have been left on the margins of inquiry because they are not easily incorporated into our comfortable narratives."[33] Recent scholarship by scholars like Cressler, Karen J. Johnson, and Amy L. Koehlinger has joined landmark studies by John T. McGreevy and Robert A. Orsi to tackle the complex racial, religious, and political contestations over urban and Catholic belonging in the mid twentieth century, as Black residents increasingly populated the neighborhoods of post-immigrant Italian, Polish, or Irish Catholic communities.[34] While this work is necessary for understanding the relationship between Catholicism and race in American history, too great an emphasis on this era of interracial encounter can risk obscuring the longer histories and early presence of not only Black residents, but more specifically of Black *Catholics*, both in the North and South prior to the Great Migration. St. Peter Claver may have

[32] Shannen Dee Williams, "Black history is Catholic history," *Catholic Review*, February 6, 2020, https://catholicreview.org/black-history-is-catholic-history/.

[33] Matthew Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 11.

[34] Cressler, *Authentically Black*; Karen J. Johnson, *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

been the first Black parish in Philadelphia, after all, but it was not the first in the country, nor even in the North.[35]

Furthermore, overstressing twentieth-century racial conflict can inadvertently reemphasize divisions between European-descent and Black Catholicisms. Although I agree with theologian M. Shawn Copeland that the paradigm of the "immigrant church" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be "insufficient to mediate the experience of African American Catholics," the history of St. Peter Claver parish nonetheless illustrates that Black Catholics were active in shaping this otherwise well-known history of Catholic institutionalism, which was defined by the proliferation of parishes, and specifically ethnic parishes.[36] They did so, moreover, long before the Great Migration, which expanded the Black population significantly in many northern cities.[37]

By the turn of the twentieth century, the heart of Black Philadelphia was the Seventh Ward, the location of W.E.B. DuBois' renowned sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*.[38] Although this South-Central neighborhood *is* better remembered today as the site of nationally significant Protestant communities—including Richard Allen's Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Absalom Jones' African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas—the Seventh Ward was also home to the Black Catholics who advocated for their spiritual, material, and educational needs throughout the early nineteenth century.[39]

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[35] St. Augustine's in Louisiana, established in 1829, claims the former title, and St. Benedict the Moor, established in 1883 in New York, holds the latter.

[36] M. Shawn Copeland, "Tradition and the traditions of African American Catholicism," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec. 2000): 633.

[37] Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 2.

[38] The U.S. Census of 1890 recorded that 22.5 percent of the city's 39,371 Black residents resided in the Seventh Ward. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899).

[39] Wallace D. Best, "Richard Allen and the Rise of African Methodist Episcopal Church, Part I," *The A.M.E. Church Review* 120, no. 393 (January 2004): 25-52; Wallace D. Best, "Richard Allen and the Rise of Bethel African

The establishment of a Black parish developed in tandem with the Seventh Ward's focus on Black Catholic education. In 1817, "the Catholic People of Color residing in Philadelphia" submitted a petition to the Board of Trustees of St. Mary Catholic Church. The petitioners asked the White parish to instruct their children "in a common English education and to appoint a teacher who will be careful above all things to cause them to know their catechism and have them say their morning and evening prayers." The signatories explained that while Protestant denominations offered educational opportunities for their children, the writers worried about their children's souls, should they be "seduced" from Catholicism. The authors pleaded with the Board, acknowledging:

> That our children are destitute of the means to acquire the knowledge of our religion and the duties whereby they might be able to repel the incessant attacks made on them by a set of beings who can quote the Scriptures with every phrase in order to seduce the ignorant. We tremble for the fate of our children….Therefore we sincerely hope that your charitable Board will take them under your protecting wing as you have taken the poor of your own colour.

The record notes that although the Board punted the issue until the summer, there is no indication that the petition was revisited.[40]

The Black Catholic community of Philadelphia, however, was not to be deterred. The Oblate Sisters of Providence, the United States' first successful Black congregation of women religious, established Blessed Peter Claver School in August 1863, at 430 Lombard Street. It was a difficult start. By the early 1870s, the Sisters faced such discrimination from local Philadelphians that the school closed.[41] Six years later, the school reopened with sixty students

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Methodist Episcopal Church, Part II," *The A.M.E. Church Review* 120, no. 394 (April 2004): 18-39; Elise Kammerer, "Uplift in Schools and the Church: Abolitionist Approaches to Free Black Education in Early National Philadelphia," *Historical Social Research* 42, no. 1 (2017): 299-319.

[40] "Petition of the Catholic People of Color in Philadelphia 1817," *The American Catholic Historical Researches* 7, no. 4 (Oct. 1890): 186.

[41] Blessed Peter Claver School was the Baltimore-based order's first institution outside of Maryland. According to Sister Mary Reginald Gerdes, "[f]inancial and racial problems…forced [the sisters] to leave this mission." M. Reginald Gerdes, "To Education and Evangelize: Black Catholic Schools of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (1828-

under the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a White order, at Thirteenth and Lombard, before relocating the following year to Seventh and Pine. This iteration of the school closed in 1882 when the state legislature ended legal segregation of Pennsylvania's public schools. Nonetheless, parents remained loyal to the St. Peter Claver School and their petitions to reopen the school were successful in 1886.[42]

The community, meanwhile, had also expanded its advocacy to pressure Bishop Wood for a Black parish. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, African American and Caribbean Catholics had previously attended segregated services at nearby St. Joseph, St. Mary, and St. Augustine parishes. In 1886, with the support of Father E. O. Hiltermann of the German parish, Holy Trinity, the Black community organized a beneficial society called the Peter Claver's Union. During the same year, the priest offered a separate Sunday morning Mass at 9:00 for Black Catholics' worship. After this segregated Mass arrangement fell through, the Union "met every Sunday evening in the home of one of its members," under the spiritual direction of Hiltermann and two additional priests until 1889.[43]

During these early years, Archbishop Patrick Ryan at first denied the Black community's requests for its own church and pastor, on the grounds that he had no suitable priest to serve them. Although it was common practice for other national parishes to petition for priests of the same ethnic and linguistic background as the parishioners, the United States would only claim its

1880)," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1988): 192-193. See also, William Edward Campbell, *How Unsearchable His Ways: One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, Saint Patrick's Church* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965).

[42] Stephanie Morris, "St. Peter Claver Church and School, Philadelphia, PA: A Collaborative Effort," *American Catholic Studies* 128, no. 1 (2017): 102.

[43] "Golden Jubilee of St. Peter Claver's, 1886-1936," PH0120, Parish History Collection: St. Peter Claver, Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (hereafter, Claver Collection). Records of this organization use multiple names (Peter Claver's Union, the Peter Claver Union, St. Peter Claver's Union, the St. Peter Claver Union), in part reflecting the canonization of the Jesuit missionary, St. Peter Claver, in 1888.

first publicly recognized Black priest, Augustus Tolton, in 1886.[44] Early Black Catholic parishes therefore had White priests of missionary orders, such as the Josephites or Holy Ghost (Spiritan) Fathers. It was the Holy Ghost Fathers, a French order best known for their missionary efforts in Africa, that eventually supplied St. Peter Claver its first priest. On July 29, 1889, Father Patrick A. McDermott arrived in Philadelphia from Pittsburgh.[45]

Most early accounts of the parish's founding emphasize the role of White benefactors and leaders, like Father McDermott. These reports often stress the "*peaceful, fraternal*, and *Christian* methods" of White Catholic priests, sisters, and others in encouraging Philadelphia's Black population "to recognize [the Catholic Church] as the true and sincere friend of their race."[46] There were, certainly, powerful and wealthy White benefactors of the parish, such as the Philopatrian Literary Institute, a predominantly White Catholic institution with interests in charitable giving and Catholic education, which supported the new parish and offered institutional access to its own library and events.[47]

One family of White Catholics received the most frequent reference in accounts about the parish's founding. A description of St. Peter Claver in the *New York Age* is typical of such reports. It characterizes the parish as "an organization composed of the colored Catholics of Philadelphia for the religious, social and intellectual advancement of its members and fellowmen and to aid and co-operate with the new mission, lately established by Father McDermott with the

[44] Although priests James Augustine Healy (1830-1900), Patrick Francis Healy (1834-1910), and Alexander Sherwood Healy (1836-1875) were born into slavery by an enslaved mother and the Irish plantation owner who bought her, Cyprian Davis and Shannen Dee Williams have illustrated that the Healy siblings did not publicly make known their family's origins. In comparison, Davis describes Tolton as "[t]he first black American priest whom all knew and recognized as black." Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 146-152; Williams, "Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations."

[45] Eddie E. Okafor, "Francophone Catholic Achievements in Igboland, 1883-1905," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 308-309.

[46] [46] P. A. McDermott, "Catholic Negroes," *The Standard*, 1 February 1890, Claver Collection.

[47] "First Visit of His Grace, Archbishop Ryan, to the Mission," *The Standard*, 1 February 1890, Claver Collection.

aid of Miss Drexel."[48] When Francis Anthony Drexel died in 1855, the wealthy banker had named his three daughters, Elizabeth, Katharine, and Louisa, heiresses to almost the entirety of his $15.5 million estate. Narratives passed down through the parish contend that the women of the Seventh Ward first pursued the support of Katharine Drexel (1858-1955), the future saint and founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, as they worried about how to secure the funds they had raised through sales of "Pepper Pot Soup."[49] According to these narratives, organizers requested that Drexel take possession of the funds, trusting her, an heiress, to keep the money safe. Katharine also used her own money to support the parish, first purchasing 832 Pine Street to facilitate the reopening of the St. Peter Claver school in 1886. In 1889, it was also Katharine who was responsible for soliciting the Holy Ghost Fathers for a priest.[50] That year, Katharine and her sisters purchased a house on Ninth and Pine streets to accommodate the parish's new mission. A chapel occupied the house's second floor, with schoolrooms on the third and living space for Father McDermott on the fourth. Soon, a girls' school opened at 1108 Pine Street.[51] The parish would remain a matter of interest to the Drexel family. By 1906, St. Peter Claver School reopened on Lombard Street, with Mother Katharine's Blessed Sacrament Sisters instructing the boys.[52]

The social, education, and theological work of the early parish was not, however, dominated by these White figures. A group of elites from the Black community also ushered the parish toward growth and success. Among these were P. Albert Dutrieuelle and Peter Jerome

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[48] "Items of the Age." *New York Age*, December 21, 1889.

[49] Adrienne Harris, Zoom interview with author, October 7, 2020; Adrienne Harris in correspondence with author, December 1, 2021.

[50] "Golden Jubilee."

[51] Joseph L. J. Kirlin, *Catholicity in Philadelphia From the Earliest Missionaries Down to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: J.J. McVey, 1909), 482.

[52] Morris, "St. Peter Claver," 102-103; Donaghy, *Philadelphia's Finest*, 111-112.

Augustin, both high-profile members of Philadelphia's prosperous Black catering industry, and Stanislaus Kostka Govern, the founder and manager of the first African American professional baseball team, the Cuban Giants.[53] Another leader for the early parish was Martin J. Lehmann, a successful businessman deeply involved in many of Philadelphia's Catholic and Black associations, holding positions including treasurer of Mercy Hospital and manager of Eden Cemetery Company. Among the range of societies, businesses, and organizations in which these men participated, the founding of St. Peter Claver was a notable point of pride. For example, the obituary of P. Jerome Augustin, a first-generation Philadelphian of Haitian descent, was printed in *The Journal,* Philadelphia's short-lived Black Catholic newspaper in 1892. After remarking upon Augustin's "foreign trade of considerate proportions" and "[prominence] in the social life of his race," the obituary notes that he also "was one of the founders of the St. Peter Claver's Church, to which he was strongly devoted."[54] Likewise, Lehmann's obituary in *The Philadelphia Tribune* concluded his lengthy list of accomplishments and memberships with recognition of his founding role at the church.[55]

If these Black men were giants in their communities, the advocacy of Black Catholic women is harder to trace in parish and public records. In its brief run during 1892, however, *The Journal* frequently recorded women participating ably in the parish's musical and choral endeavors, such as at "A Delightful Midsummer Concert" in July. The paper also praised several

[53] Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship,* vol. 1, ed. 2 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 134; David S. Shields, *The Culinarians: Lives and Careers from the First Age of American Fine Dining* (University of Chicago Press 2017), 158-159; Jerry Malloy, "The Birth of the Cuban Giants: The Origins of Black Professional Baseball," in *Out of the Shadows: African American Baseball from the Cuban Giants to Jackie Robinson,* edited by Bill Kirwin, 1-14 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

[54] "The Last of a Noble Family," *The Journal*, 9 July 1892, PA05, Newspapers Collection, Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (hereafter, Newspapers Collection).

[55] "Martin J. Lehmann: Useful Citizen and Businessman, Dead," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 8, 1924.

women for working "laboriously and untiringly" to organize and host such events.[56] One woman stands out in the record, serving as vice president on the executive board of St. Peter Claver's Union in 1892.[57] Recorded as "Mrs. Chas. A Minnie," she was likely the wife of Charles A. Minnie, a compositor and printer working in the Seventh Ward in the 1890s.[58] Mrs. Minnie appears to have been responsible for social and parish organization and entertainment. According to *The Journal,* a "May party" Mrs. Minnie planned to host "at the close of her dancing class….promise[d] to be in every way in keeping with the reputation of the class—select and enjoyable."[59] Although the historical record provides few details into the lives and work of women like Mrs. Minnie, these traces reveal that many were deeply engaged in the affairs and events of the early parish community.

In 1890, Father McDermott published a report on the parish that provides greater detail about its organization. He commented upon the continued work of the beneficial society, St. Peter Claver's Union, and noted that "a conference of St. Vincent of Paul is about to be established, a Sodality of [C]hildren of Mary is flourishing, our little Chapel is pretty well filled with our own people at the two Masses on Sundays, while it is literally crowded at Vespers and Benediction." "Our little boys, carefully trained," served as altar boys and "our own well selected choir, still young, but ever anxious to improve, renders our services as attractive, comparatively, as those of any church in the city."[60] In addition to day schools for boys and girls, the parish added nights schools for young men and women. Such successes were, according to McDermott, "a most satisfactory refutation of that absurd idea not prevalent only among those

[56] "A Delightful Midsummer Concert," *The Journal*, 9 July 9, 1892, Newspapers Collection. *The Journal* distributed local, national, and parish events in 1892.
[57] "Directory of St. Peter Claver's Church," *The Journal*, 28 May 1892, Newspapers Collection.
[58] "U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995" s.v. "Charles A. Minnie" (1892, 1895), Ancestry.com.
[59] "Personals about Persons we Know," *The Journal,* 28 May 1892, Newspapers Collection.
[60] McDermott, "Catholic Negroes."

ignorant of the colored people, or animated with unchristian prejudice against them as a race, that 'the colored man is hopelessly behind and has no prospect nor ambition to improve his intellectual status.'"[61]

McDermott published this report as part of an appeal to readers for financial assistance. By the early 1890s, the parish had grown such that it desired a larger and more established presence than the mission on Ninth and Pine afforded. The community's attention turned to the church of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, located three blocks west and two blocks south of the current mission. When Fourth Presbyterian moved to West Philadelphia in the 1880s, the congregation listed its fifty-year-old building on Lombard and Twelfth for sale for $20,000. In June 1891, Rev. James Nolan, McDermott's successor as parish priest, paid half of this asking price in cash. The parish's requests for financial assistance were also answered by local supporters. Among these was Patrick Quinn, former treasurer of the Beneficial Saving Fund Society, who bequeathed $5,000 to the parish upon his death in 1891.[62] The Philopatrian Literary Institute also contributed funds, and Father Nolan and the parish secured a loan from a local bank for the remainder. After the purchase of the property, the parish held a bazaar to raise $3,000 to repaint the church building and outfit it with a new altar in time for its dedication on January 3, 1892.[63]

If fundraising took place across the color line, the purchase of the building exhibited a more complicated instance of interracial cooperation. The church's deed names only Archbishop Patrick Ryan and the Holy Ghost Fathers as owners. A century later, parish families recalled that both the archbishop and the order stipulated their ownership in exchange for supporting the new

[61] Ibid.
[62] "Patrick Quinn Dead," *The Times*, January 29, 1891.
[63] "Golden Jubilee"; "Third Catholic Congress," *New York Age*; Kirlin, *Catholicity*, 482.

parish.[64] In turn, the St. Peter Claver's Union insisted upon language that would protect the community's plans for the property: "[the] premises are to be used as a Church for colored people, parsonage and school attached thereto, white people however being permitted to attend all religious services…and the use of said there described premises shall not be changed nor diverted from such purpose." This deed preserved St. Peter Claver as the spiritual home for Philadelphia's Black Catholics, while still reserving room for White Catholic involvement and authority.[65]

Like early accounts of the parish, the dedication ceremony in Philadelphia appears to have been designed to emphasize *White* Catholics' spiritual and philanthropic investment in the new parish.[66] Although noteworthy Black guests included Rev. Augustus Tolton, the attendees at St. Peter Claver were, by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s estimate, two-thirds White, and delegations from local White Catholic organizations packed the front pews.[67] *The Public Ledger* noted, "In the front pew, to the right of the centre [sic] aisle, were Mother Catharine [sic] and several Sisters of the Order of the Blessed Sacrament." Other attendees included the president and members of the Philopatrian Literary Institute and various representatives of the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union (ICBU), including the president of the national organization, the vice president of the diocesan branch, and Martin I. J. Griffin, a local Philadelphian and founder of the American Catholic Historical Society. The morning after the church's dedication, a requiem

[64] Harris, October 2020.

[65] Commission of Records of the City of Philadelphia, Copy of *Deed of St. Peter Claver*, Deed Book WMG No. 19, Philadelphia, 25 September 1985, BC 035 PC, St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church Records, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University.

[66] This is in contrast to the dedication of St. Benedict the Moor in New York City, where *The New York Globe* reported that "[m]ore than 1,500 colored persons flocked to" the church at Bleecker and Downing streets midmorning on November 18, 1883, with approximately half finding room within the church. "There were very few white persons among the congregation," continued the paper, "Those who were present had to exhibit special cards of invitation before they were permitted to enter." "St. Benedict the Moor's," *The New York Globe*, November, 24, 1883.

[67] "New Church for Colored Catholics," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* January 4, 1892.

Mass celebrated the late Patrick Quinn, whose donation had helped secure the purchase of the property.[68]

Archbishop Ryan led the dedication ceremonies at St. Peter Claver. His recorded comments reflected a stark awareness of the theological and social implications of the event. Prior to the archepiscopal blessing, he "made a few remarks, in which he expressed his gratification at the establishment of the church, and that the color line, as might appear to be indistinctly drawn by the erection of 'a church for colored people,' was but an incident in a transitory period." He assured his listeners "that the time would come when there would be no necessity for a church distinctly for colored persons."[69] With these remarks, the archbishop recognized a need for a Black parish, but framed this need as a short-lived one: when the Catholic Church and the country were able to erase the color line, the need for "a church for colored people" would likewise disappear. Then, he implied, full Catholic universalism would be in effect, both spiritually and socially. The parishioners' efforts to provide religious and social services to the broader Seventh Ward community were but temporary steps to full inclusion in the Church.

The history of St. Peter Claver's early organization is indeed one of interracial efforts, but Archbishop Ryan's comments, as well as the largely White guestlist of benefactors, reflected a desire to minimize the racial distinction that was nonetheless manifest in the establishment a Black Catholic parish. This tension was not unique to Philadelphia. Rather, St. Peter Claver's dedication illustrated the broader Catholic community's profound awareness of the thorny theological and social questions raised by religious separation and differentiation in a universal church—and as such, it better reflected the ambivalent inclusion of Black Catholics in the

[68] "For Colored Catholics," *The Public Ledger.*
[69] "New Church for Colored Catholics," *The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

American Church nationally at the end of the century. Although the same newspaper accounts fail to record the reaction of the parishioners to Archbishop Ryan's prediction about the Catholic color line, he was far from alone in envisioning the future of Black Catholic institutions. Indeed, two days after its dedication ceremonies, St. Peter Claver was at the center of a national gathering of Black Catholics that would ultimately challenge such ambivalent discourses of gradualist inclusion in the Church. Starting on January 3, the third meeting of the Colored Catholic Congress met, hosted by St. Peter Claver and the Philopatrian Society, to discuss the place of Black Catholicism in the American Church. Perhaps influenced by the Pennsylvania delegates, including St. Peter Claver parishioners such as Lehmann and Govern, the committee increasingly advocated for Black Catholic schools and parishes as a means of more equitable inclusion in the Church.[70]

Much as European immigrant communities organized their parishes around beneficial societies, sodalities, and schools, St. Peter Claver's educational and social outreach likewise demonstrated a commitment to Black social and spiritual advancement. To argue for these similarities is not to diminish or conflate the particular experiences of the Black Catholics with those of European Catholic immigrant communities; indeed, St. Peter Claver's early history reflected Black Catholics' unique concerns about the nature of racial inclusion. The parish's history, nonetheless, also demonstrates that the desire for ethnic parishes and schools was shared across the color line.

[70] Daniel Rudd, *Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses* (Cincinnati, OH: *American Catholic Tribune,* 1893*).*

Conclusion

As Richard N. Juliani has written, Philadelphia's history is one of many communities, each with distinct experiences and common spaces. Nonetheless, "[i]t is only when we see how these different pathways sometimes intersected and fused, but at other moments diverged and remained distinct, that we begin to understand the complicated labyrinth that is the American city."[71] The same is true for the institutionalization of the Catholic Church and the American city. In the late nineteenth century, Philadelphia's Catholics placed roots, physically and institutionally, in the city in the form of parishes, schools, and charitable societies. These roots were undeniably marked by notions of ethnic and racial difference, driving the proliferation of personal and territorial parishes across the city's neighborhoods. This emphasis on difference also prompted searing conversations on the nature of Catholic universality: in what ways might a parish, school, or individual be Black, or Italian, or Irish, and yet still American and Catholic? These were questions concerned with the nature of Catholic racial identity and belonging, alongside those of ethnicity, language, and immigration, as other studies have shown. As St. Peter Claver's early history indicates, for all the racial and ethnic discrimination that defined the nineteenth century, the complexity of Catholic belonging and ethnic differentiation also established a rich network of Catholic institutional ties across the city.

These concerns about inclusion and difference, rooted as they were in the physical and figurative stones of these Catholic institutions, would remain important through the boom of parishes, parochial schools, and religious life in the first half of the twentieth century. But by the late twentieth century, new iterations of these same questions would begin to crack the foundations of the Archdiocese. In 1985, St. Peter Claver was once again in the spotlight of

[71] Richard N. Juliani, *Building Little Italy: Philadelphia's Italians Before Mass Migration* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xvi.

questions about Catholic belonging, racial equality, and the politics of Catholic parishes. By the early twenty-first century, St. Laurentius and the five parishes of Manayunk would also grapple with these questions in the shifting contexts of the gentrifying city and the repeated revelations of clergy sexual abuse. The following chapters will map these changes and their effects on the parishes, their neighborhoods, and the Catholics who sought to define them.

Chapter 2 |
"Do Not Justify the Expense": Race, Urban Space, and Parish Closures, 1970s-1990s

Adrienne Harris called June 30, 1985, "Suppression Sunday." "Never forget it," she told me grimly. The third-generation parishioner was present at St. Peter Claver that Sunday. It was the parish's final Mass. Nearly a century after St. Peter Claver's establishment as the Archdiocese's first national parish for Black Catholics, Cardinal John Krol (1961-1988) had announced the "suppression," or closure, of the parish. Adrienne's memories of Suppression Sunday echo reporting by *The Philadelphia Daily News*. According to the newspaper, Holy Ghost Father John P. McAndrew spoke in support of the Archdiocese's decision to close St. Peter Claver, explaining that a Black national parish was a form of "segregation," which was "repugnant and hideous and contrary to the mind of Christ." His speech was met with vehement disagreement from parishioners. "Groans rose from some of the 200 people seated in the pews of St. Peter Claver Church," reported journalist Kurt Heine, "One man rushed from the service in tears, sobbing….Edna Collins, 70, who [had] attended the church for 55 years, later denounced McAndrew as 'a Judas.' And Edith Stevens, a 30-year member of the church…took to the pulpit to disagree with the pastor, urging parishioners to fight the closing."[1] Decades later, Adrienne still remembered how Stevens urged her fellow parishioners to protest, saying, "'This is wrong. This should never happen. This is horrible. I don't care what [Father McAndrew] said. This is wrong, and we need to do something about it.'" Adrienne agreed. After Mass, she saw Stevens "standing out on the steps, and I went over to her and said, 'Well, what can I do? Let me help."[2]

The protesting parishioners of St. Peter Claver marched from their church in South-Central Philadelphia to the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, one and a half miles

[1] Kurt Heine, "Congregation Fights to Keep Church," *Philadelphia Daily News* (Philadelphia, PA), July 1, 1985.
[2] Adrienne Harris, Zoom interview with author, October 7, 2020.

northwest on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Their placards read, "Down with Cardinal Cruel, he took us for a fool" and "Give my Master back His church," and they chanted, "They're trying to take our roots away, yes Lord, yes Lord."[3] Their protests, however, did not overturn Cardinal Krol's decision to suppress the parish. Although the church would remain open for services, the parish as a community—as the *first* community where Philadelphia's Black Catholics could gather to worship in their own church—had been dissolved.

Scholars and practitioners of American Catholicism often mark the widespread onset of parish closures in the United States with Cardinal Edmund Szoka's closure of 46 Detroit parishes in 1988.[4] Mass closures followed in urban dioceses including Chicago and Boston. Philadelphia's best-known closures of this era took place in 1993, when Cardinal Krol targeted fourteen parishes in Philadelphia and Chester, the largest city in neighboring Delaware County. Across the country, the waves of urban closures prompted protests, lamentations, and concerned reflections about a Church in "crisis." As historian John T. McGreevy declared, "In the 1990s, for the first time in American Catholic history, bishops closed scores of once vibrant parishes in the northern cities, leaving grafitti-scarred [sic] buildings topped by crosses as poignant relics of another era."[5]

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[3] Heine, "Congregation Fights."

[4] Jeffrey C. Bridger and David R. Maines, "Narrative Structures and the Catholic Church Closings in Detroit," *Qualitative Sociology* 21 (1998): 319-340; Thomas Rzeznik, "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27.4 (Fall 2009): 73-90; Michael Weldon, *A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004). See also: John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). In Roman Catholic canon law, a parish, as a "juridic person" (or entity with rights and obligations under the Church), "is perpetual by its nature" (CIC 1983, c. 515 §1). Once established, a parish can only be "altered" (its boundaries changed) or "suppressed" (closed) by a diocesan bishop, and even these modifications must be made in consultation with a diocesan council of priests.

[5] John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 261.

How did a parish like St. Peter Claver become, in McGreevy's terms, a "relic" of the past? The common explanation in academic and popular discourse leverages a narrative of massive demographic changes: By the late twentieth century, the legacies of an earlier era of brick-and-mortar urban institutionalism had become increasingly at odds with the demographic and economic consequences of deindustrialization and suburbanization in the American Northeast and Midwest. Dense networks of immigrant parishes leaked White parishioners into the suburbs, where they built new parishes with modern church buildings and extensive parking lots. They fled urban parishes which, unlike most Protestant denominations, were unable to relocate to follow parishioner migration. As a result, as dioceses' Catholics shifted to the suburbs, they left behind aging churches, rectories, convents, and schools occupying whole city blocks and increasingly requiring maintenance and repairs. A growing shortage of clergy and women religious compounded the financial woes of these emptying urban parishes. By the early twenty-first century, additional challenges—generational disaffiliation with organized religion, urban gentrification, and the clergy sexual abuse revelations and lawsuits—further exacerbated the threat to parish sustainability in northern cities. And from "once vibrant parishes," relics were born.

This narrative, I argue, risks depicting the phenomenon of parish closure as the inevitable result of demographic and economic changes, forces framed as largely beyond Catholic diocesan control. The evidence of this chapter and the next demonstrates that parish closures, rather than a *marker* of decline, should be understood as a *policy* of decline that actively shaped the Catholic institutional presence in the city and suburbs of Philadelphia. Together, Chapters 2 and 3 map, literally and discursively, the maturation of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's use of parish and parish school closures as a response to religious decline from the late twentieth century through

the early twenty-first. In doing so, these two chapters have three primary aims. The first is to introduce closures as a key policy of decline. In attempting to adapt to the changes and challenges of the late twentieth century, the Archdiocese introduced the closure of parishes and schools as a policy that would eliminate "unnecessary" institutional costs, redistribute available resources, and establish a more sustainable network of parishes and other Catholic institutions. In pursuit of this goal, this work also extends the history of parish and Catholic school closures back to the 1970s and 1980s, well before the mass closures of the 1990s and early 2000s. Lastly, these chapters examine the racial *and* spatial implications of closure policies. By centering parishes like St. Peter Claver, I argue that the common suburbanization-driven explanation of institutional closure fails to critically engage archdiocesan policies of decline, as well as the disproportionate consequences these policies have historically had on the region's urban Black communities.

This chapter begins by examining the roots of the Archdiocese's institutional withdrawal from Philadelphia's urban neighborhoods. Before the better-known closures of 1993, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was already closing parishes and schools in predominantly urban Black neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the Archdiocese held that these suppressions were financially and theologically sound decisions, parishioners and locals like St. Peter Claver's Adrienne Harris challenged the unspoken racial and spatial hierarchies undergirding this policy. Drawing upon scholarship from urban studies, this chapter situates the Catholic parish and school closures of the late twentieth century as a mechanism by which the Archdiocese replicated the urban and industrial policies that divested in Philadelphia's Black urban neighborhoods. Locating these neighborhoods as both the sources of *and* solutions for Catholic decline, the Archdiocese under Cardinal Krol synonymized "religious decline" with

contemporary, racialized discourses of a deteriorating Black "inner city," often marked by the shorthand "urban decline." This association justified the policy of closure, even as parishioners, clergy, and others protested the racial motivations of the Church's institutional withdrawal from Black neighborhoods

The Postwar City: Suburbanization and Deindustrialization

Compared to other northern cities, Philadelphia was home to typically smaller-scale industries in the first half of the twentieth century, providing a more diverse job market for its residents, as well as for the influx of African Americans who traveled north during the Great Migration.[6] Like other postindustrial cities in the northern United States, however, Philadelphia experienced a hardening racial and economic divisions in the postwar years. By 1960, the city had lost half a million jobs, as industries fled the urban center for the surroundings suburbs, which promised more space, fewer labor unions, and lower taxes. After 1950 the city's population fell steadily for the next fifty years. White Philadelphians who could afford it followed the jobs to the suburbs or to the newly-developed neighborhoods of Northeast Philadelphia, often leaving behind the neighborhoods settled by earlier generations of European immigrant communities. The Italians left South Philadelphia; the Jewish population declined in places like South and North Philadelphia and Strawberry Mansion; and the Irish departed West Philadelphia, Mount Airy and Germantown, and North Philadelphia.

Residential segregation hardened between White and Black neighborhoods.[7] At midcentury, these boundaries were visible in urban neighborhoods like Kensington, a

[6] James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

[7] Carolyn Adams et al, *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 10.

predominantly working-class Irish area northeast of City Center. Kensington was the site of racial tension, harassment, and at times violence as the Irish resisted local Black employment, residence, and homeownership. The Irish were remarkably successful in maintaining this exclusion: the 1960 Census recorded that 99.7 percent of the people in the lower Kensington and adjacent Fishtown areas were White.[8] In the following decades, the Black population was similarly excluded by discriminatory housing and banking practices from the new suburban housing developments, which were often almost entirely White. The population of Bucks County, for example, soared from 107,715 to 144,620 (a 34.3 percent increase) between 1940 and 1950. Only 500 of these new residents, however, were Black. The residential segregation was such that former Philadelphia mayor Richardson Dilworth described the suburbs in 1968 as "a white noose" around the city.[9] By 1980, Philadelphia ranked worst among the country's largest cities for levels of economic disparity and urban poverty.[10]

Several historical and sociological studies have sought to untangle how Philadelphia, a city with Democratic governance from midcentury, a dynamic history of civil rights and labor union mobilization, and a palpable pride in the working class, saw such drastic increases in poverty, racial isolation, and divestment. James Wolfinger and Timothy J. Lombardo have both argued that the region's midcentury Republican Party framed New Deal politics as a threatening alliance between the Democratic Party and the growing African American population.[11] The Republicans' condemnation of this alliance appealed to the post-immigrant Euro-American populations who feared for their economic security in the postwar years. According to

[8] Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided*, 7.

[9] Quoted in Jon S. Birger, "Race, Reaction, and Reform: The Three Rs of Philadelphia School Politics, 1965-1971," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 120, no.3 (July 1996): 206.

[10] Adams, *Philadelphia*, 27. As scholars of urban decline argue, residential segregation reflects other aspects of urban racial inequality, such as employment levels, quality of education, and health.

[11] Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided*; Timothy J. Lombardo, *Blue-Collar Conservatism: Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia and Populist Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Lombardo, a discourse of "blue-collar pride" among White ethnic communities coalesced by the 1980s with a populist, "law and order" politics and a conservative rejection of welfare policies associated with inner-city African American communities. This ethos emerged and hardened in the largely White, suburban ring around the city, as well as the highly segregated areas like South and Northeast Philadelphia. It was in these areas, as Thomas J. Sugrue has explained, that "[t]he barriers that kept blacks confined to racially isolated, deteriorating, inner-city neighborhoods were largely invisible to white [communities]."[12] As the city underwent the shocks of deindustrialization, these barriers to Black equality racialized the "inner city" as a site of deterioration and decline. These were processes of *active* divestment in the urban core, driven by industrial suburbanization, redlining practices, and unequal patterns of inclusion to schools, loans, and other systems of social and economic support. As Matthew Cressler has argued in his study of Black Catholicism in Chicago, "[h]istorical narratives of impoverished Black people abandoned by white flight and deindustrialization fail to account for the ways in which racist real estate practices and the overdevelopment of white suburbs occurred *at the expense of* urban Black communities."[13] This racialization and spatialization of so-called "urban decline" would emerge as a powerful factor in Catholic practices of investment and divestment in the postwar years.

[12] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9.

[13] Matthew Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 157. Italics added.

Disputing "A Fact of Life": The Suppression of St. Peter Claver

Although this literature on deindustrialization occasionally references the "'predominantly Catholic'" Irish or Italians who rigorously protested Black employment or homeownership in postwar cities, the Church's place in this history is underexplored.[14] In Philadelphia, the Church's presence was intimately tied to the shape of the city. The Archdiocese expanded significantly during the first half of the twentieth century. "God's Bricklayer," Cardinal Dennis Dougherty, was the fourth Archbishop of Philadelphia. During his tenure from 1918 to 1951, the Archdiocese established "112 parishes, 145 parochial schools, 53 Catholic high schools, four Catholic colleges, twelve hospitals and eleven homes for the aged," and ordained over 2,000 new priests. In 1951, the Archdiocese numbered 451 parishes, 305 parochial schools, and 31 Catholic high schools serving over one million Catholics. This growth was so rapid that, in 1960, the Diocese of Allentown was established from part of Philadelphia's territory, removing Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Northampton, and Schuylkill counties north of the city. Despite halving the number of counties in its territory, by 1969, the Archdiocese claimed 1.35 million Catholics in Philadelphia and the surrounding four counties.[15]

The Archdiocese's population did not overwhelmingly signal decline in the late twentieth century. The percentage of Roman Catholics to the total population of the five counties remained steady between 35 and nearly 37 percent until 2010 (see Table 2.1). Nevertheless, the Church underwent changes that tell a more complicated story about the postwar years. When John Krol was installed as Archbishop of Philadelphia in 1961, for example, the city's St. Charles

[14] Matthew Cressler, "'Real Good and Sincere Catholics': White Catholicism and Massive Resistance to Desegregation in Chicago, 1965-1968," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 30, no. 2 (2020): 273-306.

[15] "A Brief History of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, accessed December 1, 2020, archphila.org/about/#history.

Borromeo Seminary enrolled over 500 students, with over half preparing for work in the Archdiocese. By Cardinal Krol's retirement in 1988, the seminary counted only 150 students total.[16] In addition to falling numbers of clergy, after the Second Vatican Council, many women religious found ministries beyond the Catholic schools where so many had provided subsidized labor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This change levied a new financial burden on parishes seeking to support the higher salaries of lay educators.[17]

Table 2.1: Population of Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1971-2017

Year	Total Population	Roman Catholic Population	Percentage of Population
1971	3,864,810	1,359,450	35.2%
1980	3,682,709	1,316,673	35.8%
1990	3,728,909	1,304,089	34.9%
2010	4,008,994	1,476,363	36.8%
2017	4,119,268	1,292,704	31.4%

Sources: *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971; Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1980*, collected by the Glenmary Research Center and distributed by the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com); *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990*, collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies and distributed by the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com); Eugene Taber, "Map: Catholic population changes in Pennsylvania 1980-2010," *The Morning Call* (Allentown, PA), March 17, 2015; "Statistical Overview," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, last modified July 1, 2018, http://archphila.org/about/.

Table 2.2: Parishes by Decade, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1950-2019

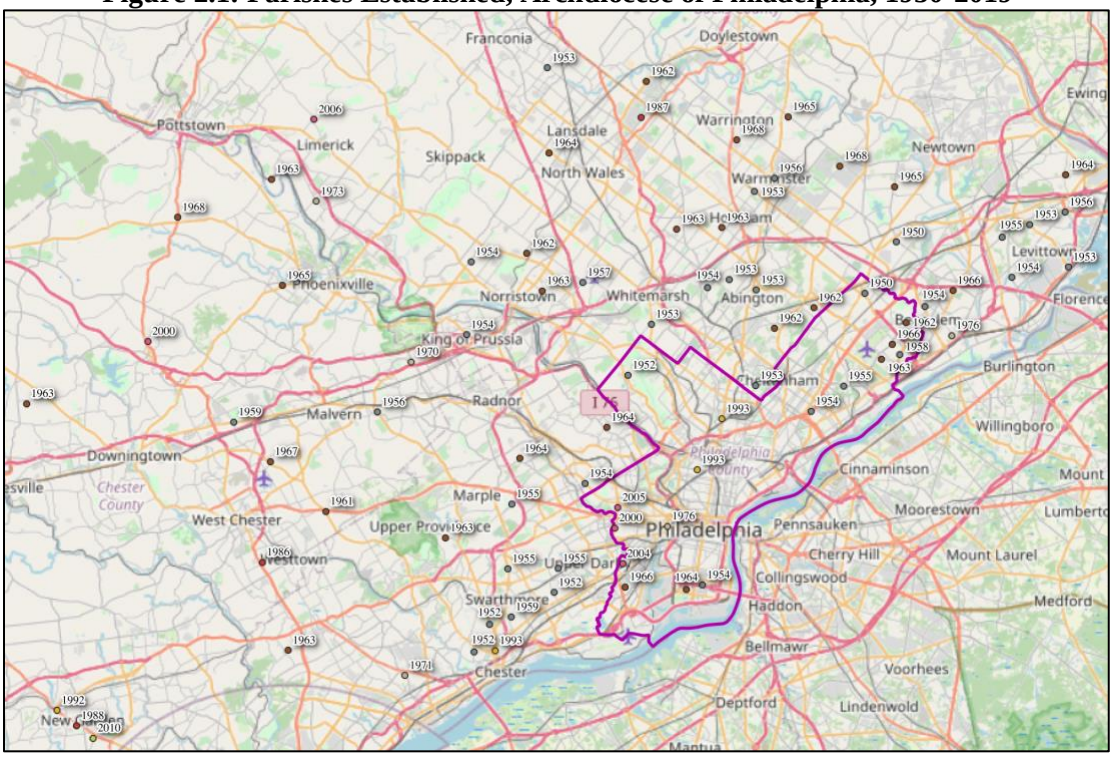
Decade	Number of Parishes Established	Number of Parishes Closed or Consolidated
1950-1959	34	1
1960-1969	29	0
1970-1979	6	13
1980-1989	3	8
1990-1999	4	18
2000-2009	6	28
2010-2019	2	62
Total	**84**	**130**

Source: "Parish Directory," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, https://archphila.org/parish/, compiled by author (November 1, 2019).

[16] Michael D. Schaffer, "In 27 years, Krol has seen a shift in archdiocese," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA) Feb. 10, 1988.

[17] These wages were still low and increasingly uncompetitive. Martha Wooddall and Laura Quinn, "More Parochial Teachers Seeking Public-School Benefit-Money," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), December 29, 1987.

Figure 2.1: Parishes Established, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1950-2019



City of Philadelphia boundary in purple.
Source: Map by author.

Among parishes, challenges were beginning to mount. Figure 2.1 represents the establishment of parishes from 1950 onward. As the map shows, the vast majority of these new parishes were erected in the suburbs around the city between 1950 and 1970. The rapid establishment of parishes ground to a halt, however, after 1969. From 34 and 29 parishes established in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, each subsequent decade saw the erection of at most six new parishes (Table 2.2); as the remainder of Part One demonstrates, moreover, by the end of this decade, these "new" parishes were often the consolidation of several closing parishes. Simultaneously, although the Archdiocese only closed one parish in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of closures rapidly increased in the 1970s and 1980s. With the exceptions of St. Patrick Mission in Dublin and Our Lady of Vilna (Lithuanian) in Chester, these closures in the 1970s and 1980s were all within Philadelphia's city limits. Eight of these Philadelphia parishes had been ethnic, established by Italian (3), Slovak (2), Hungarian (1), German (1), and African

American (1) communities. They closed in North Philadelphia, Germantown, South Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia, where African Americans were increasingly replacing white ethnic populations.

A comparative example illustrates the impact of Catholic suburbanization in the Archdiocese. Take St. Andrew in Newtown, Bucks County, approximately thirty miles northeast of Philadelphia. When local Catholics established St. Andrew in 1880, they built a church on Sycamore Street near the small downtown of Newtown Borough. The Borough, which encompasses about a half square mile, had a relatively stable population of approximately 2,000 to 2,500 residents since 1930. However, the surrounding Newtown Township doubled its number of residents from just over 700 in 1930 to over 1,400 in 1960.[18] By 1990, the Township population had reached 13,685. By the early 1980s, the St. Andrew congregation had outgrown its original Sycamore Street church, which seated only 200. A new church, constructed a mile away on Swamp Road, had the capacity to serve one of the largest parishes in the Archdiocese, which numbered in 2016 at over 6,000 families.

St. Andrew expanded to Swamp Road in 1985, the same year the Archdiocese suppressed St. Peter Claver. As discussed in Chapter 1, Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan dedicated St. Peter Claver with the belief that there would come a day when there was no longer a need for *Black* Catholic institutions. In 1985, Cardinal John Krol believed this day had arrived. He announced the suppression of St. Peter Claver on May 26, 1985, a month before Suppression Sunday. In his letter justifying the suppression, Krol explained that the Archdiocese's Commission for Parish Sites and Boundaries, which collected data "from a lengthy series of studies relative to Saint Peter Claver parish," found that "the advisability of changing the canonical status of Saint Peter

[18] The Borough and the Township of Newtown separated in 1838.

Claver parish is very much in evidence." These studies, the letter emphasized, were "intensive and extensive."[19] St. Peter Claver's membership had dropped by nearly 50 percent in only five years. In the previous five years, enrollment in the parish school had also fallen by 50 percent, from 185 to 92, and Father McAndrew, St. Peter Claver's pastor, reported that the school building required renovations costing $400,000.[20] After the Archdiocese closed the school in 1984, the parish was next.

According to the Sites and Boundaries' findings, St. Peter Claver's deterioration was unfortunate but indisputable. Krol credited "significant racial change in the very neighborhood where the parish of St. Peter Claver is located" as the primary reason for the decision. In the 1880s, when the elites of the Seventh Ward established Peter Claver's Union and later the parish, "the number of black Catholics in the city of Philadelphia was small and concentrated in the geographic area surrounding the parish," and local Catholic churches practiced segregated seating. In contrast, by 1985, the dispersal of the Black population from the neighborhood coincided with "the reality that many territorial, non-national parishes minister to the pastoral needs" of Black Catholics. Higher rates of access and integration in territorial parishes throughout the city, according to the cardinal, therefore eliminated the need for a specifically Black parish in what was becoming a White neighborhood.[21] This *reality* was not a failure of the parishioners, but a natural result of demographic changes as "population shifts in our large urban areas continue to be a factor." "As there are occasions for establishing new parishes," Krol wrote, "so, also, regretfully, there are occasions of the demise of parishes. This process has

[19] Cardinal John Krol, "To the faithful of Saint Peter Claver Church," letter, May 26, 1985. Copy provided to author by Adrienne Harris.

[20] Martha Woodall, "Few Catholic Schools Losing Fight to Survive," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 10, 1984.

[21] Krol, "To the faithful."

become *a fact of life* in the Archdiocese."[22] It was his responsibility as archbishop, he concluded, to respond to these changes for the health of each parish and the Archdiocese as a whole.

It was true that St. Peter Claver's neighborhood had changed in the last century. By the 1930s, the Seventh Ward, once the center of Philadelphia's Black population, had become home to some of the city's oldest, most dilapidated, and overcrowded housing stock. Following a devastating tenement collapse on December 19, 1936, at 517-519 South Fifteenth Street, the Black population had begun to shift from the densely populated Seventh Ward. While some residents moved only several blocks south to the Thirtieth Ward, the construction of two public housing projects in North Philadelphia, the James Weldon Johnson Homes and Richard Allen Homes, invited others into North Philadelphia. Meanwhile, many former middle-class residents of the Seventh Ward headed for West Philadelphia.[23]

This neighborhood migration increased when urban renewal plans targeted what Marcus Anthony Hunter has called "the seemingly vulnerable Black Seventh Ward."[24] The Crosstown Expressway, a proposed highway connecting I-95 and I-76, would have traveled through the neighborhood. It was a devastating proposal. Under mayors Joseph S. Clark, Jr. (1952-1956), Richardson Dilworth (1956-1960), James Hugh Joseph Tate (1962-1972), and Frank Rizzo (1972-1976), plans for the Crosstown Expressway framed the highway as a means of revitalizing Center City, easing traffic congestion, and clearing the "blight" of the Old Seventh Ward. Over the course of two decades, Seventh Warders, led by housing activist Alice Lipscombe, mobilized an interracial movement to protest the Expressway. Although their efforts forced the city to finally scrap the plans in 1974, the longstanding threat of the project nevertheless prompted the

[22] Ibid. Italics added.
[23] Marcus Anthony Hunter, *Black Citymakers: How the Philadelphia Negro Changed Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[24] Ibid., 116.

rapid out-migration of the Black population. Thus, by 1950, North Philadelphia contained twice as large a Black population as the Seventh Ward's South-Central neighborhoods, with 164,801 Black residents to South-Central's 80,754. West Philadelphia also outgrew South-Central by 1950, numbering 101,556 Black residents. As Black residents left the historic South-Central neighborhoods, White Philadelphians were, in turn, drawn to the area's proximity to Center City. The area rapidly gentrified in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The remaining Black population shrank to Lipscombe's Hawthorne neighborhood, bordered east-west by Broad and Eleventh streets and north-south by South Street and Washington Avenue. On Lombard and Twelfth, St. Peter Claver sat one block north of Hawthorne, on the outer boundary of this Black neighborhood.[25]

St. Peter Claver's parishioners argued that these were the social and economic circumstances the Archdiocese should have taken into consideration. The parish's so-called "decline" was not as simple as the Archdiocese's contention that Catholics were favoring areas like St. Andrew's Newtown, while abandoning urban neighborhoods like the Old Seventh Ward. Cardinal Krol's reliance upon demographic numbers failed to account for the fact that local industries and businesses were pumping money into the growing suburbs in the postwar decades, while the City of Philadelphia spent decades attempting to build the Crosstown Expressway through the Old Seventh Ward. There were other issues at play as well. Parishioners maintained that lower levels of parish engagement were a result of lack of leadership more than lack of interest. After the retirement of a beloved Holy Ghost Father who had been pastor for forty years, a series of sick and elderly priests in the early 1980s caused the sharp decrease in the number of parish events. And finally, although some White locals attended St. Peter Claver, the

[25] In 1950, North, West, and South-Central Philadelphia had 89% of the city's nonwhite households (only 1% of nonwhite households were not Black). Ibid., 118.

Archdiocese informed the parish council that it could not legally count them as members, despite more expansive interracial wording in the church's deed.[26]

Economic considerations aside, at the heart of St. Peter Claver's suppression was a fundamental disagreement about the nature of Black inclusion in the Church. The Archdiocese and Black parishioner-protesters contested the ideal place, literally and figuratively, of Black Catholics in a universal church. Father McAndrew and the Archdiocese approached the issue as a problem of access. They argued that the overt discrimination of the nineteenth century, when Black parishioners were restricted to segregated seating, had ended. The twentieth century Church, they asserted, was more inclusive: any Catholic should *be able to* attend the parish in his or her residential neighborhood. This was a theology of interracialism, a goal toward which Philadelphia's hierarchy had started gesturing at least as early as the 1920s and 1930s.[27] Within this framework, a Black national parish at best harkened back to an era of Catholic segregation and, at worst, was at odds with the universal nature of the Church, which held that all Catholic souls were saved through shared practice and belief, regardless of race or ethnicity. Like the Italian or Polish parishes left behind when their communities departed for the suburbs, neither the neighborhood nor the Black community needed this relic of an earlier era.

This framework did resonate with some parishioners. As Adrienne Harris recalled, St. Peter Claver's location in a "neighborhood [that] was really going down" lowered the parish's social status for some Black Catholics. Harris described some former parishioners' attitudes towards St. Peter Claver as echoing Cardinal Krol's reasoning: "Once integration came, or

[26] See Chapter 1. Suzanne Gordon, "Rallying for Their Church Members March," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 17, 1985. Deed: Certificate of authenticity, 1985, Box 6, Folder 11, St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church Records, BC 035 PC, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University, Philadelphia.

[27] McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 252-254.

segregation was done away with, and you weren't restricted to this one church, they [Black families] would join another Catholic church," explained Harris, "And they would be proud to come back and say, 'Oh, I belong to St. So-and-So. And I'm the one and only Black person there…. I'm doing better. I can do better.'"

But others found this approach to Catholic parish problematic. Decades after St. Peter Claver's suppression, Juanita O'Kedas Qui, another former parishioner, pressed, "It is very hard to be a person of color in the Roman Catholic Church."[28] Despite Cardinal Krol's dismissal of the need for a Black parish, Juanita described other parishes in South and South-Central Philadelphia that remained deeply committed to serving their founding ethnic community. She joked that one needed to be "FBI: Full Blood Italian" to attend a nearby Italian parish. If the Irish and Italian could remain committed to their ethnic parishes long after their immigrant communities first settled in Philadelphia, Juanita and others argued that St. Peter Claver, the first parish for Black Catholics, deserved the same.

Adrienne Harris' personal history in some ways mirrors the history of the Seventh Ward and illustrates parishioners' complex relationships with the Black parish. Her grandmother moved to Philadelphia in the 1910s with her first husband, whom she described as an 800-pound accountant for a circus, and "devout" Catholic. He supported St. Peter Claver, which was half a block from their residence. After her own conversion to Catholicism, Adrienne's grandmother sent her five children, including Adrienne's mother, to St. Peter Claver School. Adrienne likewise attended St. Peter Claver School as she grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, before moving to King of Prussia in Montgomery County after she married. In the late 1970s, she began to travel into the city to attend Sunday Mass at St. Peter Claver with her children. In their Catholic

[28] Juanita O'Kedas Qui, Zoom interview with author, October 23, 2020.

schools, she explained, they were learning Irish and Italian Catholic heritage, but not their own as Black Catholics. As a personal parish for Black Catholics, St. Peter Claver invited Adrienne to be a parishioner regardless of her address of residence. She recalled the parish as similarly recruiting Black Catholics from throughout the Archdiocese, as well as from the greater metropolitan area in New Jersey, and that White neighbors also attended and were welcome at services. Thus, she contended that the Archdiocese had misrepresented the purpose of a national parish, which recognized the needs of a self-organized community. In offering an alternative to territorial parishes, national parishes transcended the demographic changes of the immediate neighborhood. St. Peter Claver offered a parish, in Adrienne's words, that could "share a piece of everybody's heritage, including their own."[29] Although Cardinal Krol denied any racial motivation for the suppression, parishioners like Adrienne and Juanita disagreed. The historical nature of St. Peter Claver as the first Black parish made the erasure of race from the decision and its consequences an impossibility.

After unsuccessful petitions to view the Archdiocese's Sites and Boundaries report, a copy eventually reached parishioners Edith and Alan Stevens in an anonymous envelop. The report was published on April 2, 1984, under the February 3 directive of auxiliary Bishop Martin Lohmuller. Remarkably, despite Cardinal Krol's use of the report to justify the suppression of St. Peter Claver, the recommendation explicitly advised *against* closing the parish: "Although the Commission is aware that the neighboring parishes could absorb St. Peter Claver Parish, nonetheless, the Commission recommends that the Parish should remain as it is especially now that the school has been closed." In addition to citing the parish's financial viability with the school's closure, the Commission noted, "The historical background, in fact the site is

[29] Harris, October 2020.

historically certified, has a real symbolic significance to the black Catholics of Philadelphia. This factor is considered especially important during these times when the Church is making a concentrated effort toward the evangelization of the black community." It stated the possible consequences of suppression baldly: "These is a possible chance that the blacks might defect[,] feeling that they have been abandoned."[30] The Commission not only recommended against suppressing St. Peter Claver. It also warned of the likelihood that such a decision would appear racially motivated.

In *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva provides an explanation for the Archdiocese's denial of the racialized nature of St. Peter Claver's suppression. Cardinal Krol's insistence that the suppression was about facts and figures—not race—illustrates what Bonilla-Silva terms *color-blind racism*. A color-blind narrative insists upon own race-neutrality while nonetheless enabling "whites [to] enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding 'racist.'"[31] As Bonilla-Silva explains, color-blind racism often draws upon abstract notions of political and economic liberalism to justify racialized structures of oppression. "By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism," Bonilla-Silva writes, "whites can appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral,' while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality."[32] Cardinal Krol relied upon certain demographic and financial explanations to justify the suppression, while dismissing the Archdiocese's own studies and the local community's expressed needs and desires. His justification braided these explanations with

[30] Commission for Parish Sites and Boundaries, "Study of St. Peter Claver Parish according to the directive of His Excellency Bishop Lohmuller on February 3, 1984," report, April 2, 1984. Copy provided to author by Adrienne Harris.

[31] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, fourth edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 4.

[32] Ibid., 76.

Catholic doctrines of universality and interracialism, crafting a powerful narrative that obscured what parishioners and the authors of the Sites and Boundaries Report saw as central: the Black history of the parish.

From the chants during their Suppression Sunday march on the Cathedral to the repeated attempts through the 1990s to have the parish reestablished, the parishioner-protesters of St. Peter Claver insisted upon the relationship between their parish history, their parish's suppression, and their race. The nature of Catholic clerical authority was still a heavy weight against them. This authority, embodied in the person of Cardinal Krol and obscured by the Archdiocese's complicated bureaucratic structure, allowed very little room for parishioners to contest the archdiocesan interpretation of the suppression. As Adrienne recalled, "We didn't know what to do after the suppression." She lamented that the leadership, including Father McAndrew, failed to explicate a dense bureaucratic system that stripped their parish history from their control. She described the experience as being "betrayed by people that you trusted your whole life and were taught to respect—and they knew it, and they knew we didn't understand what was going on….and that's why they didn't tell us." Although the interpretive authority of the Archdiocese dismissed other understandings of the event, the parishioner-protesters named the suppression's racial logic, untangling the unspoken hierarchies embedded in the decision.

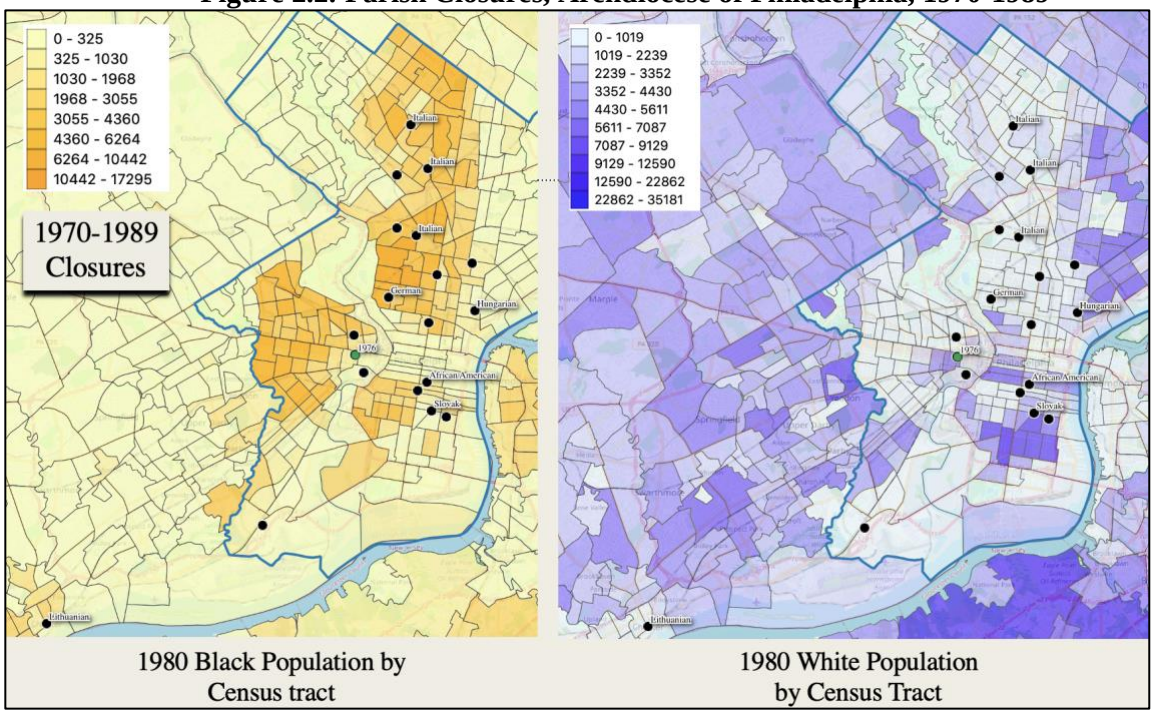
As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, the parishioners of St. Peter Claver were not alone in suspecting the Archdiocese privileged White, suburban parishes in the late twentieth century. The racial and spatial hierarchies that undergirded St. Peter Claver's suppression manifested in the Archdiocese's implementation of urban closures as a policy of decline across the metropolitan area in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. As a policy of decline, the Archdiocese implemented parish suppression—along with the closure of parish schools—to mitigate the

effects of declining numbers of clergy and women religious, the rising costs of maintaining aging urban properties, the consequences of an earlier era of institutionalizing ethnic differentiation, and the flight of large White populations. These were, of course, *real* challenges that faced many of the urban parishes—but parishioners demanded recognition that policies, rather than unavoidable demographic changes, shaped and exacerbated them. As parishes in the predominantly White parishes of growing suburban developments like Newtown's St. Andrew were reaping the benefits of economic investment, Catholics in suppressed parishes protested the Archdiocese's assumption that the Church was a victim to suburbanization and deindustrialization. Moving beyond St. Peter Claver, the following section examines the Archdiocese's development of parish and school closures as a policy of decline that actively contributed to the divestment in Black urban communities in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

"Justify the Expense": Archdiocesan Urban Divestment and Closure as a Policy of Decline

Figure 2.2 maps the Archdiocese's parish suppressions of the 1970s and 1980s with racial demographics from the 1980 Census. As the figure illustrates, most of these suppressions took place in urban neighborhoods with greater numbers of Black residents; this correlation becomes even more pronounced with the parish suppressions of the 1990s (Figure 2.3). Put simply, the Archdiocese's policy of decline in these decades was not simply to close parishes: it was to close parishes in Black neighborhoods.

Figure 2.2: Parish Closures, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1970-1989



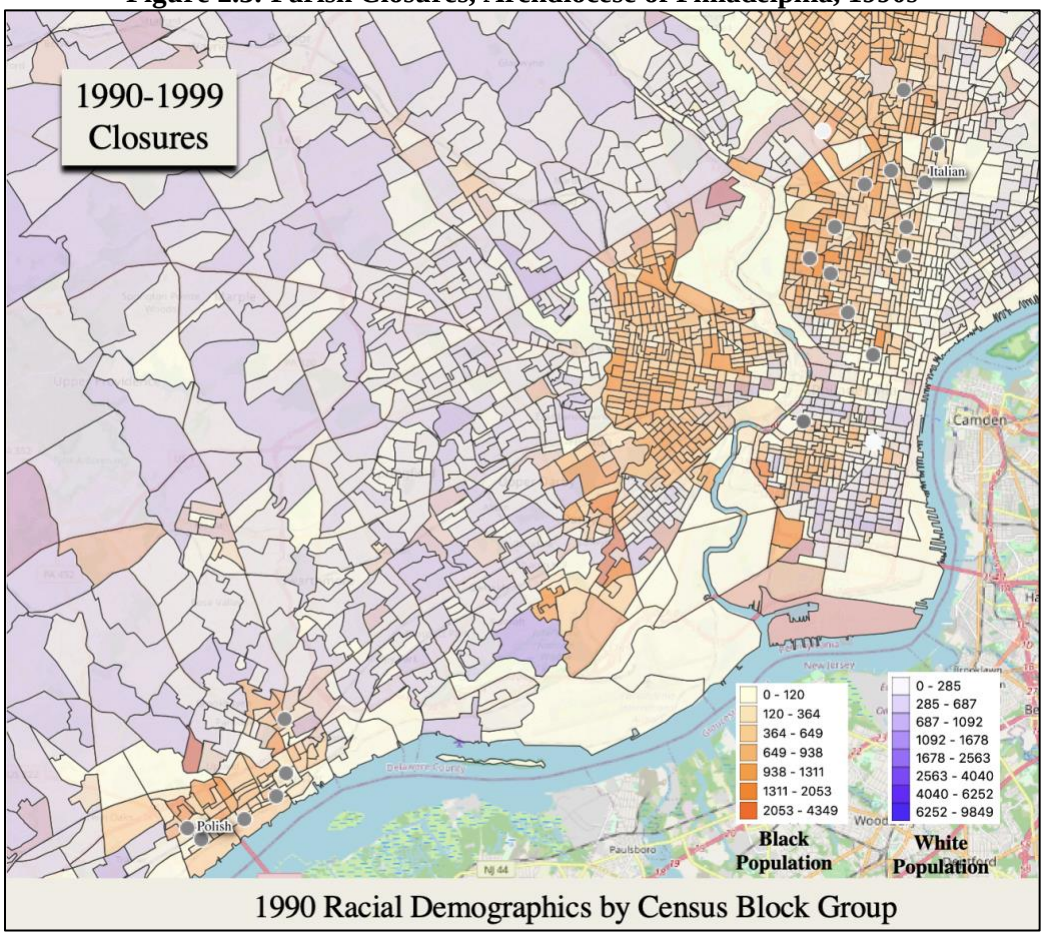
City of Philadelphia boundary in blue.

Source: Map by author. 1980 Census Tract by Race: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

This policy of decline also frequently targeted parish schools as a preliminary step before the suppression of the parish itself. Take the case of several Black Catholic schools closed in 1984: St. Peter Claver in South-Central Philadelphia, Our Lady of Mercy in North Philadelphia, and St. Michael in Chester. Describing these closures, a spokesperson argued, "The sizes of the parishes and the schools' enrollments do not justify the expense of refurbishing and maintaining their aging buildings."[33] These schools no longer had the concentration of Catholic students and Catholic money to constitute a Catholic space in the same way, for example, as St. Andrew in Newtown.

[33] Eric Harrison, "Archdiocese Closing Three Black Schools," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 4, 1984.

Figure 2.3: Parish Closures, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1990s



Source: Map by author. 1990 Census Block Group by Race: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

For the community of Our Lady of Mercy School in North Philadelphia, however, this interpretation of Catholic vitality and purpose was myopic. North Philadelphians pointed to several trends that did not seem to factor into the Archdiocese's policy. The simple explanation that Black religiosity was less likely to be Catholic than Italian or Irish, for example, obscured a more complicated story. In 1980, the Archdiocese estimated about 40,000 Black Catholics in the region—and these numbers were rising.[34] Moreover, non-Catholic identity did not necessarily

[34] The 1975 estimate was 38,000. As Matthew Cressler has shown, the Great Migration resulted in a significant growth of Black Catholics in northern cities in the twentieth century. Cressler, *Authentically Black*.

preclude engagement with Catholic institutions in these neighborhoods.[35] St. Peter Claver school, one of the 1984 school closures, had of course been established a century earlier to serve Black populations—but by the 1980s, Our Lady of Mercy and St. Michael also had majority or all-Black student population. These non-Catholic Black families saw parish schools as an alternative to a public school system in which the dropout rate for Black students nearly tripled that of White students. "We are not only about Catholic people," insisted the Rev. William A. Trader, assistant pastor of Our Lady of Mercy, "There is not a sign on the door that says 'Catholics only.'…The distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic in an area like this is not very helpful."[36] The fact that Our Lady of Mercy served a primarily non-Catholic population did not mean the neighborhood had no need or desire for the institution, or that the parish had no incentive to support its students. Rather, by removing the school, the closure of these schools stripped resources from neighborhoods in need. As the principal of Our Lady of Mercy, Sister Marian Behrle, told reporters at the time of the school's closure, "The impact is on North Philadelphia and not just the students." Rev. Trader likewise explained, "First it was the banks that left. Then businesses started closing their doors. Then last year the public school across the street was closed. And now the Catholic church."[37] The community protested that the Archdiocese failed to recognize the role of these Catholic parishes and schools to the neighborhood.

Some, like Sister Virginia Jenkins of Our Lady of Mercy, also challenged the Archdiocese to think more expansively about the Church's place in neighborhoods like North

[35] By the 1960s, Catholic parishes in parts of North Philadelphia were more engaged in "neighborhood ministries." These ministries including nurseries, legal and employment advice, civic improvement programs, and youth programs. Church of the Gesu, the parish on which McGreevy focuses, was among the parishes serving a Black neighborhood that the Archdiocese suppressed in 1993. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 256-257.

[36] Woodall, "Few Catholic Schools."

[37] Ibid.

Philadelphia. "I think that we [the sisters] feel that there has to be more creative solutions.…Instead, one by one the churches are closing and leaving them abandoned buildings," said Sister Jenkins, "This is all we're leaving behind."[38] In the era of Catholic liberation theology, Sister Jenkins and others desired what they saw as a more Christian, critical, and holistic framework for understanding urban change, racial inequality, and parish suppression. They recognized that the city's Catholic schools were 90 percent White by the mid-1960s, and they would continue to serve more White students than the city's public schools through the 1980s.[39] In local reporting, the clergy and staff of Our Lady of Mercy challenged this discrepancy, noting that the closure of their school would only worsen it. Like the parishioner-protesters of St. Peter Claver, these Catholics pushed back against what they saw as overly simplistic explanations of institutional closures without recognition of the social and racial consequences. They encouraged the Archdiocese to reconsider questions of religious change in light of contemporary Catholic theologies of oppression.

The Archdiocese was not, however, totally reliant upon closure as its sole policy of decline. In recognition of the demographic changes that left many parishes struggling with diminishing collections, school fees, and aging properties, Cardinal Krol had established the Inter-Parochial Cooperation Commission (IPCC) in 1972 to distribute funds to parishes in financial need.[40] The needs of parishes quickly overwhelmed the IPCC. Parishes that failed to

[38] Harrison, "Archdiocese Closing Three."

[39] Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 224-225; n.57, 379-380. Pennsylvania relies heavily upon local taxes for public education, which advantages wealthy districts. Moreover, Philadelphia's public school system suffers because of the City and County of Philadelphia are synonymous. The deindustrialization policies that stripped inner-city neighborhoods of employment and investment opportunities likewise weakened the tax base to support the public schools. Carolyn Adams, *From the Outside In: Suburban Elites, Third-Sector Organizations, and the Reshaping of Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 5.

[40] Justin Rigali, "Stewardship and Solidarity," *Catholic Exchange*, July 7, 2006, https://catholicexchange.com/stewardship-and-solidarity.

receive coveted funds often faced suppression as a result. This was the case for St. Mary the Eternal, a former Italian parish located about two miles northwest of North Philadelphia's Our Lady of Mercy parish. In 1976, when St. Mary the Eternal failed to receive IPCC funds, the Archdiocese slated it instead for suppression.[41]

Although the Archdiocese did not explicitly frame the IPCC as a support for Black parishes, it quickly became recognized as a fund for struggling "inner-city," and often Black, parishes and their schools. As such, it signaled the Archdiocese's charitable assistance to these parishes in a way that could be tinged with racial paternalism. As Edith Stevens of St. Peter Claver explained, "[the Archdiocese's] biggest thing is, 'Look at all the money we give black people.'"[42] Although the IPCC might have treated the symptoms of these Black parishes' financial precarity, it rarely, however, addressed the underlying structural mechanisms of deindustrialization and suburbanization that caused and perpetuated this precarity.

A closer look into Our Lady of Mercy School closure demonstrates not only how this framework made the IPCC funds less effective, but also how it obscured the Church's *active divestment* in Black communities. Before its closure in 1984, Our Lady of Mercy received IPCC support in the early 1980s. By then, its school, which the Sisters of St. Joseph had founded and staffed since 1894, enrolled only Black children. In 1982, the Rev. Wilfred Pashley described to reporters the effort to keep the school afloat despite the additional support. "What you tend to do is cut back on necessary things like repairs in order to keep your subsidy as low as you can," Pashley explained, "so whoever is looking at those figures won't say, 'Look at Our Lady of

[41] Kitty Caparella, "St. Mary's Hears Solemn Bells Toll," *Philadelphia Daily News* (Philadelphia, PA), June 3, 1976. Tioga maintained a White population through the 1960s but increasingly became predominantly African American. Countryman, *Up South*, 237.

[42] Michael D. Schaffer, "Black Catholics Seek A Larger Role," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), August 9, 1986.

Mercy, it [the financial situation] is getting worse.' You do the things that keep you dry, warm[,] and lights in the classrooms."[43] The IPCC, while necessary for this school's survival, offered only a stopgap in addressing the school's needs. Yet, by the 1983-1984 schoolyear, Our Lady of Mercy School was in better condition. In addition to the IPCC funds, fundraising by teachers and parents, which a former pastor called "a heroic effort," also supported the school's recovering financial health. Whereas the Archdiocese considered enrollment below 200 students an indication of school decline, Our Lady of Mercy enrolled 261 students in 1983-1984. Over one third of the students were Catholic, despite the fact that only two percent of the neighborhood belonged to the Church. Although rumors were circulating that the parish church might close due to expensive furnace repair costs, the community was optimistic about the 1984-1985 schoolyear.

On May 27, 1984, Cardinal Krol announced the suppression of Our Lady of Mercy parish and the closure of its school, both effective June 18. The Archdiocese reached the decision without input from the parishioners, parents, clergy, or vowed religious, many of whom responded with shock and outrage. As one local priest lamented in a local paper, "the blacks who live there weren't even asked."[44] While the Archdiocese presented Our Lady of Mercy's closure as another commonsense financial decision, the community argued that the suppression was neither obvious nor value-neutral, but rather a unilateral decision. Based on the primary markers of financial viability and enrollment level, many believed their school should remain open. To make matters worse, not only had families already registered and paid tuition for the 1984-1985

[43] Marcia A. Slacum, "Inner-City Parochial Schools Struggling to Survive," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 9, 1982.
[44] Woodall, "Few Catholic Schools."

schoolyear, but because the announcement came after parochial school registration deadlines, they were also left scrambling for limited places in other parish schools for their children.

Our Lady of Mercy's closure indicated that failure to receive IPCC support was not the only danger: being a beneficiary also seemed to toll the death knell for parishes. In justifying the suppression of Our Lady of Mercy, Cardinal Krol referenced the parish's receipt of IPCC funds over the last dozen years as proof of parish decline.[45] Father John P. McNamee, a joint administrator to Our Lady of Mercy and nearby St. Malachy, protested, "It looks like the interparochial fund [IPCC] is a Trojan Horse. The more money you receive from it, the more autonomy you lose."[46] Rather than an investment in Our Lady of Mercy, the IPCC became a means by which the Archdiocese ultimately justified its divestment from the community.

Scholarship on the racialization of urban space has analyzed how other institutions, such as banks, likewise leveraged color-blind frameworks in the late twentieth century to obscure the racial implications of urban divestment. The overtly racist policies of Black exclusion, such as redlining, gave way over the latter half of the twentieth century to what Nathan D. B. Connolly has described as "seemingly objective models of real estate economics." These models, Connolly explains, "offered a handy explanation—supposed black inferiority—for why capitalism never quite worked the same way for everybody."[47] Real estate practices and discourses created a circular logic in which Black homes and neighborhoods were undesirable sites of investment because Black poverty was risky. In *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor likewise contends that with the

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2014), 7. Charles Mills has characterized this "*racing* of space" as, "'You are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself.'" Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 41-42.

passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, politicians and real estate professionals began to insist that, with the removal of discourses of exclusion, race had ceased to be an engine of urban decline. To these professionals, the disappearance of racial language evinced the disappearance of racial exclusion itself. In reality, as overt exclusion gave way to what she calls "predatory inclusion" practices in housing markets, Taylor finds, "[t]he conservative-inspired discourse of colorblindness and its erasure of 'race talk' did not actually eliminate the invocation of race to make meaning of the shifting social, economic, and political context of the 1970s; *it just changed how race was invoked*."[48] The divestment in urban spaces was never incidental, and it was never disentangled from race. Instead, phrases like "urban crisis" or "risky investment" came to signal "Black" and "poor" as a new kind of race talk.

These studies rarely take religion into account, but their analyses have significant resonances with the history of parish and school closures in Philadelphia. By centering Black parish experiences during an era of deindustrialization, it becomes evident that the Archdiocese's color-blind interpretation of its policy of decline obscured a reliance upon—and in fact *reinforced*—the types of discourses about "risky" investments in "the inner city" that Connolly and Taylor analyze. Our Lady of Mercy and St. Peter Claver were not "risky" because there was no desire or need for Catholic institutions in the neighborhood; both communities vehemently protested the opposite. It should read as neither surprising nor paradoxical, therefore, that the suppression of St. Peter Claver resulted of falling numbers of Black residents, while for Our Lady of Mercy, suppression signaled the opposite. The Blackness of these parishes was the unacknowledged fulcrum upon which the Church justified the withdrawal of resources.

[48] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 20. Italics added.

As a result, the closures synonymized "religious decline," or the suppression of Catholic parishes and the closure of Catholics schools, with contemporary racialized discourses of "urban decline." A 1988 reader letter excerpted in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* illustrates the connection. As Bishop Anthony Bevilacqua prepared to replace Cardinal Krol as archbishop of Philadelphia, "a suburban mother of adult children" wrote in to journalist Clark DeLeon's column. Her letter read, "I sat all last Sunday composing a letter to the new archbishop pleading with him to honor the tradition of a missionary church who comes down on the side of the 'least' of God's people in earthly possession, finding ways to keep open the inner city parishes." She lamented, "Money cannot be the bottom line in Christianity as in General Electric. Very, very difficult, I realize but at least make that goal a priority." After all, the "suburban mother" warned, there was "the dire need for the presence of the Church in those areas."[49] The paternalism of this suburban Catholic's concerns celebrated the Church's assistance in Black urban neighborhoods as a form of Christian charity, but it did so in a way that reinforced notions about Black urban need. The parishioners of St. Peter Claver or Our Lady of Mercy likely did not think of themselves as "the 'least' of God's people," in material or spiritual possession. The steady flurry of closures, as well as the notoriety of the IPCC, nonetheless created a strong association between urban Black neighborhoods, financial and material need, and Catholic closure.

To borrow Taylor's language, suppression/closure operated as a kind of "race talk" for the Archdiocese during the 1980s. It was a color-blind shorthand for articulating the relationship between Catholic resources, urban spaces, and race, namely that these Black urban neighborhoods were the appropriate sites for the Church to close shop, save costs, and redistribute resources elsewhere. But by framing the financial precarity of Black parishes in

[49] Clark DeLeon "Reaction: *Here's winking at you*," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), February 15, 1988.

terms of larger economic forces of deindustrialization or suburbanization, the Archdiocese denied this articulation, casting the closures as reasonable and, in terms of overall archdiocesan resource allocation, even wise. After all, the decline of Black Catholic schools and parishes mapped neatly onto other trends that signaled the so-called "urban crisis" of the late twentieth century.[50] Yet, parishioners, clergy, and sisters understood the racial and spatial hierarchies of postwar investment that effectively diminished Our Lady of Mercy's local resources while allowing St. Andrew's to boom. As federal and local policies funneled investment into White suburban housing developments and communities, so too did the Archdiocese's policies sanction the redirection of Catholic resources toward White suburbs, without critical consideration of the causes or effects.

Race, Suppressions, and Catholic Belonging: the 1990s

The suppressions of the 1970s and 1980s took place in the midst of renewed discussions about Black Catholics' unequal inclusion in the Church. In addition to protesting school and parish closures, Philadelphia's Black Catholics also began to advocate for better representation in archdiocesan leadership. Father Rayford Emmons was ordained as the Archdiocese's first Black priest in 1974. In 1987, Emmons articulated his concern that the Archdiocese underestimated "the impact of Blacks as parishioners, nuns and priests," due to "barriers of racism [in] our churches and schools."[51] He pressed, "We want to keep parishes alive. We can do this by sending in personnel who are concerned about our welfare." Speaking at a Mass celebrating Philadelphia's Black Catholic history—hosted by St. Peter Claver Church—Father

[50] Taylor, *Race for Profit,* 57-58.

[51] Douglas Dabney, "Black Catholics Celebrate History," *The Philadelphia Tribune* (Philadelphia, PA), February 17, 1987.

Emmons repeated concerns he had expressed earlier. The previous year, he had publicly criticized Cardinal Krol for ordaining too few Black priests, as well as for the Archdiocese's failure to promote a Black priest to pastor of a parish, much less to the role of an auxiliary bishop.[52] Cardinal Krol responded by promising that, when a Black priest achieved the seniority befitting a promotion, Philadelphia would have its Black pastor. As for an auxiliary bishop, Krol challenged, "Is there a Polish auxiliary bishop? A Lithuanian? A Slovak?" The first Italian auxiliary bishop, he noted, had not been promoted until recently.[53] Cardinal Krol cautioned Father Emmons to bide his time like the White ethnic communities that had swelled the Archdiocese's numbers in the first half of the twentieth century. In an echo of the arguments that justified St. Peter Claver's suppression, the cardinal equated Black Catholic experience to that of White ethnic communities.

From the perspective of critics like Father Emmons, however, the emphasis on seniority in due time misread the issue. It was insufficiently critical of Catholic racial history and created a false equivalency between White ethnic experiences in the Church and those of Black Catholics. The traditional measures, Black Catholics argued, did not take into account the fact that the hierarchy had long excluded them from participation. As Charles P. Hammock, Pennsylvania state representative from 1973 to 1976 and a native Philadelphian Catholic, wrote in 1986, "We need our own bishop…. Wherever the church has been serious about evangelization of a people there has been indigenous bishops." In an op-ed for *The Philadelphia Tribune*, Hammock argued that, in addition to increasing Black evangelization and the expansion of city schools, the

[52] C. 519: A pastor "carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing" the parish entrusted to him. Cressler explores similar issue of Black pastorship in depth in Chicago.

[53] Schaffer, "Black Catholics Seek a Larger Role."

Archdiocese needed to amend its "sinful" lack of Black pastors and bishops.[54] The issue, according to Hammock, was not the maintenance of a careful ladder of clerical success, but rather the message the Archdiocese sent to Black Catholics and potential Black converts by failing to recognize the symbolic weight of the overwhelmingly White clergy. One of the Archdiocese's seven Black ordained deacons, Albert J. Singleton, presented the issue more frankly to a local newspaper in August 1986: "We want a certain amount of sharing of power….When it comes to black folk, we are the final word on black folk."[55] In advocating for Black representation in leadership, these Catholics challenged archdiocesan authority to definitively frame the state of racial matters in the local Church. Like the suppressions, they interpreted the support of a robust Black clergy as a fundamental sign of Catholic inclusion and belonging.

In 1987, shortly before his resignation in 1988, Cardinal Krol named Father Rayford Emmons the Archdiocese's first Black pastor. Despite this victory, urban and Catholic decline remained tangled into the 1990s, with strong racial and spatial consequences for parish suppressions. In 1993, the Archdiocese announced its first largescale "parochial restructuring" efforts under Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, whose tenure in Philadelphia spanned 1988 to 2003. These suppressions again targeted North Philadelphia, as well as Chester, Delaware County's largest city. While the Archdiocese promised to invest in new ministries and initiatives in these urban areas, the restructuring plan alarmed many.[56] In Chester, the Archdiocese consolidated all six of the city's parishes into a "new" parish, St. Katharine of Drexel, at the site of former St.

[54] Charles Hammock, "This is the Year for Black Catholic Awareness," *The Philadelphia Tribune* (Philadelphia, PA), August 12, 1986.

[55] Schaffer, "Black Catholics Seek a Larger Role."

[56] Rzeznik, "Church in the Changing City," 81. These uses included repurposing former parish buildings for ministries like Project HOME, a nonprofit founded in 1989 by Joan Dawson McConnon and Sister of Mercy Mary Scullion to address homelessness.

Robert (see Table 2.3 and Figures 2.4, 2.5). The North Philadelphia plan was as shocking. After the earlier closures of the 1980s, the Archdiocese suppressed ten of North Philadelphia's remaining fifteen parishes, while establishing two (St. Martin de Porres and Our Lady of Hope) at former parish churches. The plan in turn expanded the boundaries of North Philadelphia's remaining parishes, St. Malachy, St. Veronica, and Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to encompass the territories and faithful of the suppressed parishes. In a final blow, one of the suppressed parishes was St. Elizabeth, where Father Emmons had become the Archdiocese's first Black pastor.

Table 2.3 1993 Restructuring, Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Parish	Establishment	Location	1993 Effect
St. Anthony of Padua	1908 (Italian)	Chester	Closed (building sold)
St. Bonaventure	1889	North Philadelphia	Closed (building sold)
St. Columba	1895	North Philadelphia	Expanded
St. Edward the Confessor	1865	North Philadelphia	Closed (building sold)
St. Elizabeth	1872	North Philadelphia	Closed (building demolished 1995)
Church of the Gesu	1868	North Philadelphia	Closed
St. Hedwig	1902 (Polish)	Chester	Closed
St. Henry	1916	North Philadelphia	Closed
Holy Child	1909	North Philadelphia	Closed (site of new Our Lady of Hope)
Immaculate Heart of Mary	1873	Chester	Closed
Incarnation of Our Lord	1900	North Philadelphia	Maintained and expanded
St. Katharine Drexel	1993	Chester	Opened (site of former St. Robert)
St. Malachy	1850	North Philadelphia	Maintained and expanded
St. Martin de Porres	1993	North Philadelphia	Opened/Renamed from St. Columba
St. Michael	1842	Chester	Closed (building sold)
Most Precious Blood	1907	North Philadelphia	Closed (building sold)
Our Lady of the Holy Souls	1909	North Philadelphia	Closed

Our Lady of Hope	1993	North Philadelphia	Opened (at site of former Holy Child)
Our Lady of Pompeii	1919	North Philadelphia	Closed (building sold)
Resurrection of Our Lord	1911	Chester	Closed (building sold)
St. Robert	1922	Chester	Closed (site of new St. Katharine Drexel)
St. Stephen	1843	North Philadelphia	Closed (building sold)
St. Veronica	1872	North Philadelphia	Maintained and expanded
Visitation BVM	1873	North Philadelphia	Maintained and expanded

Sources: "Parish Directory," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, https://archphila.org/parish/, compiled by author (November 1, 2019); Thomas Rzeznik, "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 76.

In an echo of the 1980s suppressions, the Archdiocese justified the 1993 restructuring with a study that pointed to massive urban demographic change, financial insecurity, and the costs of aging urban properties as necessitating the closures. According to the Archdiocese's calculations, the Catholic population of Chester had dropped nearly 60 percent from almost 19,000 in 1970 to approximately 7,500 in 1991.[57] These numbers coincided with the drastic loss of over one third of Chester's overall urban population in the late twentieth century, from over 65,000 in 1950 to less than 42,000 in 1990.[58] Figure 2.4 depicts the placement of these parish churches with the total number of residents by block group, a geographic subdivision smaller than a census tract. The large number of white-shaded sections on the map reflect the low population levels in many of the downtown areas, and Figure 2.5 shows the distribution of the Hispanic (blue), Black (green), and White (red) populations. Like North Philadelphia, where the

[57] Rzeznik, "Church in the Changing City," 80.

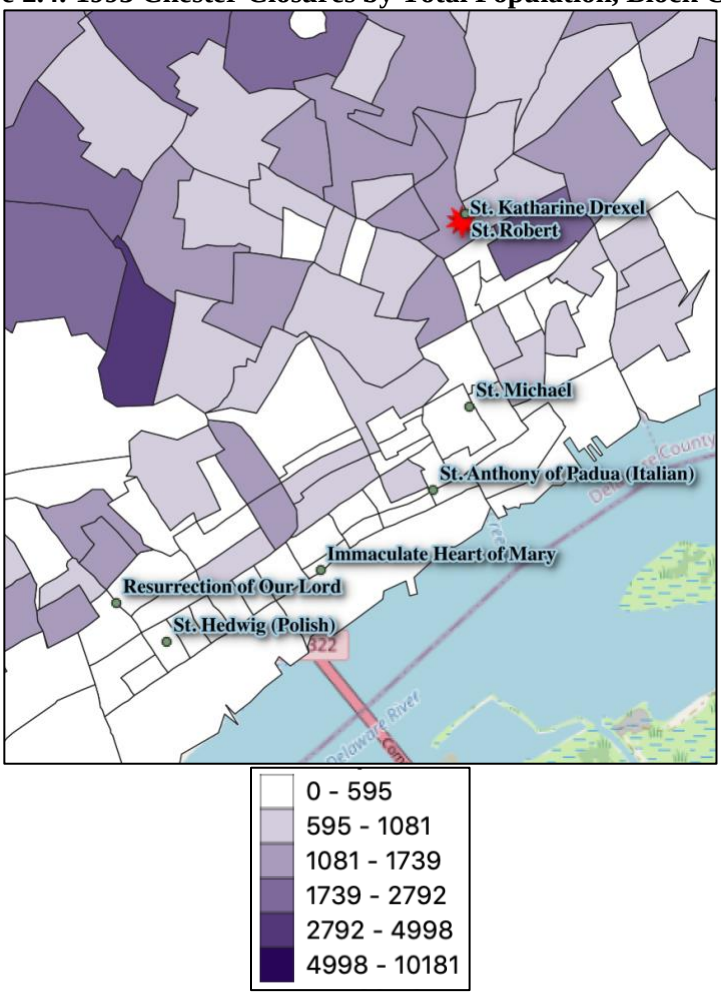
[58] U.S. Census Bureau, "1950 Census of Population: Preliminary Counts—Population of Pennsylvania, by Counties," https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/pc-02/pc-2-46.pdf; U.S. Department of Commerce, "1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics (Pennsylvania)," https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-2/cp-2-40-1.pdf.

Catholic population had similarly fallen 54 percent between 1970 and 1991, the Chester parishes relied on archdiocesan funds and operational subsidies prior to the consolidation. Both North Philadelphia and Chester were low-income areas with predominantly African American and Hispanic residents.

Historian Thomas Rzeznik has examined the 1993 restructuring plan.[59] He argues that although the Archdiocese acted within its "prerogative and planning authority," the number and nature of the closures "seemed callous" and provoked charges of racial and class prejudice. In another echo of the St. Peter Claver suppression, the eighteen-month process of study and consultation appeared to have been somewhat less than transparent. Accusations abounded that the Archdiocese, again, ignored the recommendations of its committee, while a leaked report from the Office of Research and Planning "seemed to indicate," writes Rzeznik, "that archdiocesan officials had already determined which parishes would close ten months before the study period had ended."[60] In Chester, the Archdiocese's decision to locate the newly consolidated parish of Blessed (later, Saint) Katharine Drexel at the church of St. Robert also raised ire. An interstate highway and railway lines separated the church from downtown Chester. Although the Archdiocese argued St. Robert Church was the soundest physical plant, the optics were poor. As Rzeznik explained, "the archdiocese effectively closed those parishes located literally 'on the wrong side of the tracks.'"[61] These plans garnered vociferous protests from laity and clergy alike.

[59] Rzeznik, "Church in the Changing City."
[60] Ibid., 81.
[61] Ibid., 81

Figure 2.4: 1993 Chester Closures by Total Population, Block Group

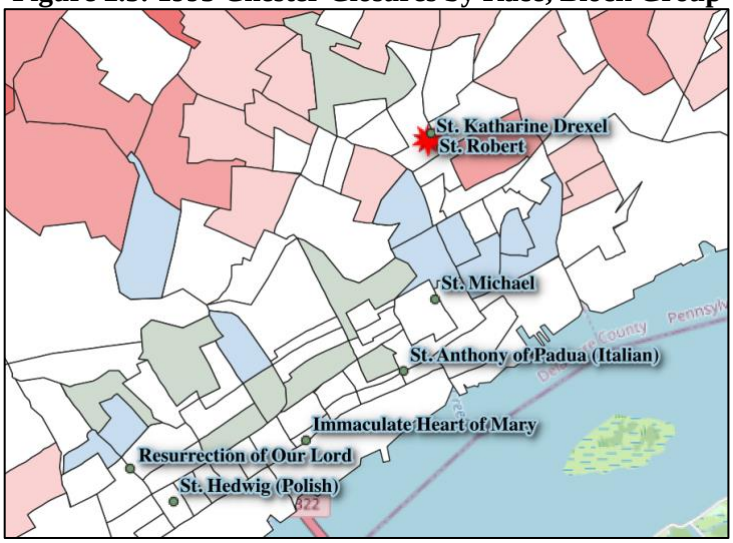


Source: Map by author. Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

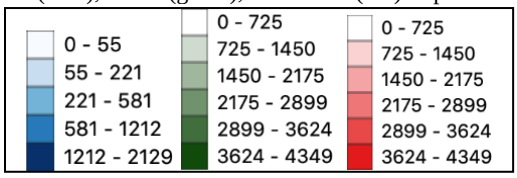
Chester's restructuring plans stirred White parishioners as well. St. Hedwig and St. Anthony of Padua were two of the suppressed parishes further downtown than St. Robert/St. Katharine Drexel. Established in the first decade of the twentieth century, St. Hedwig and St. Anthony of Padua served the Polish and Italian communities, respectively. In 1993, St. Hedwig's regular parishioners numbered about 550, and St. Anthony of Padua's about 300. Although these were relatively strong numbers for the city, and although both parishes insisted they were financially secure, only about half of St. Hedwig's regular parishioners and one third of St.

Anthony of Padua's lived in the city of Chester.[62] Like the Black Catholics who commuted to South-Central Philadelphia to attend St. Peter Claver, the remaining Polish and Italian parishioners traveled into Chester to attend services.

Figure 2.5: 1993 Chester Closures by Race, Block Group



Hispanic (blue), Black (green), and White (red) Population Count



Source: Map by author. Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

On June 27, 1993, more than 300 Catholics congregated outside the doors of Blessed Katharine Drexel Church, where about 700 gathered for the new parish's installation Mass.[63] The protesters wanted to overturn the Archdiocese's decision to close St. Hedwig and St. Anthony of Padua. An article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* recorded the disagreements among the assembled Catholics. Michelle Koperna, a former parishioner of St. Hedwig, explained, "I graduated from St. Hedwig School, and I want to be married in St. Hedwig Church….We are going to fight as long as we can for our church." In contrast, James Iannarella, a seminarian,

[62] Gloria A. Hoffner, "At 6 Chester Parishes, Last Mass Is Said," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 24, 1993.
[63] Ibid.

argued, "I'd like to carry a protest sign myself that says 'Obedience to the successor of the apostles….We are not in the nostalgia business; we're in the business of bringing Jesus to the people." Likewise, Soni Brown, who had been a parishioner of Immaculate Heart of Mary, noted, "This is a house of God, not a black God or a Polish God, but the God of all."[64] Like the debate over the relevance of St. Peter Claver for Black Catholics, these parishioners illustrated the ongoing tensions between an earlier era of ethnic differentiation and the current policy of decline, which justified closure for the ideal of the universal Church. Instead of seeking inclusion through ethnic and racial divisions, the Archdiocese now advocated a parish model that served everyone. That this policy seemed relevant particularly in low-income urban areas, however, struck many as disingenuous.

Despite its many resonances with the earlier suppressions, the 1993 restructuring plan was, nonetheless, a turning point for the Archdiocese's policies of decline. The use of consolidations as well as suppressions and the emphasis on redistributing resources to urban ministries were possibly a response to the protests surrounding the earlier suppressions of Our Lady of Mercy and St. Peter Claver. It is also possible, however, that Cardinal Bevilacqua found the Archdiocese in a different Catholic world than a decade earlier. By 1993, the high-profile announcements of closures in Detroit and Chicago had raised awareness of parish restructuring initiatives as a policy of Catholic decline. By signaling a plan to reinvest in Chester and North Philadelphia, Cardinal Bevilacqua was possibly also interested in staving off the worst of the criticisms levied at Cardinal Szoka in Detroit.[65] Under his episcopate, the Archdiocese of

[64] Gloria A. Hoffner, "Protests Mark Church's First Mass," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 28, 1993.

[65] Cardinal Joseph Bernardin announced a similar plan for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Bernardin's effort to engage parishioners in a more transparent evaluative process resulted in less outcry. Rzeznik, "Church in the Changing City," 78; Jeffrey C. Bridger and David R. Maines, "Narrative Structures and the Catholic Church Closings in Detroit," *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 3 (1998), 219-340.

Philadelphia would continue to develop closure and consolidation as a policy of decline for the region. By his resignation in the early twenty-first century, new challenges had emerged to shift the interpretation and implementation of this policy, with consequences for the racialization of Catholic decline.

Conclusion

Centering communities like Our Lady of Mercy and St. Peter Claver reveals the racialized history of parish closure as simultaneously a symptom of and a tool for the management of Catholic decline. This chapter places the Archdiocese's official narratives of parish suppression in conversation with scholarship on other color-blind institutional discourses to illuminate the racial and theological logics that shaped closure as an archdiocesan policy of decline. Far from a race-neutral response to forces beyond its control, the policy of closure actively shaped the Catholic institutional presence in the region during the last quarter of the twentieth century. To argue so is not to deny the financial, leadership, and demographic challenges facing many of these parishes. But while Catholics pleaded with the Archdiocese to consider these challenges as an opportunity to engage in a more creative, socially just Catholic theology and practice, the Church's withdrawal from Black urban neighborhoods, instead, exacerbated the divestment by banks, industries, and housing authorities that created systems of poor education access, income inequality, and residential segregation. Although the Archdiocese's policies of closure would adapt to the challenges of the twenty-first century, this racialization of decline had planted deep roots in Philadelphia's Catholic Church.

Chapter 3 |
Just Cause: Clergy Sexual Abuse, Parochial Restructuring, and the Church in "Crisis," 2000s-2010s

The weekend of June 4, 2016, the 219 parishes of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia received a letter from Archbishop Charles J. Chaput (2011-2020). The subject was a bill currently making its way through the Pennsylvania state legislature. Several weeks earlier, the House of Representatives had passed House Bill (HB) 1947, legislation cosponsored by Democrat Mark Rozzi and Republican Ron Marisco, by a vote of 180 to 15. If also passed by the Senate, HB 1947 would drastically reform Pennsylvania's strict statutes of limitations for cases involving the sexual abuse of children. The legislation was two pronged: it would eliminate the criminal statute of limitations for future sexual abuse crimes, as well as retroactively extend the window for survivors of child sexual abuse to file civil claims by 20 years.[1] In the letter parishes received, Archbishop Chaput encouraged parishioners to press their representatives "to vote *against* HB 1947" in the Senate.[2]

According to Chaput, HB 1947 disproportionately and discriminately targeted the Catholic Church as the perpetrator of the sexual abuse of minors. By 2016, successive waves of revelations regarding the sexual abuse of minors by clergy—as well as bishops' efforts to hush and hide allegations—*had* made the issue of Pennsylvania's statute of limitations an increasingly pressing concern for legislators, survivors, and bystanders alike. But Archbishop Chaput argued that reform efforts "target[ed] innocent Catholic parishes and families, like your own," Chaput warned parishioners in his letter, "who will bear the financial burden of crimes committed by bad

[1] Ivey DeJesus, "House approves bill to reform child sex crime laws; measure heads to Senate," *Pennlive.com*, updated January 5, 2019.
[2] "Archbishop outlines dangers from Pa. bill on statutes of limitation," *CatholicPhilly.com*, June 6, 2016.

individuals in the past, along with the heavy penalties that always result from these bad bills." The archbishop continued,

> This is *not* just an archdiocesan problem. In other states where similar legislation passed, local parishes have been sued, resulting in parish and school closures and charity work being crippled. The effect of bills like HB 1947 is to erase the sacrifices of generations of faithful Catholics who have done nothing wrong.

Although he and the parishioners were distraught about the sexual abuse revelations that had come to light in the Archdiocese and elsewhere, the bill, Chaput cautioned, "pose[d] serious dangers for all of our local parishes and for the ministries, charities and schools of our archdiocesan Church."[3]

Chaput's warning occurred amidst the waves of legal suits related to abuse allegations hitting dioceses across the country. These suits could, indeed, have financial repercussions for Catholic communities. Between July 2004 and July 2021, twenty-eight Catholic dioceses in the United States filed for bankruptcy, alongside three religious orders (Oregon Province of the Jesuits, Congregation of the Christian Brothers, and Crosier Fathers and Brothers), in cases related to the sexual abuse crisis.[4] As legal scholar Marie T. Reilly has written, claimants in these cases did often suggest that parish assets, as well as diocesan, should be included in the settlement calculations, instigating contentious debates about the nature of Catholic organization, hierarchy, and property. "The Catholic bankruptcy cases put a legal spotlight," Reilly explained, "on the secular and ecclesiastical relationships between a diocesan debtor and the parishes, schools, cemeteries, and other entities that operate within the diocese and under the bishop's authority."[5] While canon law preserves the juridic authority and ownership of a parish over its

[3] "Archbishop outlines dangers from Pa. bill on statutes of limitation," *CatholicPhilly.com*, June 6, 2016.
[4] "Bankruptcy Protection in the Abuse Crisis," BishopAccountability.org, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/bankruptcy.htm, accessed September 20, 2021.
[5] Marie T. Reilly, "Catholic Dioceses in Bankruptcy," *Seton Hall Law Review* 49 (2019): 874.

legitimately acquired assets, the secular legal structures by which dioceses often organized frame the (arch)bishop as sole administer and supervisor of *all* properties and assets within his (arch)diocese. As a result, claimants in these abuse-related bankruptcy filings have attempted to include parish properties, schools, and other assets in the bishop-debtor's estate, in order to make these assets available for settlement payouts.

As Reilly has argued, however, American courts have ruled in favor of parish financial autonomy and ownership, excluding parish assets from the diocesan estate in bankruptcy filings.[6] In other words, Chaput's warning to parishioners about the dire threats HB 1947 posed to the Archdiocese's parishes was, then, perhaps a cynical framing of the effort to reform the statute of limitations.[7] Had the bill passed the Senate intact—instead, its retroactivity provision was removed and the House declined to vote on the revised measure—the financial reality would likely have been more complicated than Chaput's letter suggested. Subsequent lawsuits would possibly have bankrupted the Archdiocese, hindering its ability to offer support and subsidies to struggling parishes. It was legally unlikely, however, that the assets owned by parishes themselves—including their buildings, funds, and other resources—would have been as directly impacted as Chaput implied.

The connection Chaput drew between parish health, archdiocesan finances, and the sexual abuse crisis illustrates the subject of this chapter, namely the lived and institutional framework of crisis that permeated the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the 2000s and 2010s. By the early twenty-first century, the challenges of religious decline had overwhelmed the Archdiocese's earlier policies of decline, which synonymized Catholic parish closures with the

[6] Ibid.

[7] Dan Levin, "Why the Explosive Report on Catholic Church Abuse is Unlikely to Yield Criminal Charges," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2018.

deterioration of the Black "inner city." As Chapter 2 argued, protests over parish closures had increasingly made the unilateral decisions by the archbishop an unpopular and untenable approach. At the same time that the Archdiocese shifted its policy of closure to signal the inclusion of parishioners and clergy in the process, the sexual abuse crises burst into the local and national spotlight.

Nationwide, the repeated waves of revelations regarding clergy sexual abuse and diocesan efforts to cover up allegations have, as many scholars, reporters, and Catholics have argued, come to define modern Roman Catholicism. In reporting his resignation, *The New York Times*, for example, characterized the episcopate of Chaput's predecessor, Cardinal Justin Rigali, as dogged by concerns about "changing demographics, the migration of Catholics from cities to the suburbs, the contraction of the parochial school system and the graying of the priesthood. But here," the paper opined, "the sexual scandal has dominated those issues."[8] The Archdiocese's "mishandling of the [clergy sexual] abuse scandal" would be "the cloud that hangs over Cardinal Rigali's legacy."

Scholars, too, have emphasized the importance of the crisis for modern Catholicism. Brian J. Clites, in pursuing research on survivor communities, has written, "As the project has evolved, I have come to recognize clergy sexual abuse as central to the lived experiences of Roman Catholicism in the twentieth-century United States."[9] The "crisis" of ongoing revelations, I would add, continues to be central to the lived experiences of Roman Catholicism in the twenty-first century as well. A 2019 report by Pew Research Center found that 92% of all U.S. adults—and 95% of U.S. Catholic adults—had heard at least "a little" about "recent reports of

[8] Katharine Q. Seelye, "In Philadelphia, a Changing of the Guard in the Shadow of Scandal," *The New York Times*, July 19, 2011.

[9] Brian J. Clites, "Soul Murder: Sketches of Survivor Imaginaries," *Exchange* 48 (2019): 271.

sexual abuse/misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops."[10] This awareness has reverberated deeply. The trauma of widespread and, as Robert A. Orsi has argued, explicitly *Catholic* systems of abuse has exacted psychological, emotional, and institutional tolls on many American Catholics grappling with the apparent schism between their Church's ideals and realities. Clites, Orsi, and others have examined psychological and theological questions about abuse and survivorship, while John C. Seitz has encouraged scholars to examine both historiographical and historical discourses about priesthood in light of the crisis.[11]

While these are critical and important steps in developing a nuanced understanding of the impact of sexual abuse on the contemporary Catholic Church, this chapter contests the suggestion that Philadelphia's sexual abuse scandals *overshadowed* the Archdiocese's other challenges in the 2000s and 2010s. Instead, it places two Philadelphia Grand Jury reports on clergy sexual abuse in the context of the collapse of the Archdiocese's parish school system and, underwriting this collapse, the rising levels of parish and diocesan financial insecurity. As Chaput's 2016 letter illustrates, the Archdiocese in the 2010s framed the clergy sexual abuse as a crisis that, if unchecked, would aggravate the challenges facing parishes and, indeed, threaten their very survival. This construction of the twinned crises of sexual abuse scandals and widespread closures had the effect of decoupling "Catholic decline" from "urban decline," the dominant interpretive framework for parish closures in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Instead, the threat of closure became *universalized* in the twenty-first century—a discursive

[10] Pew Research Center, "Americans See Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse as an Ongoing Problem," June 11, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/06/11/americans-see-catholic-clergy-sex-abuse-as-an-ongoing-problem/.

[11] Clites, "Soul Murder"; Brian Clites, "Our Accountability to Survivors," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no.2 (Summer 2019): 4-7; Robert Orsi, "What is Catholic about the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis?" in *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader*, edited by Kristin Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 282-292; Susan B. Ridgely, "Centering the Children in the Catholic Sex Abuse Crisis," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 8-11; John C. Seitz, "The Lives of Priests," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 18-23.

process of "whitening" closure that erased the continued impact of this policy on urban neighborhoods of color.

"Would You Demand a Refund?": The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis in Philadelphia

On January 6, 2002, the Spotlight Team of *The Boston Globe* reported on the sexually predatory practices of former priest John J. Geoghan. "Now, as Geoghan faces the first of two criminal trials next week," wrote the team, "details about his sexual compulsion are likely to be overshadowed by a question that many Catholics find even more troubling: Why did it take a succession of three cardinals and many bishops 34 years to place children out of Geoghan's reach?"[12] With this publication, the hushed allegations, psychological treatments, and repeated reassignments of sexually predatory priests burst forward into the national consciousness, prompting a surge of revelations of abuse of minors and bishops' complicity across the country. Such allegations, however, were not entirely new. Earlier reporting had covered the 1984 plea deal of Reverend Gilbert Gauthe of Louisiana on over thirty counts of sex crimes against children. Less than a decade later, allegations against Reverend James Porter in Massachusetts prompted promises of reforms from high-profile bishops and cardinals, including Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago and Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) formed a committee of bishops that released three reports between 1994 and 1996 on sexual abuse. As Tricia Bruce has written, despite these earlier sparks of attention, *The Boston Globe* coverage "was a tipping point for

[12] The Globe Spotlight Team, "Church allowed abuse by priest for years," *The Boston Globe,* January 6, 2002.

greater recognition and an organized response to the problem of abuse and its (now more widely known) cover-up."[13]

Philadelphia's immersion in the scandal followed soon after. In April 2002, District Attorney Lynne Abraham impaneled a Grand Jury to investigate the sexual abuse of minors by members of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's clergy. The investigation produced a report that was published on September 21, 2005. This report found credible evidence of "*hundreds of child victims*" of sexual assault by "at least *63 different priests* in the Archdiocese."[14] The report also roundly criticized the Archdiocese under Cardinal John Krol (1961-1988) and Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua (1988-2003) for covering up sexual abuse allegations throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. "Documents and testimony left us with no doubt," reads the report, "that [Krol and Bevilacqua] were personally informed of almost all of the allegations of the sexual abuse by priests, and personally decided or approved of how to handle these allegations."[15] As in other dioceses, the abuse itself became only part of the scandal; the failure of the Church hierarchy to respond to allegations in a way that protected children, rather than abusive priests, was as devastating.

The 2005 Grand Jury report listed several illustrative cases of the system that perpetuated abuse. "One abusive priest was **transferred so many times** that, according to the Archdiocese's own records, they were **running out of places to send him** where he would not already be known." The report also criticized the practice of requiring a priest to "self-report" before receiving a psychological evaluation, a process that hinged upon "whether the abuser was willing

[13] Tricia Colleen Bruce, *Faithful Revolution: How Voice of the Faithful Is Changing the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.

[14] Italics in original. *Grand Jury Report on the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy,* Gwendolyn N. Bright, Supervising Judge re: Misc. No. 03-00-239, Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Criminal Trial Division, released publicly by Lynn Abraham, District Attorney of Philadelphia, on September 21, 2005: 2.

[15] 2005 *Grand Jury Report*, 4.

to admit that he was a pedophile." If a priest did not self-report, "the Archdiocese declined to treat any priest as a pedophile, no matter how compelling the evidence." Moreover, "Even when admitted, the abuse was excused: an Archdiocese official comforted one sexually abusive priest by **suggesting that the priest had been 'seduced' by his 11-year-old victim**."[16] Despite the evidence the investigation established, however, the 2005 Grand Jury report resulted in no criminal convictions or civil suits. Under Pennsylvania's strict statutes of limitations, the cases had all expired. Citing these and other examples of abuse, the report expressed revulsion with the circumstances that made legal prosecution difficult in Pennsylvania.[17] While the Archdiocese of Boston, for example, paid $85 million in settlements, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's payments had only amounted to $200,000 by the release of the 2005 report.[18]

Upon the Grand Jury report's publication, the current Archbishop of Philadelphia, Cardinal Justin Rigali, supported his predecessors, cardinals Krol and Bevilacqua, denying "any intentional or criminal behavior on the part of officials of the archdiocese." Rigali also encouraged Catholics to avoid reading the report. "I don't think it's of value to families," he said in an interview with *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.[19] Rigali, whose career began as a Vatican diplomat, had succeeded Bevilacqua to the episcopate in October 2003, before the report's release but after the investigation began—and well after the allegations under investigation had taken place. Arriving from his position as Archbishop of St. Louis, Rigali pledged the

[16] Bolded print in original. 2005 *Grand Jury Report*, 5.

[17] On page 7, the 2005 Report explains, "Pennsylvania law does establish the possibility of corporate criminal liability for the kind of ongoing, institutional misconduct that we discovered here. The Archdiocese, however, has chosen not to organize itself as a legal corporation, thus immunizing itself from such liability. Current Pennsylvania law concerning criminal conduct by unincorporated associations like the Archdiocese is much more limited, and cannot form the basis of a prosecution against the Archdiocese as an entity."

[18] Craig R. McCoy, Nancy Phillips, and Mark Fazlolllah, "How silence let clergy abuse continue," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 14, 2005.

[19] David O'Reilly, "Don't Read Report, Rigali Says," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 23, 2005.

Archdiocese of Philadelphia's commitment to the care of children and victims, and he instituted an independent review board, with a mandate to report new allegations to law enforcement.

Critics, however, challenged his detached approach to the sexual abuse crisis.[20] Although the sexual abuse crisis in St. Louis under Rigali's episcopate did not reach the scale of larger dioceses like Boston, he was not resoundingly recognized as a proactive or responsive bishop to the crisis when he inherited the Philadelphia Grand Jury investigation. At the time of his appointment to Philadelphia, a leader of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) described Rigali as "among the least open and compassionate church leaders with respect to the abuse crisis."[21] The perception followed him through his episcopate in Philadelphia, with some reason. When, in 2005, the Vatican defrocked seven Philadelphia-area priests, the Archdiocese announced the news on the eighth page of its newspaper, *The Catholic Standard and Times*, in a short article characterizing the sexual abuse euphemistically as "misconduct involving minors."[22] *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Cardinal Rigali declined to comment on the announcement after its publication, in addition to declining "repeated interview requests" about the Grand Jury investigation and report prior to its public release in September.[23]

Most damning, however, was the initiation of a second Grand Jury investigation into clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese. Its findings were published February 11, 2011. As described in the report, the second investigation was prompted by the allegations of two young

[20] John Grogan, "Even the faithful chastise cardinal," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 22, 2005.
[21] Associated Press, "New archbishop has close ties to pope; Rigali's background is that of a diplomat and administrator," *The Morning Call,* July 16, 2003.
[22] David O'Reilly, Nancy Phillips, and Jim Rensen, "Church defrocks 7 local priests," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 24, 2005.
[23] John Grogan, "Indignation at lack thereof," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 28, 2005; Craig R. McCoy, Nancy Phillips, and Mark Fazlolllah, "How silence let clergy abuse continue," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 14, 2005.

men, “Billy Doe” (a pseudonym) and Mark, who came forward with their stories after the 2005 report. “Billy” and Mark accused Father Charles Engelhardt of St. Jerome School in Philadelphia and Father James Brennan formerly of suburban St. Andrew Church in Newtown, respectively, of rape and sexual abuse.[24] Unlike the allegations from the first report, these cases fell within Pennsylvania’s statute of limitations, and thus were eligible for criminal prosecution. Following a mistrial on rape and endangerment charges, Brennan accepted a plea deal resulting in two years’ probation; Englehardt was sentenced to six to 12 years in prison in June 2013, although he died shortly thereafter in 2014. Another defrocked priest and a former parochial schoolteacher were also convicted as a result of these allegations.[25]

In total, the 2011 Grand Jury report found credible allegations against 37 priests in the Archdiocese, most of whom were still actively ministering. In investigating these cases, the Grand Jury also found evidence of archdiocesan officials’ recent efforts to cover up allegations. It claimed the Secretary for Clergy under Cardinal Bevilacqua, Monsignor William Lynn, not only knew of previous accusations against these priests, but repeatedly allowed and even encouraged or reassigned them to ministries with children or adolescents.[26] After a three-month trial in 2012, Lynn became the first high-level official of the American Catholic Church convicted for the cover-up of clergy sexual abuse.[27]

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[24] *Grand Jury Report*, Renee Cardwell Hughes, Supervising Judge re: Misc. No. 0009901-2008, Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Criminal Trial Division, released publicly by R. Seth Williams, District Attorney of Philadelphia, on February 11, 2011: 1-3.

[25] Edward Avery, while a priest at St. Jerome’s parish in the early 1990s, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and sexual assault, although he testified during the trial of Monsignor Lynn that he had only done so to minimize his sentence time. Bernard Shero, a former teacher of St. Jerome parish, was also convicted of the rape, assault, and endangerment of “Billy Doe.” Associated Press, “Ex-priest accused of attempted rape with teen takes plea deal,” *The Crux*, October 19, 2016, https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2016/10/ex-priest-accused-attempted-rape-teen-takes-plea-deal/; Brian Roewe, “Philadelphia priest convicted of sex abuse proclaimed innocence until his death,” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 8, 2015, https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/philadelphia-priest-convicted-sex-abuse-proclaimed-innocence-until-his-death.

[26] 2011 *Grand Jury Report*, 3-5.

[27] Lynn’s legal battles continued through the 2010s. The conviction was overturned in 2013 but reinstated by the state Supreme Court; he returned to prison in April 2015 and served 33 months of the three to six years of his

Unlike the 2005 report, the 2011 investigation challenged the Church's longstanding claims that any abuse and archdiocesan mismanagement of allegations were historical—rather than recent and even ongoing—issues. Despite assurances that Cardinal Rigali's Archdiocese had made concerted efforts to fix the systematic problems that perpetuated abuses, the report was critical of the current system. The investigation found that the Archdiocese did, "at least in some cases," report allegations to law enforcement and pay for survivors' counseling, two initiatives instituted following the 2005 report. Additionally, the Archdiocese's compensation to survivors had increased, primarily through compensation for counseling and other services. The investigation, however, also revealed that the Archdiocese had failed to implement many of the recommendations proposed by Mary Achilles, the victims advocate hired by the Archdiocese in 2006. In fact, according to the Grand Jury report, the Archdiocese's "victim assistance process" appeared to protect abusers rather than victims. As the report details, the victim assistance coordinators had on occasion betrayed their clients' confidentiality rights. In one instance, a coordinator passed Mark's records on to his abuser, Father Brennan.[28] Moreover, despite both local and national discussions of the clergy sexual abuse, the report condemned the Archdiocese for allowing 37 previously accused priests to nonetheless continue to minister to children and adolescents.[29] Cardinal Rigali immediately disputed this latter claim, issuing a letter to parishioners stating that no priests with "an admitted or established allegation of sexual abuse of a minor against them" were active in the Archdiocese.[30] Yet, within the same week, he

sentence before winning a retrial and being released on bail. The retrial was slated to take place in 2020, but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Maryclaire Dale, "Monsignor's conviction of sex-abused complaints reversed," Associated Press, December 22, 2015, https://apnews.com/article/6134d81d8fff4746971fd677f260e07e; Aaron Moselle, "Msgr. Lynn on trial again for covering up clergy sexual abuse," *WHYY Philadelphia,* March 12, 2020, https://whyy.org/articles/msgr-lynn-on-trial-again-for-covering-up-clergy-sexual-abuse/.

[28] 2011 *Grand Jury Report*, 6-9.

[29] 2011 *Grand Jury Report*, 9.

[30] "Archdiocese denies claim that 37 abusive priests remain," *WHYY Philadelphia*, February 11, 2011.

suspended three priests named and accused by the Grand Jury report, belying this very assurance to parishioners.[31]

On February 13, two days after the report's public release, Monica Yank Kinney of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* asked readers, "If Catholic churches across the region took up a collection this Sunday and used it to hire lawyers to mislead victims of clergy sex abuse, would anyone give? If a parish priest confessed that your tithing paid rapists to retire and funded interrogations that pushed innocents to suicide, would you demand a refund?"[32] Readers from across the Archdiocese replied to Kinney's questions with letters to the editor. Peter R. Sigmund of Ambler, Montgomery County, insisted that he would "try to up my contributions because I believe in the church's mission" and the vast majority of the Catholic community. In contrast, Frank A. Smith of West Chester, Chester County, answered Kinney with "a resounding no." He noted that the Archdiocese was "in the midst of a $200 million fund-raising campaign," with most of the funds funneled not to parishes but toward diocesan expenses. "We must trust that this money is not used to fund the sex-abuse scandal, but why," asked Smith, "should we trust a hierarchy that has lost all credibility?"[33] Likewise, in an editorial in the *Bucks County Courier Times*, J.D. Mullane described the Grand Jury report as an invitation to "a crisis of faith." "The unfolding crisis will contribute to the continuing decline in Catholic school enrollments, the closing of those schools and the closing of parishes," wrote Mullane, "What took generations of Catholics to build is being destroyed at the hands of bishops who are the most inept, corrupt bunglers since Johann Tetzel sold indulgences on behalf of Pope Leo X."[34]

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[31] "Rigali suspends three priests, enlists former prosecutor to re-examine sex abuse claims," *WHYY Philadelphia*, February 16, 2011.

[32] Monica Yant Kinney, "Grand jury shows audacity of archdiocese," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 13, 2011.

[33] "Letters to the editor: The church and sex-abuse allegations," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 15, 2011.

[34] JD Mullane, "Catholics and a crisis of faith," *Bucks County Courier Times*, February 15, 2011.

These Catholics read the Grand Jury reports—as well as Cardinal Rigali's responses to the new slew of allegations—through the lens of concerns at the parish and diocesan level. They saw the sexual abuse crisis as a factor in the Church's ongoing demographic and financial crises. While sexual abuse scandals won headlines across the country, many of the region's Catholics also nervously braced for the impact upon parish health, diocesan finances, and the Archdiocese's ongoing efforts to redistribute waning resources through the closure of parishes and schools. They had good reason to do so. In the years following the 1993 suppressions, the Archdiocese under Bevilacqua, Rigali, and Archbishop Charles J. Chaput had refined its policy of closing parishes and schools as a response to the challenges of decline. Under these archbishops, the archdiocesan policy of decline gradually divorced closure from its associations with urban Black neighborhoods. Instead, as the mushrooming numbers of closures—first of parish schools, and then of the parishes themselves— increasingly required White Catholics to confront decline, the phenomenon became intertwined with the clergy sexual abuse scandals as a threat to the future of the Church.

"Death By a Thousand Cuts": School Closures in the Archdiocese

After the contentious suppressions of 1993, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia changed its playbook for closure. The process of closing a parish shifted from a centralized and unilateral decision to one in which, ostensibly, parishes themselves had a say. In 1996, Cardinal Bevilacqua's Archdiocese introduced the concept of pastoral "clusters" as key to policy's new look.[35] The 1996 *Guided by Faith: A Guide Book for the People of God in Cluster Pastoral Planning*, produced by the Archdiocese's Office for Research and Planning, describes "Cluster

[35] Ron Goldwyn, "Archdiocese Loses Parishioners in City, Gains in Suburbs," *The Philadelphia Daily News*, September 1, 1999.

Pastoral Planning" as "a collaborative process to evaluate whether the parishes, parish resources, programs, buildings and organizational structures in a given cluster are of the necessary number, type and variety in light of the parish pastoral plans of that cluster."[36] To form a cluster, the Archdiocese identified geographic groups of parishes and encouraged them to consult together on the pastoral needs of their neighborhoods. Each cluster would determine the programs, assets, and vitality each of the individual parishes, as well as the needs and resources of the entire cluster area. Should one or more parishes seem to be failing, the cluster had the opportunity to weigh the benefits of consolidating several parishes, their resources, and their debts to maximize and redistribute local resources. Finances and budget were not the sole factors in assessing a parish's vitality: the number of sacraments received in each parish was also under consideration. In his study of Philadelphia, historian Thomas Rzeznik notes, "Cluster planning may not have democratized the restructuring process, but it did decentralize procedures."[37] As a decentralized and consultative process, cluster planning signaled the involvement of parishes in the decision-making process.

A central concern of the clusters was the state of the Catholic school system. Long a source of parish and regional pride, the Archdiocese's vast parochial school system had its peak enrollment during the school years of the Baby Boom generation in the 1960s and 1970s.[38] By the 1990s, however, although the population in Philadelphia was once more growing after decades of decline, Cardinal Bevilacqua closed sixteen parish-run elementary schools, with

[36] Office for Research and Planning, *Guided by Faith: A Guide Book for the People of God in Cluster Pastoral Planning*, revised August 1996 (Philadelphia: The Archdiocese of Philadelphia), https://archphila.org/pastplan/PDF/guiderev596e.pdf, 9.

[37] Thomas Rzeznik, "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 84.

[38] Elementary school enrollment was at its height in 1960 with 195,079 students; diocesan high school enrollment peaked a decade later in 1970 with 58,113 students. Martha Woodall, "Catholic schools shift with the population," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 11, 2009.

several more in the last years of his episcopate. While many of these closures took place at the behest of the parish clusters, others were contested—and in yet other cases, parish recommendations *for* closure and parishioner protests *against* closure were not mutually exclusive. The Archdiocese announced the closure of St. Paul parish school in 1998, for example, located in the Italian Market section of South Philadelphia. The pastor had recommended the closure, viewing the chance to sell the property to a charter school as an opportunity to ease parish debts. Despite his support for the closure, parents and teachers quickly mobilized to fundraise and encourage higher enrollment, winning permission to keep the school open. But the reprieve did not last long. By January 1999, student enrollment had fallen from 150 the previous year to 117 students, and in addition to needing nearly $70,000 in building repairs, the school already carried a deficit of approximately $300,000. The school closed at the end of the year.[39]

Bevilacqua's introduction of the parish clusters did not stabilize the school system, and during the tenure of his successor, Cardinal Rigali, the situation worsened. Overall elementary enrollment fell from 84,556 during the 1998-99 schoolyear to less than 70,000 in 2004-05; it was 49,117 in 2011-12, when Charles J. Chaput succeeded him as archbishop. As one local editorial opined, the rising costs of tuition at Catholic schools, the rise of free charter schools since 1997, and shifting demographics, including the aging of Catholic urban neighborhoods and the suburbanization of White families, had combined to weaken the appeal of parish schools. "[I]n competition today for students," wrote this author, "charters have a distinct advantage: as quasi-public schools, they are tuition-free. The state and the school district combine to provide roughly a $6,700-per-student subsidy." In contrast, continued the editorial, "Catholic schools, with no

[39] Jennifer Weiner, "St. Paul's School Wins a Reprieve," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 5, 1998; Susan Snyder, "At school that fought to survive, closing finally inevitable," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 5, 1999.

direct aid, must charge tuition, which averages about $1,500 per student at grade schools," and more at high schools.[40]

Similar to the closures in the late twentieth century, the collapse of the Catholic school system was not universally experienced across the Archdiocese's five counties. Parishes and the Archdiocese continued to open or build new schools in the outer suburbs, including a new building for Bishop Shanahan High School in Downingtown, Chester County, in 1998, and the opening of Pope John Paul II High School in Royersford in 2010. Meanwhile, city and inner-suburb schools were hit somewhat harder. In 2005, Rigali's Archdiocese closed nine parish elementary schools, all but one of which were within Philadelphia. That December, it announced it was considering an additional 16 parish schools, whose enrollment numbers had dropped to or below 200, for closure. All were either within the city or the inner-ring suburbs.[41]

Efforts to minimize the Catholic divestment in low-income urban neighborhoods, however, had increased since the high-profile critiques of the 1990s. In 2004, the Archdiocese began a "sponsor-a-student" campaign to encourage wealthier and older Catholics who were products of the school system to cover the tuition of current pupils. By 2008, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that "all 21 high schools and at least 23 parishes [had] tried [the program]."[42] These programs were particularly useful for non-Catholic students whose tuition would be higher than for parishioners, such as the roughly 80 percent of students at St. Ignatius and Sorrows in West Philadelphia who were not Catholic.[43] Another policy emerged during Rigali's tenure and would gain traction during Chaput's: the outsourcing of urban schools of color to private entities.

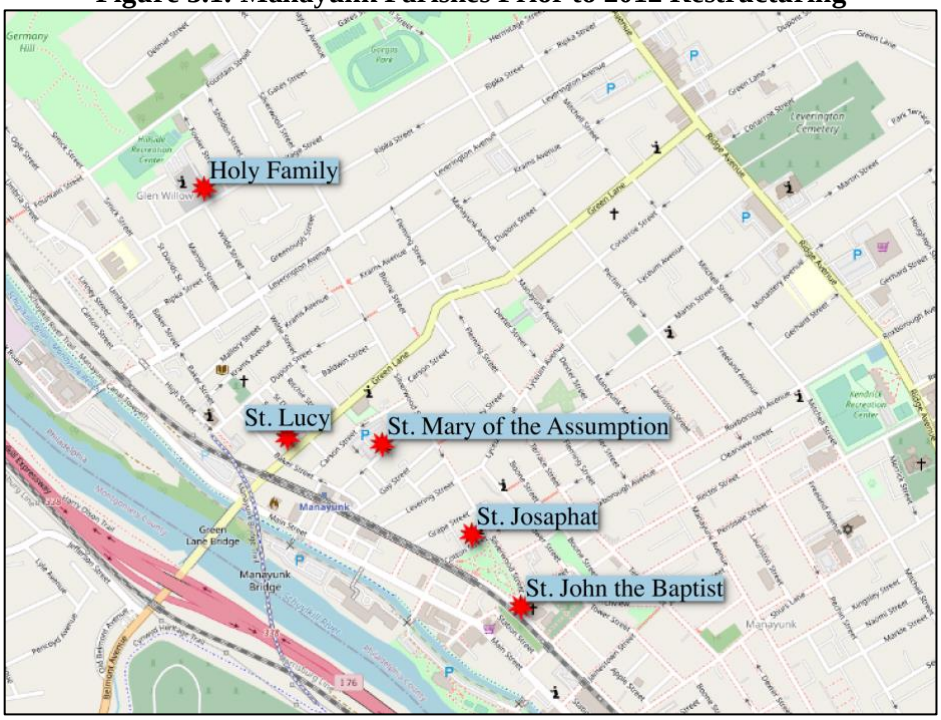
[40] Tom Ferrick, Jr., "Charter model could help declining parochial schools," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 2, 2003, B01.
[41] Martha Woodall, "Unsure future for parish schools," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 9, 2005, B01.
[42] David O'Reilly, "Price of school survival," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 24, 2008, B01.
[43] Ibid.

In 2005, St. Katharine Drexel School, created from the 1993 consolidations, almost closed its doors as the last Catholic school in the city of Chester. With the approval of the Archdiocese, Neumann University and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia partnered with the parish to create the Drexel Neumann Academy, an independent Catholic school that opened in 2007.[44]

Five of the affected schools in the 2005 round of closures and consolidations were in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Manayunk. Chapter 1 introduced Manayunk's five parishes, all clustered in the mile between the territorial parishes of St. John the Baptist (c. 1831) and Holy Family (c. 1885). The three ethnic parishes for Manayunk's German (St. Mary of the Assumption, c. 1849), Polish (St. Josaphat, c. 1898), and Italian (St. Lucy, c. 1927) residents clung to the steep hills and narrow streets of the neighborhood (see Figure 3.1). So close were the parishes' churches that two, St. John the Baptist and St. Josaphat, stood literally across tiny Pretzel Park from one another. As many of Manayunk's residents agreed, although St. John the Baptist was always technically a territorial parish, the parish was so dominatingly Irish that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish, Italian, and German communities had demanded their own parishes—or, in more critical narratives, were forced to do so because the Irish excluded them from parish life. This remarkable density of parishes reflected not only the demographic composition of the neighborhood at the turn of the twentieth century, when Manayunk was a hotbed for textile manufacturing, but also the Archdiocese's approach to parish life at the time, which encouraged the proliferation of ethnic parishes in close quarters.

[44] "About: Our History and Who We Are," Drexel Neumann Academy, https://drexelneumannacademy.net/about-us, accessed September 15, 2021.

Figure 3.1: Manayunk Parishes Prior to 2012 Restructuring



Source: Map by author.

By the twenty-first century, however, the neighborhood was very different. The approximately 6,000 residents occupying the neighborhood's narrow streets and famously steep hills remained predominantly White, but Manayunk became home to a large university and postgraduate population, with a median age under 30 in 2011.[45] The neighborhood's character adapted in response to this changing demographic's needs. As trendy restaurants and boutiques renovated the mills and lofts lining the Manayunk canal, enrollment at the parish elementary schools fell.

When Monsignor Kevin Lawrence became the pastor of St. John the Baptist in 2014, he became familiar with the details of the contentious negotiations to consolidate the parish schools in 2005. "A plan was put out to try and merge all the schools into one," he explained in a 2019 interview, "and they had worked towards that probably for about two or three years. And then

[45] The median age was 28.8 according to the American Community Survey, 2011: ACS 5-Estimates Data Profiles: Demographic and Housing Estimates, Zipcode Tabulation Area (ZCTA5) 19127, data.census.gov.

when it came time to do it, two of the parishes balked at it and said, '…We're staying open.'" The recommendation of the parishes' cluster had, in this case, failed to convince the parishioners of St. John the Baptist and St. Josaphat. "St. John's [school] decided to stay open," Lawrence explained, "St. Josaphat said, 'if they're staying open, we're staying open.'" The Archdiocese's 2005 plan reflected this change, directing the three remaining schools —Holy Family, St. Lucy (Italian), and St. Mary of the Assumption (German)—to consolidate into one regional school at the location of the former Holy Family school.[46]

But regardless of the plans and hopes of the resisting parishes, the financial and demographic support did not materialize. "Eventually St. Josaphat's failed almost a year later," Lawrence recalled, "They just didn't have the resources to operate a competitive school." St. John the Baptist followed soon after.[47] In 2006, both schools also joined the regional school, which had been renamed Holy Child. Within two years, the number of Manayunk's Catholic elementary schools dropped from five to one.

Parish resistance to closure and consolidation, however ill-fated, must be understood as reflective of the profound importance of parish identity. Lawrence noted, "[W]hen the schools closed, it literally was like a kick in the gut for all these parishes. It completely took the wind out of [them]." With such a robust emphasis on parish schools and education throughout the Archdiocese's history, "it's not an unusual phenomenon [in Philadelphia] to have your schools become the center of your parish," Lawrence continued, "Rather than being an auxiliary ministry of evangelization, they become the heart of it. So, when a school closes, you're basically ripping the heart out of a parish." Philadelphians "are so imbued with the mentality of having to have a

[46] Monsignor Kevin Lawrence, interview with author, Philadelphia, August 21, 2019.
[47] Ibid.

school." To be stripped of a school, then, was more than a sign of a parish's decline. It was also to be stripped of a vital component of parish identity, independence, and sustainability.[48]

Although Cardinal Bevilacqua introduced the cluster system to mitigate the strong reactions to closure that had defined the decisions of earlier decades, the new approach could not divorce parishioners' personal, familial, and community legacies from their parishes and schools. The policy adaptation did, however, introduce *all* parishes to the reality of closure both as a sign of Catholic decline and as a possible solution for it. This awareness peaked when, at the end of his episcopate, Cardinal Rigali initiated a Blue Ribbon Commission to examine the state of the Catholic education system. He announced the plan to convene lay and diocesan leaders in December 2010. Throughout 2011, the Commission reviewed the demographic and financial status of the Archdiocese's schools, encompassing nearly 50,000 students enrolled in 156 parish elementary schools; 15,172 students in the 17 diocesan high schools; and 212 students at four special-education schools. Subcommittees on elementary and high schools also considered parent, teacher, and administrator responses to an online survey prior to making their recommendations on school closures and consolidations. On January 6, 2012, the Commission announced its recommendations.

H. Edward Hanway, chairman emeritus of Cigna and the chairman of the elementary school subgroup, spoke to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in advance of the announcement. "'We have been experiencing death by a thousand cuts,' Hanway said, 'We've had episodic, one-off, crisis-based school closures.'" Sister R. Patricia Fadden, former principal of Archbishop Prendergast High School and member of the Blue Ribbon Commission, likewise used the language of *crisis* to describe the challenges facing the school system. "'The issues aren't going

[48] Ibid.

to go away because people's hearts are broken….The blueprint for the schools is good,'" she told local reporters, after the Commission's announcement, "'It's unfortunate that there was a crisis in so many of our schools. And all the good will and all the plans for the future and the world cannot begin to be implemented if you have a crisis.'"[49] The goal of the Commission, Hanway explained, was to create a sound business plan for the school system that would put an end to the Archdiocese's piecemeal approach to dealing with the faltering system. As *The Philadelphia Inquirer* added, "Commission leaders say their goal is making Catholic education stronger and putting schools on solid financial footing to give parents confidence that if they send a child to a Catholic school, it will be there in the years ahead."[50]

On January 6, with newly installed Archbishop Chaput's approval, the commission announced its recommendations: the closure of 45 parish elementary schools, with consolidation plans that would ultimately affect 81 total elementary schools, and the closure of four high schools. Community backlash was swift and forceful. As Chaput told *CatholicPhilly.com*, "I've been surprised by the intensity of some of the responses. The response has gone beyond the natural anger and family concerns to hostility, even assigning bad motivation to members of the Blue Ribbon Commission, or to the pastor or to me."[51]

Within a month, 27 schools submitted challenges to the commission's recommendations, including 24 elementary and three high schools. Among the elementary schools appealing the decisions were schools that the commission had slated to close, as well as those that would be structured as a regional (not parochial) school by consolidating students from the closing

[49] Susan Snyder, "Philadelphia school closings will affect Catholic colleges, too," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 17, 2012, A01.
[50] Martha Woodall, "Archdiocese may close 'staggering number' of schools," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 1, 2012, A01.
[51] "Questions and Answers with Archbishop Chaput," *CatholicPhilly.com*, January 19, 2012.

schools. The appeals came predominantly from within the city itself (15 elementary schools and St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls), although Bucks (six elementary schools and Conwell-Egan Catholic High School), Delaware (four elementary schools and co-institutional Monsignor Bonner-Archbishop Prendergast Catholic High School), and Montgomery (two elementary schools) counties also fielded challenges.[52]

Some parishes, like St. Laurentius in Fishtown, argued that the data the Commission used to make its recommendations was unfairly outdated. The Polish national parish, which we saw last in Chapter 1, argued that the rapid gentrification of its neighborhood, Fishtown, was not only drawing younger residents to the area, but it was also increasing the school's enrollment. The 2010-11 schoolyear had seen a 12 percent increase from the previous year, the data the Commission had used in making its decision.[53] Likewise, the community of St. Bridget in East Falls similarly protested its school's consolidation with the neighboring Holy Child Regional School in Manayunk, which had consolidated the neighborhood's five parishes in 2005 and 2006. The appeal did not dispute the merger itself, but rather the fact that Holy Child would remain the site of the regional school while St. Bridget—a newer, more updated building in a more accessible neighborhood—would close. The appeal requested that St. Bridget's newer school building be the site of the regional school, rather than Holy Child.[54]

In February, Archbishop Chaput granted 18 of 24 appeals by elementary schools, and generous donations and fund-raising efforts by parents and community members staid the closure of all the high schools.[55] Among the elementary schools, the archbishop revised the original plan,

[52] Martha Woodall, "At least 24 archdiocese schools appeal closings," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* February 5, 2012, A01.

[53] Woodall, "At least 24."

[54] John T. Gillespie, "Parents, Parishioners Challenge St. Bridget School Closing," *The Fallser*, March 2012.

[55] The co-institutional system uniting Bonner and Prendergast became an official merger into one school building in 2012.

merging 49 parish schools into 23 regional schools, instead of 81 parish schools into 37 regional schools. Not all were pleased, however, with the rearrangement. While St. Laurentius in Fishtown won its appeal, remaining a parish elementary school under its own name and direction, St. Bridget did not: the Archdiocese maintained that Holy Child was the more suitable location for the newly proposed regional school, which, with the addition of St. Bridget's students, would be renamed St. Blaise. In other cases, the victorious appeal of one parish elementary school resulted in the unexpected closure of another—even when the latter school had not originally been slated for closure in the January 6 announcement. Such was the case for Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in Media. The original plan had located Nativity as the site for a consolidated regional school with St. John Chrysostom in Wallingford. When St. John Chrysostom won its appeal, however, "parents at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary…were stunned to learn their school would close in June….and Media students will be expected to travel to Wallingford."[56] St. John Chrysostom School, while losing its name and parish affiliation, became the site for the newly consolidated Mother of Providence Regional Catholic School.

With this slew of school closures, the Archdiocese also adjusted its policy regarding schools operating in predominantly Black urban neighborhoods. Following the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations in 2012, local business leaders formed Independence Mission Schools (IMS), an organization charged with overseeing the operations of 14 independent Catholic schools in "vulnerable" neighborhoods, all but one in the Philadelphia's city boundaries.[57] Although the former parish and regional schools retained their own names, IMS

[56] Martha Woodall, Bill Reed, and Shaj Mathew, "18 Catholic schools are granted a reprieve," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 19, 2012, A01.

[57] Archdiocese of Philadelphia Schools, "14 Catholic Elementary Schools Officially Become Independently Managed School System—Independence Mission Schools," Press Release, July 15, 2013,

leased the schools from the Archdiocese at a rate of $1 a year for the first ten years, and in so doing, assumed control of expenses, staff, and operation.[58] Through fundraising, grants, and state programs, such as Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC), IMS sought to keep Catholic education available to largely non-Catholic families that approved of the alternative to public schools. Aldo Cavalli, IMS president, explained that the organization offered an educational model that provided for "the spiritual side of the child's life and [brought] this [emphasis] into the family."[59] As Figure 3.2 illustrates, these schools were in predominantly Black neighborhoods within or near city limits. Like the earlier example of Chester's former St. Katharine Drexel school, these independent schools remained open, accessible Catholic schools, usually for low-income neighborhoods of color. But the Archdiocese outsourced the funding and service of these schools, reserving its own funds and staff for other missions.

Table 3.1 Select Decisions of Blue Ribbon Commission and Appeals, 2012

School Prior to Blue Ribbon Commission	Location	Blue Ribbon Commission Recommendation	Appeal	After Appeal	By 2022
St. Laurentius	Fishtown, Philadelphia	Closed	Approved	Remained Open	Open
St. Bridget	East Falls, Philadelphia	Students sent *to* Holy Child Regional School (Manayunk)	Denied	Consolidate Holy Child—renamed St. Blaise	St. Blaise never opened
St. John Chrysostom	Wallingford, Delaware County	Students sent *to* Nativity BVM (Media)	Approved	Renamed Mother of Providence Regional School, take students from Nativity BVM	Open
Nativity for the Blessed Virgin Mary	Media, Delaware County	Remain open; take on students from St. John Chrysostom (Wallingford)	Did not appeal	Students sent *to* Mother of Providence Regional School (former St. John Chrysostom)	Closed 2012

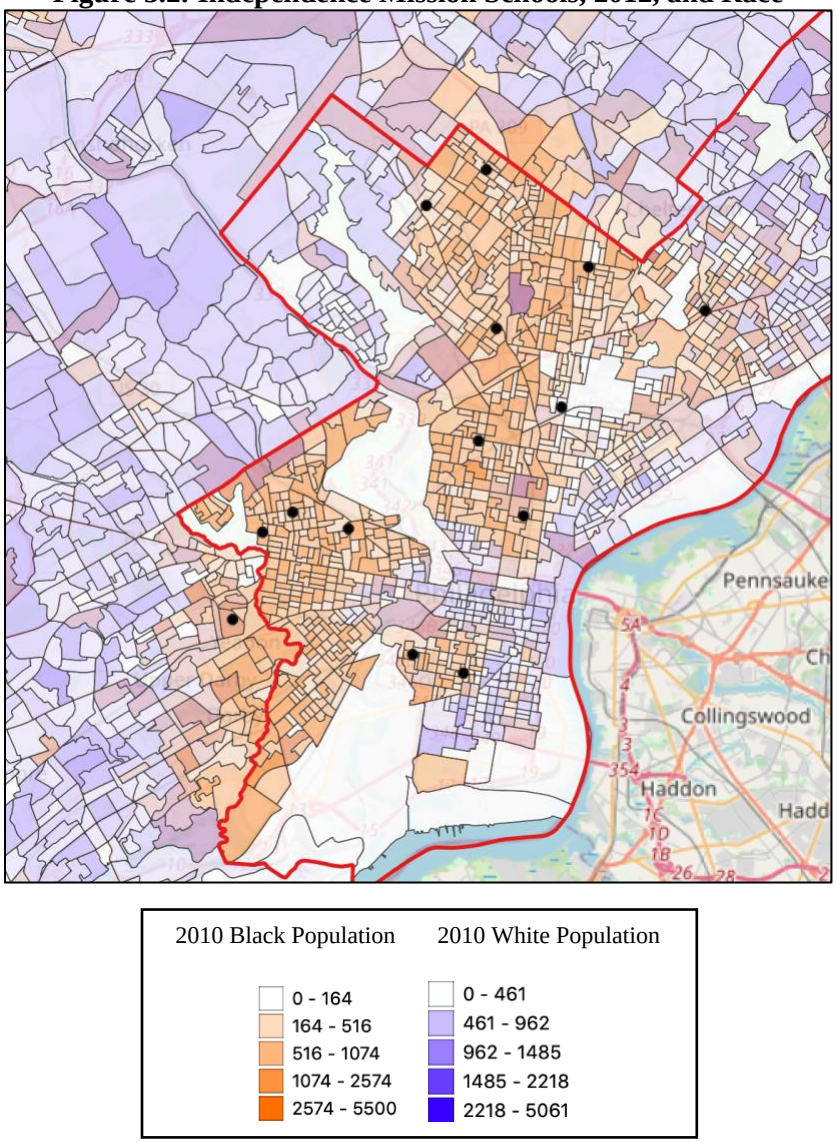
Source: Compiled by author.

https://aopcatholicschools.org/2013/07/15/14-catholic-elementary-schools-officially-become-independently-managed-school-system-independence-mission-schools/.

[58] Lou Baldwin, "Group operating 14 'mission' Catholic schools gets start-up grants," *CatholicPhilly.com*, March 29, 2013.

[59] Ibid.

Figure 3.2: Independence Mission Schools, 2012, and Race



City of Philadelphia boundary in red.

Source: Map by author. 1980 Census Tract by Race: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

Ultimately, the Blue Ribbon Commission's decisions did stem the annual trickle of school closures that had plagued the Archdiocese since 2000. Until the Covid-19 pandemic hit and wasted the resources of several schools, the Archdiocese did not close any additional parish, regional, or high schools between 2013 and 2021. The 2012 changes were not, however, immediately successful everywhere. On June 8, 2012, parents of the East Falls and Manayunk

parishes received a letter from the Archdiocese encouraging enrollment for St. Blaise Regional Elementary School, the new regional school that would consolidate Holy Child and St. Bridget. According to the letter, enrollment was 95 students short of the minimum needed to account for the school's expenses. Only 155 students had enrolled, out of the expected 400. Prospective parents had one week to enroll their children to enable to school to open for the coming school year. But after the July 15 deadline passed, the parishes learned that no additional students had been registered after the Archdiocese's letter. St. Blaise Regional Elementary School never opened.[60]

St. Anywhere: Parish Closures

In 2019, among its resources for pastoral planning, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's website provided a link to "Manage Conflict in Your Parish," a short article by Kathy Kleinlein from the March 2009 issue *Today's Parish Minister* (now *Today's Parish*). Kleinlein's article begins with the story of "St. Anywhere," a parish undergoing unspecified changes. While "most of the parishioners were excited and enthusiastic about the changes taking place at St. Anywhere," the article begins, others have complained that the parish was becoming too Communist—or perhaps too Protestant. (The article jokes, "You've never heard these [complaints], right?") In response to these concerns, the pastor of St. Anywhere and his pastoral team decide to meet with a facilitator to understand "what to do about the people who were uncomfortable or downright angry about the changes." As the team learns from the facilitator about techniques for managing internal organizational change, so too does the reader.

[60] "St. Blaise Elementary School won't open this fall in Manayunk," *WHYY Philadelphia*, June 18, 2012.

While the story of St. Anywhere is as devoid of details as the fictional parish's name, several sidebars in Kleinlein's article offer insight into possible issues in pastoral consolidations. In one section, the article lists the ten "Biggest Mistakes in Managing Change," such as "1. Not understanding the importance of people" or "5. Not appropriately 'setting the stage' for change," as well as steps to take to avoid these mistakes. Kleinlein also lists eight "Difficult Behavior Types" with their "Behavior Traits," as well as "Coping Mechanisms" pastoral teams should employ to handle these types of parishioners. For example, in responding to "Sherman Tanks," who are "[a]ttacking, accusing, abrupt, confrontational, angry," one should "[l]et them run down; get them to sit down; avoid head-on arguments." In contrast, to manage "Know-It-Alls," the article suggests "[d]o your homework; listen carefully; ask questions; make time for reflection" in order to handle their "[l]ow tolerance for criticism."[61] Despite these pithy suggestions and archetypes, these sections in Kleinlein's article are not intended to be humorous. Instead, they reflect the deep and difficult emotional conflict that restructuring efforts can elicit. In a third sidebar entitled, "Working with Difficult People," Kleinlein offers a list of options to help pastoral leaders handle their Sherman Tanks and Know-It-Alls, Exploders and Super-Agreeables. Tellingly, the final option reads, "If all else fails, change parishes."

Under Archbishop Chaput, clergy and leadership teams across the region must have encountered their fair share of "Difficult People" worried about the fate of their parishes. While Chaput might have inherited the Blue Ribbon Commission on Catholic schools from his predecessor, he fully embraced parish closures as a policy for addressing the Archdiocese's financial concerns. As he wrote in a letter "to the people of the Archdiocese" on the first anniversary of his installation, "Events of the past decade have wounded the whole Church.

[61] Kathy Kleinlein, "Manage conflict in your parish," *Today's Parish Leader* 3, no. 6 (March 2009): 19-22, https://archphila.org/archdiocesan-offices/office-for-parish-service-and-support/, accessed April 7, 2020.

They've placed an undeserved burden on all of you as believers….Unfortunately the problems facing our local Church remain grave." In addition to "continuing legal challenges" and "serious budget deficit and liquidity issues" at the diocesan level, "[m]any of our parishes continue to struggle financially. Many of those problems simply can't be sustained." In his letter, Chaput promised "to rebuild the pastoral and financial health of this Church" and to restore hope and trust in the Archdiocese, including in areas of Catholic education and the stewardship of minors.[62] A new era of parish pastoral planning and restructuring was key to his promise.

At the parish level, Chaput inherited and oversaw the execution of new system Cardinal Rigali introduced shortly before his resignation, which replaced "clusters" with "Pastoral Planning Areas" (PPAs). PPAs similarly organized geographic units consisting of several neighboring parishes. Chaput also instituted a new hierarchical system, which divided the Archdiocese into four regions, each supervised by an auxiliary bishop; the four regions were further divided into 12 deaneries. This new system served to streamline communication between parishes and the Archdiocese.[63] Under the new Parish Areas Pastoral Planning Initiative (hereafter, the Initiative), each parish was directed to undertake an evaluation of its resources, assets, and debts, in conversation with the other parishes in its PPA. In 2010, Monsignor Arthur E. Rodgers, the coordinator of the Archdiocese's planning initiatives, described the PPAs as an effort "to get away from the rigidity of the clusters. The pastors were asked what would be the best arrangement so they would feel comfortable in dealing with their neighboring parishes." For parishes encouraged to work with their PPA, Rodgers explained, "[t]hey are going to be

[62] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "A letter to the people of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia," September 8, 2012, https://catholicphilly.com/2012/09/news/local-news/archbishop-chaput-sends-letter-to-the-faithful-on-anniversary/.

[63] Lou Baldwin, "Archbishop Chaput appoints 12 deans, divides archdiocesan regions into deaneries," *CatholicPhilly.com*, November 16, 2011.

evaluating their area with much the same criterion as they are using when they evaluate their own parish," namely questions of vitality and sustainability. Such efforts could lead to combining programming efforts—or, more radically, consolidating parishes. In 2010, the Archdiocese introduced PPA evaluations in a staggered approach, inviting 22 of the 44 new PPAs to begin self-examination.[64]

After Chaput's installation in September 2011, he quickly took up the work and process of the Initiative. According to the December 14, 2011, press announcement, the PPAs "will take part in a prayerful and participative process by which each parish clearly defines its identity, mission, and goals while working to determine if it has the resources required for sustained operation." The first 22 PPAs were expected to begin executing their self-study immediately. Parish Pastoral Councils undertook the work at the parish level, passing their data on to the local PPA. From this stage, the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee, coordinated by Reverend Monsignor Arthur E. Rodgers, made recommendations for the archbishop's review. [65]

On April 15, 2012, the Archdiocese published a press release announcing the first slate of closures. The Archdiocese's announcement explained that "a combination of factors" contributed to the decisions, including, "demographic shifts in Catholic populations, concentrated density of parishes in a limited geographic area, history of declining Mass attendance and sacramental activity, increasing economic challenges that threaten sustainability, a decrease in the availability of clergy to staff parishes, and a review of facilities."[66] Rather than *suppress* parishes outright, Chaput's policy frequently consolidated or "merged" ethnic parishes with nearby territorial

[64] Lou Baldwin, "Parishes begin planning," *CatholicPhilly.com*, June 15, 2011.

[65] Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Archdiocese of Philadelphia Announces Rollout of Parish Pastoral Planning Initiative," Press Release, December 14, 2011, archphila.org/press releases/pr001885.php, accessed April 7, 2020.

[66] Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Archdiocese Announces Initial Round of Parish Mergers Resulting from Pastoral Planning Initiative," Press Release, April 15, 2012, https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2012.html, accessed September 30, 2021.

parishes.[67] The 2012 announcement merged 13 parishes into five in Philadelphia and Coatesville, Chester County. All mergers were effective July 2 of the same year.[68]

Of the thirteen affected parishes, five were the Manayunk parishes that had, in 2005 and 2006, struggled with the consolidation of their schools. With the Initiative's round of closures in 2012, the Archdiocese determined five parishes in Manayunk were no longer necessary or sustainable for the Catholic population in the young, gentrifying neighborhood. The April announcement consolidated Manayunk's five parishes into two: St. John the Baptist subsumed St. Josaphat (Polish) and St. Mary of the Assumption (German); St. Lucy (Italian) merged into Holy Family. Put simply, the neighborhood maintained its two territorial parishes, while dissolving the three ethnic parishes.[69]

In response to new guidelines published in 2010 by the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, the Catholic Church's highest judicial authority after the pope, Chaput's closure decrees established *just cause* for the consolidations. Because the canonical definition of a parish includes its right to exist in perpetuity, the establishment of just cause, the Apostolic Signatura directed, was necessary for a parish closure.[70] According to canon law scholars, just

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[67] According to the Congregation for the Clergy, there are four types of closures: "i. *extinctive union*: (sometimes known as merger) [in which] A and B unite to form C, only C remains (cf. can. 121); ii. *extinctive union*: (sometimes also known as merger, or as an amalgamation) [in which] A is subsumed into B, only B remains (by analogy to can. 121); iii. *total division* [in which] A is divided into B and C, only B and C remain (cf. can. 122); iv. *suppression* [in which] A is extinguished…nothing remains (cf. can. 123). The Congregation for the Clergy, "The Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same," April 30, 2013, published in "Official Documents of the Holy See: Letter from the Congregation for the Clergy and Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes and the Closure, Relegation, and Alienation of Churches," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 73 (2013): 214.

[68] These included the mergers of: St. Cecilia into Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Joseph (Coatesville); St. Stanislaus Kostka into St. Joseph (Coatesville); Immaculate Conception and St. Francis of Assisi into St. Vincent de Paul (Philadelphia); St. Lucy into Holy Family (Philadelphia); and St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Josaphat into St. John the Baptist (Philadelphia). Archdiocese, "Archdiocese Announces Initial Round."

[69] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Merger of Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Saint Josaphat Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania into Saint John the Baptist Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," April 11, 2012, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed April 7, 2020.

[70] Robert W. Oliver, "Temporal Goods and the Suppression/Merger of Parish," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 72, no. 1 (2012): 166.

cause has several parameters: the reason for closure must be specific to the parish in question, must account for the welfare of the souls comprising the parish in question, must be grounded in relevant evidence, and may also take into consideration the health of the diocese more broadly.[71] Curiously, however, the just causes listed in Chaput's decrees are less *causal reasons* for a specific parish's closure (for example, falling membership numbers) than justification for consolidation. Following an almost identical pattern for the other decrees he would sign over the course of his episcopate, Chaput's decree merging St. Josaphat and St. Mary of the Assumption into St. John the Baptist listed the following as "causes":

> (1) to provide more effectively for the pastoral needs of the faithful of Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish and Saint Josaphat Parish, which have declined in population over the years and no longer serve predominantly German and Polish speaking communities;
> (2) to assure the vitality of parish life for Saint John the Baptist Parish;
> (3) to provide for a better stewardship of resources; and,
> (4) to provide for the optimum use of clergy and lay personnel.[72]

The decree justifies the consolidation as a means of redistributing resources, suggesting that the consolidation would enable the remaining parishes a higher probability of being able to provide schools and additional parish programming, the dedicated attention of clergy, and the finances to support salaries and building repairs and maintenance.

If the decree itself was relatively devoid of specific details, the April 15 press release announcing the consolidations provided a comparison of the number of infant baptisms, marriages, and weekend Mass attendance between 2006 and 2010 in the Manayunk parishes (Tables 3.2 and 3.3). Although infant baptisms actually increased by 16 percent across the three

[71] Congregation for the Clergy, "Guidelines," 214.
[72] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Merger of Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Saint Josaphat Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania into Saint John the Baptist Parish, Philadelphia," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, April 11, 2012, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed September 30, 2021.

parishes, illustrating one important marker of Catholic vitality, the number of marriages decreased by two percent, and weekend Mass attendance declined by six percent.[73]

Table 3.2: 2006 Number of Sacraments, Manayunk

Sacrament	St. John the Baptist Parish	St. Josaphat Parish	St. Mary of the Assumption Parish	Total
Infant Baptism	48	3	6	57
Marriages	28	2	9	39
Weekend Mass Attendance	738	314	259	1,311

Source: Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Archdiocese Announces Initial Round of Parish Mergers Resulting from Pastoral Planning Initiative," Press Release, April 15, 2012, https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2012.html, accessed September 30, 2021.

Table 3.3: 2010 Number of Sacraments, Manayunk

Sacrament	St. John the Baptist Parish	St. Josaphat Parish	St. Mary of the Assumption Parish	Total	2006-2010 Percent Change
Infant Baptism	55	2	7	64	16%
Marriages	31	5	2	38	-2%
Weekend Mass Attendance	748	198	276	1,222	-6%

Source: Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Archdiocese Announces Initial Round of Parish Mergers Resulting from Pastoral Planning Initiative," Press Release, April 15, 2012, https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2012.html, accessed September 30, 2021.

As these numbers suggest, determining the outcome of the PPA evaluations was more complicated and more contentious than archdiocesan press releases initially suggested. Monsignor Lawrence, pastor of St. John the Baptist, described the Initiative as an idealized model. "[T]he whole idea behind pastoral planning" is "the Archdiocese…trying to get these communities to come to the realization that they really didn't have the resources or the population to endure. But nobody is going to foreclose on themselves; it's just not going to

[73] Archdiocese, "Archdiocese Announces Initial Round."

happen. So, eventually, [the Archdiocese] had to impose a plan—a pastoral plan—which was to consolidate." In other words, despite the seemingly commonsense or objective measures by which parishes were to measure their vitality, conflict was a frequent element in pastoral planning. When Lawrence was assigned to St. John the Baptist in 2014, it was two years after its merger with St. Josaphat and St. Mary of the Assumption, but the emotional aftershocks of the process remained. In an interview in 2019, Monsignor Lawrence described the pastor who preceded him as "well-intentioned" but "really embattled. It didn't matter who it was. It's going to happen. People are angry." According to Lawrence, recognizing the necessity of consolidation marks only the beginning of a long process of community building. He theorizes that "it really takes a good two to three years" to navigate the consolidation process as multiple parishes negotiate the end of their individual histories and communities. "And in the midst of that," he explained, "there's a lot of hurt, there's a lot of name calling, there's a lot of frustration and anger….Because you're dealing with the soul of a community, the spirituality of people. So when you tell people they have to leave, it's just devastating." [74]

Jillian, a former parishioner of St. Mary of the Assumption who joined the merged community at St. John the Baptist, offered a similar perspective. She characterized the process of consolidation as "political" and "emotional," reviving longstanding rivalries between neighboring parishes. "It wasn't a friendly situation," she admitted, "What does it say that there are two [Catholic] churches across the park?" The sense of difference, heritage, and identity embedded in the multiple communities was difficult for many to shake. While some families

[74] Lawrence, August 2019. Prior to his arrival, Lawrence was not a novice to parish consolidation. He had previously served as parochial vicar of St. Martin de Porres, one of the parishes newly established from the 1993 restructuring in North Philadelphia. Prior to 1993, the churches for St. Columba (1895), Most Precious Blood of Our Lord (1907), and Father Rayford Emmons' pastorate, St. Elizabeth (1872), had stood within a mile and a half of one another in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion, located east of Fairmount Park.

from St. Josaphat and St. Mary of the Assumption did eventually join St. John the Baptist, Jillian recalled that others were "disenfranchised" by the process and "refused to join St. John's." "They couldn't deal with it, they couldn't cope with it, and it really rocked their sense of security," she said. Meanwhile, "a lot of people over 60" instead joined Immaculate Heart of Mary in the adjacent neighborhood of Roxborough. The reason, she noted, was Immaculate Heart of Mary's accessibility. With parking only available on steep, narrow streets, St. John the Baptist could not compete with the more neighboring parish, which boasted a dedicated parking lot.[75]

As Chaput continued to implement the PPA system in years following St. John the Baptist's consolidation, the number of parishes affected by the policy was staggering. One archdiocesan official explained that some parishioners experienced "a multiplicity of losses" as parishes and schools closed across the region. "Everyone's angry," she admitted in 2020 ruefully. During one recent parish restructuring meeting, she encountered a man who was especially frustrated with the process. As she recalled, he finally told her, "'You've closed my parish, my wife's parish, [the parish] of my high school, and now you're trying to close the parish where I raised my kids.'"[76] In stories like this one, parish and parish school closure loomed as a universal worry for Philadelphia's Catholics by the late 2010s. The unspoken sense was that closure could, perhaps this year or in a decade, happen to any community. Once synonymized with racialized discourses of *urban decline*, Catholic decline became a problem that seemed to face every parish. The fictional parish of Kleinlein's article, St. Anywhere, seemed aptly named.

[75] Jillian, telephone interview with author, February 2, 2021. This interviewee did not give permission for her full name.

[76] This official asked for anonymity. Interview with author, Philadelphia, February 28, 2020.

St. Anywhere?: The Universalization of Catholic Decline

While it is impossible to determine the exact causal effects of the sexual abuse crisis on the region's Catholicism, several factors are possible to assess. First, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia faced sharp demographic changes in the 2010s (see Table 2.1). After decades of decline, the urban population of Philadelphia began to grow after 1990. Likewise, the Catholic population grew until 2010. Between 2010 and 2017, however, the Catholic population fell by over 18,000, dropping below one-third of the total population (from 36.8 percent to 31.4 percent) for the first time. While these numbers offer no causal explanations, it is far from impossible to imagine a relationship between the revelations of the second Grand Jury report and the sharp decrease in Catholic membership.

Polls have linked the clergy sexual abuse crisis to Catholic disengagement with the Church. A 2019 Gallup poll questioned U.S. Catholics whether the crisis had led them to "[question] whether you would remain in the Catholic church." 37 percent said they *had* questioned their membership, up a significant 15 points from 22 percent in 2002.[77] This poll, however, did not reveal whether these Catholics *would* leave the Church, or if their considerations of leaving had had any tangible impact upon their Catholicism or their Catholic communities. The poll also found that while Americans Catholics were, on the whole, confident in both Pope Francis and the priests at their own parishes, they were far less confident in American bishops and priests outside their parishes.[78] Perhaps more clarity comes from 2019 findings from Pew Research Center, which questioned Catholics on their behaviors. "[A]s a result of the recent reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by Catholic priests and bishops," Pew

[77] Jeffrey M. Jones, "Many U.S. Catholics Question Their Membership Amid Scandal," Gallup, March 13, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/247571/catholics-question-membership-amid-scandal.aspx.

[78] Ibid. 40 percent said they had "a great deal of confidence" in Pope Francis, with 18 percent saying they had "quite a lot of confidence." 41 percent had "a great deal of confidence" in their own priests; 18 percent "quite a lot."

found that 27 percent of U.S. Catholic adults had "gone to Mass less often" and 26 percent had "reduced the amount of money they donate to their parish/diocese."[79] As was the case in the Gallup poll, the negative effects on Catholic identity and behavior were stronger among Catholics who self-reported attending Mass less frequently than at least once weekly. In Philadelphia, these indicators—lower Mass attendance and fewer donations—played a role in calculating parish sustainability and vitality.

Secondly, archdiocesan finances were not hit as hard as other dioceses across the country. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia was not among the 28 dioceses that filed for bankruptcy between 2005 and 2021. In part, Philadelphia escaped the higher financial costs of the sexual abuse crisis because of Pennsylvania's statute of limitations for child sexual abuse crimes. As a result, Marci Hamilton, a founder of Child U.S.A. and a lawyer involved in suing the Archdiocese, estimated in 2018 that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia had faced fewer than 30 suits related to child sexual abuse since the early 2000s, the majority of which were dismissed.[80] Hamilton represented the parents of Sean McIlmail, who, prior to dying of an overdose in 2013, had accused Robert L. Brennan, a defrocked former priest, of molestation. When the Archdiocese settled with the McIlmails in June 2018, it was only the sixth known settlement related to sexual abuse, none of which had gone to trial or released settlement figures to the public.[81]

The lack of public settlements did not mean the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was flush with funds, however. On the first anniversary of his installation as Archbishop of Philadelphia, Chaput described the "serious budget deficit and liquidity issues" he had taken on when he

[79] Pew, "Americans See Catholic."
[80] Craig R. McCoy, "A Major Settlement by Phila. Archdiocese," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 2018.
[81] Ibid.

arrived in Philadelphia by way of Denver in September 2011.[82] "One of the things people need to understand," he insisted, "is that when I arrived in the Archdiocese we had nearly run out of money….We just don't have any money so I've been forced to make decisions and make some unfortunate ones."[83] During his nine-year episcopate from 2011 to 2020, Chaput would come to be defined by his efforts to establish diocesan and parish financial solvency through aggressive policies of decline. In addition to the school and parish closures, Chaput also approved the relegation of 33 church buildings to "profane but not sordid use," a process which Chapter 4 will discuss in greater detail. Other hard choices included, among others, selling the residence of the archbishop for $10 million to St. Joseph's University, the reorganization of archdiocesan offices, and the discontinuation of 117-year-old *The Catholic Standard and Times* (under editor Matthew Gambino's leadership, it became *CatholicPhilly.com*). One of his final acts as archbishop was the sale of the 72-acre property of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynwood to Main Line Health for $43.5 million in May 2019. Until Pope Francis accepted his resignation on January 23, 2020, Chaput continued to restructure parishes, close institutions, and sell properties and buildings.

As evinced by his 2016 letter regarding HB 1947, Archbishop Chaput encouraged local Catholics to understand these policies of decline as linked to the concurrent sexual abuse crisis. Not only did the ongoing revelations of abuse drive Catholics from the Church, but the litigation reform efforts also presented a direct threat—at least in Chaput's interpretation—to diocesan and parish assets. Although HB 1947 failed in the Pennsylvania state legislature, Chaput had another opportunity to associate the two crises in 2018.

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[82] Chaput, "A letter to the people."

[83] Matthew Gambino, "Archbishop Chaput reflects on his first year in Philadelphia," *CatholicPhilly.com,* https://catholicphilly.com/2012/09/news/local-news/archbishop-chaput-reflects-on-his-first-year-in-philadelphia/, September 6, 2012.

On August 14, 2018, a new Grand Jury report, initiated by the office of Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, documented the sexual abuse of over 1,000 children by more than 300 Catholic priests in the dioceses of Allentown, Erie, Greensburg, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Scranton.[84] As subjects of previous reports, Philadelphia and Altoona-Johnstown, Pennsylvania's remaining dioceses, were not included. *The New York Times* characterized the report as "the broadest examination yet by a government agency in the United States of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church."[85] With this report, Pennsylvania became the state with the most Grand Jury investigations regarding Church sexual abuse. The claims substantiated in the reports, however, were overwhelmingly time-barred from civil litigation under the state's strict statute of limitations.

As the widespread national—and increasingly international—reporting of the scandal continued in its second decade, however, the pressure to address the claims had become overwhelming. The Pennsylvania state legislature took up the issue almost immediately. On November 26, 2019, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law three reforms: the elimination of the criminal statute of limitations for new cases of childhood sexual abuse, the extension of the criminal and civil statutes of limitation for young adult victims (aged 18 to 23), and the extension of the window for claimants to file civil cases (raised from age 30 to age 55). Although survivor advocates had also lobbied for a two-year retroactivity window, in which claimants could file claims over otherwise expired cases, the Republican majority rejected this provision, characterizing it as unconstitutional. Instead, the legislature passed a proposed amendment to the

[84] *Report I of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury—Redacted*, PA Supreme Court, July 27, 2018, released publicly by Josh Shapiro, Attorney General of Pennsylvania, on August 14, 2018, https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/pa-abuse-report.pdf.

[85] Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, "Catholic Priests Abused 1,000 Children in Pennsylvania, Report Says," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2018.

state constitution for a similar window for retroactive suits. Here, however, the reform efforts stumbled. After passing in the state legislature, the amendment was due to come before voters as a referendum in the May 2021 primary election. Under Commonwealth law, the Department of State was required to publicize the proposed amendment in all 67 counties for three months prior the General Assembly elections. As lawmakers, survivors, and advocates alike learned on February 1, 2021, the Department of State had failed to do so prior to the November 2020 elections, meaning that the referendum would no longer be available for voters in the primary elections in May 2021. To make matters worse, the amendment would require passage again in two consecutive legislative sessions (2021-2022 and 2023-2024) before becoming available again for voters. At the earliest, the amendment could reach voters in 2023.[86]

The Commonwealth, however, was not alone in responding to the 2018 Grand Jury report. On September 21, 2018, Pennsylvania's bishops, including Chaput, issued a joint statement recognizing "the ugly record of clergy sexual abuse in our Commonwealth, and…times when Church leadership failed to protect our people over a period of decades." While pledging to "support all reasonable and constitutional efforts" by the Pennsylvania state legislature to enact litigation reform, the bishops "recognize[d] our responsibility to provide an opportunity for sexual abuse survivors whose cases are time-barred from pursuing civil claims to share their experiences, identify their abusers, and receive compensation to assist their healing and recovery." The bishops announced the initiation of "an independent, voluntary program" to "provide a resolution to survivors and allow them to avoid difficult and prolonged litigation."[87]

[86] Katie Meyer, "Survivors react to Pa's botched sexual abuse amendment: 'You've got to be kidding me,'" *WHYY Philadelphia*, February 1, 2021.

[87] Archdiocese of Philadelphia Office for Communications, "Pennsylvania's Bishops: We Pledge Our Support for Independent Sex Abuse Survivors' Compensation Program," Press Release, September 21, 2018, *https://catholicphilly.com/media-files/2018/09/Pennsylvania-Bishops-Statement_IDV_09-21-2018.pdf.*

Similar to Chaput's 2016 letter to parishioners, the bishops linked survivor compensation to financial concerns with wide reaching consequences. In contrast to the independent program they proposed, a legislative window to retroactively reopen the statute of limitations for expired cases would "inevitably result in bankruptcy for dioceses." The bishops cautioned that such a window, like the ill-fated amendment that the legislature would eventually bungle, "would cripple the ability of a diocese to provide compensation and healing for survivors, while vastly reducing or eliminating social service programs that greatly benefit all Pennsylvanians by serving some of the most at-risk people in our communities."[88] In his weekly column published on *CatholicPhilly.com* four days later, Chaput restated this position directly to Catholics in the Archdiocese. In many cases, the archbishop wrote, the abusers in expired civil litigation cases were already deceased. As a result, "the overwhelming majority of people who bear the burden of any legal penalties are innocent current members of the Church. In many cases diocesan bankruptcy is the result, with parishes and ministries very much at risk."[89] Once again, Chaput cast litigation reform—and, by implication, survivor compensation—as a threat to parish vitality and ministries.

In keeping with the bishops' joint statement, on November 13, 2018, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced the formation of an Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program (IRRP) to review abuse claims and provide compensation. "This compensation program requires substantial fiscal commitment over time," declared the Archdiocese's statement, "It will impact the Church and her ministries in a serious way, but this will not deter the Archdiocese or

[88] Ibid.
[89] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Toward a Fair and Reasonable Way Forward," *CatholicPhilly.com*, September 25, 2018.

the program from proceeding."[90] With this announcement, the Archdiocese became one of seven Pennsylvania dioceses to offer such a program; Altoona-Johnstown alone did not initiate a similar compensation program, citing lack of funds. As a program independent of the state, the IRRP offered survivors an opportunity to receive recognition of and compensation for their claims, even for cases no longer prosecutable by the statute of limitations. In exchange, claimants who accepted IRRP compensation were barred from further civil lawsuits against the Archdiocese. Prospective participants in the program had until September 30, 2019, to send in their cases for consideration. Three members comprised the independent oversight committee, which oversaw the distribution of archdiocesan compensation funds: Judge George J. Mitchell (former U.S. Senate Majority Leader), Kelley Hodge (former Interim District Attorney for Philadelphia), and Judge Lawrence F. Stengel (former Chief Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania). Two claims administrators, Kenneth R. Feinberg and Camille S. Biros, reviewed the eligibility of claims, with Lynn Shiner, former Director for the Office for Victims' Services at the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, acting as Victim Support Facilitator.

Within eighteen months, the IRRP received 615 formal claims, with an expected $130 million in estimated settlements. By April 2020, the IRRP had already resolved 208 of these claims, paying $43.8 million to claimants. In a letter to the Archdiocese on May 5, 2020, newly-installed Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez explained that funding the IRRP obligations included "approximately $33.2 million from the sale or lease of non-restricted [Archdiocesan] assets; $28 million in risk mitigation payments; and $25 million derived from loans." Pérez assured readers,

[90] Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., Announces Establishment of Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program to Support Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," Press Release, November 8, 2018, https://archphila.org/archbishop-charles-j-chaput-o-f-m-cap-announces-establishment-of-independent-reconciliation-and-reparations-program-to-support-survivors-of-childhood-sexual-abuse/.

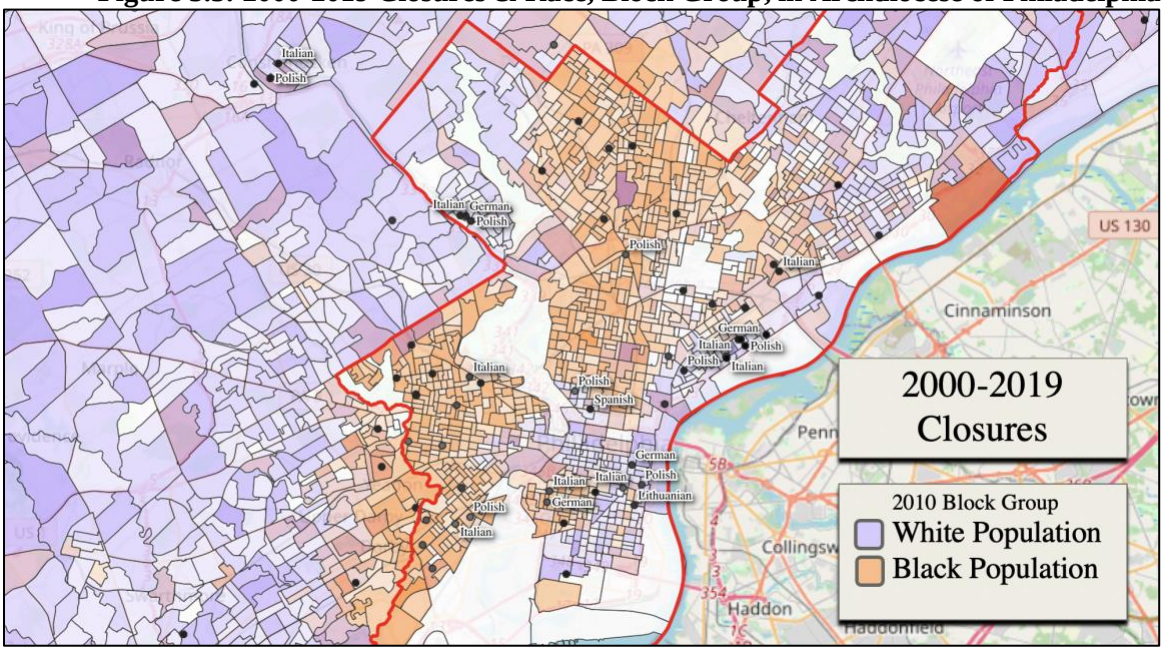
"[T]he funding plan for the IRRP allows for the continuation of all of the other vital missions of the Archdiocese while honoring our resolute commitment to survivors."[91] The funding, put simply, derived not from parish assets or donations restricted to a particular use (such as funds earmarked for certain ministries), but rather from diocesan-level assets and borrowing.

Between 2011 and 2020, Archbishop Chaput framed survivor compensation and litigation as a potential threat to parish health and ministry. As the Archdiocese's policies evolved from the 1990s, Catholics across the region had already increasingly confronted closure as a possible fate for their parishes through the cluster and PPA systems. By requiring all parishes to take stock of their own performance and sustainability on a regular basis, the Archdiocese had not only "decentralized" the process of closure. It had also introduced the policy as a potential threat to *all* parishes, a shift that decoupled the association between closure and urban Black neighborhoods that had dominated in the 1980s and early 1990s. The widespread, profoundly difficult parish and school closures of the 2000s and 2010s amplified the anxiety over closure as a "universal" threat. Indeed, the complicated—and sometimes convoluted—bureaucratic processes that determined the victims of these closures created an atmosphere of uncertainty regarding the future of the local parish. No longer the purview of urban Black neighborhoods, decline "whitened" in these decades. Chaput accentuated this uncertainty by suggesting that the public attention on clergy sexual abuse and the Pennsylvania litigation reforms would further destabilize the parish. While the Grand Jury reports and public conversation about clergy sexual abuse undoubtedly did affect Catholic membership and finances to some degree in the 2010s, Chaput's discourse of crisis obscured another relationship between these issues: the closures were not simply the consequence of the clergy sexual abuse

[91] Nelson J. Pérez, D.D., Letter from the Office of the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, May 5, 2020, https://www.scs.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/irrp.sem_.mailing.np-ltr.pdf.

crisis. The Archdiocese achieved the financial stability to afford the survivor compensation program *because* of Chaput's policies of decline. Under Chaput, closure was a proactive policy.

Figure 3.3: 2000-2019 Closures & Race, Block Group, in Archdiocese of Philadelphia



City of Philadelphia boundary in red.

Source: Map by author. 1980 Census Tract by Race: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

Finally, despite what the name "St. Anywhere" suggests, the Archdiocese's policy of closure was not, in fact, a *universal* threat to parishioners across the region. Rather, certain parishes faced a much higher likelihood of closure in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Figure 3.3 indicates that many of the closures targeted ethnic parishes between 2000 and 2019. The restructuring plans of the PPAs and the Archdiocese frequently privileged territorial parishes over ethnic parishes when coordinating a consolidation. Much as Manayunk's three ethnic parishes consolidated into the two territorial parishes in 2012, St. Laurentius, the Polish parish in Fishtown that once used the neighborhood's rapid gentrification to successfully reverse the closure of its elementary school, found itself the victim of the same demographic trend. In 2013 Archbishop Chaput decreed its consolidation with the territorial parish located two blocks

away, Holy Name of Jesus. Although the dispersal of ethnic communities during the late twentieth century lends justification to such decisions, the elimination of ethnic parishes reveals just how strikingly different the twenty-first century Archdiocese's institutional approach to urban parishes is from that of a century earlier.

Many of these former ethnic parishes were established in the old neighborhoods of Center City and eastern neighborhoods along the Delaware River, where European immigrant communities had settled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Following decades of White flight, many of these neighborhoods began experiencing high levels of gentrification in the early twenty-first century. Alongside the emergence of young, Millennial communities less likely to frequent the local parish, these neighborhoods also experienced the aging of their existing Catholic populations. But these generational and urban developments did not empty these former ethnic parishes of meaning. Indeed, as Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada has argued in her study of men's Catholic devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, standard scholarly frameworks of gentrification, which prioritize neoliberal economic and policy development, often fail to incorporate religion in their analyses—including the ways in which religious communities, both past *and* present, interact with and shape urban spaces through community and meaning-making processes. "These frameworks," writes Maldonado-Estrada, "often erase the very ways people…hold on to their neighborhood identities, their churches, and their ethnic identities in spite of and in conversation with larger trends of urban redevelopment and gentrification."[92] As the following chapter will argue in greater depth, some communities that lost their ethnic parishes fought bitterly to claim their parish legacies even after closure.

[92] Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada, *Lifeblood of the Parish: Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 195.

Figure 3.3 also reveals another pattern to the recent closures. A high concentration of territorial parish closures took place in the predominantly Black neighborhoods of West and North Philadelphia. Overall, the number of Black Catholics in Philadelphia fell from 40,000 in 1980 to 20,000 in 2021.[93] While the exact causes of this decline are impossible to pinpoint, several factors are likely to contribute. As Matthew Cressler has shown, historical methods of Black evangelization by Catholics in the mid-twentieth century often leveraged Catholic schools as an opportunity to bring families to the Church.[94] Whether or not the creation of the Independence Mission Schools, for example, has resulted in any conversions, the role of institutional presence and access is important to consider. As more Catholic institutions close in Black neighborhoods, families have less access to the Church as a religious, educational, or social option.

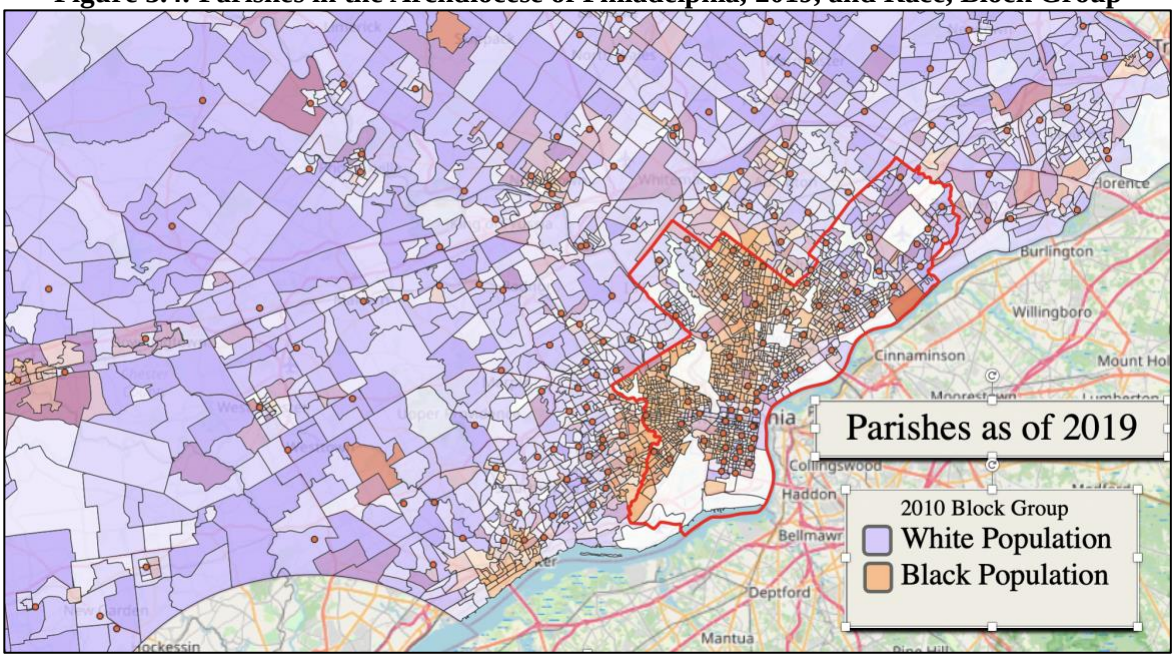
Some Black Catholics, however, have another explanation for the decline. As Adrienne Harris quipped in an interview, "You know the biggest Black Catholic Parish? Enon Baptist Church." At my puzzled look, she explained, "Enon Baptist Church has more…people that used to be deacons [in the Catholic Church] because people get sick of being disrespected….There's more than one path to God. And if the Catholic one is clogged up, go another route."[95] The decades of racialized closure in Black urban neighborhoods, starting in the 1970s, may have turned many former—and presumably prospective—Catholics away from the Church.

[93] Kristin E. Holmes, "Black Catholics looking for recognition from pope," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 30, 2015; Michael Days, "Black Catholics deserved recognition in PBS doc on Black churches," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 25, 2021.

[94] Matthew Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

[95] Adrienne Harris, Zoom interview with author, October 7, 2020.

Figure 3.4: Parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 2019, and Race, Block Group



City of Philadelphia boundary in red.

Source: Map by author. 1980 Census Tract by Race: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 15.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V15.0.

As Figure 3.4 shows, the patterns of these closures have also had a profound impact on where the Catholic Church *remained* at the start of the century's third decade—and thus, where local Catholicism will be in the future. As one theologian told me, "the fate of neighborhoods and the Archdiocese go hand and hand." The Church, she continued, "had chances to make different decisions vis-à-vis people who were Black or Hispanic [but] we didn't always make those courageous decisions to make a more stable city."[96] Put simply, despite the universalizing discourse epitomized by Kleinlein's "St. Anywhere" parish, the risk of closure has not faced all parishes equally. After generations of archdiocesan policies of closures, the historically dense urban Catholic communities of earlier eras have given way to predominantly White, suburban Catholicism in the wealthier counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery.

[96] Maureen, interview with author, Philadelphia, January 23, 2020. This source asked not to be named by her full name.

Conclusion

Together, this and the previous chapter have argued that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has developed and implemented a policy of closure since the 1970s. Over the past fifty years, the Archdiocese's has depicted the closure of parishes and schools as both a symptom of *and* a tool for the management of Catholic decline. After 1993, when the suppression of urban parishes and schools of color were announced with little transparency or input from community members, the Archdiocese under Cardinal Bevilacqua engaged parish involvement in the process of measuring parish sustainability. Upon Archbishop Chaput's arrival in 2011, the Archdiocese pushed the policy of closure into overdrive. Chaput leveraged closures at an unprecedented level to manage the financial stresses at the parish and diocesan levels, achieving a state of financial security by his resignation in 2020. The aggressiveness of his approach, however, provoked anger and uncertainty as Catholics across the region interpreted closure as a growing threat to all parishes, a fear Chaput stoked by framing litigation reform efforts as a further risk to parishes. In Philadelphia, the sexual abuse scandals and widespread parish closures should therefore not be viewed as separate crises, but as intertwined processes that shifted the interpretation of Catholic decline from a predominantly Black, urban concern to a threat, at least discursively, facing the White Catholic future.

PART TWO |
"A State of Good Preservation": Repertoires of Decline

Part Two turns from archdiocesan policies of decline to repertoires of decline circulating in Catholic Philadelphia in the 2010s. Like the Archdiocese's policies, each repertoire offers a coalescing yet nebulous array of practical, narrative, and affective strategies. Catholics combine and leverage these strategies to make sense of religious change on the local level, such as at parishes and in neighborhoods. Continuing the histories of Part One's three parishes, Chapter 4 introduces legacies of the sacred, a repertoire challenging archdiocesan authority over relegated, or deconsecrated, churches. Protesters have drawn upon legacies of the sacred to express a sense of ownership and sacredness that transcends the parameters defined in canon law. The fifth chapter examines the invocation of older age and aging in interpretations of decline. Older age weaves through various repertoires, both as a marker of decline and as a challenge to archdiocesan policies of decline. I offer age in this chapter as an analytical framework for studying the often-invisible work older women perform to create Catholic communities and identities. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this study by analyzing several repertoires of renewal, each presenting visions for the future of the Catholic Church. The primary repertoire of this chapter is that of revitalization, which has emerged in response to papal exhortations to the New Evangelization and through the rapid growth of Catholic devotional media companies.

Chapter 4 |
Grave Cause: Church Relegations and the Unmaking of the Sacred in the 21st Century

Nearly thirty-four years after the closure of St. Peter Claver parish, the former parishioners learned on March 4, 2019, that Archbishop Charles J. Chaput had slated their church for deconsecration. Effective on April 8, the building on Twelfth and Lombard streets would cease to be St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church.[1] The process of deconsecration, known in Roman Catholic canon law as relegation, strips a Catholic church of its sacred character to allow for its rental, sale, or demolition. The Archdiocese's plan after deconsecration was to sell St. Peter Claver Church. The incentive to do so was significant: several new residences across the street had each sold for roughly $1.5 million in recent years.[2]

Recalling the day of the announcement, Adrienne Harris, who had attended St. Peter Claver as a parishioner until its 1985 suppression, explained that she felt hopeless. She had spent decades advocated for the reestablishment of the parish, organizing with other former parishioners and writing letters to bishops and even the Vatican to overturn the suppression.[3] "I've spent more than almost half of my life with this, and I have done the best I can," she recalled feeling, "And I'm sorry to the ancestors. And I was giving it up." Although Archdiocese of Philadelphia promised to use the proceeds from the church's sale to fund ministries serving Black Catholics, Adrienne and other Black Catholics were distraught by the decision—one in which they had had no say.[4]

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[1] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Relegation of Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," March 1, 2019, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed April 7, 2020.

[2] Ashley Hahn, "Saying goodbye to Philadelphia's first black Catholic Church," *WHYY Philadelphia*, March 29, 2018.

[3] Adrienne Harris' letters and work on behalf of St. Peter Claver are archived in the Charles Blockson Collection, Temple University, along with other parish materials and records: BC 035 PC, St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church Records, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University (hereafter, Blockson Claver Collection).

[4] Adrienne Harris, Zoom interview with author, October 7, 2020.

Then, Adrienne received a phone call. On the other end was Brody Hale, a lawyer located in southwestern Massachusetts, whose expertise included Roman Catholic canon law. Adrienne remembered Hale telling her, "'I know canon law very well…And I know about St. Peter Claver, and I can help you. Do you want help?'" Hale explained to Adrienne that he believed the Archdiocese of Philadelphia had violated canon law in relegating St. Peter Claver Church. According to Adrienne, "[Hale said], 'If you don't do something today, they're free to sell the property Monday.' This was on a Thursday. He said, 'I'll write a letter for you. Will you sign it?'" After more than three decades of trying to preserve the St. Peter Claver community, Adrienne answered, "Yes."[5]

Figure 4.1 St. Peter Claver Church



Source: Photograph courtesy of Joseph E. B. Elliott, April 26, 2020.

[5] Harris, October 2020.

By 2019, the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver were not the first nor the only Catholics in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to learn their church was slated for relegation. Although canon law defines relegation as a last resort measure, Archbishop Chaput, like American bishops in other dioceses, relegated 35 churches in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia between 2011 and 2012. As a policy of decline, relegation can be an effective measure. By reducing parish and archdiocesan debt through the sale of costly properties, relegation at once lessens the financial burden of their upkeep and provides profit through the sale. While the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver protested diocesan authority to deconsecrate their sacred space, bishops also frequently sign relegation decrees at the behest of the parishes themselves.[6]

Scholars of American religions have produced extensive studies of the production of sacred spaces, exploring the role of embodiment, practice, and affect.[7] As David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal have argued in *American Sacred Space*, "Sacred spaces are always highly charged sites for contested negotiations over the ownership of the symbolic capital (or symbolic real estate) that signifies power relations."[8] The deliberate and institutional deconsecration, desacralization, or what cultural geographer Veronica della Dora calls the "unmaking" of sacred

[6] In 1983 CIC, the Church defines its "innate right…to acquire, retain, administer, and alienate temporal goods independently from civil power," as a means to "its proper purposes." The Church's purposes include providing for worship, "the decent support of the clergy and other ministers," and the works of charity and evangelization (c. 1254 §§ 1-2). In other words, in order to serve its function as the Catholic Church, it is allowed to acquire, keep, administer, and alienate or sell temporal goods. A parish, as a "public juridic person" under canon law, likewise has these rights and obligations to acquire, keep, administer, and alienate temporal goods in order to advance the mission of the Church and its apostolate (; c. 515 § 3). John Anthony Renken, "The *Parochus* as Administrator of Parish Property," *Studia canonica* 43 (2009): 487-520.

[7] David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds. *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995); Elaine A. Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Elizabeth Perez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Robert Brenneman and Brian J. Miller, *Building Faith: A Sociology of Religious Structures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[8] David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction," in *American Sacred Space*, edited by David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995), 16.

space, however, has received far less attention from Americanists.[9] Although there is a more robust scholarly conversation about the deconsecration and reuse of religious sites in Western Europe, the affective experiences and theological, financial, and practical negotiations of unmaking a sacred space remain understudied. Yet, the American Catholic Church is far from alone in deconsecrating and often selling formerly sacred spaces, making the question of unmaking, selling, destroying, and/or reusing sacred space a critical one for the study of contemporary lived religion.[10]

This chapter, however, is less about relegation as a policy of decline than about the response of locals to this policy. Although this chapter will return to the case of St. Peter Claver toward its conclusion, to only center examples of radical protest or resistance to relegation would be to obscure the varied experiences of anger, grief, and acceptance that most Catholics experience during such a process. Indeed, most of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's relegations in the 2010s proceeded without significant protest or delay. For those that did prompt debate or resistance, these disputes took place in a different legal arena than John C. Seitz's resisters in *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns*, who sought to wrest authority from the Archdiocese of Boston by physically occupying closed churches.[11] Instead, Philadelphians, including Catholics and non-Catholics alike, more often turned to civil and canonical authorities to dispute Archdiocesan power in determining the future of former church buildings. Appealing to these alternate authorities, these locals have leveraged *legacies of the sacred*, a repertoire of

[9] Veronica della Dora "Infrasecular Geographies: Making, Unmaking and Remaking Sacred Space," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no.1 (2018): 44-71.

[10] Shahla Farzan, "Houses of Worship Find New Life after Congregations Downsize," *National Public Radio*, Aug 24 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/08/24/753256634/houses-of-worship-find-new-life-after-congregations-downsize; Amelia Nierenberg, "New Spirits Rise in Old, Repurposed Churches," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/25/us/abandoned-churches-covid.html.

[11] John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdown* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

decline encompassing several practical, narrative, and affective strategies to make sense of decline at local sites. This particular repertoire includes an affective and narrative appeal of obligation to one's historic parish community to care for a physical church building, as well as practical strategies for this care. By claiming that sacredness comes not from a bishop's power or from canon law, but rather from the history of the community itself, parishioners have challenged the boundaries of what constitutes Catholic sacredness. Through an analysis of Catholic canon law, archdiocesan and parish justifications for relegation, and community responses to such decisions, this chapter situates the unmaking of sacred space paradoxically as itself an ongoing process of producing, defining, and owning the Catholic sacred.[12]

Outlining the canonical process of relegation, the first section illustrates the logistical complexities involved in the 2015 parish-driven relegation and sale of St. Mary of the Assumption Church by Manayunk's St. John the Baptist parish. The second section turns to St. Laurentius, a former Polish parish church in Fishtown. After the Archdiocese relegated the church in 2014, former parishioners, advocates, and neighbors became locked in a lengthy debate over the appropriate use of the erstwhile Polish church. This section analyzes the strategy of historic preservation in the repertoire of legacies of the sacred. In the civil arenas of zoning meetings and the Philadelphia Historical Commission, preservation advocates leveraged legacies of the sacred to debate the most appropriate use for the relegated church. The third and final section returns to St. Peter Claver to examine a different appeal to legacies of the sacred as a challenge to the Archdiocese's authority over the church. Together, these three cases illustrate

[12] Note: this chapter is about the deliberate and institutional deconsecration by the Catholic Church of its own religious sites. Scholars of Catholic canon law distinguish between the temporary desecration or violation of sacred places "by injurious actions done in them" (c. 1211); the permanent destruction of sacred places (c. 1212); and the purposeful deconsecration, profanation, or desacralization of sacred places through exercise of canon law (c. 1222). Kim de Wildt, "Ritual Void or Ritual Muddle? Deconsecration Rites of Roman Catholic Church Buildings," *Religions* 11, no. 517 (2020): 1-18.

how relegations reveal elisions and tensions between competing lay, civil, and canonical constructions of Catholic sacred space.

I. From Perpetuity to Relegation: Negotiating Church Use in Manayunk

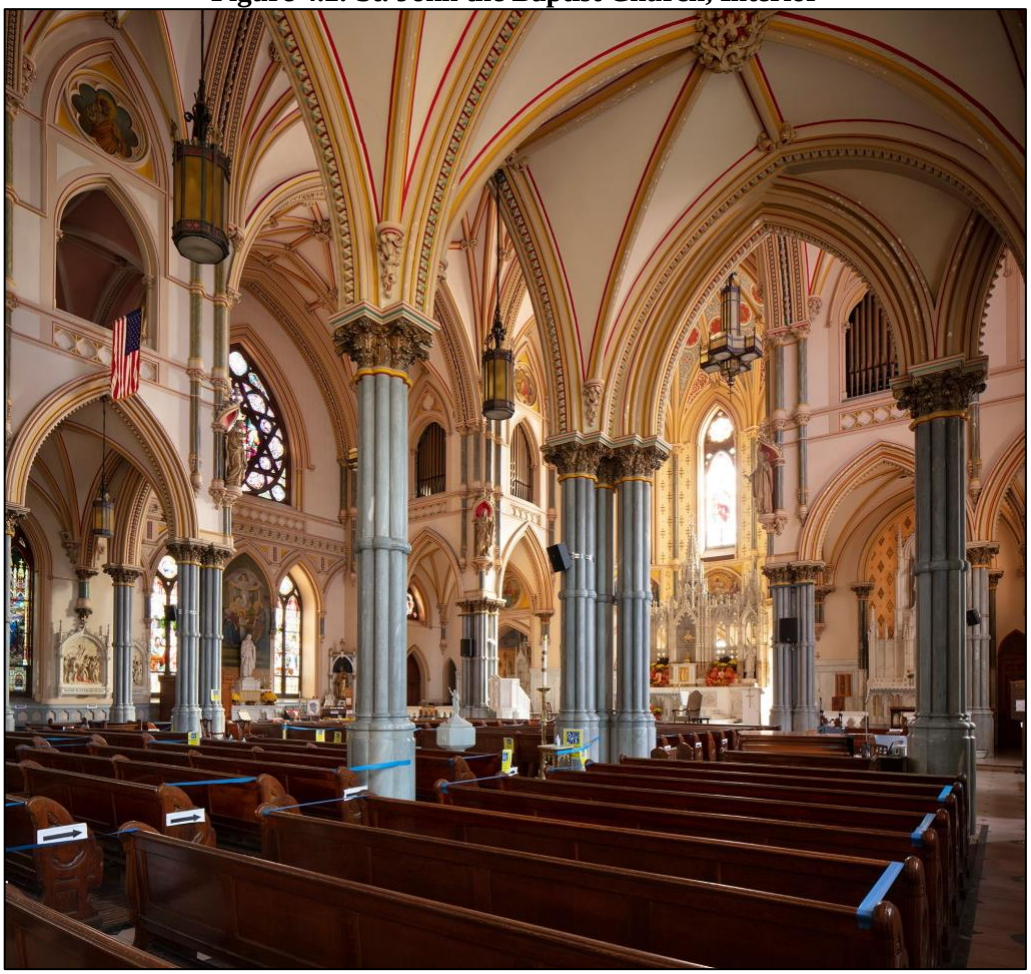
While Monsignor Kevin Lawrence was the priest at St. Malachy parish in North Philadelphia, he often commuted along Henry Avenue, a major thoroughfare through Manayunk. He occasionally stopped along this route to treat himself at Dalessandro's Steaks. One such afternoon in 2013, while waiting for his sandwich, he overheard "this heated conversation about St. John the Baptist" from Dalessandro's other patrons. Aware that the parish had recently merged with St. Mary of the Assumption (German) and St. Josaphat (Polish) parishes, Lawrence listened in.[13]

At the time of the 2012 merger (see Chapter 3), the committee of parishioners from the three combining parishes had chosen the physical plant of St. John the Baptist to serve as the seat for the newly consolidated parish. St. John the Baptist Church, a large Gothic-style building in Bucks County brownstone, became the parish's primary worship site. "If you've ever seen it," Lawrence explained in a 2019 interview, "you would understand why. I mean, it's just a beautiful church" (Figures 4.2, 4.3). Dedicated in 1886 by Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan, it commanded an imposing view of the neighborhood at the intersections of Cresson, Rector, and Silverwood streets at Pretzel Park. A block up the steep hill of Rector Street, the rectory, with its two-storied balconies, housed the parish's consolidated administrative offices. At Dalessandro's, however, Lawrence discovered the year-old decision to use St. John the Baptist Church was no

[13] Monsignor Kevin Lawrence, interview with author, Philadelphia, August 21, 2019. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Merger of Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Saint Josaphat Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania into Saint John the Baptist Parish, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," April 11, 2012, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed April 7, 2020.

longer quite so settled. What concerned parishioners, particularly those from the former parishes of St. Josaphat and St. Mary of the Assumption, were "how bad the buildings were" at St. John the Baptist. The church "was losing mortar every day," the priest recalled, "There were gaps in the mortar joints of the tower that you could stick your whole arm in. There were birds nesting in the cracks. There were weeds growing out of it."[14] Jillian, a parishioner, remembered a problem rather more dramatic than weeds. "There was a tree growing out of it," she explained to me, "A *small* tree, but it wasn't a sprout."[15] Among other complaints were the church's lack of parking lot and air conditioning, as well as the rectory's similar state of disrepair.

Figure 4.2: St. John the Baptist Church, Interior



Source: Photograph courtesy of Joseph E. B. Elliott.

[14] Lawrence, August 2019.
[15] Jillian, telephone interview with author, February 2, 2021.

Image 4.3 St. John the Baptist Church, Exterior



Source: Photograph by author, August 21, 2019.

As Lawrence learned during his visit to Dalessandro's, the parishioners planned to attend a townhall later that evening to discuss the costs of renovating St. John the Baptist. But alternative possibilities were also up for debate. "The problem was," Lawrence clarified, the newly consolidated parish "also had two other perfectly fine church buildings."[16] Both St. Mary of the Assumption (five blocks north of St. John the Baptist) and St. Josaphat (one block northwest) churches would require far less money to operate. These two churches had become auxiliary worship sites of the parish after the merger, but they were still fully functional. The merged parish had quickly recognized St. Mary of the Assumption as too small—and too

[16] Lawrence, August 2019.

inaccessible—to serve as the parish seat. But parishioners continued to debate the merits of St. John the Baptist and St. Josaphat churches. The former was the church of the first parish in Manayunk; it was "bigger and prettier" and "an iconic image" for the neighborhood.[17] But St. Josaphat, constructed to replace the former Protestant church the Polish parish first purchased, was a newer build from the 1950s. Jillian recalled that St. Josaphat "was always immaculately taken care of," without need for major renovation or repair. And, temptingly, St. Josaphat had *air conditioning*.[18]

These debates about renovation costs and air conditioning, nitty-gritty as they were, had profound implications for the consolidated community's sense of legacy, privilege, and preservation. As Monsignor Lawrence noted, the discussion about maintenance and repairs had "reopened" old "wounds" about the merger of three distinct and historic communities. Although sympathetic to the priest overseeing the merger, Reverend Thomas Kletzel, Jillian noted that his use of St. Josaphat during the summer months "filled [the former parishioners of St. Josaphat] with hope" that their church would become the parish seat. Manayunk's Catholics had struggled with the contentious merger of their parish schools in 2005 and their parishes in 2012—and now the debate over church use had reignited the deep-seated rivalries that had defined Manayunk's Catholicism for almost two centuries.[19]

That afternoon in Dalessandro's, as he listened to the parishioners, Monsignor Lawrence did not yet know that the Vicar of the Clergy would assign him to the pastorship of St. John the Baptist in only a matter of weeks. Instead, "my cheesesteak came," he remembered with an

[17] Jillian, February 2021.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Lawrence, August 2019.

ironic smile, “and I put my head down to say my grace, and all I said was, ‘Thank God I’m not at St. John the Baptist.’”[20]

This example illustrates the challenges that many newly consolidated parishes faced after the Archdiocese’s parochial restructuring plans in the 2000s and 2010s. Suddenly responsible for two or more churches, rectories, convents, and/or school buildings, merged parishes often found the financial burden of these aging and often very large physical plants unsustainable. These costs could be especially high for aging properties. As Lawrence explained, one engineering firm estimated a cost of $4 million to deconstruct and rebuild St. John the Baptist Church’s steeple “in a historic, accurate way” (Image 4.3). When the parish balked at the cost, the firm “suggested [that] until we could raise the money, [we could] wrap the building in a metal mesh to keep stones from falling on people. And well, how much?” On top of these costs, newly consolidated parishes had the emotional and challenging work of bringing distinct communities into agreement on which properties to support and prioritize.[21]

It is in these often tense and difficult circumstances that relegation, or the deconsecration of a Catholic church to allow for its sale or demolition, has become an increasingly attractive option for parishes and dioceses alike. Such was the case for St. John the Baptist parish. Ultimately, the parish chose to keep St. John the Baptist Church as its primary worship site; St. Josaphat, with its air conditioning, would remain an auxiliary worship site. Given its financial concerns, however, the parish decided it could not also maintain the property of St. Mary of the Assumption. St. John the Baptist asked the Archdiocese to relegate the church, thereby allowing the parish to sell the property to developers. The sale would help pay down the debts of the

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

newly consolidated parish, freeing resources to fundraise for and finance the renovation of St. John the Baptist Church.

Defining Relegation: Profane Use, Sordid Use, and Grave Cause

A Catholic church is not inherently sacred. The rite of consecration or, in post-Vatican II terms, dedication imbues the physical building with its sacredness.[22] Nikolaus Schöch, a canon law scholar for the Apostolic Signatura, has articulated the complexity of a church's simultaneous existence as a physical building and a sacred space. According to Schöch, the "Catholic concept of a church as a sacred space, as opposed to a more functional or utilitarian concept, is unfortunately not always given sufficient consideration. A church building cannot be treated as just another physical asset."[23] By both canon law and tradition, Catholics frequently the church building unlike other forms of physical property or temporal goods. For this reason, the management of these buildings as their sacredness is dismantled is a complex process.

The merger or suppression of a parish has little immediate bearing on a church's designation as sacred. When the Archdiocese of Philadelphia merged the three Manayunk parishes, the churches of St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Josaphat remained sacred spaces. They only ceased to be *parish churches*, or "the [center] of the liturgical life of the parish." Instead, they became "subsidiary churches" of St. John the Baptist, or what the Archdiocese calls worships sites, which remain suitable sites for occasional Masses or other services. The possible

[22] As Seitz explains, consecration "aimed to establish churches as sites of unique spiritual efficacy and inviolable sacred presence." Setiz, *No Closure,* 70, 75.

[23] Nicholas Schöch, "Relegation of Churches to Profane Use (c. 1222, §2): Reasons and Procedure," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 67, no. 2 (2007): 485.

tensions inherent in defining *occasional* use—for weddings or non-English-language Masses, for example—revealed itself in the debate over air conditioning and repair costs in Manayunk. [24]

In Catholic canon law, the process of intentionally deconsecrating a church is known as *relegation*, a legal method by which a bishop dissolves a church's sacredness. The relevant canon is 1222 (1983 CIC), which states,

> § 1. If a church cannot be used in any way for divine worship and there is no possibility of repairing it, the diocesan bishop can relegate it to profane but not sordid use.
> § 2. Where other grave causes suggest that a church no longer be used for divine worship, the diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, can relegate it to profane but not sordid use, with consent of those who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church and provided that the good of souls suffers no detriment thereby.

In sum, a diocesan bishop has the authority to deconsecrate a church building in a situation wherein the church building is no longer suitable for worship (due, for example, to damage by natural disaster or war) and its reconstruction or repair would be so financially taxing upon parishioners as to be morally impossible (§1); *or*, wherein other significant and *grave* concerns signal the necessity of deconsecration (§2).[25] Once the bishop has determined the necessity of relegation by either of these standards, he issues a decree (c. 51) of relegation, whereby the building is no longer a worship site. Instead, it becomes available for profane but not sordid use.

Without a clear canon law definition of sordid use, this last phrase is vague. Canon law scholar Schöch defines sordid use succinctly and yet expansively as a use "contrary to Christian morality."[26] My interlocutors in Philadelphia have repeatedly offered brothels as an example of what might constitute sordid use, but there are other, perhaps more likely, limitations. Schöch adds that non-Christian religious worship would also be inappropriate "because of the symbolic

[24] Ibid., 486.
[25] Ibid., 490.
[26] Ibid., 486.

effect of an apparent triumph over the Catholic Church."[27] In December 2018, the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Italian Episcopal Conference, and the Department for Cultural Heritage of the Church hosted a conference, "Doesn't God dwell here anymore?" to address this question. The conference published recommendations for the reuse of former churches. They reserve "transformation into private dwellings" for "buildings of lesser architectural value," and note overall that "[c]ommercial for-profit reuses seem to be excluded" as appropriate options for reuse.[28]

Across the United States, the appropriate use of a former church appears to be more expansive. The Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, for example, moved into the relegated church and rectory of St. Francis de Sales in New York in 2011 (students apparently use the former church building as an alcohol-free space for chapter meetings), and the Church Brew Works in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, occupies the restored and former St. John the Baptist Church.[29] In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, many former parish churches have first been sold to other Christian denominations to remain in use as Christian worship sites.[30] Other relegated churches have become residential complexes, like the former St. Agatha in the Mantua-Powelton Village area of West Philadelphia, which was converted into moderate-income apartments after the parish merged with St. James the Greater in 1979.[31]

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[27] Ibid., 489.

[28] Pontifical Council for Culture, *Guidelines: Decommissioning and Ecclesial Reuse of Churches*, "Doesn't God Dwell Here Anymore?" Conference, December 17, 2018, http://www.cultura.va/content/dam/cultura/docs/pdf/beniculturali/guidelines.pdf.

[29] Nierenberg, "New Spirits."

[30] As Thomas Rzeznik found in his study of the 1993 restructuring in North Philadelphia and Chester, of the fourteen churches that did not remain parish churches, eight of the buildings were sold to other Christian denominations. The remainder were used as worship/subsidiary sites for parishes (3), the chapel for a school (1), or the site of an archdiocesan social services center (1), or were demolished (1). The remaining sites were kept as a worship site for a parish, a chapel for a school (formerly the Gesu), and the site of an archdiocesan social services center (formerly St. Henry). Thomas Rzeznik, "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2009):76.

[31] Christopher Mote, "How to Reuse a Church: Our Top Ten," *Hidden City,* updated June 21, 2013, https://hiddencityphila.org/2013/05/how-to-reuse-a-church-our-top-ten/.

Contrary to Rome's guidelines, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia had not, as of 2021, excluded commercial and/or residential reuse as an option for relegated churches.

Unlike parish closures, which only require just cause, relegations require grave cause. What constitutes a grave cause is, like "sordid use," a matter of some varying interpretation. Generally, experts define grave cause as an unsurmountable challenge inhibiting the church's preservation as a sacred space. Robert W. Oliver, a canon law scholar, describes grave cause as a higher standard than just cause. "A mere lack of funds in the diocese or a desire to reduce the diocesan debt is, therefore, not by itself considered to be a grave reason," he summarizes, "The decree of relegation must establish that the diocese has truly looked for the necessary funds and seriously sought alternative financial resources to maintain the church building."[32] In 2013, the Congregation for the Clergy listed the following as insufficient causes for relegation: diocesan restructuring plans, lack of need, suppression, decreased number of parishioners, "a desire to promote the unity of the parish," or events or concerns predicted for the future. The congregation of the Roman Curia did, however, grant that grave cause may "arise…from a combination of just causes, each insufficient in itself, but which together manifest the seriousness of the situation."[33] These high standards reflect the Church's view that a church, once established as sacred, should thereafter retain its sacredness permanently. The Congregation for the Clergy stated, "There is a clear disposition both in law and in tradition that a sacred edifice which has been given over *perpetually* for divine worship should retain that sacred character if at all possible."[34] In general,

[32] Robert W. Oliver, "Temporal Goods and the Suppression/Merger of Parish," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 72, no. 1 (2012): 171.

[33] The Congregation for the Clergy, "The Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same," April 30, 2013, published in "Official Documents of the Holy See: Letter from the Congregation for the Clergy and Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes and the Closure, Relegation, and Alienation of Churches," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 73 (2013): 217.

[34] Italics added. Congregation, "Procedural Guidelines," 216.

the Catholic Church is committed to maintaining and expanding its physical presence in the world. Relegation should only be a last resort measure.[35]

In weighing these considerations, it is ultimately the diocesan bishop that decides upon a relegation, not the parishioners or priests of a parish. Indeed, the bishop does not require the parishioners' consent for the relegation of their church.[36] In the 2010s, Archbishop Chaput, like many American bishops, developed relegation as a policy of decline. In many cases, although parishioners may have desired to keep and maintain former churches, the sheer number and size of church properties proved an unsustainable burden.[37] Even when a parish *does* desire relegation, the decision often remains a painful and reluctant one for parishioners, clergy, and even local residents, as the case of St. Mary of the Assumption in Manayunk attests.

Parking Lots & Air Conditioning in Manayunk: Negotiating Relegation and Reuse

Archbishop Chaput signed St. Mary of the Assumption's decree of relegation on September 29, 2015, effective November 1 of that year. The justification for St. Mary of the Assumption Church's relegation followed the pattern in Chaput's other decrees. The decree listed five grave causes that "suggest that the church be so relegated and no longer used for divine worship." These included: 1) the parish's lack of need for the church; 2) the high costs of maintenance and repairs for the church which, in light of the parish's debt, would "negatively [impact] the ministries of the parish;" 3) the unavailability of funding; 4) the church building's lack of "any particular architectural, historical, or artistic significance;" and 5) the opportunity to

[35] Oliver, "Temporal Goods," 171.

[36] Schöch writes, that it is "recommended" that the bishop consult the pastoral council, "the bishop is neither obliged to consult them nor to ask for their consent." Schöch, "Relegation," 499.

[37] Despite the ambiguity of what constitutes a grave cause, the most common reason for relegation is financial necessity. Ibid., 492

"enhance parish unity" by "having all the parishioners worship at the parish church."[38] Curiously, although the Archdiocese introduced these reasons for relegations as "grave causes," only the third (high costs) and fourth (lack of funding) constituted grave cause by common interpretations of canon law. The lack of need for the church, the value of the building, and the need for unity did not in and of themselves justify breaking the Church mandate to seek all possible means of perpetuation before relegation. They might have been reasons the parish and Archdiocese desired the church's relegation, but canon law scholars may have contested them as true grave causes.

That upkeep costs and debt were prohibitive for the parish *did*, however, constitute grave causes for the relegation of the church. According to the decree, the annual maintenance costs for St. Mary of the Assumption Church were $33,000. But, "because this church building cannot be reasonably separated from other unused parish buildings on the same property, the parish is forced to maintain and pay taxes on these buildings as well," climbing to an annual cost of roughly $138,000.[39] According to the decree, St. Mary of the Assumption Church also required an additional $900,000 to $1,400,000 in repairs. Compounding the weight of these costs, St. John the Baptist also carried a debt of approximately $400,000. Indeed, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in 2015 that St. John the Baptist parish had an income loss of $142,714 the previous fiscal year.[40]

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[38] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Relegation of Saint Mary of the Assumption Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Profane But Not Sordid Use," September 29, 2015, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed April 7, 2020.

[39] This statement is somewhat unclear. While churches are exempt from federal, state, and local income and property taxes, properties or activities from which a church draws an income "unrelated to [its] tax-exempt purposes" may be subject to the Unrelated Business Income Tax (UBIT). St. Mary of the Assumption had sold paid permits for over 50 cars in its 100-space parking lot, which might have constituted triggered the UBIT. Internal Revenue Service, "Tax Guide for Churches & Religious Organizations," Publication 1828, Department of the Treasury, (August 2015), 19.

[40] Melanie Burney, "St. Mary of the Assumption will be closed," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 19, 2015, B4.

After St. Mary of the Assumption's relegation in 2015, the future of the physical plant remained the subject of debate for several years. In 2016, developer Jack Bienenfeld was under agreement with St. John the Baptist for the property. His initial proposal for the "St. Mary's Rehabilitation Project" included a multi-family residential complex incorporating the renovation of the rectory, school, and church, as well as the construction of new buildings. In March 2017, Bienenfeld and the architecture firm Campbell Thomas & Co. submitted an application to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission detailing the plan to convert the church properties into a total of 34 apartments, with an additional 66 apartments in new constructions. The plan promised to "preserve, protect and enhance the unique character of Manayunk."[41] Bienenfeld's proposal had the support of local Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr., who introduced an ordinance for the spot rezoning of the property.

Prior to a public meeting with Bienenfeld on March 22, 2017, the Manayunk Neighborhood Council posted a comprehensive—and furious—overview of the project online. Of particular concern was the issue of parking. The one-acre property sat on two consecutive blocks between the parallel streets of Carson, Conarroe, and Gay, in a residential neighborhood of row-houses. These streets were narrow, with an estimated one on-street parking space available for every three houses.[42] The Council's overview of Binenfeld's proposal suggested the plans would worsen the parking situation. It prompted residents to ask the developer a series of questions at the upcoming zoning meeting, such as, "Your project is not allowed under current zoning. Why do your renters, therefore, have more of a right to the parking spaces than the

[41] James Campbell, "Civic Design Review Project Application Form," Philadelphia City Planning Commission, February 20, 2017, available Manayunk Neighborhood Council, "Saint Mary of the Assumption," http://www.manayunkcouncil.org/zoning/saintmarys/20170222-saint-marys-cdr-plans.pdf.

[42] Manayunk Neighborhood Council, "Saint Mary of the Assumption," updated April 6, 2022, http://www.manayunkcouncil.org/zoning/saintmarys/index.html#cdr-plans.

current neighbors?" The post also listed questions for "Saint John's [St. John the Baptist parish]," including, "Why didn't you consult with the neighbors or community regarding redevelopment of the property?" and "How is this redevelopment plan in the best interests of the immediate neighbors?"[43] According to local reporting, the questions and comments at the meeting were even more pointed than these prompts. One resident objected, "Forget about the parking because none of it will be left. You will have lost your hair because you will have pulled it out…Your family life will be destroyed. Your mental health will be destroyed."[44]

The meeting attendees rejected Bienenfeld's proposal vehemently. A year later, another public meeting took place on January 11, 2018, allowing residents to review Bienenfeld's revised proposal. The plan decreased the number of units to 21 townhouses and 35 apartments, and it provided additional on-street parking. This time, the residents approved the plan.[45]

Jillian estimated that St. John the Baptist parish received between $1 to $2 million less for the property as a result of the revised plans. But what concerned some former parishioners of St. Mary of the Assumption most, she explained, was not the loss of money from the sale; it was the final use of the proceeds from the sale. Those who had belonged to the former German parish had discussed first settling St. Mary of the Assumption's outstanding debts, before using the remainder of the money to develop a legacy for the closed parish. Some, for example, had floated the idea of dedicating the funds to support a youth minister. "That's their legacy, this money," said Jillian, of the former parishioners, "It's all they have left." They wanted the money's use to reflect the significance of the German community they had lost. Instead, the

[43] Manayunk Neighborhood Council, "Saint Mary of the Assumption: Questions for Jack Bienenfeld," http://www.manayunkcouncil.org/zoning/saintmarys/questionsforthedeveloper.html, accessed May 20, 2020.

[44] Mark Dent, "Manayunk meeting blows up over parking for church apartments," *Billy Penn*, March 23, 2017.

[45] It also offered North Light Community Center, which ran neighborhood programs, 16 parking spaces in the former church parking lot to purchase. Manayunk Neighborhood Council, "Saint Mary of the Assumption."

parish council first used the money to settle St. John the Baptist's debt. Next, parishioners received a letter from Monsignor Lawrence detailing the construction of a new 40-spot parking lot at St. John the Baptist, to be paid in part from the sale of St. Mary. Regardless of the great furor caused by parking in Manayunk, the lot failed to impress some former parishioners as the appropriate use of their closed parish's legacy.[46]

The challenges involved in the relegation of the former St. Mary of the Assumption property were not unique to Manayunk. Indeed, within the city limits, the practical concerns of parking and zoning frequently abut concerns about neighborhood character, parish history, and community heritage in the Archdiocese's relegations of Catholic churches. These interwoven issues echo the observation of Oliver, the canon law specialist: "As the controversies over parish closings demonstrate, often with much emotion, Catholics think of their parish as a precious reality, a source of sacred identity and memory in the Church." This sense of identity, Oliver explains, "derives not only from their connections in the present, but also from their connections with past members of their parish family, the community of faith."[47]

As the afterlife of relegated churches illustrates, is not only the parish, but also the parish's *physical manifestation* in the church building, that operates as a powerful source of Catholic identity, memory, and belonging. During relegation negotiations, parishioners often describe the care of the physical space as an obligation or even burden passed down to them as a legacy. The building acts as a repository for and symbol of the generations of local, family, and personal histories for the parish. This accrual of meaning imbues not only the building, but also community members' responsibility of care for it, with a powerful sacredness. Appealing to these *legacies of the sacred* enables parishioners to articulate a sense of stewardship over the

[46] Jillian, February 2021.
[47] Oliver, "Temporal Goods," 165.

building. Throughout the region, locals have drawn upon practical strategies to complement these narrative and affective appeals, crafting a repertoire that empowers them to interpret the processes of closure and relegation. As the following sections will demonstrate, many Philadelphians have leveraged legacies of the sacred to contest the appropriate reuse of former churches. In these cases, they challenge even diocesan and canonical definitions of what constitutes the Catholic sacred.

II. The Spires of St. Laurentius: Preserving Legacies of the Sacred

If the negotiations regarding St. Mary of the Assumption's future use hinged upon parking, other relegation cases in Philadelphia have instigated far more debate about the communal and theological parameters for the appropriate reuse of a former church. The fate of St. Laurentius, the church of Fishtown's former Polish parish, was one particularly acrimonious case, involving not only former parishioners, but also neighborhood residents, Polish community organizers, and the Philadelphia Historical Commission. For nearly a decade, several groups, each claiming to advocate for the appropriate use and legacy of St. Laurentius, vied in the arena of historic preservation to secure the fate of the former church.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, Fishtown was predominantly home to White, working-class residents employed in the neighborhood's shipyards and factories, including for companies like Stetson Hats and the Slinky. Although deindustrialization in the late twentieth century hit the adjacent neighborhoods of Kensington and Port Richmond harder than Fishtown, the neighborhood nonetheless saw the dispersal of the Polish Catholic community that had once petitioned for its own parish. By the early 2000s, Fishtown experienced economic revitalization and rapid gentrification, becoming a trendy and desired location particularly for Millennials. By

2018, *Forbes* published a lengthy article entitled, "How Fishtown, Philadelphia Became America's Hottest New Neighborhood," comparing the neighborhood's real estate market to those in Brooklyn or Washington, D.C.[48]

Despite the renewed investment in the neighborhood, Fishtown's changing demographics did not refill St. Laurentius' emptying pews. In 2013, the Archdiocese merged St. Laurentius with the territorial parish of Holy Name of Jesus; the two churches were located about a quarter of a mile from one another. The physical stability of St. Laurentius Church was an immediate concern for the newly consolidated parish. According to Father John Sibel, Holy Name's parish priest, St. Laurentius' records indicated that the parish had deferred repairs on the towers since the 1960s.[49] At first, estimates for repair ran between $1.2 and $3.4 million. When demolition estimates amounted to only $700,000, the parish council decided to proceed with this more cost-effective option, and the necessary relegation followed soon thereafter.[50] Issuing the decree on September 26, 2014, Archbishop Chaput cited the church's precarious physical condition and the steep renovation costs as grave causes. With the twin copper-tipped spires in dire need of repair, along with "numerous cracks in the façade of the building," engineers had declared the church "a potential safety hazard to the public."[51] As a final blow, the relegation decree leveled upon St. Laurentius a judgment passed upon many of the Archdiocese's churches: "the church building does not have any particular architectural, historical, or artistic significance" to justify the high

[48] Peter Lane Taylor, "How Fishtown, Philadelphia Became America's Hottest New Neighborhood," *Forbes*, May 2, 2018.

[49] Philadelphia Historical Commission, "The Minutes of the 635th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission," July 10, 2015, https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-historical-commission/public-meetings/, 30.

[50] Matthew Gambino and Lou Baldwin, "St. Laurentius Church sold, ending 6-year dispute," January 17, 2020, *Catholic Philly.com*

[51] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Relegation of Saint Laurentius Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Profane But Not Sordid Use," September 26, 2014, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed March 11, 2020.

costs of its maintenance and repair. Relegation and demolition, the Archdiocese agreed, was the smart decision.

The backlash was swift. A group of former St. Laurentius parishioners independently organized and called themselves the Friends of St. Laurentius. One active member described the group in 2016 as seeking to save the beloved church from the Archdiocese's "sinful, maniacal, un-Christian" demolition plans.[52] The group's goal was to disprove the Archdiocese's argument that leveling the church was the only reasonable fate for St. Laurentius. The Friends of St. Laurentius turned to historic preservation.

Historic Preservation in Philadelphia

Philadelphia has a long history of both redevelopment and preservation.[53] The Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC), the first of its kind, was established more than a decade before Congress passed the National History Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966.[54] As urban studies scholar Stephanie R. Ryberg argues, however, the PHC often took a limited view of what architectural spaces were worthy of preservation, focusing predominantly on colonial- and federal-era buildings.[55] Responding to market forces, which made preservation often a more cost effective alternative to demolition and clearance, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission practiced conservation more broadly than the midcentury PHC. Under the

[52] A. J. Thomson, "Zoning Meeting Tomorrow," *Save St. Laurentius*, September 19, 2016. https://savestlaurentius.org/.

[53] After the establishment of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in 1942, Pennsylvania passed the United States' first urban redevelopment law (1945), and Philadelphia established both the first local redevelopment authority (1946) and the first citywide historical commission (Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1955).

[54] Achieved after the contentious and widely disparaged demolition of the old Pennsylvania Station in New York City in 1964. The NHPA created a National Register of Historic Places, required all states and territories to appoint a state historic preservation officer, provided tax credits for owners of historic properties, and permitted states and municipalities to maintain their own zoning and regulation laws.

[55] Stephanie R. Ryberg, "Historic Preservation's Urban Renewal Roots: Preservation and Planning in Midcentury Philadelphia," *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 2 (2012): 196.

leadership of the City Planning Commission's director, Edmund Bacon (1949-1970), Philadelphia was widely recognized as an innovator in urban renewal programs, which were typically more conservative or moderate in comparison, for example, to Robert Moses's approach in New York City.[56]

Despite the city's early investment in historic preservation, Philadelphia has since lagged in developing an expansive and inclusive preservationist practice. In the twenty-first century, the PHC has continued to favor the city's colonial and federal history. A 2009 report published by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia found that preservation efforts had remained uncoordinated, reactive, and piecemeal throughout the region. These efforts had almost exclusively focused on Center City and largely White neighborhoods, such as Society Hill or Main Street in Manayunk. "There is less attention," wrote the report's authors, "to preserving the character of or historic resources in other neighborhoods, especially those neighborhoods that have experienced population loss and disinvestment." As a result, preservation was "dominated by wealthier, professional, largely white residents of Center City and selected neighborhoods."[57] Industrial-era and later constructions in other neighborhoods had received less support, particularly where subsequent disinvestment, depopulation, or abandonment had taken place.[58] Philadelphia's Black history, too, received less support from the PHC. Inga Saffron, longtime journalist for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, challenged the city in 2021 to recognize the unequal

[56] Society Hill was the important example. The renewal program that turned this neighborhood into a tourist destination also involved the (sometimes forced) relocation of residents who could not afford the "newly created building 'conformity' codes" enforced by the Redevelopment Authority. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 122.

[57] John Andrew Gallery and Randall Mason, *Preserve Philadelphia!*, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, July 2009, http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SummaryPreservationIn2020.pdf, 8.

[58] "Citywide Vision: Renew," Philadelphia2035, https://www.phila2035.org/_files/ugd/32cb1b_4c55f0e2a977489ea1bdf378f8aebb9e.pdf, accessed January 14, 2021, 156, 160.

weight certain racial histories and geographic districts received in preservationist decisions. Saffron critiqued the Philadelphia Historic Commission for "[giving] too much weight to arcane technical specifications or architectural alterations—and [paying] too little attention to the role of the building in community life."[59]

These issues are reflected in preservation literature. At its best, preservation can help communities productively make sense of the complex legacies of their heritage and history. Yet, as scholars of the field have argued, historic preservation has long been interwoven with the real estate market. At its worst, "the bulk of preservation work is organized around the needs of private real estate," observe Max Page and Marla R. Miller, editors of a collection on preservation, "making preservation seem at times simply a handmaiden to market-based economic development."[60] Since the 1980s, developers have converted historic properties into commercial spaces and luxury apartments for significant profit, linking preservation to gentrification. While such efforts have in many cases proceeded with the economic revival of downtowns across the United States, these processes also often displace local, and particularly minority, communities. Rather than stimulating dialogue about community and heritage, preservation efforts have often been more successful in funneling profits to real estate developers while displacing local communities.[61]

In Philadelphia, development has created a patchwork of gentrified and deeply depressed neighborhoods. In 2019, the Pew Charitable Trusts published Philadelphia's annual "State of the

[59] Inga Saffron, "It's time for Philadelphia to reckon with historical racism as an obstacle to preservation," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 1, 2021. When Philadelphians elected Jim Kinney as mayor in 2015, he established a Historic Preservation Task Force to strengthen preservation efforts in the city.

[60] Max Page and Marla R. Miller, "Introduction," in *Bending the Future: Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years of History Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Marla R. Miller (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 29-30.

[61] Graciela Isabel Sanchez, "Preservationists Must Be Anti-Gentrification Activists," in *Bending the Future: Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years of History Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Marla R. Miller (Boston, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 214-218.

City." Reflecting on ten years of such reports, the authors noted that while population and job growth rose in 2019, this growth was unevenly distributed. For example, Society Hill reported a median household income of $106,823 in comparison to North Philadelphia East's $15,232.[62] It should come as no surprise that Society Hill, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, was the site of a high-profile redevelopment scheme in the 1970s that displaced many residents of color.[63] In contrast, North Philadelphia's neighborhoods were the sites of systematic divestment from the city in the late twentieth century. Ongoing disparities in the twenty-first century, the Pew report noted, revealed that "the contrasts between the city's neighborhoods to be as dramatic as ever."[64]

In a gentrifying neighborhood like Fishtown, religious—or formerly religious—buildings can be attractive sites for preservation. Distinctive architectural features and community histories appeal to some developers interested in unique opportunities for "adaptive reuse," or the reuse of historic buildings for new functions. There is, nonetheless, a noticeable dearth in the American preservation literature of any sustained discussion on preserving formerly religious properties. Many texts reviewing historic preservation only cursorily reference potential differences between the preservation of religious properties and other historic sites.[65] Readers are left to wonder what aspects of preservation are unique to religious properties, as well as how to address them. Even in Page and Miller's collection, none of the fifty articles addresses the issue of religion or

[62] The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Philadelphia 2019: State of the City," April 11, 2019, https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2019/04/11/philadelphia-2019, 13.

[63] Although the activism of a small group of residents eventually resulted in the establishment of a small-scale, low-income housing scheme in Society Hill, opposition framed mixed-income housing as "un-American." Francesca Russello Ammon, "Resisting Gentrification Amid Historic Preservation: Society Hill, Philadelphia, and the Fight for Low-Income Housing," *Change Over Time* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 23.

[64] Pew Charitable Trusts, "Philadelphia 2019," 1.

[65] Virginia A. Benson and Richard Klein, *Historic Preservation for Professionals* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008), 105. The City of Philadelphia's 2010 comprehensive plan, *Phila2035*, notes vaguely on page 160 that religious properties, "though challenging, can be converted to new uses," without further explanation of their particular challenges.

religious sites.[66] The meaning of a formerly consecrated or sacred space, in other words, is often absent from the discussion of preservation, as are the reasons religious communities might seek to preserve—or challenge the preservation of—their properties.

Contesting Legacies of the Sacred: St. Laurentius and Historic Preservation

On July 10, 2015, the Friends of St. Laurentius lobbied the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) for the historic designation of St. Laurentius' brownstone, Gothic Revival exterior. A. J. Thompson, an attorney and former parishioner of St. Laurentius, fronted the Friends' effort. Among the speakers he introduced were Oscar Beisert, whom one local paper described as "the city's most passionate and prodigiously effective champion of historic (and not-so-historic) buildings"[67]; architectural and landscape historian Emily Cooperman; Deborah Majka, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland for Southeastern Pennsylvania; and Michael Bichasz, the president of the Polish American Congress, Eastern Pennsylvania District, and the president of the Polish American Cultural Center. A bevy of former parishioners and neighborhood residents added their voices to the call to designate the church. Together, they articulated several primary claims to the building's historical value: the church's cultural and religious significance as the first Polish community organization in Philadelphia; the architectural value of the building's design by Edwin Forest Durang, a prominent ecclesiastical architect in the nineteenth century; and the value of the church's "strong presence" as "a familiar

[66] Although preservation literature from outside of the United States offers a more developed analysis of these issues, this scholarship tends to focus on the architectural possibilities of formerly consecrated religious properties for adaptive reuse. Kristen Velthuis and Dirk H. R. Spenneman, "The Future of Defunct Religious Buildings: Dutch Approaches to their Adaptive Reuse," *Cultural Trends* 16.1 (March 2007): 43-66; Nicholas Lynch, "Domesticating the Church: The Reuse of Urban Churches as Loft Living in the Post-Secular City," *Social and Cultural Geography* (2016): 1-22.

[67] Malcolm Burnely, "Oscar Beisert's Quest to Save Philadelphia History," *Philly Magazine*, August 13, 2016.

visual feature" of Fishtown, particularly its dual, copper-tipped spires.[68] In other words, the Friends of St. Laurentius took aim at the relegation decree's denial of St. Laurentius' "architectural, historical, or artistic significance." It was precisely these realms of value that they looked to *prove* during that July.

At the July PHC meeting, Holy Name of Jesus parish also sent a representative to contest the preservation effort. Michael Phillips, an attorney, represented the parish and the Archdiocese. He explained that the parish did not dispute the historic nature of St. Laurentius church. Holy Name of Jesus instead asked that the PHC recognize the likely consequences on the parish's financial health.[69] In his presentation, he raised two objections to the preservation of the building: the "significant public safety risk" of the deteriorating building and Holy Name of Jesus' inability to afford the now $4.75 million estimated for its restoration. As owners of the building, Holy Name of Jesus parish, Phillips argued, did not have the financial means of averting St. Laurentius' disastrous deterioration. Historic designation, furthermore, would hamper developers' interest in buying the property because of the limitations and costs of the necessary preservation. Although preservationists argued that the parish's "hardship" concerns did not affect the value of the building, Phillips "asserted that passion and fervor should not trump logic and reason, which show that there is not sufficient money to make this building safe and reusable."[70]

Monsignor Daniel J. Kutys, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, later echoed Phillips' position on behalf of the Archdiocese. In a January 2016 letter to parish priests, Kutys cited "concerns that designation allows the

[68] PHC, "635th Stated Meeting," 26.
[69] Ibid., 31.
[70] Ibid., 28.

government to place undue restrictions on religious structures and property, which in effect interferes with the free practice of our religion." To prevent these interferences, Kutys explained, the Archdiocese intended as a matter of policy to challenge the historic designation of any Church property "where the Archdiocese does not consent to or agree with the proposed designation."[71] In addition to the costs of maintaining the aging structure, interference in ecclesiastical affairs by historical commissions outweighed, for the Archdiocese, the ideals of preserving St. Laurentius as a historic site. As legal scholar Angela C. Carmella has argued, religious communities often resist preservation efforts, even when they support the *ideals* of preservation. "Churches are often committed to preservation of their own architectural and artistic resources," Carmella explains, "and historically have been among the proudest and most conscientious preservers. The conflict is instead over the weight to be given preservation in the course of balancing competing values."[72] Carmella's point is an important one: the Church frequently weighs cultural and material heritage in balance with other necessities, including parish and diocesan financial health.[73]

With this context, it is worth revisiting the relegation decree's dismissal of St. Laurentius' value. The Fishtown church was not alone in receiving such harsh judgment. This reason, perhaps erroneously listed as a grave cause, appeared in most of Chaput's relegation decrees and represented the Archdiocese's general rejection of historic preservation efforts. By

[71] Monsignor Daniel J. Kutys, Letter to parish priests, January 7, 2016, https://whyy.org/wp-content/uploads/planphilly/assets_12/archdiocese-memo-on-historic-preservation-jan-7-2016.original.pdf.

[72] Angela C. Carmella, "Landmark Preservation of Church Property," *Catholic Lawyer* 34 (1991): 47.

[73] This point resonates with Pope Francis' position, which advocates, "teaching which while inculcating the duty of protection and conservation of the Church's goods, and in particular of cultural heritage, declares that they do not have an absolute value, but in case of necessity they must serve the greater good of the human being and especially at the service of the poor." "Message of the Holy Father Francis to Participants at the Conference 'Doesn't God Dwell Here Anymore? Decommissing Places of Worship and Integrated Management of Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage," November 29, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20181129_messaggio-convegno-beniculturali.html.

negating the value of the church building, the Archdiocese sought to foreclose what it viewed as a civil intrusion into its affairs. The PHC did not require the property owner's consent for nomination *or* designation, allowing parishioners or neighborhood locals to appeal to the Commission without the consent of either a parish or the Archdiocese.[74] But property's owners still retained the responsibility of complying with PHC guidelines for historic designation, usually without any financial incentives.[75] In the case of St. Laurentius, historic designation, even without Holy Name of Jesus parish's consent, would have required the parish to renovate and restore the building, including its crumbling façade and structurally unsound towers to "architectural authenticity." The fact that the PHC was a city government agency strengthened the Archdiocese's policy of avoiding historic designation, as Monsignor Kutys wrote in his 2016 letter. Dioceses across the country have similarly battled such designations, framing these restrictions as First Amendment violations.[76] In short, the denial of churches' value served as a preemptive denial of the preservationist impulse, which would deny the potentially most cost effective option for financially strapped parishes: demolition.

Despite these arguments, it was the preservationists who were victorious at the July PHC meeting. The historic designation of St. Laurentius' exterior, of course, did not overturn the relegation of the former church, but it did make demolition a far more difficult path forward for the parish. In this case, appeals to the legacies of the sacred were more efficacious than the parish's focus on the logistical concerns of the building's deterioration and the parish's finances. The parishioner-preservationists framed the building as inextricably interwoven with its

[74] Inga Saffron, "A vow to fight preservationists—Archdiocese tells priests not to cooperate with landmark-designation efforts," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 17, 2016.

[75] Rachel Hildebrandt, Zoom interview with author, May 26, 2021.

[76] Elizabeth Cameron Richardson, "Applying Historic Preservation Ordinances to Church Property: Protecting the Past and Preserving the Constitution," *North Carolina Law Review* 63, no. 2 (1985): 404-429.

existence as a repository for community and individual memory. They emphasized St. Laurentius' significance to Fishtown (its spires on the horizon), to Polish Americans (the first Polish American community organization), and to former parishioners (the accumulated legacies of generations). Drawing upon the *parish* history as well as that of the church, the preservationists not only rejected the Archdiocese's assessment of St. Laurentius' value and its viable future; their grassroots efforts also won civil recognition and support for this rejection.

The common ground of St. Laurentius' preservationists, however, began almost immediately to crumble. In the coming years, rather than reaching a resolution, the debate over St. Laurentius' fate intensified—increasingly *between* various preservationist factions each claiming a purer commitment to St. Laurentius. As was the case for St. Mary of the Assumption's reuse in Manayunk, competing visions clashed in the forum of a neighborhood zoning meeting. The meeting in question took place the evening of Tuesday, September 20, 2016. The Fishtown Neighborhood Association (FNA) estimated more than 250 attendees gathered in the basement of Holy Name of Jesus Church to vote on a zoning variance which would finalize developer Leo Voloshin's purchase and conversion of the former church into 23 residential units.

The FNA meeting about St. Laurentius combined the logistics of parking with concerns about the appropriate use of the former church building. A local online newspaper outlined the two-hour session in which Voloshin and attendees debated issues ranging from the logistical (what was the plan for parking?) to the theological ("When did this space become no longer sacred?") Although all attendees may have agreed with Voloshin's assessment that "it would be a damn shame to lose" the building, the debate was heated. Arguments that traded name-calling and insults "spilled out onto the sidewalk and somehow devolved into a back-and-forth about

(what else?) [then-presidential candidate] Donald Trump." Political affiliation aside, two opposing camps oriented the discussion: the "yea" voters, who argued that the development plans, while perhaps flawed, would save St. Laurentius from almost-certain demolition, due to its worsening structural instability; and the "nay" voters, who challenged this framing as overly fatalistic, and who cherished a vision of St. Laurentius preserved as a community center.[77]

Figure 4.4 St. Laurentius Church



Source: Photograph by author, February 6, 2021.

[77] Anna Orso, "Fishtown neighbors nix St. Laurentius apartments at name-calling meeting," *Billy Penn*, September 21, 2016, https://billypenn.com/2016/09/21/fishtown-neighbors-nix-st-laurentius-apartments-at-name-calling-meeting/.

The Friends of St. Laurentius, represented by lawyer A. J. Thompson, championed the development plans. As Thompson argued, "We're here because we have a gun to our head…If this plan is not approved, the Archdiocese is going to demolish this building as soon as it can. Don't vote against this because of parking." The Friends of St. Laurentius saw Voloshin's adaptive reuse of the building as the only realistic option for saving the historic structure and preserving its presence, in at least some recognizable form, in the neighborhood. In opposition, a new group calling themselves the Faithful Laurentians advocated a plan that would more holistically preserve the church.[78] They pointed to the significance of the church's interior, which boasted fourteen oil paintings depicting Biblical scenes, stained glass windows portraying Polish saints, a German oak altar screen, and a powder blue ceiling with trim in pastel colors. Jesse Gardner, a resident of the adjacent neighborhood of Northern Liberties, framed the Friends' compromise with Voloshin as a failure. "What we're looking at here is the loss of a sacred space," Gardner explained to the local reporter, "When I saw this place, I was really disappointed. You will never be able to get in that building without knowing someone….Without the interior, the exterior is just a shell." For Gardner and others in the Faithful Laurentians, the former church—even relegated—deserved treatment different from that of other historic properties.[79]

Both parties saw themselves as *saving* the site. Both claimed their vision for St. Laurentius had a better chance of preserving not only the physical building itself, but also the individual, familial, and community legacies that infused the structure with a sacredness

[78] Perhaps ironically, the overlap in the Friends of St. Laurentius and the Faithful Laurentians' goals and language led numerous reporters to misattribute affiliation or equate the two groups as one. In "Fishtown neighbors," Orso calls the Friends of St. Laurentius "Save St. Laurentius." This is the name of the Facebook group for the Friends of St. Laurentius.

[79] Orso, "Fishtown neighbors."

untouched by the Archdiocese's relegation. These concerns illustrate the "uniquely communicative and practical role of religious buildings" for more than their own religious communities.[80] The debate also bucks the easy categorization of parishioner-preservationists on one side of a battle over a historic property, with the Archdiocese advocating demolition and destruction on the other. In reality, the sides are riddled with factions, each advocating a set of overlapping and sometimes contradictory goals.

Attendees voted 167 to 105 to deny Voloshin's zoning variance. After the rejection of his plan, Voloshin withdrew his interest in purchasing and developing the property. St. Laurentius sat vacant and unused until 2020, when Humberto Fernandini, a developer from New Jersey, purchased the church. In the meantime, the twin spires remained unsupported by scaffolding, and several stones pieces fell from the building onto the street, including one 6,000-pound stone. On August 14, 2020, the PHC voted to allow partial demolition of the church: the towers would come down, while other parts of the historic structure, including the Berks Street façade, were to remain preserved under Fernandini's redevelopment plans.[81] A year later, however, still nothing had been done to secure the building. On September 30, 2021, the Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections granted Fernandini a demolition permit for the former church.[82] Three months later, on January 5, 2022, the department issued a zoning permit allowing Fernandini to construct 49 residential units in an eight-story building on the site.[83] As the debate over reuse dragged on, time itself had become a participant in deciding the church's fate.

[80] Brenneman and Miller, *Building Faith*, 156.

[81] Angela Gervasi, "Philly approves partial demolition of St. Laurentius," *WHYY Philadelphia*, August 14, 2020, https://whyy.org/articles/fishtown-fought-to-save-this-landmark-for-6-years-the-neighborhood-just-lost/.

[82] Michaelle Bond, "L&I grants demolition permit for Fishtown's St. Laurentius Church," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 30, 2021.

[83] Department of Licenses and Inspections, City of Philadelphia, Zoning Permit Number ZP-2021-015157, issued January 5, 2022.

Figure 4.5 St. Laurentius, Demolition



Source: Photograph courtesy of Joseph E. B. Elliott, April 2022.

Translating the German-language work of Clemens Leonhard, Kim de Wildt has questioned whether canon law or ritual practice can affectively and effectively "eradicate," "dissolve," or "annihilate" the sacred nature of a church building for many Catholics—and even non-Catholics. In an apt, if perhaps facetious comparison, she refers to "the well-known duck test: 'If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck,'" to suggest that a former Catholic church building retains, in a translation of Leonhard's words, its "auratic sacredness" for many.[84] This perception locates sacredness as lingering yet abundant, well beyond the making and unmaking power of a bishop's decree or even a ritual practice.

[84] De Wildt, "Ritual Void or Ritual Muddle?" 6, 12.

In the case of St. Laurentius, the parishioners and preservationists stressed the building's auratic sacredness through appeals to nostalgic legacies of the sacred. Locating the physical building as the site of accumulated Polish worship, dedication, and sacrifice, these advocates denied the authority of the parish or the Archdiocese to determine the appropriate future of St. Laurentius. History and memory, urban change and continuity, community and authority all buttressed the architecture as sources of this sacredness. Although the narrative and affective appeals to legacies of the sacred were powerful, the preservationists faltered in their implementation of effective practical strategies for the building's upkeep. The failure to identify and agree upon a reuse plan left St. Laurentius to deteriorate beyond repair. Returning to St. Peter Claver, the next section will consider how appeals to racial history, memory, and sacred legacy succeeded—at least for a time—where St. Laurentius' parishioner-preservationists did not.

III. "Like Our Ancestors Before Us": St. Peter Claver's Legacies of the Sacred

The relegation decree for St. Peter Claver Church, in many ways, followed the pattern established by Archbishop Chaput. Signed on March 1, 2019, the decree weighed the church's history against its costly upkeep. The church was "no longer needed" by its most recent occupants, the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics, which had used the building to house the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization for Black Catholics. Prior to its closure on October 31, 2014, the Center was "underutilized," in large part because "ministry to Black Catholics has been taking place at other parishes throughout the Archdiocese" as a result of "demographic changes." Chaput's relegation decree also cited the financial burden of the building. While "[t]he Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics has striven to maintain Saint

Peter Claver and the other buildings on the property in good repair," the decree explained, "…the costs of maintaining Saint Peter Claver Church have placed a significant strain upon the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics and are not conducive to the office's present or future financial stability." Echoing the arguments put forward by Holy Name of Jesus parish, the Archdiocese determined that the costs of maintenance and repair would ultimately drain the resources of the Office for Black Catholics and hamstring its other goals. Nor could the Office for Black Catholics' supervising body, the Archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelization, front these costs: the Archdiocese, the decree clarified, "itself is in the process of stabilizing its own finances, and so cannot bear the additional costs associated with repair" of the church. Like St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Laurentius, St. Peter Claver was an aging, expensive, and underused property.[85]

In noteworthy ways, however, St. Peter Claver's decree broke with the established pattern. First, unlike with St. Mary of the Assumption or St. Laurentius, Chaput *did* recognize St. Peter Claver Church's meaning to the local community. "It should be noted," the decree declared, "that the Saint Peter Claver Church building does have significant historical value, as it is one of the 'mother churches' for Black Philadelphians." Unlike St. Laurentius, which was the mother church of Polish Catholicism in the city, St. Peter Claver's historical significance received recognition from the Archdiocese. This recognition might have reflected the Archdiocese's awareness of the racialized politics of the parish's suppression in 1985. A perhaps more cynical reading, however, might interpret this recognition as acknowledgement that the PHC had already designed the church's historic façade decades earlier.[86] According to Adrienne

[85] Chaput, "Relegation of Saint Peter Claver."

[86] Philadelphia Historical Commission, "Committee on Certification Minutes," March 8, 1984, https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-historical-commission/public-meetings/.

Harris, two active parishioners, Edith Collins Stevens and Allen Stevens, had petitioned the PHC for the designation as an attempt—albeit an unsuccessful one—to prevent suppression.[87] Designation was granted on April 5, 1984, a year before the suppression. Despite this unusual recognition of value, however, Chaput's decree claimed that the financial hardship of keeping the church outweighed its cultural importance.[88]

The decree's fourth "grave cause" was also unusual, and therefore uniquely telling. It concerned the deed of the property, signed by Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan in 1896. The deed granted use of the property to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, "in trust that the said there above-described premises are to be used as a Church for colored people, parsonage and school attached thereto, white people however being permitted to attend all religious services….and the use of said there described premises shall not be changed nor diverted from such purpose."[89] According to former parishioners, this language protected the property in trust for the use of Black Catholics. The Archdiocese's canon lawyers must have agreed. As St. Peter Claver's relegation decree explained, the Archdiocese petitioned to change the property's deed restrictions, filing a petition on October 29, 2015, with the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia Orphans Court Division. The aim of this petition was to remove the language holding St. Peter Claver Church in trust, thereby freeing the Archdiocese to relegate and sell the church. Former parishioners protested these changes. As the decree reported, after "[c]ertain unnamed advocates for the preservation of the legacy of the Saint Peter Claver Parish Property objected to the sale of the property," the court appointed Russell M. Nigro, a retired Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice, "to act as *Trustee Ad Litem* on behalf of a group of

[87] Adrienne Harris, correspondence with author, January 29, 2021.
[88] Chaput, "Relegation of Saint Peter Claver."
[89] Commission of Records of the City of Philadelphia, Copy of *Deed of St. Peter Claver*, Deed Book WMG No. 19, Philadelphia, 25 September 1985, Blockson Claver Collection.

individuals from the general public who had objected to the sale." But the court found this group of individuals absent to make their case. On December 12, 2017, the court "rendered its decree allowing for the sale of the property free and clear of the recorded restrictions," opening the door for the Archdiocese to relegate and sell the building.[90]

This debate over the deed reveals an important slippage between notions of community in canon law and Catholic practice. When the Archdiocese closed St. Peter Claver parish in 1985, the type of closure was a suppression, rather than a merger: the community of St. Peter Claver parish was extinguished, rather than subsumed into another parish. Compare this process with this chapter's other parishes. Both St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Laurentius closed in mergers, with their surviving parishes (St. John the Baptist parish and Holy Name of Jesus parish, respectively) inheriting their properties *and* their communities. Thus, although deeply contested in the latter case, the relegations of St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Laurentius came at the behest of the communities that claimed to have succeeded and inherited the closed parishes. In contrast, the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver were expected to disperse and join territorial parishes across the region, depending on their place of residence. St. Peter Claver as a canonically recognized *community* no longer existed. Therefore, the authority to change the racial limitations of the deed and to relegate the church lay with the Archdiocese.

Of course, the long protests of the Friends of St. Laurentius and the Faithful Laurentians, as well as the court intervention regarding St. Peter Claver's deed, prove the reality more complicated. Parish *qua* juridic entity might come in and out of existence at the assertion of the archbishop's decree, but parish *qua* community does not. The former parishioners of these closed parishes appealed insistently to the importance of their heritage, contesting the Archdiocese's

[90] Chaput, "Relegation of Saint Peter Claver."

authority to decide the fate of their communities. In doing so, they also reasserted their communities' continued existence, even when unrecognized by the Archdiocese. This claim to transtemporal ownership is central to the sacred abundance articulated through appeals to legacies of the sacred. While the preservationists of St. Laurentius were ultimately unable to agree upon and unite actionable, practical strategies to the affective power of these appeals, the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver were more successful. They aligned the affective and narrative appeals of generational legacy with an awareness of canon law and a practical plan for the church's future. Together, this application of legacies of the sacred presented a compelling challenge to archdiocesan authority.

After receiving lawyer Brody Hale's offer for help, Adrienne and her friend and fellow former parishioner, Juanita O'Kedas Qui, took part in a flurry of last-minute organizing. Adrienne and Juanita signed a petition of canonical recourse to the Archdiocese on March 13, 2019, challenging St. Peter Claver Church's relegation. The petition, written by Hale, cited several violations of canon law in the Archdiocese's relegation of St. Peter Claver. These violations included former parishioners' lack of involvement in discussions regarding the church's relegation (although Schöch argues that the bishop is not obligated to include others in the decision); the Archdiocese's failure to hold mandatory masses in the church since 2014; and its failure to establish clear and irrefutable grave cause for relegation.[91] The letter contended that most of the causes cited by the archbishop, including demographic change or minimal use, were only "just" causes. Although the lack of funds was, the letter conceded, "independently sufficiently grave to justify the relegation," former parishioners had organized and were willing "to take on the care and restoration of St. Peter Claver church as a Roman Catholic sacred space

[91] These include the mandatory mass on the anniversary of St. Peter Claver Church's dedication and on the feast day of St. Peter Claver, the patron saint of the church (cc. 1167 and 1168 CIC 1917, c. 2 CIC 1983).

at [their] own expense." If they were able to provide the financial support to maintain St. Peter Claver Church as a Catholic sacred space, the lack of funds was no longer a true grave cause.[92]

Ultimately, Adrienne, Juanita, and Brody Hale were successful in managing what many protesting Catholic parishioners have attempted and few have succeeded: overturning St. Peter Claver's relegation. On April 6, 2019, Archbishop Chaput first signed a decree delaying the church's relegation.[93] A month later, on May 21, he issued yet another decree withdrawing the previous decree of relegation entirely. This third document offers a brief but equivocal explanation, with an unusual use of first-person language, referring to Chaput: "The causes for relegation listed in my March 1, 2019 decree remain valid. However, in light of the importance of the church, I have determined that additional efforts need to be made to ascertain if it is in fact possible to preserve Saint Peter Claver Church as a place of Divine Worship."[94] Neither the April nor May decrees mention the former parishioners' petition or plans for the church.

Following this victory, Adrienne and a group of other former parishioners, calling themselves the Advocates and Descendants of St. Peter Claver (ADSPC), submitted a proposal outlining their plans to care for the church as promised. Above all else, the ADSPC sought to maintain the building's designation and use "as a Roman Catholic sacred space." In a shift of focus from earlier advocacy, the ADSPC assured the Archdiocese that it did not seek to reestablish St. Peter Claver as a parish. The group desired only to make St. Peter Claver available for prayer, the stations of the cross, occasional mass, and programming aimed particularly at

[92] Adrienne Harris, Petition for Canonical Recourse against the Relegation to Profane but not Sordid Use of St. Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, March 13, 2019. Copy provided to author by Adrienne Harris.

[93] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree Delaying the Relegation of Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Profane But Not Sordid Use," April 6, 2019, https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Decree-Delaying-The-Relegation-Of-Saint-Peter-Claver.pdf.

[94] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree Withdrawing March 1, 2019 Decree Concerning Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," May 21, 2019, https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/StPeterWithdrawl.pdf.

interracial Catholic dialogue. To do so, the ADSPC suggested that St. Peter Claver Church operate as another form of worship space, such as a chapel or oratory.[95] The proposal provided several specific precedents in which American Catholics reached arrangements with their local parishes and dioceses to manage and preserve former parish churches after restructuring. In all, the proposal estimated "over eighty Catholic churches being maintained across the United States, Canada and Australia today by Catholic Church preservation groups," which "avoided the permanent loss of churches" and "also averted much of the anger which is often directed toward church officials for the permanent closure of a church." The ADSPC prompted the Archdiocese to see the value in this more harmonious path.[96]

The ADSPC had higher hopes still that the Archdiocese might restore the Shrine of Our Lady of Victories, a replica of the statue of Our Lady of Victories (Notre Dame des Victoires) in Paris, which became the first shrine in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1898. It had been stripped from the church, along with such items as the baptismal font, after the 2014 closure of the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization.[97] The shrine's unique history, the ADSPC explained, "is a source of great pride for us as descendants of those who established St. Peter Claver Church, and for the Black Catholics of Philadelphia in general."[98] If the physical materials were restored, the entire church might then be designated as a shrine, which would

[95] An oratory is "a place for divine worship designated by permission of the ordinary for the benefit of some community or group of the faithful who gather in it and to which other members of the faithful can also come with the consent of the competent superior" (c. 1223, CIC 1983). A private chapel is "a place for divine worship designated by permission of the local ordinary for the benefit of one or more physical persons" (c. 1226, CIC 1983).

[96] "Proposal of Advocates and Descendants of St. Peter Claver of Philadelphia," sent to Monsignor Daniel J. Kutys, June 2019. Copy provided to author by Adrienne Harris.

[97] Harris and the ADSPC found this profoundly distressing and cited it as another violation of canon law. Saint Raymond Church bulletin, "Father Chris to Friends," February 15, 2015. Copy provided to author by Adrienne Harris.

[98] "Proposal of ADSPC," 8.

"[provide] the most fixed form of future purpose for the utilization of St. Peter Claver Church as a Roman Catholic sacred space."[99]

The ADSPC offered to maintain the building and oversee its programming "at no expense to the archdiocese."[100] The ADSPC planned to organize as a nonprofit corporation and, if necessary, as a private lay association with juridic personality under canon law (cc. 312 and 322). The proposal outlined a capital campaign and series of fundraising options to allow the ADSPC to manage the insurance, utilities, and routine maintenance for the church building, as well as "any capital expenditures required to re-establish the shrine to Our Lady of Victories and to keep St. Peter Claver Church in a state of good preservation."[101] The proposal also insisted upon the ADSPC's low impact on archdiocesan clergy. By seeking designation other than as a parish church, the ADSPC would not require the dedicated presence of assigned clergy, and Masses at St. Peter Claver would not compete with those of local parishes. Noting that canon law required two annual Masses on the anniversary of the church's dedication (January 3) and the feast day of St. Peter Claver (September 9), the proposal insisted, "If we were able to only receive these two guaranteed masses per year, we would accept this."[102]

One final rhetorical move in the ADSPC's proposal is noteworthy. Although the ADSPC recognized the contentious history surrounding the parish's closure in 1985, the group assured the Archdiocese that it "[does] not seek to revisit the past, but rather, [to] ensure that any negative developments which may have occurred can be counteracted through what will be an

[99] Defined in canon law as "a church or other sacred place to which numerous members of the faithful make pilgrimage for a special reason of piety, with the approval of the local ordinary" (c. 1230, CIC 1983). The proposal included two examples as precedent: Our Lady of Pompeii in Chicago and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Nesquehoning, Pennsylvania (Diocese of Allentown), had both previously been parish churches for Italian national parishes before finding new life as shrines.

[100] "Proposal of ADSPC," 1.

[101] Ibid., 6.

[102] Ibid.,3.

unquestionably positive future for St. Peter Claver Church." To adopt the ADSPC's plan, the proposal concluded, would be "a win for everyone and most importantly a win for God."[103] Despite this conciliatory language, the ADSPC nonetheless signaled its willingness to push back against what it considered arbitrary archdiocesan policies of decline. The proposal observed that since January 2011, "[t]he Vatican has also ordered, in 38 separate cases, that church buildings in 11 different dioceses and archdioceses across the United States be reopened as places of at least occasional public worship and unlimited private devotional activities, following the submission of petitions for canonical recourse by parishioners aggrieved at the closure of these churches."[104] In each case, the proposal explained, the Vatican found fault with the "grave causes" justifying the relegations. In referencing these cases, the ADSPC wielded its knowledge of canon law to signal the group's awareness of the potential fallibility of archdiocesan policies. The petition for canonical recourse submitted on March 13 stated these significance of this knowledge more clearly yet, concluding, "We do not seek a confrontation with you [Archbishop Chaput] or the archdiocese….We sincerely hope we do not have to take this petition for canonical recourse to the Congregation for the Clergy and Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura of the Holy See."[105] While the former parishioners suggested that the best option for all parties was to work together, they wanted Archbishop Chaput to recognize that they were no longer cowed or baffled by Church bureaucratic procedures. They were aware of their legal options and rights.

After the withdrawal of the relegation, Archbishop Chaput assigned Monsignor Kutys, the author of the Archdiocese's rejection of historic designation, and Father Richard Owens, the young African American Capuchin Franciscan director of the Archdiocesan Office for Black

[103] Ibid., 11.
[104] Ibid., 10.
[105] Harris, Petition for Canonical Recourse.

Catholics, to work with the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver. But according to Adrienne, "we never got any feedback from them about that proposal." In an October 2020 interview, she claimed, "Like I said, they just ignore [us]. Ignore. It's like a bad odor. You sniff in the opposite direction. We have had no feedback, no nothing." By the summer of 2020, Father Owens had relocated to the Diocese of Greensburg in western Pennsylvania, and Monsignor Kutys, according to Adrienne, "no longer communicates with us." The ADSPC, which received 501(c)3 status in 2019, had continued to organize into the beginning of 2020, establishing an office and a five-person board of directors, and opening a bank account and a post office box. As Adrienne explained, the group was cautious about establishing methods of fundraising without first receiving the Archdiocese's approval. They worried that if they raised money, "the Archdiocese is going to say, 'Give it to us. We own the church. Give us the money.'" As they settled on how best to ask for pledges, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the United States in early 2020, and ADSPC decided "this is not the time to be asking people for money."[106]

Although the group had yet to raise donations, the ADSPC had taken initial steps toward its goals. They hired an inspector to take stock of the building's physical state. His assessment located the roof of the rectory, termites, and the heating system as the most pressing concerns. Planning to use funds they had collected by "putting money aside as we can," the ADSCP asked the Archdiocese for access to the church to begin repairs on the roof. After several rejected attempts to gain access, the ADSPC finally received word that the Archdiocese had had its own inspection of the roof and found nothing wrong with it. The following excerpt from our October 2020 interview summarizes Adrienne's interpretation of this response:

> AH: Don't forget, that property has been assessed in value of more than $6 million. And they want the money. They want the money. They don't care about our heritage or anything else. They never liked us in the first place. And the fact

[106] Harris, October 2020.

> that there's money like that and they can get rid of somebody they never wanted—
> MG: Yeah. So, for them, if the roof falls down, if the termites eat it, doesn't matter because—
> AH: Oh, then the building would have to be condemned. And then they could put on a show of fake piety and say, 'Oh, we had no choice but to have it torn down because the place was falling apart.'[107]

In Adrienne's view, the Archdiocese had determined to sell the property, located as it was in desirable proximity to Center City. Although the ADSPC forwarded its proposal to Archbishop Chaput's successor, Archbishop Nelson Perez, after his installation to the Archdiocese in February 2020, they had yet to hear from him by October.

While not unequivocally successful in achieving their aims, the ADSPC nonetheless wrested more from the Archdiocese than the preservationists of St. Laurentius. Although both churches were "mother churches" of their respective Catholic communities, the ADSPC leveraged the transtemporal legacies of the sacred of the church and parish to propose a fluid, dynamic, and new use for the old building. The ADSPC appealed most clearly to this discursive framework in the proposal's conclusion:

> Now, like our ancestors before us, we do not approach the Archdiocese of Philadelphia asking for financial assistance; we approach merely to ask that we be given the right to use our own funds to ensure that the cradle of our Catholic faith in this city may continue to kindle the faith in future generations of Catholics of all racial and ethnic backgrounds as it kindled the faith within all of us.[108]

In articulating the sacred legacies of St. Peter Claver, the ADSPC relied less upon the architectural and physical nature of the church building itself. Instead, the group emphasized the sacredness produced by the ancestors' personal and financial sacrifices and contributions to the historic shaping of Philadelphian Catholicism's ethnic and racial diversity. These were concerns of cultural, theological, and religious value that proved efficacious in challenging archdiocesan

[107] Ibid.
[108] "Proposal of ADSPC," 10.

policies of decline. In contrast, the emphasis on the physical building of St. Laurentius situated the debate of its future squarely in the realm of whether to preserve the building, to what extent, and the parameters of reuse; the church became a matter of civic and economic concern first and foremost. The ADSPC's combination of nostalgic narratives of sacred legacy, Catholic bureaucratic knowledge, and an actionable proposal created an alternative to relegation that, at least officially, the Archdiocese could not dismiss.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three relegations to underscore the affective, narrative, and practical aspects of relegating of a Catholic sacred space. The stakeholders involved in determining the futures of these three churches articulated expansive conceptions of sacredness that transcended and frequently challenged Chaput's diocesan authority to unmake and reuse a church. Former parishioners often expressed a powerful sense of legacy—of obligation and also burden—that bound them to the generations that preceded them to build, maintain, and make sacred their now-disappearing community. The expression and performance of these legacies is itself a form of producing, defining, and claiming a sacred beyond canonical or episcopal authority. Like other forms of protest, however, appeals to legacies of the sacred are not always efficacious. Relegations, like parish closures, operate as a means of negotiating the very real and pressing concerns of religious decline. As a policy of decline, therefore, the Archdiocese *and* parishes understand relegation as an effective option.

The three cases have all taken place in gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods where the urban properties are highly valued and potentially attractive to developers. The heated contestations over development plans—such as the number of residential units and parking in Manayunk and Fishtown—reflected the impact of relegation and reuse on more than the local

Catholic community. Rachel Hildebrandt, the Director of the National Fund for Sacred Places at Partners for Sacred Places, explained, "When the real estate values are high, there is a greater temptation to sell." But, as she also noted, that the opposite was also true. In economically depressed neighborhoods, some massive, relegated properties have been left unused to deteriorate, creating both public safety hazards and lowering property values.[109]

Phillips, the lawyer representing the Friends of St. Laurentius in the 2016 PHC meeting, referenced one such example to plead Holy Name of Jesus' case for demolishing the former Polish parish church. The Church of the Assumption, a Gothic Revival church built in 1848 by architect Patrick Charles Keely at Spring Garden Street and Ridge Avenue, was once the parish church of affluent German Catholics north of City Center. In 1858, future saint Katharine Drexel was baptized in the church, making it a site of both local and international Catholic history. But with demographic and urban change, which left Spring Garden, in the words of a local reporter, "an 80-foot-wide expanse that cuts a dreary and dangerous furrow across Philadelphia's midsection," the parish began to decline.[110] The Archdiocese relegated the Church of the Assumption in 2006, whereafter it was sold for $800,000 to Siloam, a Catholic social services agency. After the PHC designated the church a city landmark in 2009, a round of appeals and challenges began the following year, when Siloam claimed financial hardship and applied for a demolition permit. Facing backlash, Siloam instead sold the property to local developer John Wei in 2011. A decade later, however, the church remained unused, deteriorating, and vandalized. As Phillips of the Friends of St. Laurentius said of Assumption, "I don't think by any stretch of the imagination would that property reflect the strength of the economy of the city of

[109] Hildebrandt, May 2021.

[110] Inga Saffron, "As Philadelphia advances streetscape plan for Spring Garden, historic buildings fall to neglect," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 12, 2021.

Philadelphia. It certainly doesn't foster a sense of civic pride. It is a blighted, abandoned property, with missing windows, holes in the roof."[111] Historic designation and even the prompt sale to a developer full of promises, Phillips suggested, was far from an assurance that a beloved church structure would be cared for.

The "unmaking" of Catholic churches offers a unique opportunity for examining challenges to archdiocesan policies of decline. These buildings are the sites of memories and stories, upon which personal and social values can so easily be cast. It is for this reason that legacies of the sacred has developed as an accessible repertoire for those protesting the relegation and reuse of these buildings. What legacies of community, ownership, and history does an empty or unused church contain and convey? What obligations and duties do these legacies impart to community members? And who—parishioners, priests, neighbors, or descendants—bears the burdens of enacting these obligations? These are thorny and complicated questions that Catholics and non-Catholics alike work out in various religious, civic, and legal arenas to wrangle over the past and future of the built environment.

[111] Bobby Allyn, "Historical designation saves St. Laurentius," *WHYY Philadelphia,* July 10, 2015, https://whyy.org/articles/historical-designation-saves-st-laurentius/.

Chapter 5 |
"Where Your Spirit Can Grow": Older Age In and Beyond Discourses of Catholic Decline

The sun shone through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the conference center. Below, a ring of trees overlooked a pond filled with koi, hiding from view the surrounding streets of suburban houses. Cranaleith Spiritual Center, the home of this conference center, was an unexpectedly green retreat in the Somerton neighborhood of Far Northeast Philadelphia, minutes from the border with Bucks County.[1] In 1996, Francis Henry "Frank" Trainer, who had inherited the property from his parents, bequeathed the ten acres, house, and barn to the Sisters of Mercy (R.S.M). Frank and his wife Mary had raised four children on the property, including oldest child Mary, who took her first vows as a Sister of Mercy in 1961. Mary's final vows followed in 1966, on the cusp the massive changes the order underwent following Vatican II. After her parents' deaths, Sister Mary, along with fellow Mercy Sister Maria DiBello, opened Cranaleith Spiritual Center in 1998 as a collaborative project with the remaining members of the Trainer family.

That September morning in 2019, I had been invited to participate in a strategic planning session with Cranaleith's "honored" volunteers. Steve Hart, Cranaleith's new chairman of the board, led the session, taking notes with an easel and large pad of paper before the wall of windows. Addressing a row of eleven volunteers seated in a semicircle before him, Steve was the only man in attendance. One by one, the women introduced themselves by their relationships to Somerton and Cranaleith, describing memories of sledding down the hill behind the Trainers' house when they were children, or of raising their own children to do so. More than one referred fondly to Moses, the beloved Trainers' donkey who used to greet them as schoolchildren at the base of the property. All the women had volunteered for more than ten years, and some had been

[1] "Cranaleith" is Gaelic for "Sanctuary of Trees." Joseph C. Trainer, of Irish descendent, named the property upon his purchase of the property in 1906.

active volunteers since the Center's founding in 1998. In comparison, I knew very little of Somerton, had never been sledding on the property, and would only meet Moses—or rather, his taxidermied head—for the first time later that fall (Figure 5.1). More surprisingly yet, although I had been at the Center at least weekly that previous summer, my time as a volunteer had not spanned ten years, or even one year. I had only arrived at Cranaleith three months before the planning session.[2]

Figure 5.1 Moses at Cranaleith Harvest Festival



Source: Photograph by author, October 13, 2019.

In an article about ethnographic methods, John C. Seitz has called for scholars to recognize and embrace the "weirdness" of fieldwork. Calling for a more robust consideration of relational techniques for the ethnographic study of religion, Seitz argues that "we can benefit

[2] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, September 17, 2019.

from entertaining the jarring possibility that what we are doing as researchers entails unsettling the settled, jumbling smooth paths, and advancing awkwardness in place of ease." Despite assiduous efforts to develop relationships with our interlocutors, Seitz suggests ethnographers must recognize the ways in which their presence, and certainly their questions and interests, disrupt settled patterns of behavior and practice.[3]

There was, that day in September, something a bit weird about my inclusion as one of Cranaleith's honored volunteers. Several factors likely contributed to my access to this privileged conversation. My educational background and role as a researcher surely played a role, particularly because the Mercy sisters who acted as my gatekeepers at Cranaleith had their own advanced degrees. Although I am not a Philadelphian or a practicing Catholic, I am a White Pennsylvanian with an Italian last name—a type instantly recognizable in the region's Church—and as a heterosexual, married woman, I shared easy access to many of the conversations and jokes the other volunteers shared. Lastly, my regular engagement and embodied participation in recent activities—from gardening to knitting to beekeeping—meant I was, simply, *abundantly* present around the grounds in the summer leading up to Steve Hart's planning session.[4]

During my time at Cranaleith, however, I came to understand that key to my ethnographic access and experience was my *age.* It was also what was most consistently and noticeably "weird" about my presence in these spaces. Of the women in attendance at the September strategic planning session, I was not only the newest volunteer, but I was also the youngest by at least three decades. On many occasions, my relative young age (mid to late

[3] John C. Seitz, "Keep Research Weird: Psychoanalytic Techniques and Fieldwork in the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 25 (2013): 33.

[4] Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada, *Lifeblood of the Parish: Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Elaine A. Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Elizabeth Perez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

twenties at the time of my fieldwork) afforded curious glances and comments from volunteers and attendees unfamiliar with me. Sometimes it prompted jokes, such as when one Mercy sister laughed that she had mistaken me for a middle schooler from a local Catholic school. In other instances, my age appeared to place me in prominent positions. A month after the 2019 Fall Harvest Festival, for example, it was *my* picture in the newsletter, although Cranaleith had gathered at least forty volunteers for the event.[5]

In spaces almost entirely occupied by older women, age became particularly salient because it was a marker of my visible, physical, and practical difference. I often moved through Cranaleith as a body marked by this difference. In prompting this sense of weirdness, my body was something of a "barrier," as Kristy Nabhan-Warren has written, "to cultural exchange and to entering and knowing [my] interlocutors' lifeworlds."[6] My embodied existence in Cranaleith shaped my experience of the center in ways that often differed from my interlocutors'. But the performance and experience of age was also *more* than the state of our physical bodies. Age also encompassed shared generational memories or movement through lifestages, and my interlocutors and I navigated age through conversations engaging these types of topics far more often than we explicitly discussed our bodies. Moreover, the embodied actions we performed at the same time—knitting in a circle around a table of candles, bent double over garden beds, or sorting donated goods into cardboard boxes—created what Nabhan-Warren calls "a bridge" between our lifeworlds.

This chapter interrogates the role of age, and particularly *older* age, in discourses and practices relating to Catholic decline. News, pollsters, and popular media locate the "graying" of

[5] "Fall Harvest Festival Attracts Hundreds to Cranaleith," *Crosscurrents at Cranaleith* (Fall 2019).

[6] Kristy Nabhan-Warren, "Embodied Research & Writing: A Case for Phenomenologically Oriented Religious Studies Ethnographies," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (June 2011): 380.

pews as an indicator of religious change in the United States, and as a sign of religious decline. As rising numbers of Americans, particularly among the younger Millennial and Generation Z generations, join the ranks of the so-called "Nones," or the religiously unaffiliated, age has become a prominent factor in plans and visions for the future of American Catholicism. Strategies for negotiating religious decline and change often focus on the engagement of young people in Catholic spaces—or, more often, the lack thereof—to reverse trends of decline. Programs to attract families with young children or an appealing social media presence, for example, seek to engage the elusive young Catholic. While this chapter *will* consider questions of intergenerational Catholicism, too great an emphasis, however, on the absence of young people obscures the experiences, communities, and religion-making processes of older Catholics. For many Catholic parishes and communities, older women constitute a majority of the most active participants. Yet, their active creation of Catholic community, including efforts to build sustainable and meaningful communities for the present and the future, often remains invisible—not only despite their predominance, but *because* of it. The dramatic heft of statistics on "graying" Catholicism can obscure the experiences of people like the volunteers at Cranaleith who participated in and contributed to the construction of Catholic community. The same, I argue, is true for the older women engaging in parish activities across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

In introducing age as an analytical frame for Catholic decline, I do not intend to reinforce an *equivalence* between older age and decline. Rather, my goal is to locate age in its conspicuousness in plans for the future of Catholic spaces. While the focus on attracting young people and families constitutes its own repertoire of decline, marshalling a common set of strategies in response to archdiocesan policies, I am interested in how "age" and particularly

"older age" become leveraged in the service of various, disparate repertoires, including Chapter 4's legacies of the sacred or repertoires of renewal, the subject of Chapter 6. Age adds a powerful affective dimension to these repertoires, acting variously as a shorthand for nostalgia, grief, heritage, and even loneliness. To this end, this chapter examines three spaces in which age is particularly salient. After examining the study of age in the field of religious studies, it first considers age and generational difference in common Catholic frameworks of decline and sustainability. I turn next to a discursive use of age that positions older Catholics as strikingly visible signifiers for community grief in response to archdiocesan policies of closure and relegation. Lastly, I return to my ethnographic fieldwork at Cranaleith Spiritual Center to highlight age as a co-constitutive category of religious practice and identity alongside identities including gender. This chapter's primary aim is to make the case for age, and especially older age, as an important analytical category for interrogating lived religion.

Age in Religious Studies

"[P]erhaps the most important dimension of aging well lies in the awareness that there is a purpose to aging," wrote Joan Chittester, a Benedictine nun and theologian, in her reflection on aging, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*, "…Old age enlightens—not simply ourselves, as important as that may be, but those around us as well. Our task is to realize that."[7] Hidden in Chittester's words of encouragement is a quiet insistence upon the necessity, benefits, and indeed *gifts* of aging and older age in an American society that frequently prioritizes youth instead. Chittester challenges her readers to translate "stereotypes of [the] incompetence" of

[7] Joan Chittester, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully* (New York: BlueBridge, 2008), xi.

older people into a sense of freedom "to create for myself a life more suited to what I now want to be."[8]

Efforts to emphasize the opportunities of "aging well" have boomed in the twenty-first century, and for good reason. In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau predicted that by 2030 one in every five residents will be older than 65.[9] This significant shift, marked by the transition of the Baby Boomer generation into older adulthood, has implications for the study of lived religion. Not only does older age bring with it, as Chittester argues, new opportunities for personal, spiritual, and religious reflection, but older American adults also report higher rates of religious identification and engagement, as well as belief in God, than younger adults. A 2018 Pew Research Center study found that, in the United States, 60 percent of those aged 40 and over consider religion "very important" to them, in comparison to 43 percent of adults under 40.[10]

These numbers indicate the critical importance of aging and, in particular, older age in the study of twenty-first century American religion. Indeed, it should not be surprising, given these numbers, that so many Catholics in my research leveraged the category of age so quickly when contemplating the future of their communities. Yet, much of the scholarship that explicitly analyzes religion and older age has taken place outside of the field of religious studies, such as in American or British psychosocial gerontological health fields. Religious gerontology's

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[8] Ibid, 109-111.

[9] Adults aged 65 years and older would outnumber children under 18 for the first time in the country's history. "Older People Projected to Outnumber Children for First Time in U.S. History," United States Census Bureau, last modified September 6, 2018, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html.

[10] Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," last modified June 13, 2018, https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/; Stephanie Kramer and Dahlia Fahmy, "Younger People Are Less Religious Than Older Ones in Many Countries, Especially in the U.S. and Europe," Pew Research Center, last modified June 13, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/13/younger-people-are-less-religious-than-older-ones-in-many-countries-especially-in-the-u-s-and-europe/; John C. Cavanaugh and Christine K. Cavanaugh, eds, *Aging in America: Societal Issues*, vol. 3 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 224.

methodological proximity to clinical concerns regarding individual health has produced a limited understanding of what constitutes religion in these studies. Scholars in this field privilege ahistorical measures of individual practice and belief over considerations of religion's sociocultural components. The field of aging studies in the United States, while offering important insights into the historical and sociocultural constructions of old age, has also had a limited engagement with religion as an influential factor.[11]

As for religious studies, with all its analytical tools for examining practice, community, discourse, and embodiment, few works have explicitly named aging, and specifically older age, as a critical category alongside race, gender, and religion. In her ethnographic study on children's First Communion rites, Susan Ridgely Bales encourages scholars of religion to "move beyond ageless—or perhaps imagined middle-aged—subjects, acknowledge all their subjects' ages, and discuss the consequences of this demographic in their work."[12] Her work makes the case for children and *young* age as a productive analytical site for the study of lived religion. For obvious reasons, however, the experiences and practices of older people remain primarily beyond the purview of her work.

Other works, such as Michael D. McNally's *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion* and Anthea Butler's *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, have examined questions of aging in light of cultural authority, such as "elderhood," and ritual practice.[13] Butler

[11] Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Dana Sawchuk, "Aging and Older Adults in Three Roman Catholic Magazines: Successful Aging and the third and Fourth Ages Reframed," *Journal of Aging Studies* 35 (2015): 221-228; Bernice L. Neugarten, "Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old," *the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 415, no. 1 (Sept., 1974): 187-198; Terri L. Premo, *Winter Friends: Women Growing Old in the New Republic, 1785-1835* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); John W. Rowe and Robert L. Kahn, "Human Aging: Usual and Successful," *Science* 237 (1987): 143-149.

[12] Susan Ridgely Bales, *When I was a Child: Children's Interpretations of First Communion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 183.

[13] Michael D. McNally, *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 19; Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*

urges religious studies scholars to "[l]ook closer" at the role, power, and authority of church mothers, or "the older women who lead songs, shout, and take homemade pies and dinners to the pastor," in the African American Pentecostal Church of God in Christ.[14] McNally, framing older age more broadly, argues that the field "must consider how old age is marked in three inseparable but distinguishable frames: how the authority of age is marked bodily, how old age is marked culturally, and how both are marked historically."[15] While older age may bestow authority in some cultures, older people, especially women, often find that the practices of older adults are invisible in the United States.[16] Thus, as Barbara Myerhoff explained in *Number Our Days,* her pioneering ethnographic study of a Jewish day center in the 1970s, "We are rarely presented with the views of old people about themselves and given an opportunity to hear how aging is experienced by them."[17] That this remains largely true in religious studies presents a significant opportunity for reconsidering many of the field's core questions and concerns through an underused but productive analytical lens.

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); See also: Jack Kugelmass, "Moses of the South Bronx: Aging and Dying in the Old Neighborhood," in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 231-256; Michael D. McNally, "Aging, Eldership, and Religion," in *Religion and American Cultures: An Encyclopedia of Traditions,* vol. 1, ed. Gary Laderman and Luis León (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 405-407; Jane Peterson, "Age of Wisdom: Elderly Black Women in Family and Church," in *The Cultural Context of Aging,* ed. Jay Sokolovsky (New York: Bergin and Garvey: 1990): 213-227.

Aging and older age are not absent from American religious studies on both historical and contemporary subjects, although it is rarely named explicitly as a central frame of analysis. For example, work on immigration to the United States has considered the relationships between generational change, religious community, and social identity. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Pyong Gap Min, *Preserving Ethnicity through Religion in America: Korean Protestants and Indian Hindus across Generations* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[14] Butler, *Women in the Church*, 2.

[15] McNally, *Honoring Elders*, 23.

[16] Hillary Kaell, *Walking Where Jesus Walked: American Christians and Holy Land Pilgrimage* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

[17] Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days: A Triumph of Continuity and Culture Among Jewish Old People in an Urban Ghetto* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 251.

In leveraging age as an analytical category for religious studies, it is critical to note that scholarship concerned with "aging" and "old age" variously employ these terms to encompass an astounding array of cultural, physical, and phenomenological components. "Aging" can refer to a universal human condition of continuous physical and cognitive change; socially and culturally recognized phases of maturation; processes of knowledge acquisition and the accumulation of wisdom; periods of economic participation, independence, and dependence; and medical and scientific periods of health and illness. Likewise, "old" or "older" age suggests changing bodies and mental states, lived experiences and embodied performances of generational difference, symbols of wisdom or irrelevance, historical continuity and rupture, and discourses of life, death, and personhood. I contend that the field of American religious studies offers powerful tools for making visible these connotations undergirding the terms aging and old age and for interrogating the processes that construct and reify them. Furthermore, religious studies would benefit from more regularly employing "age" as an analytical category, similar to gender or race, in order not only to make sense of the demographic changes in the United States today, but also to consider how experiences, disciplines, and discourses of old, young, and middle age structure religious communities and practices more broadly. In the sections that follow, I offer three brief examples to illustrate the analytic productivity of age as a lens for the study of religious decline.

(When) Will They Settle Down?: Generations and Aging in Catholic Discourses of Decline

The average age of participants in a religious space often prompts theological and social questions regarding the future of the Church, as well as practical implications for the specific community's financial and demographic sustainability. During her tenure as Executive Director of Cranaleith, Charlene Flaherty grappled daily with how to attract young people to the retreat center's programs, because attendance at these events was crucial to the center's financial sustainability. Voicing the doubts of an imagined Millennial considering Cranaleith's programming, she asked, "'You know, am I going to go hang out with old people when I go do this there? Because that's what their other programs are, and I might meet my grandmother there.'"[18] Parish leaders likewise express concern that a lack of young families will result in lower Mass attendance rates, financial contributions, and early-life sacramental preparation and engagement. Beyond the financial concerns of low engagement, lower rates of sacraments like baptisms and confirmations may also negatively affect the perceived vitality of the parish during any future rounds of parish restructuring initiatives.[19]

Catholics of all ages claim an astounding variety of positions in relation to the Church—leaving, joining, or remaining lifelong participants. The focus on age, however, typically reflects an intergenerational tension between Millennials (born 1981-1996) and their parents' Baby Boomer (1946-1964) and grandparents' Silent Generation (1928-1945) cohorts. Recent polls and studies have emphasized the increasing disaffiliation of American younger generations not only from Catholicism but from religion more broadly.[20] There is disagreement, however, about

[18] Charlene Flaherty, interview with author, Philadelphia, July 2, 2019.

[19] See Chapters 2 and 3.

[20] Gregory A. Smith, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," Pew Research Center, December 14, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/; Michael Lipka, "Millennials increasingly are driving growth of 'nones,'" Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/; Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle, "Following Wave III: Religious Congregations in 21st Century America," National Congregations Study (Durham, NC: Department of Sociology, Duke University, 2015).

whether this generational shift will be permanent, unlike previous generations in which religious identification weakened during youth before strengthening during marriage, childrearing, and older age.[21] Millennial disaffiliation from religion is variously credited to upbringing, lack of trust or interest in institutions, online dating, and the increasing association of religion with the Republican Party. Catholics, academics, and journalists have pointed to political polarization, the ongoing clergy sexual abuse allegations and revelations, and postconciliar liturgical reforms as contributing to the flight of young people from the Catholic Church.[22]

This focus on Millennial disaffiliation means that age and aging play a profound role in the discursive and practical negotiation of intergenerational Catholicism. Among my interlocutors, these concerns typically manifest in the popular narrative currently finding evidence in the polls and the pews: the concerning possibility that the disengagement of younger generations is irreversible, and therefore ushering the Catholic Church to a massive demographic shift. When I attended a Bible study at Manayunk's St. John the Baptist in March 2020, for example, one woman expressed her concerns to our table that her son, a Millennial, might not marry in the Church. Her worries were both for her son and for her Church. Yet, as Charlene's comments evinced at the opening of this section, most Catholics with whom I have spoken also maintained a sense of positive action toward the issue of Millennial disengagement. The other

[21] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomas-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion and Not Coming Back," December 12, 2019, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/; Frank Newport, "Millennials' Religiosity Amidst the Rise of the Nones," Gallup, October 29, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/267920/millennials-religiosity-amidst-rise-nones.aspx.

[22] For example: Robert Barron, *Letter to a Suffering Church: A Bishop Speaks on the Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2019); Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "Explaining Why more Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012," *Sociological science* 1 (October 2014): 423-447; Michael Murphy, "Suspicious Minds: The Spirituality of the Postmodern Nones," *America Magazine: The National Catholic Review*, February 24, 2014, https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/suspicious-minds; Cat Wise and Kira Wakeam, "Millennials are leaving organized religion. Here's where some are finding community," *PBS Newshour*, January 2, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/millennials-are-leaving-organized-religion-heres-where-some-are-finding-community.

women at the Bible study hastened to suggest that as this woman's son approached marriage and became a father, he might find himself drawn back to the Church of his childhood. Monsignor Kevin Lawrence, the parish priest of Manayunk's St. John the Baptist, echoed this cautious optimism. Explaining that Millennials comprised 65 percent of the neighborhood, he described the parish's goal. "The hope is that we can provide something of an anchor here," he said, "It's a city community, if people are looking to raise a family in the city." After a moment, he added thoughtfully, "I will say that last Sunday when I was walking by the park, there were actually three young couples with baby carriages. Not everybody was walking a dog. I thought, 'Well, this is different.'"[23]

Table 5.1: Percentage of Catholic Population by Age, Metroplitan Area

Metropolitan Area	Age: 18-29	Age: 30-49	Age: 50-64	Age: 65+
New York City	11%	35%	32%	23%
Philadelphia	21%	24%	30%	25%
Washington, D.C.	26%	39%	24%	11%
All U.S. Catholics	17%	33%	29%	20%

Source: Pew Research Center, "Generational cohort among Catholics by metro area," *Religious Landscape Study*, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/metro-area/philadelphia-metro-area/religious-tradition/catholic/, 2014.

In reality, the causes and consequences of Millennial disaffiliation are likely to be multifaceted, numerous, and too complex to fully analyze, especially while the generation remains relatively young. A 2014 Pew study found, for example, that geographic location might affect the generational composition of the Church. The Philadelphia metropolitan area claimed a higher percentage of younger *and* older Catholics than New York City or Washington, D.C. (Table 5.1). Philadelphia's greater share of at least younger Millennials (roughly 18 to 33 years of age at the time of the study) could be a result of the area's very robust Catholic education system, which includes several Catholic institutions of higher education. In contrast, the

[23] Monsignor Kevin Lawrence, interview with author, Philadelphia, August 21, 2019.

metropolitan area's share of older Millennials and Generation X was much lower than the national or regional average.

The generational negotiation of Catholic identity, however, is even more complicated than simply a higher correlation between Millennials and religious disaffiliation. Among American Millennials and the subsequent generation, Generation Z (those born in 1997 through the early 2010s), some have been drawn not toward disaffiliation but rather a particular form of engagement with the Church, colloquially known as traditionalism, "radical traditionalism," or restorationist Catholicism. Since at least as early as the 1980s, a small segment of American priests, bishops, and laypeople has advocated for a restoration of the preconciliar Mass. They often desire a return to the Latin Mass, as well as practices such as the priest's orientation away from the congregation, the restriction of lay roles, and the prohibition of female altar servers. Restorationists are more likely to consider the liturgical reforms of Vatican II as a cause of diminishing Catholic vitality or culture—or even as heretical, as some schismatic groups have argued.[24] Although Vatican II took place long before the birth of either Millennials or Generation Z, restorationist or so-called "rad trad" Catholicism has increasingly been associated with younger Americans, especially as it emerges as a community on social media platforms like TikTok. Chapter 6 will explore restorationism, alongside several other repertoires of renewal, in greater detail.

Millennials and Generation Z, then, occupy a complicated position in the equation of decline. They are a source of both anxiety *and* optimism regarding the future of Catholicism, with the aging of these two generations offering, in many Catholics' minds, a greater possibility for their return to the Church. This tension not only places disproportionate emphasis on these

[24] For example, the Society of St. Pius X, founded 1970.

younger generations, but its overemphasis in discussions of Catholic futurity also often casts older generations as irrelevant or even synonymous with the Church's decline. Such a framing takes for granted the relationship older generations have with Catholicism. It obscures the experience of older adults who also identify as "former" Catholics, as well as of those who *actively* engage in practices to sustain and build Catholic community for themselves.

The Lament of Displaced Elders: Signifiers of Grief in Parish Closures

When the Archdiocese of Philadelphia suppressed St. Peter Claver parish in 1985, the church was no longer the site of certain lifecycle and sacramental celebrations. "We didn't leave because of that," insisted former parishioner, Adrienne Harris, "What we did was find another way to operate." Because of the presence of the shrine of Our Lady of Victories in St. Peter Claver Church, the former parishioners had access to the church for Masses, private prayer, and some community-organized events. "So, if [we] couldn't do baptisms," Adrienne explained, "we did naming and blessing ceremonies." Instead of weddings, the community hosted a celebration.[25]

But it was not the prohibition on weddings—nor that on baptisms and First Communions—that most rattled the former parish community. "[T]he thing about not being able to have funerals [at St. Peter Claver Church] was the saddest thing ever," Adrienne recalled, "Because many of our elders, as they started to get sick and die or go into the hospital, they wanted the Holy Ghost fathers to come. This is the only priest we always had. Well, after the suppression, the Holy Ghost fathers refused to go to the hospital and give these people the Last Rites." Decades after the 1985 suppression, Adrienne still remembered being in the church one

[25] Adrienne Harris, Zoom interview with author, October 7, 2020.

night when another former parishioner arrived. He was "in tears," she explained, "And he said, 'This is the last time I will step foot in the Catholic church the rest of my life.' He said, 'My mother is dying and so-and-so over in that rectory refused to go and give her the last Rites. And all she wants is him to come. She's not going to make it 'til morning, and I'm here trying to find somebody.'" As Adrienne recalled, the Holy Ghost Fathers, who had served St. Peter Claver since the parish's founding in 1886, refused to attend former parishioners to administer the Last Rites, a process involving penance, the anointing of the sick, and Holy Communion (viaticum). Presumably, the Holy Ghost Fathers saw the administering of these sacraments as the role of Catholics' *parish* priests, a position they no longer served for the community still gathered around St. Peter Claver Church. In response, the community mobilized to "[make] some phone calls" on the dying woman's behalf. They eventually found a Black Catholic priest who agreed to administer her the Last Rites. "And he also went to her funeral," Adrienne remembered, "and he apologized to the family for the Catholic Church. And he helped another one that was dying the next week or so."[26]

In addition to the denial of the Last Rites, former parishioners also condemned the Archdiocese for denying them funerals in their church. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* interviewed Henrietta Davenport at the time of the 1985 suppression, noting that she had been a parishioner of St. Peter Claver "[f]or 75 of her 75½ years." The paper quoted Henrietta as lamenting, "'It is terrible, absolutely terrible because this is my home and I'm going to have to join another church. I can't have a burial here.'" Margaret Palmer, similarly, was 83 when St. Peter Claver closed. She had attended the Black parish since 1917, when no other parish in Philadelphia felt

[26] Ibid.

"like home."[27] With the suppression, Henrietta and Margaret had to envision their own funerals taking place elsewhere.

Within a year of St. Peter Claver's suppression, the question of how to treat the former parish's dead and dying had reached a climax. According to a 2018 WHYY retrospective of St. Peter Claver's history, "some parishioners were so upset they threatened to hold funerals in the middle of the intersection at 12th and Lombard" outside the church.[28] The community's sense of betrayal over these issues was ultimately so powerful that the former parishioners managed to squeeze a concession out of the Archdiocese. In 1986 Cardinal Krol budged: parishioners older than 60 years of age were allowed a funeral inside the church.[29]

In 1985, the social and theological disruptions of St. Peter Claver's suppression made age and especially *older* age unexpectedly visible. With the suppression, parishioners who had spent decades attending and serving the parish no longer had access to the Catholic space that had given social, theological, and physical shape to their Catholicism. In addition to the losses shared by the rest of the former parish, the sacramental and ceremonial farewells offered by the Church to the dying—including the Last Rites, a funeral, and a burial—were abruptly denied to them. In these moments, older age, rather than signifying or justifying parish closure, instead lent poignancy and potency to *critiques* of archdiocesan policies. Lamenting the impact on older parishioners was a way to signal the feelings of nostalgia, mourning, and disruption that closure inspired.

[27] Suzanne Gordon, "Rallying for their Church," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 17, 1985.
[28] Ashley Hahn, "Saying Goodbye to Philadelphia's first black Catholic church," *WHYY Philadelphia*, March 29, 2018, https://whyy.org/segments/saying-goodbye-to-philadelphias-first-black-catholic-church/.
[29] Michael D. Schaffer, "Group Seeks Reinstatement of Black Catholic Parish," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 4, 1986, B01.

Although the concession St. Peter Claver won from the Archdiocese was unusual, this link between older age, death and dying, and parish suppression was not unique to the Black Catholic community. Rather, framing parish closures and church relegations by their impact upon elders has extended into twenty-first century as an implicit critique of closure and relegation as archdiocesan policies of decline. As primarily an affective frame, this lament does not constitute a unique repertoire of decline, but it does weave through other repertoires, lending affective depth to a variety of practical strategies and narrative frameworks marshalled toward other repertoires. The lament of the older parishioner's displaced care and burial, for example, often aligns seamlessly with expressions of legacies of the sacred. The displacement of elders raises questions about heritage, memory, and shared meaning. As the previous chapter argued, former parishioners who challenge archdiocesan policies of relegation often insist upon their communities' heritage, legacy, and historic value. These narratives gain poignancy with the cumulative weight of years, not only of the community or parish, as Chapter 4 emphasized, but also of the individual. Consider again the power of Henrietta Davenport's dismay over the dislocation of her own funeral from St. Peter Claver. Both Henrietta and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* positioned her as a literal *life-long* member of the parish: she had dedicated her long life to St. Peter Claver and, by extension, the Catholic Church. Didn't the weight of her commitment obligate the Church to commit as equally to her in return? Lamenting her displaced funeral served, then, as a lament of the Church's faulty commitment to its elders.

As *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s references to Henrietta and Margaret illustrate, reporters, as well as the Catholics themselves, have produced this lament. When the same newspaper covered the merger of the Manayunk parishes in 2012, the reporters again couched the event in terms of age. The paper described the shock and unhappiness experienced by "*78-year-old*

Eleanor Schommer, a member [of St. Mary of the Assumption parish] since she was married there *53 years ago*," and of Carl Hood, "a member of St. Mary's *for 40 years*" (italics added). The article's accompanying image depicts "Megan Clayton and her mother, Mary Beth Syrnick, gaz[ing] at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Manayunk, *their longtime family church*" (italics added).[30] In local reporting, the emphasis on age and time as descriptors for these individuals works as a discursive shorthand for signifying their emotional commitment to St. Mary of the Assumption, as well as their anguish over its closure. In relying upon this frame for parish closures, even articles sympathetic to archdiocesan policies frame the events as emotionally weighted and often tragic.

The affective power of this lament, as the examples at St. Peter Claver illustrate particularly vividly, hinges upon an implied relationship between older age and practices of end-of-life. The Catholic Church has a robust set of practices to facilitate the process of mourning and grieving death, including the Last Rites and funeral services, which provide rituals of transition for both the dying and those gathered around them. As Agnes M. Brazal, a Catholic scholar and theologian has written, disruptions to these ritual processes can "make it difficult for people to acknowledge the loss, thus leading to complicated grief," or the prolonged and overwhelming sense of grief and loss that can hinder one's ability to function.[31] Although Brazal wrote about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on priests' ability to administer the Last Rites to ill and hospitalized patients, the theological and affective impact of this disruption resonates with the grief and disbelief Adrienne recalled from 1985. The displacement of sacramental, ritual, and cultural practices of aging, death, and mourning likewise created a profoundly disorienting experience.

[30] David O'Reilly, "Seven Catholic Parishes to Close," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 16, 2012, A1.
[31] Agnes M. Brazal, "The last rites in a time of pandemic," *Journal of Public Health* 43, no. 3 (2021): e549-550.

The rhetorical emphasis on aging parishioners' displacement is so prevalent in interpretations of decline because it serves as a clear and poignant flashpoint for broader communities' emotional responses to parish closures and church relegations. Rev. Michael Weldon, O.F.M., has argued that the lack of mourning rituals and ceremonial procedures for closures and relegations has created an emotional sore for many Catholics grieving the loss of their community. Frequently, Weldon explains, the Church itself—in the form of a bishop, diocesan official, or priest announcing or enforcing the closure or relegation—becomes "the source of trauma," rather than a source of reconciliation, forgiveness, or acceptance for Catholics to move productively through a grieving process.[32] While many Catholics may feel betrayed by Church policies of decline, the impact on the elderly casts this betrayal into sharper affective relief. The grief of closure and/or relegation is refracted through and enhanced by the anticipated grief of a displaced funeral or burial. The denial of this displaced event, moreover, becomes a source of shame to the Church. While policies of decline often position parishioners in contention with representatives of the Catholic hierarchy (i.e., St. Peter Claver parishioners against the Holy Ghost Fathers), this displacement, however, can be powerfully disturbing to laity and clergy alike (i.e., St. Peter Claver parishioners and the Black clergy who administered the Last Rites).

In this lament, aging and old age become a visible and affective signifier of the emotional and psychological trauma an entire community may feel during and after a parish closure or church relegation. For the former parishioners of St. Peter Claver in 1985, the lack of access to Catholic sacramental and ritual processes at end of life fueled the community's critique of the perceived racialized nature of the parish suppression. The power of this critique is evident in the

[32] Michael Weldon, O.F.M., *A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), xx.

community's victory in winning back funerals for its older members. In the case of reporting by newspapers like *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the emphasis on older community members is less clearly an obvious *critique* of archdiocesan policy, but grief remains a symbol to suggest the larger community's sense of betrayal, mourning, or even anger with the closure or relegation.

While these examples illustrate a site where aging becomes sharply visible in discourses of decline, it is crucial to recognize the conflation between older age, dying, and anticipated or imminent death. Older age serves a rhetorical and affective purpose that nonetheless obscures the complexities and realities of older Catholics' experiences in their religious practices and communities. In short, older age and death become collapsed, leaving unexamined how older Catholics *live* their Catholicism. The remainder of this chapter, then, will shift to address these questions by considering the role of age, aging, and older age at Cranaleith Spiritual Center.

Bridging Difference at Cranaleith: Age, Gender, and Catholicism in Practice

Charlene began with a self-deprecating disclaimer: "So, this is probably more information than you want." With short, sandy hair and a wardrobe of loose, colorful patterns, Charlene spoke with an air of intense focus—one frequently cut by an affection for dogs she brought to bear on an impressive range of subjects. She was explaining to me that two years earlier, she had been grieving and seeking meaningful employment after her husband's death. It was during this time, in her early fifties, that she started revisiting thoughts she had had in her twenties about joining a Catholic religious order. After twenty-five years' experience in governmental and nonprofit management and development, Charlene considered "what other path maybe God is leading [her] in." She explained how she felt drawn to the Sisters of Mercy, who had taught at her childhood elementary school in Pennsylvania and with whom she had

interacted during her professional life in Arizona.[33] When Charlene first reached out to the Sisters of Mercy about the possibility of taking vows, she spoke on the phone with a vocations director. As she recalled, the director "heard my story and said no." She told Charlene, "'You're older, you just lost your husband, you're not even on the East Coast—mmm, probably not.'" Persistent, Charlene nonetheless continued to pursue the order. "And then it just became clearer and clearer and clearer," she told me, "that this is what I wanted to do."

Around the same time, Charlene saw a job posting for the position of Executive Director of Cranaleith Spiritual Center, a retreat center run by Catholics in northeastern Philadelphia. "My first thought was maybe they'll feed me," she admitted wryly, "[My husband] did all the cooking, and literally that was the opening—maybe they'll cook food here and I won't starve, if I go do this." Although Charlene spoke lightheartedly, her comment reveals the profound changes to her material and emotional circumstances following her husband's death, as well as the unexpected opportunities these unwanted changes afforded. The open position at Cranaleith, with its ten "beautiful, pastoral" acres on the boundary between Philadelphia and Bucks County, seemed to Charlene a sign of "the Spirit guiding" her. Not only did the retreat center seek a new hire with the skills she had spent a career developing, but Cranaleith was also a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy.

Charlene got the job. "You can't make this stuff up," she insisted, describing her path to Cranaleith, "I just feel this profound sense of, 'you can't make this up.'" Less than two years after she began working at Cranaleith, Charlene became a candidate for the Sisters of Mercy. At the time of our interview, she planned—"if all of this works"—to become a novice in August

[33] Catherine McAuley founded the order (R.S.M.) in Ireland in 1831. As of 2022, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas numbers "over 2,000" sisters, with worldwide sisters "over 6,000." https://nebo.sistersofmercy.org/, accessed April 10, 2022.

2021. She was, indeed, laughing aloud when she told me, "I'm laughing. It's like, I'll need a walker by the time I make final vows."[34]

With this last joking comment, Charlene recognized the ways in which her story was unusual. She is among the declining number of Catholic women choosing to pursue religious life in the twenty-first century. The number of American women religious peaked in 1965, when the United States counted 181,421 sisters.[35] Between 1965 and 2015, the number fell 72 percent, dropping to fewer than 50,000 women religious, a process sisters call "diminishment."[36] According to a report by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, 80 percent of responding American religious institutes had no one professing perpetual or final vows in 2018.[37] Moreover, not only are there fewer sisters nationwide, but they are also rapidly aging. The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), which manages retirement plans for Catholic brothers and sisters, collects information on the median age, retirement funds, and costs of eldercare in Catholic religious institutes in the United States. In 2018, it found 68 percent of its nearly 550 reporting communities had a median age of

[34] Charlene, July 2019.

[35] The term "Catholic women religious" refers to women who have taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a religious institute. Women religious include nuns, who typically take solemn vows to live a cloistered life in contemplative prayer, and sisters, who typically take simple vows to belong to a religious institute dedicated to apostolic and charitable works. Both use the term "sister," although not all sisters are nuns. The Sisters of Mercy are an apostolic community of sisters. I use the terms "women religious" and "sisters" to refer to Catholic women who have taken simple and solemn vows; when used, the term "nun" refers specifically to sisters who have taken solemn vows. Mary L. Gautier, "Population Trends Among Religious Institutes since 1970," in *Pathways to Religious Life*, ed. Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ. (New York: Oxford 2018), 16.

[36] Brian Titley, *Into Silence and Servitude: How American Girls Became Nuns, 1945-1965* (Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 177; Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993)..

[37] Thu T. Do and Mary L. Gautier, *Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2018* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, January 2019), https://cara.georgetown.edu/ProfessionClass2018.pdf.

at least 70. Within the decade, the NRRO predicted that retired religious will outnumber their wage-earning peers by nearly three to one.[38]

Charlene, however, illustrated the importance of looking beyond these numbers. Although fewer women are joining orders like the Sisters of Mercy, some *do*, and the sisters that remain continue to construct and imagine Catholic community through their practices. They construct and perform Catholic identity even as they negotiate the decline of their communities. Although Charlene may have encountered the stages of religious life differently from her fellow sisters, many of whom professed their vows among large cohorts in the late twentieth century, she still participated in creating Mercy community. Her own age—originally imagined by the vocations director as a strike against her—and her life experiences as a married, now widowed woman with a career shaped her engagement with the order, and vice versa. As much as the young women who flocked to the order in the preconciliar years, Charlene contributed to the shaping of Catholic identity and community.

Charlene and the other sisters also worked hard to shape the community of Cranaleith, where age was also a continuous thread in the center's plans and activities. During my time at the center, several men from Saint John's Hospice, a Catholic Social Services shelter for men, traveled from Center City to Cranaleith to help with grounds work. I also heard the staff talk wistfully about the years when women from Libertae, a program for women with substance abuse disorders, used to volunteer around the grounds. But providing regular transportation from Saint John's or Libertae was a challenge, and I saw only a handful of these volunteers in 2019. As a result, most of the volunteers I met were women in their sixties or older, many of them

[38] The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men oversee the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO). "The Need," Retirement Fund for Religious, accessed April 2, 2019, https://retiredreligious.org/the-need/#lack-of-funds.

longtime Somerton residents, most of them White. Several men, mostly in the same age range, were also regular volunteers, usually focusing on grounds work. Each volunteer participated in ways specific to their own needs, interests, and strengths. Among the 2019 Fall Harvest Festival volunteers, there were the well-known and popular "Crafty Angels," who made small devotional objects and crafts to sell in the Cranaleith giftshop; others ran flea market tables outside or offered walking tours of the historic house, with which I helped; and several women in wheelchairs or with walkers greeted guests and sold raffle tickets in the lobby.

Kathie Ulinski (née Trainer) sat down with me to discuss how Cranaleith had changed over the course of their volunteers' lives. When I undertook fieldwork at Cranaleith between June 2019 and June 2020, Kathie helped coordinate volunteers, including the large undertaking of the 2019 Fall Harvest Festival. She explained that prior to the opening of the new Conference Center in 2012, all their events and programming took place in the historic house that crowned Cranaleith's property. There, the staff both hosted and fed participants, including overnight retreaters. In those days, members of the local parish, St. Christopher, organized to "make casseroles and desserts for lunch and dinner" for the guests. "They did everything," Kathie explained, "They would get sponsors for us. They would help us clean up, set up, do everything. Get people, sell tickets….We couldn't be here today if it wasn't for our volunteers." By 2020, Kathie continued later, "We have our connections…that help us out and [get events] organized. But there's fewer and fewer." When I asked the reason for the lower numbers, she answered baldly, "Age. People die. We've had so many of our volunteers die, and age with health problems. So, [of] the older group, there's about seven of them that are left out of—I would say, you used to have—oh, my gosh, we had so many volunteers." Kathie noted that with fulltime staff members, including chefs and cooks, most of the volunteering work the Center *needed* was

on the grounds. But tending to the grounds and garden was either less appealing or less accessible to many of Cranaleith's volunteers. "For the older [volunteers]," she added, "There's less work to do, except for greeting when we have programs and host…groups if they're down there [at the Center]." A moment later, she started to describe one grounds project as ideal for "younger people," before correcting herself: "I don't mean young. Middle-aged, but who can still do it. So, we have a real challenge on our hands right now with volunteers….The people that have the time are usually the older retired people who would just [say], 'Oh yeah. I'll greet.' Well, we can only have so many greeters. So, it's a challenge for us."[39]

At Cranaleith, age often appeared in reflections upon the gendered experience of growing older. An example from Cranaleith's Knit, Crochet, Pray Together demonstrates the shape of these reflections. I attended this small group from the fall of 2019 until the Covid-19 pandemic moved the sessions online in the spring of 2020. Prior to the weekly Zoom meetings, the group gathered every first and third Tuesday afternoon of the month in the century-old Main House. Prior to the Trainers' residence, the historic home was built in the 1890s for Rachel Foster Avery, a close friend of Susan B. Anthony and active suffragist. Although most of Cranaleith's events take place in the Conference Center, built on the footprint of an old barn about a hundred yards down the driveway, the biweekly gathering of Knit, Crochet, Pray Together took its sense of familiarity and coziness from meeting in the house. The living room was studded with paintings and pictures of the historic property, gifted by neighbors and retreat participants, with two couches and several chairs clustered before a fireplace. An upright piano, a Trainer family heirloom, stood beside a long window overlooking the back lawn and driveway.

[39] Kathie Ulinski, interview with author, Philadelphia, February 17, 2020.

Between eight and fourteen women typically attended Knit, Crochet, Pray Together, most of whom were in their fifties and older. In addition to Sister C., R.S.M., who led the group, the attendees included several sisters of other religious congregations and laywomen.[40] Most of the attendees were White and were either retired, working from home, or with flexible schedules that allowed them to attend the weekday afternoon sessions. Several were advanced knitters or crochetiers, while others were new—or newly returned—to the fiber arts.[41]

Each week, the group began by reading aloud and discussing a short spiritual reflection, before spending the remaining time on projects—mostly scarves and shawls the women made as gifts for family and friends, or for the children of a nearby school around the holidays. During the 2019-2020 winter, we read through several chapters of Lisa Bogart's *Knit, Purl, Pray: 52 Devotions for the Creative Soul.* On March 3, 2020, the group read aloud "Multitasking," a chapter in *Knit, Purl, Pray*. After we spent a moment reflecting in silence, Sister C., the group's leader, asked for any thoughts we wanted to share. The conversation was slow in starting but soon picked up. Maggie suggested that "as women, we are conditioned" to multitask and to feel inadequate if we concentrate on one task at a time. Years after she had finished raising her now-adult children, she recalled that she had never managed to feel comfortable with the pace and responsibilities she had set herself as a young woman and mother. Two sentences from the text struck Maggie as most powerful: "I don't think God made us to accomplish a long to-do list each day. I think He made us to live in His world and help each other out."[42] Sister C. agreed with

[40] This sister asked not to be named.

[41] Studies of the revival of fiber arts, particularly knitting, since the mid-1990s have noted the gendered and class- and race-based assumptions undergirding the growing community. Jodi Eichler-Levine, *Painted Pomegranates and Needlepoint Rabbis: How Jews Craft Resilience and Create Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Elizabeth Groeneveld, "'Join the Knitting Revolution': Third-Wave Feminist Magazines and the Politics of Domesticity," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010: 263-4; Jaya Saxena, "The knitting community is reckoning with racism," *Vox,* February 25, 2019, https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/2/25/18234950/knitting-racism-instagram-stories.

[42] Lisa Bogart, *Knit, Purl, Pray: 52 Devotions for the Creative Soul* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Inspired, 2015), 77.

Maggie, mentioning how the chapter "hit home." Because of the emphasis on care and compassion in religious life, she admitted that sometimes loving and caring for other people as a spiritual adviser, staff member at Cranaleith, and Mercy sister could be overwhelming. Although it might sound strange, she explained wryly, there was plenty of stress at a spiritual center, and her own drive to multitask had at times been hard on her own spiritual and physical health. We need to be "human beings," she concluded, not simply "human doers."[43]

Reflections on gender and age frequently flowed through discussions about religion and spirituality. In Knit, Crochet, Pray Together, the lay and religious women reached for common experiences of gendered aging—from commiserating about crafting with arthritis to celebrating the birth of a new generation—to establish a shared sense of community. The sisters were adept at translating the laywomen's experiences with spouses and children to their own as spiritual advisers, community members, or teachers. Sister C.'s seamless comparison of the pressures of care she and Maggie felt illustrates community-making. Their *different* experiences with reproductive marriage and a religious life of celibacy took backseat to shared gendered experiences. Alongside discussions of craft stores and patterns, these reflections on age, gender, and Catholicism produced meaningful and often humorous connections between group members, who usually saw each other only at the biweekly meeting.

While most participants placed themselves spatially, socially, and theologically in the Catholic Church, the group's conversation flowed through and beyond Catholicism, without being constrained by concerns of Catholic orthodoxy. Sister C. encouraged expansive expressions of spirituality in Knit, Crochet, Pray Together. Projects taken up by the group suggested a more socially progressive Catholic agenda: washcloths for immigrants, blanket

[43] "Maggie" is a pseudonym. Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, March 3, 2020.

squares for Afghan refugees, winter hats and scarves for low-income school children, and scent-cloths for mothers and babies in newborn intensive care units (NICU). When Julie once reminded us of her Buddhist practice, Sister C. remarked that although we used *Knit, Purl, Pray*, which contained Christian scripture and prayer, we should feel free to "stretch" the readings however we wanted to make them meaningful.[44]

The readings from Bogart's *Knit, Purl, Pray* encouraged the women to interpret making as a meaningful and spiritual activity, and they often framed their projects as an act of giving or caring for others, as well as an act of meditation or prayer for themselves. An octogenarian Holy Redeemer sister explained that she loved crocheting, despite her lack of finesse as she learned the new skill. Moved by a chapter in *Knit, Purl, Pray*, she reflected upon one of Bogart's phrases, "heart to heart."[45] Making projects was a way to be heart to heart with the recipients of her gifts, and, through this interpersonal connect, heart to heart with God. It was also, she suggested, a way to be heart to heart with herself. "At my age," she concluded succinctly, "I need to be learning new things."[46] Much as in the discussion about "Multitasking," the women often analyzed their gifts, as makers and as women, through the lens of their relationship to God, the Church, or their spirituality.[47]

This expansive approach to Catholicism was not unique to the crafting group but reflected the aims of Cranaleith more generally. Although owned and operated by Catholic laypeople and the Sisters of Mercy, Cranaleith billed itself not as "Catholic" but rather as a "spiritual" retreat center, with programs appealing to a range of spiritually- and religiously-inclined participants. In addition to directed and private retreats, the staff provided regular

[44] "Julie" is a pseudonym. Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, February 18, 2020.
[45] Bogart, *Knit, Purl*, 73.
[46] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, February 4, 2020.
[47] Eichler-Levine, *Painted Pomegranates*, 84.

programming for women veterans, a "Work & Spirit Series" for business leaders, spiritual direction opportunities, and programs on "Contemplative Ecology," such as gardening and composting.

Most of the regular volunteers and event participants I met, however, were Catholics or former Catholics. Some were former Catholic school teachers and longtime parishioners in their neighborhood parish. Others had a more complicated relationship to their Catholicism. One woman with whom I gardened over the summer muttered that she should hide her "atheism" from me when I described my research, although she quickly added, without further detail, that she had deep roots with Cranaleith and the local parish. Ella, a former Mercy Sister who had left the order and pursued a nursing career, spent her Thursday mornings in the summer of 2019 gardening with clients of Citizens Acting Together Can Help (CATCH), which serves people with cognitive disabilities and mental health and substance abuse needs. Louisa, another Harvest Festival volunteer, explained that she had not practiced "[her] religion" for many years, in part because she was troubled by the Church's position of women's ordination and because of her dislike of priests. Upon attending a retreat organized by former Sisters of St. Joseph, Louisa had marveled at their encouragement to try tai chi and yoga, which she had never before seen practiced by Catholics. Cranaleith, she explained, offered similar opportunities to engage in Catholic community or culture alongside spiritual programs the Church would not endorse.[48]

For each of these women, Cranaleith offered an opportunity to practice her unique relationship to the Catholic Church, to the local community, and to Mercy sisters or the Trainer family. How she practiced these relationships was refracted through the prism of her aged and gendered experiences and spiritual desires. When Kathie asked whether "you feel people are

[48] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, October 13, 2019.

scared of the term 'spiritual,'" one Cranaleith volunteer responded, "There are so many individuals interested in New Age philosophies in the climate of our country right now; they may be looking for solace." Kathie and another volunteer considered this response, before riffing off one another: Kathie suggested Cranaleith is a place "where your spirit—" "— can grow," concluded the volunteer.[49]

Several weeks after he became the new board chairman of Cranaleith in 2019, Steve Hart met with me at a nearby diner to discuss why the center encouraged such an expansive take on Catholicism. Other Catholic retreat centers, he explained, are "much more bounded. You have to be something to get in. Cranaleith is much more open-ended." But Cranaleith's flexibility in programming, he admitted, could be both "a blessing and a curse." Cranaleith offers programming, such as reiki or meditation, that "makes the Archdiocese's hair bristle." According to Steve, "the nondenominational status and Catholic overlay" causes "dissonance" for predominantly Catholic audiences who might perceive these practices as un-Catholic or "pagan." Although he imagines Cranaleith as offering a "universal message" of welcome, hospitality, and spirituality, he admits this flexibility is in many ways "its Achilles heel," because "even priests are shy about being here."[50] Despite this suspicion of Cranaleith's Catholicism, Steve proudly declared that Sister Mary and Sister Maria commanded respect from the Archdiocese. Their experiences had made them formidable figures in the construction of local Catholic community.

The volunteer and participant spaces of Cranaleith offer an opportunity to consider older age not only in but also *beyond* discourses of Catholic decline and sustainability. While it was true that Cranaleith's leadership was concerned about the average age of volunteers and program participants, it would oversimplify the inner workings of Cranaleith to view their older age as

[49] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, September 17, 2019.
[50] Steve Hart, interview by author, Philadelphia, October 3, 2019.

only a warning about the Center's future sustainability or its dire need for younger participants and stakeholders. The women and men who gave their time, labor, and/or financial support to Cranaleith were more than the impact of their advancing age on the Center. Cranaleith, instead, was a site where, together, they created meaningful personal and communal Catholicism, not in spite of age, but together with it. Understanding this process is key to understanding contemporary practices of lived Catholicism in communities where older participants, and especially older women, predominate.

Conclusion

The communities laywomen and women religious constructed at Cranaleith reflected a phenomenon both recognized and yet too often denigrated about Catholic communities, parishes included: the active labor, commitment, and engagement of *older* women in creating and maintaining community. As Chapter 6 will show, parishes and transparochial Catholic programming also grapples with the higher rates of participation among older women, despite active marketing towards younger generations. Rather than train our focus on this absence, however, scholars of contemporary American religion should examine the religion-, identity-, and community-making work already present in these spaces.

Chapter 6 |
Waking the "Sleeping Giant": Catholic Devotional Media and the Repertoire of Revitalization

I climbed the steep hill of Rector Street in Manayunk to the McKenna House, a gray, two-story building set unusually far from the sidewalk for this neighborhood—or any neighborhood, in fact—in Philadelphia. At several minutes to 6:00 in the evening, St. John the Baptist was quiet and looming across the street in the winter dark. Lights shone through paper signs taped to the windows of the McKenna house's enclosed porch, announcing the parish's Bible Study groups. I passed through this porch into a low-ceilinged room with the vibe of a schoolroom. There were several small tables, each with five or six chairs, and an array of posters. A long card table was decked with Tastykake offerings (once a Philadelphia brand, by 2011 sold off to Flowers Foods in Georgia), books, and pamphlets. Four women seated across two of the tables turned to peer curiously at me as I hesitated in the doorway.

Jillian, the intensely friendly and intensely organized leader of St. John the Baptist's parish events and groups, turned from setting up the card table to greet me. When I admitted I hadn't been sure of what to bring to the evening's Adult Formation group (and so hefted up a new Bible), she showed me a small stack of Matthew Kelly's *Rediscover the Saints: Twenty-Five Questions That Will Change Your Life*. "Do you know Matthew Kelly from Dynamic Catholic?" she asked, as she handed me a bright yellow book with blue print.[1]

I *was* aware of Matthew Kelly, the founder of Dynamic Catholic. Jillian, during our first conversation several months earlier, had spoken to me about Kelly's nonprofit organization as, around us, fellow parishioners snacked on donuts in the basement of St. John the Baptist Church.

[1] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, February 18, 2020. Matthew Kelly, *Rediscover the Saints: Twenty-Five Questions That Will Change Your Life* (North Palm Beach, FL: Blue Sparrow Publishing, 2019).

After that first conversation, she had left me with a staggering list of Catholic resources, including documentaries, online portals, and organizations producing devotional materials and media. Dynamic Catholic was one of these last.[2]

Taking the proffered copy of *Rediscover the Saints*, I joined the other women in the Adult Formation group at the tables. There were eight of us that February evening in 2020, a week before the beginning of Lent—and, although we could hardly have predicted it, only several weeks before the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the Church online for months. Aside from me, Jillian, in her mid-fifties, was among the youngest of the attendees. All of us were White. One, Gail, bounded in with the wired energy of the caffeinated to gush over the installation of the new Archbishop, Nelson Pérez, that afternoon. Her reenactments of the archbishop's "adorable" enthusiasm carried on, animating the quiet room, until Jillian marshalled us to order. We introduced ourselves by sharing our favorite saint or best saint story. (At the following week's meeting, when the group swelled to fifteen women for a Lenten Bible Study, we would wear nametags reading, *Hi, my name is…And my favorite saint is…*) After nods to St. Jude, St. Francis, the Little Flower, and Padre Pio, Jillian helped me introduce myself and my research. I admitted I did not yet have a favorite saint. But when I suggested that perhaps I would soon have a better answer, the women enthusiastically remarked upon the great array of possibilities from which I would soon be able to choose.

That evening, we read aloud through the first several chapters of Kelly's *Rediscover the Saints*, each of which outlined the life and death of a saint and the author's personal connection to a highlighted theme in this narrative. The opening chapter of *Rediscover the Saints*, entitled "You Have a Future," begins with an assurance and a promise: "Wherever you are in your

[2] Fieldnotes by author, Philadelphia, December 15, 2019.

journey, wherever you have been and whatever you have done, the lives of saints such as Augustine remind us that God never gives up on us."[3] In addition to a worksheet to guide our reflections, Jillian had supplied us with additional books on the saints. Prompted by our discussion of *Rediscover the Saints*, Gail discovered in one of these resources that St. Augustine had recently been named the patron saint of bloggers. "See!" Jillian announced triumphantly, if wryly, "The Church is *relevant*!"[4]

This chapter contends that materials like Matthew Kelly's *Rediscover the Saints* populate a rapidly expanding field of Catholic media in the early twenty-first century. Far from a unique publication, *Rediscover the Saints* is one of an astounding number of devotional materials produced within the past decade by the media and publication branches of many new Catholic companies. Frequently founded by Catholic businessmen, companies like the Cincinnati-based Dynamic Catholic offer conferences and workshops alongside an ever-growing array of Catholic devotional material: their products include books, videos, podcasts, daily email and app reflections, and other such media to inspire their Catholic audiences towards a deeper engagement with their parish, the Church, and their faith. Jillian's triumphant exclamation in the Adult Formation class reflects the buoyant optimism of these materials. Products like *Rediscover the Saints*, through their language and the practices they encourage, offer a similar assurance for Catholics: See, the Church *is* relevant!

Much of the content produced by companies like Dynamic Catholic encourages personal and shared reflection, with the ultimate goal of deepening the consumer's Catholic faith. Other materials engage parish leadership and management to strengthen Catholic lay involvement in parishes, in order to slow the rapid number of closures in recent decades. As such, these products

[3] Kelly, *Rediscover the Saints*, 13.
[4] Fieldnotes, February 18, 2020.

reflect American Catholic responses to papal exhortations, such as Pope Francis' 2013 *Evangelii Gaudium,* to reengage Catholics through "the New Evangelization" efforts. This chapter situates these materials as tools for the New Evangelization: they target an audience of former or disengaged Catholics not as a cautionary tale of religious decline, but rather as sources for the Church's potential growth in the twenty-first century. In so doing, organizations like Dynamic Catholic locate Catholic renewal—and specifically parish revitalization—in the spiritual development of laypeople in their homes and personal relationships.

Although materials like *Rediscover the Saints* shy away from explicit acknowledgement of challenges facing the American Catholic Church, such as clergy sexual abuse or lay polarization, recognition of the impact of religious decline pervade these companies' missions and materials. They legitimize their missions with only oblique references to the need for parish revitalization, orienting away from decline to imagine an optimistic Catholic future that is not consumed by recent and ongoing scandals of institutional power abuse. Instead, the layperson is lauded as the ideal source of Catholic renewal. The effort to revitalize Catholicism through its parishes nonetheless reflects an awareness of the widespread use of closure and relegation as policies of decline across the country. These products have established a repertoire of revitalization that envisions a responsive, dynamic Church for the twenty-first century. Falling under a broader umbrella of renewal repertoires, the repertoire of revitalization targets the lay parishioner as a source of parish revitalization by offering easily accessible materials with an emphasis on meeting this parishioner "at home." This chapter examines the role of the New Evangelization and Catholic gender complementarianism in this repertoire, which provides an alternative to diocesan policies of closure to tackle parish sustainability. To conclude, this

chapter compares revitalization with additional renewal repertoires conceiving the future of Catholicism.

"The Best Version of Yourself" ®: New Catholic Media

In February 2021, Father Charles Zlock spoke with me over the phone about his parish's experience with new leadership models. Since his arrival in 2012, St. Monica, a suburban parish in Berwyn, Chester County, has used models from Pat Lencioni, Catholic Leadership Institute, and John Martin's Amazing Parish model, which recommends a parish leadership team, rather than a more advisory parish council.[5] Zlock described St. Monica as an active parish, although he recognized the challenges facing the parishes of the Archdiocese. "At some point, we're going to have to do some kind of consolidation in Philadelphia," he explained, "We've got too many buildings, too much real estate, too many Masses, and not enough priests. Right. So, the consolidation is going to come. Let's make sure when the conversation comes up…[what] they say about St. Monica [is], 'We don't know what's going to happen, but St. Monica—that's a pretty vibrant parish.'" Zlock imagined the vibrancy as stemming from the initiatives that he and his leadership team, the head of liturgy, the facilities director, and a fulltime Director of Parish Mission Support regularly test out in the parish. These initiatives have focused on parish revitalization in the form of organizational and technological innovations, as well as parish programs for small groups. While Zlock admitted he suspects St. Monica will remain a small parish, his aim for the community is to be aware of and take advantage of cutting-edge Catholic resources for revitalization. As he emphasized, "That's what we need to try and build."[6]

[5] Canon law (c. 537 CIC 1987) mandates a consultative finance council for each parish. A parish council is not required.

[6] Charles Zlock, telephone interview with author, March 4, 2021.

Zlock's concern with St. Monica's vitality grew out of his experiences as a pastor elsewhere in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. A decade earlier, he was the pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption in Manayunk when the Archdiocese announced its merger with St. John the Baptist and St. Josaphat in 2012. There, he met Jillian, who converted to her husband's Catholicism when their children were young. "I think the parish at St. Mary of the Assumption was really cutting edge in terms of leadership models," Father Zlock told me, "but they saw the writing on the wall." The parish was too deeply in debt to survive the Archdiocese's restructuring initiatives of the 2010s. Although Jillian also remembered the German national parish for its investment in parish leadership programs, Zlock laughed when I mentioned the new resources St. Monica began using after his arrival.[7] "None of this stuff was around when I was in Manayunk," he clarified.[8]

There *were*, of course, Catholic presses and devotional materials before the 2010s. It is indeed necessary to recognize the familiar legacies and roots upon which companies such as Dynamic Catholic seek success, lest the "newness" of the new digital media be overblown. Although Protestant and especially evangelical print culture has received the lion's share of academic consideration in American religious history, Catholics have long engaged print and other technologies. Una M. Cadegan's *All Good Books Are Catholic Books: Print Culture, Censorship, and Modernity in Twentieth-Century America* illustrates the richness of the Catholic literary world of the twentieth century, emphasizing its steady engagement with technological innovation in print and other media. "Catholic literary and print culture grew, strengthened, diversified, and professionalized in the first half of the twentieth century," writes Cadegan, encompassing "Catholic publishing houses and bookstores, Catholic newspapers and periodicals,

[7] Fieldnotes, December 15, 2019.
[8] Zlock, March 2921.

catechisms and textbooks for children in Catholic schools, Catholic novels and etiquette books and calendars and encyclopedias and comic books."[9] Both Catholic publishers, like Liturgical Press (founded at Benedictine St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, in 1926), and secular publishers produced these materials to the growing Catholic population in the United States.[10]

As sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow has shown, "small groups" such as Bible studies or adult faith formation groups have been a compelling form of religious community and practice for decades.[11] Although the scholarship has again largely focused on Protestant small group and reading practices, Catholics have also long participated in small groups, retreats, and sacramental preparation programs (such as Pre-Cana marriage preparation or Pre-Jordan baptism preparation), even prior to the post-Vatican II emphasis on lay involvement. Indeed, as Kathleen M. Joyce has argued, "[i]t is quite possible, in fact, that the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II would not have taken root as firmly as it did in the United States if a tradition of lay leadership had not already been there."[12] Kristy Nabhan-Warren has, for example, examined Catholics' participation in the Cursillo retreat weekend in the United States since the mid twentieth century.[13] Deeper roots still can be found in the fraternal, devotional, and beneficial societies that many nineteenth and early twentieth century parishes developed to support the financial, social, political, and spiritual formation of their members.[14]

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[9] Una M. Cadegan, *All Good Books Are Catholic Books: Print Culture, Censorship, and Modernity in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4-5.

[10] Mark J. Twomey, *Seventy-Five Years of Grace: The Liturgical Press 1926-2001* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

[11] Robert Wuthnow, ed. *"I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994); Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

[12] Kathleen M. Joyce, "The Long Loneliness: Liberal Catholics and the Conservative Church," in *"I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion*, edited by Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 63.

[13] Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America: Catholics, Protestants, and Fourth-Day Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[14] See Chapter 1.

Despite this rich history, however, both St. John the Baptist's Jillian and Thomas McGurk, one of Father Zlock's parishioners and former leadership team members at St. Monica, found something missing. Both admitted to using materials and programs designed for Protestant Bible studies and faith formation groups into the early 2010s, due to a dearth of compelling and appropriate Catholic options beyond sacramental preparation. Jillian described the difficulty of finding materials in the early 2010s: "There was really very little good Catholic content out there. So, not a lot of good small group resources. Or not something a contemporary laywoman would want to have anything to do with. So, I ran a lot of Protestant stuff."[15] In another conversation, she clarified her dissatisfaction with Catholic materials at the time. Bible study materials were "not new and fresh; [they] felt dry." Many programs were "very old school Catholic [with] lots of rigid rules," which she felt were not suitable for people trying to "find their faith."[16] As an adult convert from Protestantism, she considered herself well prepared to translate between the theological underpinnings distinguishing Protestant faith formation materials from those of Catholics. "But it's exhausting," she continued, especially when programs often ran only six weeks at a time, "And then it was a lot of explaining. And I was just [spending] so much time looking for content."[17]

Then, Catholic-specific materials for small groups suddenly began to boom. As St. Monica's Thomas explained, a "tidal wave" of new materials suddenly became available in a multitude of formats, including Bible study programs, phone apps, YouTube Channels, and podcasts: "I mean, it just goes on, and on, and on, and on," he mused.[18] Some companies were first founded as presses for print books in the 1990s or early 2000s, before moving into the

[15] Jillian, interview with author, Philadelphia, January 29, 2020.
[16] Jillian, telephone interview with author, July 2, 2021.
[17] Jillian, January 2020.
[18] Thomas McGurk, Zoom interview with author, June 15, 2021.

expanding market for Catholic devotional materials in digital formats. Matthew Pinto's Ascension is one such company. Already the successful publisher of Jeff Cavins' *The Great Adventure ® Bible Study,* Ascension rebranded in 2015 to mark its foray into digital media with its Ascension Presents YouTube channel and later podcast channel. In January 2021, Ascension Presents' "The Bible in a Year Podcast," hosted by the fast-talking, blue-eyed star of many of its videos and podcasts, Father Mike Schmitz, topped the charts of Apple Podcasts.[19] Other well-known companies, like Lisa Brenninkmeyer's Walking with Purpose, discussed in greater detail below, focus on providing materials for Bible studies and small groups to a targeted audience. More companies still, like Amazing Parish, create programs and resources for parish leadership and strategic planning.[20]

As Father Zlock's comments at the beginning of this section demonstrate, this devotional and material culture is profoundly tied to concerns about Catholic parish change and decline. It asserts a mission of revitalizing the parish not through closures, consolidations, and the redistribution of resources, but rather by issuing a warm invitation back to the parish and church hall. Consider Matthew Kelly's Dynamic Catholic. In *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic: How Engaging 1% of Catholics Could Change the World*, Kelly (1973-), an Australian businessman and author, describes the impetus for founding Dynamic Catholic. According to Kelly, "[r]oughly 7 percent of Catholic parishioners are doing almost everything in their faith community and paying almost entirely for the maintenance and mission of the parish. This led me to the seminal question: What is the difference between engaged Catholics and disengaged

[19] Founded in 1998 as Ascension Press by Matthew Pinto, author of *Did Adam and Eve Have Belly Buttons?* in Chester County's Exton, PA.

[20] These include businessman Tim Flanagan's Catholic Leadership Institute, founded in 1991 in Malvern, a Chester County suburb of Philadelphia; and Los Angeles-based Parish Catalyst, co-founded in 2012 by a Californian investor and a theologian.

Catholics?"[21] What would it take, Kelly next asked, to increase the number of engaged Catholics—and what effect would this have of the vitality of Catholic parishes around the United States?

In the years since *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, the publications and products of Dynamic Catholic, written by Kelly and others, have attempted to diminish this gap between engaged and disengaged Catholics. Printed and digital materials encourage consumers to "Become the-Best-Version-of-Yourself," a trademarked shorthand for active and daily engagement in Catholic thought and prayer. Books such as Kelly's *I Heard God Laugh: A Practical Guide to Life's Essential Daily Habit* (2020) or Jane Trufant Harvey's *Ask Him: Simple Words to Jumpstart Your Conversation with God* (2020) offer tips to a more meaningful process of prayer. Daily Reflections, a daily email subscription sending "an inspiring quote," promises to "help you live each day with passion and purpose."[22] No longer the purview of children's Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes or sacramental preparation, Dynamic Catholic has made Catholic devotional and spiritual development quickly, regularly, and easily accessible in any desired format.

At the conclusion of St. John the Baptist's Adult Formation class that February 2020 evening, I approached Jillian to ask about the cost of Kelly's *Rediscover the Saints*. She waved off the question. At Christmas, she explained, the parish had ordered 1,200 copies to disperse as free gifts to parishioners. The book she had handed me was one of the leftovers. The parish had participated in Dynamic Catholic's Parish Book Program, a low-cost distribution program. At Christmas and Easter, Dynamic Catholic offered a featured book for parishes to buy cheaply and

[21] Matthew Kelly, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic: How Engaging 1% of Catholics Could Change the World* (North Palm Beach, FL: Beacon Publishing, 2012), 12.

[22] "Sign up for Daily Reflections," Dynamic Catholic, https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/daily-reflections.html, accessed June 15, 2021.

to distribute for free to their parishioners. In 2019, parishes could buy up to 500 copies of *Rediscover the Saints*, which was advertised as part of Dynamic Catholic's BEST LENT EVER© series, at $3 per book, and purchases of over 500 copies dropped the price to $2 per book; in 2021, Dynamic Catholic added $1 per book deals. "Easter presents a powerful opportunity to engage the Catholics in your community who have drifted away, and to help all of your parishioners rediscover the genius of Catholicism," expounds a promotional video on Dynamic Catholic's website, "Imagine for a moment if everyone in your parish read one great Catholic book in the coming year. How different would your parish be?"[23] If disengaged or potential Catholics were to attend only one Mass a year, it would likely be at Christmas or Easter. Present them with this free book, suggests Dynamic Catholic's advertising, and it might be the invitation they needed to reengage more deeply with the Church.

In addition to the Parish Book Program, Dynamic Catholic also sells free or low-cost materials for sacramental preparation, such as the *Decision Point* Confirmation program, which it claims is "the most used Confirmation program in America."[24] Other materials have included sacramental or life stage preparation, as well as reflections upon the liturgical calendar. In 2019, Dynamic Catholic began a pilot program of Dynamic Parish, offering 21 parishes free participation in a program providing weekly meetings between its parish team and a Dynamic Catholic consultant to strengthen parish engagement and leadership.[25] A 2020 effort launched Matthew Kelly's YouTube channel, on which short videos tackled bite-sized ideas from his

[23] "Easter Book Program 2021: Taking Your Parish on an Incredible Spiritual Journey," Dynamic Catholic, https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/parish-book-program.html, accessed March 24, 2021.

[24] "Decision Point," Dynamic Catholic, https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/confirmation/decision-point.html, accessed March 22, 2021.

[25] Heidi Schlumpf, "New Matthew Kelly program sees parishes as fertile market for consulting," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 17, 2020, https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/new-matthew-kelly-program-sees-parishes-fertile-market-consulting.

publications.[26] But Dynamic Catholic's model of free or low-cost materials and programs has distinguished its brand, with Kelly's books frequently under discussion in Adult Formation classes and copies floating around parish entry halls. Regular Catholic inspiration, reflection, and practice might not necessarily result in more active and more financially generous parishioners—but Dynamic Catholic has oriented countless clergy and parishioners towards this possibility.[27]

The range of programs, apps, podcasts, and YouTube videos increasingly available to Catholics provide a daily, intimate, tailored, and accessible option for Catholic engagement that transcends the sacred time and spaces of Mass or the sacraments. As St. Monica's Thomas noted, the proliferation of available materials and personalities has presented Catholics with the choice of devotional, theological, and personal styles. "A popular priest out there on the Internet is Father Mike Schmitz," Thomas explained to me, by way of an example, "I'm sure you're probably familiar with him. So, he doesn't do anything for me." He laughed. "But my daughter, who minored in religion like you did in your undergraduate, he's a big thing with her and my wife as well. And for me, yeah, I just don't get it. Bishop [Robert] Barron speaks to me." After a pause, he continued, "So not only is it a lot of content. It's a lot of diverse content. And so if you're looking for seekers, everybody has a different chord to kind of strike, right? They come into it with years of living and experience, and they hear things they need to hear. And

[26] Dynamic Catholic has had a YouTube channel since the mid 2010s, but its content is far more limited.

[27] A three-part series by Heidi Schlumpf of *National Catholic Reporter* in January 2020 found that Dynamic Catholic reported about $20 million of total annual revenue as of 2017, with "[t]he vast majority of the institute's money—nearly $14.5 million in 2017—[coming] from contributions and grants." The remainder of the company's revenue includes proceeds from their print publications and programs, as well as from the conferences and workshops they offer parishes and parish leadership teams. Schlumpf also reported that Dynamic Catholic engages in significant business dealings with the for-profit companies sharing the same founder. Heidi Schlumpf, "Matthew Kelly finds success, influence as Catholic author and speaker," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 15, 2020, https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/matthew-kelly-finds-success-influence-catholic-author-and-speaker; Heidi Schlumpf, "Matthew Kelly's companies do business with the nonprofit he founded," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 16, 2020, https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/matthew-kellys-companies-do-business-nonprofit-he-founded; Schlumpf, "New Matthew Kelly program."

everybody is hearing something different. And so this explosion of content, what's great about it [is] it's very diverse."[28]

The available content does indeed offer an array of personalities, content, and styles for different targeted audiences. Some companies focus first and foremost upon the organizational and pastoral structures of a parish, while those examined in this chapter often place the starting point of parish revitalization with the layperson. Across this expanding Catholic marketplace, companies like Dynamic Catholic nonetheless share and develop a repertoire of practical business strategies, discourses about identity and belonging, and emotional appeals. Through their outreach efforts, they promote a contemporary, future-oriented Catholicism that meets the personal needs of laypeople, emotionally and socially. This optimistic vision of reinvigorated parishioners flooding parish pews is an alternative to the cycles of closure and consolidation many dioceses, like Philadelphia, have undergone in recent decades.

Cafeteria, Beige, or Lapsed: The New Evangelization and its Audience

Dan Tarrant was teaching high school theology at St. Andrew parish in Newtown, Bucks County, when he felt a calling from God. "These kids are having these powerful experiences of Jesus Christ, welcoming him personally into their lives," Dan said of his students in an interview, "….and then we drop them off in an adult church….I don't want to say it's dead, but—you're basically teaching kids institutionally that taking Jesus personally is a kid thing and grown-up Catholics don't do that." He elaborated, "It was just show up and shut up at church, and I don't think that was intentional. I think it's just the way things have gone….And I realized, I really have to do this [work] for adults."[29] Dan, a lifelong Catholic, founded ReEngaged Ministries, a

[28] McGurk, June 2021.
[29] Dan Tarrant, Zoom interview with author, June 16, 2021.

Newtown-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit, in 2015. Although other companies like Dynamic Catholic or Ascension are giants in the marketplace, ReEngaged Ministries, along with a print and media branch called Personally Catholic, has worked from St. Andrew, one of the largest parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, to release videos on Catholic TV, a Bible app, and Dan's own print publications.[30] Dan, in his mid-forties, describes the mission of ReEngaged Ministries as offering an *on-ramp* to the robust devotional culture emerging from Catholic presses. Programs and products from organizations like Dynamic Catholic "are designed for somebody who's already begun to say yes," he clarified, describing a Catholic seeker already eager for a more engaged spiritual and parish life. He described his work in comparison: "And I think I'm probably most designed for the person who is not saying yes at all."[31]

If ReEngaged Ministries and similar companies can attract disengaged or former Catholics, their consumer base would be significant. Well-known polls have indicated not only the decrease in the number of adult Americans identifying as Catholic, but also the relatively high attrition rates for the Church compared with Protestant Christian denominations. As Pew Research Center reported in its 2014 Religious Landscape Study, "nearly 13% of all Americans are former Catholics." The report concluded that "Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses due to religious switching," with "more than six former Catholics for every convert to Catholicism."[32] These numbers are attributable to broad changes in the American religious landscape, including higher rates of religious disaffiliation among younger generations, as well

[30] From 2015 to 2020, ReEngaged Ministries filed a Form 990-N with the IRS, indicating an income less than $50,000 annually—a much smaller organization and income compared to Dynamic Catholic Institute's $20 million in 2017.

[31] Tarrant, June 2021.

[32] Pew Research Center, *America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow* (Washington, D.C., May 2015), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/#:~:text=Nearly%20one%2Din%2Dfive%20U.S.,now%20identify%20with%20some%20religion.

as to the impact of the ongoing revelations of clerical sexual abuse and the political and ideological polarization of the American Church on such issues as abortion, birth control, and sexuality. As we saw in Part One, these shifting demographics in the Church have reshaped the institutional presence of American Catholicism, perhaps most notably in the closures of parishes and parochial and diocesan schools. For Dan and others in the growing Catholic media marketplace, convincing these former or so-called "lapsed" Catholics to return to the Church could create a seismic opportunity to not only reinvigorate American Catholicism, but also to reshape it for the twenty-first century.

In identifying this audience, the repertoire of revitalization participates what is called "the New Evangelization" of the Church, a term coined by Pope John Paul II. Although he used the term as early as 1979, John Paul II developed the concept in his 1990 encyclical on missionary activity, *Redemptoris Missio*, in which he encouraged a renewed commitment to missionizing "new frontiers" of non-Christians *and* "in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed." He recognized both a decline in external missionary activity and the increase in "[t]he number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church" since the end of the Second Vatican Council.[33] The New Evangelization targeted the evangelization of people in perhaps nontraditional missionary fields: for Americans, their own neighbors or members of their parish.

If John Paul II described of the Cold War, the developments in communication technology, and "a kind of soulless economic and technical development" as the grounds of a "new" evangelization opportunity, his successor, Benedict XVI pointed to social, scientific,

[33] Pope John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate," December 7, 1990, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

technological, and economic developments as causing "a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred" for many.[34] On June 28, 2010, Benedict announced the establishment of a Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. His 2010 Apostolic Letter, *Ubicumque et Semper*, emphasized the New Evangelization as a response to "an abandonment of the faith—a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by the Gospel," but in which atheism and secularization increasingly drew people from the Church.[35] With documents such as his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis has also advocated the New Evangelization. His approach encourages Catholics to "appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet."[36] This framing for Francis reflects his pastoral emphasis and interest in Catholic hierarchical reform. Despite their different styles and concerns, these successive popes have encouraged the New Evangelization as a response to—and even policy of—decline.

This study has focused on the role of closure as a key policy of decline in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, but the New Evangelization has also played a role. After arriving in Philadelphia in 2012, Meghan Cokeley became Director of the Archdiocese's Office for the New Evangelization, which works to assist parishes "in their work of evangelization." Among the targeted audience for this evangelization are "inactive Catholics," as well as potential new

[34] Ibid.

[35] Pope Benedict XVI, "Apostolic Letter in the Form of *Motu Proprio*: *Ubicumque et Semper* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI Establishing the New Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization," September 21, 2010, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html.

[36] Pope Francis, "Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World," November 24, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#III.%E2%80%82The_new_evangelization_for_the_transmission_of_the_faith.

converts. The Office has trained willing "disciples" to participate in programs like the Legion of Mary Door-to-Door Visiting and Rosary for Evangelization, and has supplied evangelization pamphlets, audio CDs, and "Been Away for Awhile?" postcards to assist in this effort. As a policy of decline, the work of this Office is both an alternative and a complement to parish closures. [37]

The repertoire of revitalization often encourages laypeople to lead the New Evangelization efforts in their home parishes. Dynamic Catholic's vision statement, for example, reads, "To be the innovative leader in the New Evangelization helping Catholics and their parishes become the-best-version-of-themselves." Although the New Evangelization advocates missionary activity to both non-Christian and Christian audiences, companies like Dynamic Catholic and ReEngaged Ministries focus specifically on the *re*-evangelization of those Catholics described as disengaged or inactive. To promote the mission of re-evangelization, Pope Benedict's 2010 letter also mandated the new Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization "to study and to encourage the use of modern forms of communication as instruments for the new evangelization."[38] The proliferation of these media nonprofits has been a dynamic response to the call for a New Evangelization, as well as the encouragement to engage in new forms and formats for its dissemination. These components make up the core strategies of the revitalization repertoire: the practical business strategies of low-cost book deals, easily accessible apps, and floods of podcast and YouTube videos; the explanatory narratives of the challenges facing American Catholics; and the affective appeals to "come home" to the Church.

The same audience—former Catholics, or Catholics who may attend only the occasional Mass—has been the subject of consternation in American Catholic media. By the mid 1980s,

[37] Office for the New Evangelization, https://www.phillyevang.org/, accessed April 7, 2022.
[38] Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio*.

"Cafeteria Catholic" was a common if cynical term to refer to Catholics who "feel they can '*pick and choose'* among the various doctrines and laws of the Church."[39] For many conservative Catholics, the practice of choosing to disregard some Church teachings (often those regarding issues of sexual practice, such as birth control usage) was threatening. As one Catholic priest declared in 1993, "We must accept not just **most** of what the Church teaches as divinely revealed, but **all** of it."[40] Perhaps the highest profile condemnation came from Pope John Paul II in his address to the bishops of the United States upon his visit to Los Angeles in 1987. "It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium is totally compatible with being a 'good Catholic' and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments," warned the Pope, "This is a grave error that challenges the teaching office of the bishops of the United States and elsewhere."[41]

More recently, Bishop Robert Barron has popularized the denunciation of "beige Catholicism," or a liberal Catholicism that is "culturally accommodating, hand-wringing, unsure of itself."[42] From 2015, Bishop Barron (1959-) has served as an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He also became a popular Catholic media figure, known as an author, a frequent speaker on major news networks, and the founder of Word On Fire, another popular Catholic media nonprofit based in Illinois. "Beige Catholicism," a phrase he coined, refers to a "really problematic instantiation of the Church" after the Second Vatican Council, which "emphasizes what [Roman Catholicism] has in common with all the great kind of

[39] Paul A. Duffner, O.P., "Cafeteria Catholics," *The Rosary Light & Life: Theology for the Laity*, 46.4 (Jul-Aug 1993).

[40] Ibid. Bolded text in original.

[41] John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II," Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Canada: Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America, Minor Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles, September 16, 1987, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870916_vescovi-stati-uniti.html.

[42] Bishop Robert Barron, "The Evangelical Path of Word on Fire," March 2, 2021https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/the-evangelical-path-of-word-on-fire/30079/.

religions and spiritualities." Although a sense of universality is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, Barron has contended, "when it becomes the point of departure or the point of orientation….it will produce this kind of bland or watered-down Catholicism."[43] For Catholic writers like Bishop Barron, the postconciliar reception of the Second Vatican Council caused an abandonment of Catholic distinctiveness which, in turn, has failed to engage Catholics meaningfully.

Barron's interpretation, if not his lamentation, finds some common ground with academic studies of American Catholicism. Michele Dillon, in *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal*, has noted that the postconciliar Church contributed to the production of an American Catholic culture defined by "interpretive diversity." Contemporary American Catholics' "attachment to the Church is largely preserved by Catholics' exercise of their own authority in interpreting its obligations and doctrines," an interpretive autonomy that Vatican II legitimated.[44] Perceptions of one's own interpretive autonomy have empowered American Catholics to disagree with the teachings of their parish priest, diocesan leaders, or even the Vatican while still maintaining their identification with the faith. While the field of American Catholic studies has robustly shown that the Church has always contained a diversity of practices and forms of community, scholars like Dillon have argued that the proliferation of diverse interpretive authorities has defined the twenty-first century so far.[45] As Tricia Colleen Bruce has shown in her study of the Voice of the Faithful, claimants to different interpretive authorities may challenge the very authenticity of their opponents' Catholic faith and identity. For critics of the

[43] "Episode 034: Don't Be a 'Beige' Catholic," *Word on Fire Show*, August 2, 2016, https://www.wordonfire.org/videos/wordonfire-show/episode34/.

[44] Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14.

[45] Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Katherine Dugan, *Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is Trying to Make Catholicism Cool* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Voice of the Faithful, a lay movement organized in response to the sexual abuse crisis, "[t]he argument," writes Bruce, "stretched beyond 'we don't like your ideas,' to 'you are not one of us.'"[46]

If conservative Catholic critics have condemned dissent or disagreement over some teachings as a threat to the Church, the growing population of "lapsed," former, or simply unengaged Catholics in the twenty-first century has constituted a more difficult category for some to address. For many Catholic leaders and theologians, the apathy of some former Catholics can present a severe challenge for the New Evangelization. As Bishop Barron has written, "I am just as concerned about these armies of young people who are simply walking away from the Church as I am about those who, crying tears of rage [about the clergy sexual abuse crises], hang on." While shared "affection" allows him to reach some members of the latter group, "in regard to the former, it is much more difficult to get any traction."[47]

Dan of Newtown's ReEngaged Ministries, however, is more optimistic. "My favorite audience is the audience that's just hostile to God," he claimed cheerfully. He framed "cultural Catholicism" as having unintentionally inculcated a static Catholicism that failed to satisfy the spiritual and emotional needs of laypeople. While some have left the Church as a result, he contended that the issue was not the Church's incompatibility with modern needs, but rather a lack of compelling options for personal and social reflection, engagement, and commitment. As Thomas, the parish leader at St. Monica, similarly surmised, "I think [lay]people are realizing if you just go to Sunday [Mass], it just ain't going to do it for you." For many Catholics, Thomas opined, it is no longer enough to "just show up an hour a week and throw your envelope in the

[46] Tricia Colleen Bruce, *Faithful Revolution: How Voice of the Faithful Is Changing the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 96.

[47] Robert Barron, *Letter to a Suffering Church: A Bishop Speaks on the Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2019), 15.

box and off you go. That's not really what our faith is about." Even sacramental preparation programs or Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) have failed to provide the necessary spiritual and social support. Thomas told me about a men's group meeting he had led earlier the day of our conversation. In a discussion of Kelly's *I Heard God Laugh*, the men had discussed the subject of prayer. "The men in this group now," Thomas divulged, "half of them say, 'No one's taught me how to pray.'" While he noted that they could, of course, *recite* prayers, they had yet to develop a personal practice of praying that felt meaningful to them. The trust and regular social and theological formation of their small group, however, offered the opportunity for them to imagine a more robust life of prayer.[48]

As produced in the materials of ReEngaged Ministries or Dynamic Catholic, the repertoire of revitalization borrows from the New Evangelization to reimagine the apathetic, the confused, or the troubled as a potential source of Catholic renewal. The easily accessible materials are an invitation to these consumers to return to the parish. Rather than lamenting Catholic demographic change, the repertoire of revitalization empowers laypeople to be boldly hopeful about occasioning further change; rather than denigrated, these consumers are an abundant source of optimism and opportunity. This repertoire, consequently, belies the clear-cut distinction between "not Catholic" or "Catholic" in much polling data about the decline of Catholicism. Instead, revitalization presents disengaged Catholicism as a complicated gray area worthy of attention and available for rehabilitation. It is "good news," writes Matthew Kelly, that so few Catholics are currently dynamically engaged. "If just 7 percent of Catholics are accomplishing more than 80 percent of what we are doing today, imagine what 14 percent could

[48] McGurk, June 2021.

do. Not to mention what 21 percent or 35 percent could accomplish. Our potential is incredible. The Catholic Church is a sleeping giant. We literally have the power to change the world."[49]

This rhetorical use of the New Evangelization is thus a critical reworking of the narrative of Catholic decline in the United States. With the exception of materials explicitly devoted to such subjects, the revitalization companies have rarely referred to the challenges that scholars and Catholics alike see as the underlying factors in declining Catholic affiliation, such as the clergy sexual abuse crises.[50] The language of spiritual rehabilitation and parish revitalization nonetheless reveals that decline operates an orienting framework. But by focusing on potential areas of growth and development, these organizations construct of a repertoire that is optimistic and future-oriented.

Warriors of the Home and Heart: Gender Complementarianism in Catholic Renewal

In the introduction of *Walking with Purpose: Seven Priorities that Make Life Work,* Lisa Brenninkmeyer describes how she spent a week dutifully applying antibiotic ointment to her puppy's infected ears, only to realize the source of the pup's persistent discomfort: she had used superglue instead. "If you picked up this book hoping to learn how to walk with purpose from someone who has completely figured out life," continues Brenninkmeyer tongue in cheek introduction, "I might disappoint you a little."[51] But, humbly, she outlines seven "priorities" to help readers orient towards spiritual purpose and personal balance. By attending to these priorities (e.g., Priority Two: "Tending to Your Heart" and Priority Five: "Clarity in the Clutter

[49] Kelly, *Four Signs*, 14.

[50] Bishop Barron's *Letter for a Suffering Church* is an example of materials directly addressing the sexual abuse crisis.

[51] Lisa Brenninkmeyer, *Walking with Purpose: Seven Priorities that Make Life Work* (North Palm Beach, FL: Wellspring, 2013), 7

of Your Home"), this mother of seven promises her readers might learn "to be women who walk purposefully and experience all that God has for us in this life."[52]

Brenninkmeyer's particular focus on Catholic women, wives, and mothers has made her work a massive success. In 2008, she founded Walking with Purpose (WWP), a 501(c)3 nonprofit based in Maryland. Among the major players of Catholic revitalization materials, WWP is known for its 22-week Bible studies designed specifically for women and girls. In an infographic reviewing the 2020 fiscal year, WWP counted 367 Parish Programs across 94 dioceses, 40 states, and 3 counties, with over 22,000 participants.[53] In the spring of 2021, 33 official programs took place within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, including Father Zlock's St. Monica parish in Berwyn.[54] St. John the Baptist's Jillian, who spent over four years as a board member of WWP, estimated that only 60 percent of the organization's materials were shipped to "official" locations. Individuals or small groups meeting in homes or parishes have also purchased WWP materials and run the program without the official oversight of the organization.[55]

Brinninkmeyer's introductory anecdote in *Walking with Purpose* does more than establish her as an approachably frazzled mother, wife, and Catholic with whom her readers can enjoy embarking on a journey of self-reflection and renewal. It encourages readers to take up both the book and the organization of WWP in a particular way: as curious but somewhat casual seekers who foreground their religious and spiritual reflection in their womanhood, femininity, and home lives. Rigorous spiritual development need not require a weekend retreat or the

[52] Ibid, 12.
[53] "Our Impact," Walking with Purpose, https://walkingwithpurpose.com/our-impact/ accessed March 22, 2021
[54] Compiled by author March 2021 from "Find a Parish Program" search tool on Walking with Purpose's website.
[55] Jillian, July 2021.

sacramental preparation of certain life stages; it can take place within a compassionate and trusted circle of other women, or during and between daily household chores. According to Jillian, WWP seeks to "appeal to women who don't feel put together." The "relaxed" and welcoming style of the program, from the visual design (on which Jillian worked as a member of the board) to its texts, encourages women to ease into and validate this personal time.[56]

Walking with Purpose, like Kelly's Dynamic Catholic publications, centers questions of relationships and emotionally healthy spirituality. The text intersperses chatty, personal anecdotes from the author's life with quotes from the Bible, Catholic and non-Catholic Christian authors, and well-known historical figures. The devotional and theological reflections are brief and easily digestible, such as Brenninkmeyer's consideration of Pauline gender discourse: "When we pray, we should always ask God to help us to be attentive to the times in our day when he's calling us to set our own needs and desires aside in order to bless our husbands."[57] The pastel, floral, and hand-drawn designs of WWP's Bible study materials suggest a playful, youthful femininity. Programs for adult women encourage the audience to reflect upon their relationships with God and their husbands, children, homes, and friends. To ground a renewed Catholicism in these relationships assumes, of course, the existence of husbands, children, and a home to keep "organized and running smoothly."[58]

This emphasis on meeting readers "where they already are" is not unique to WWP, or even to Catholic revitalization materials more broadly. In *What Would Jesus Read?: Popular Religious Books and Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century America*, Erin Smith examines texts popular with Bible study groups across Protestant denominations, such as Dan Brown's *The Da*

[56] Ibid., 2021.
[57] Brenninkmeyer, *Walking,* 98.
[58] Ibid*,* 132.

Vinci Code (2003) or Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). Smith argues that the authors "used popular allegory and contemporary, colloquial language to ensure that these texts were useful to modern readers and that they engaged readers' daily lives in immediate, material ways."[59] Readers could, Smith illustrates, engage with these texts in ways that felt grounded in their everyday experiences. This therapeutic usefulness, moreover, often "transcend[ed]" denominational, institutional, or ideological differences.[60] In encouraging this type of reading experience, the texts entered into a broad nexus of American discourses concerned with the seeking self both within and without religious institutions. As Lee Eric Schmidt has written in *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality,* from the Christian Booksellers Association to yoga, "a therapeutic culture of self-realization and a consumer culture of self-gratification are at least as much 'evangelical' as they are 'liberal'" in the United States.[61]

The expanding marketplace of Catholic revitalization materials likewise targets a similar American seeker-consumer culture that so frequently transcends theological publishing boundaries. Brenninkmeyer presents WWP as meeting audiences in their homes, with their families, and in the roles they already fill on a daily basis. WWP's products do nonetheless differ in important ways from the texts in Smith's study. The materials examined in this chapter firmly adhere to Catholic doctrine and institutional authority, rather than a broadly Christian-influenced spirituality. As Brenninkmeyer explains in a promotional video, while WWP in no way can replace Mass or the sacraments,

> I could just see in the faces of so many women coming out of Mass that there was some kind of disconnect. That there was something more that they felt they hadn't gotten that morning. And I think a big piece of that something missing was what would connect Sunday morning with the rest of the week for them, in the sense of

[59] Erin A. Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?: Popular Religious Books and Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3.
[60] Ibid., 13.
[61] Lee Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2005), 21.

> application—like how does this have anything to do with my day-to-day life? But also people: connection to people that's meaningful so that we're not just going in and out of Mass with nobody knowing us or caring whether or not we come next week.[62]

As this statement demonstrates, the goal is to use small groups and personal reflection as a supplement to Catholic practices seen as "traditional." If Mass can at times be impersonal, WWP—like the other revitalizing products in this chapter—reconnects women's heart to the deeper meaning of Catholic faith.

St. John the Baptist's Jillian was first introduced to WWP in the early 2010s. "So, my friend invites me," she recalled, "and the last thing I needed was another small group." It was a September launch event for WWP in Philadelphia. With her typical dry humor, Jillian admitted she "showed up….basically to get their materials. I want to find out what they're using for materials because whatever they got, I want. And I walk in, and 50 women had showed up at this church on a Thursday morning." From there, Jillian was, to her chagrin, roped into leading a discussion section the following week. But she was also repeatedly impressed by WWP's ability to keep the women's attention. "And that's how it started," she said, "And it was an incredibly beautiful year, and what was really amazing [is that the Bible] studies are 22 weeks long. At the end of 22 weeks, we still had 47 people [participating.]" When I confessed the retention rate surprised me, she replied, "It should be! It should be shocking." Most programs struggle to retain as high a percentage of participants.[63]

Part of what Jillian finds successful in WWP is its emphasis on creating a space, both physically and spiritually, designed to welcome women. At WWP events, "there are tablecloths on the tables. And there is always coffee. And every four weeks there is coffee and more

[62] "What is Walking with Purpose?" Walking with Purpose, https://walkingwithpurpose.com/our-ministry/, accessed June 6, 2021.
[63] Jillian, January 2020.

extensive food." As she explained, "the thought process—and this is how I see it—[is that] this might be the only time in a woman's…week where somebody is serving them, or where somebody else has set the table for them, whatever it is. So they're coming to an engaging, pretty atmosphere which makes them feel welcome." She continued,

> I would talk about what subconsciously happens to somebody who walks into a room and it's all set up. It makes people feel like, 'They want me here.' Whereas if you walk into a room that's just half put together, a bunch of folding chairs and people are still trying to get it together, then people feel like they're the burden….[With WWP], [yo]u feel like you're walking into a big accepting hug. Lisa, the founder, her whole thing is that masks are dropped at the door.

WWP encourages participants to view their Bible study and spiritual formation as a celebration of women by women, as well as an extenuation of personal or self-care time. The care taken with the physical surroundings, as Jillian contended, reflects and promotes women's care with each other and themselves.[64]

Although WWP was initially created to cater to young mothers, Jillian admitted the primary participants have been women in their 50s or older in Philadelphia. She considered the time commitment an important factor, although she has also led a group of women in the 20s and 30s in a young adult program of WWP. Throughout Philadelphia, the courses have typically taken place during the fall and spring to mimic the schoolyear—and to allow for summer travel and vacations—but some parishes have held daytime, weekday meetings of WWP, while others offered evenings. The scheduling both reflects and defines the group's shared experiences with family and career, much as WWP's materials already assume and shape a model of Catholic womanhood around heterosexual, reproductive marriage. A daytime session, while more

[64] Ibid., 2020.

accessible to women with flexible work schedules or retired women, precludes many others with variable or full-day employment or childcare.[65]

WWP's success has inspired similar small group efforts to focus on Catholic men. Steve Bollman, founder of Texas-based Paradisius Dei in 2001, launched That Man Is You! (TMIY) as one such program. Thomas of St. Monica began leading TMIY as a joint effort between St. Monica and nearby St. Norbert in the mid-2010s. He described TMIY as "a different kind of model" from Walking with Purpose. "We don't work as hard as women do," he laughed, "I mean, they [the women] do all this homework."[66] Instead, TMIY relies upon a three-part structure: a meal, a DVD or video presentation, and a small group discussion, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Although TMIY offers a two "semester" model consisting of 26 weeks, Thomas' group has met year-round at 6:30 am each week, substituting materials like Kelly's *I Heard God Laugh* during summer months.[67]

In comparison with WWP's heart-centered and floral femininity, TMIY employs active, hard-hitting verbs and adjectives to define its brand. The 2021 syllabus "equips and enables men to engage in the cosmic, spiritual battle raging in our day. Authentic masculine identities will emerge to inspire heroic lives of service to a calling greater than ourselves." The weekly topic discussions for the year include five weeks of "Battles" between Week 8 and Week 12, including "The Battle for Your Own Soul," "The Battle for Your Marriage," "The Battle Against Lukewarm Christianity," "The Battle Against the Flesh, The World and the Devil," and "The Battle Against the Dictatorship of Noise." Other weeks focus on Biblical men (Week 16:

[65] Ibid. Brinninkmeyer may have less in common with many of her readers than the puppy anecdote initially suggests: converting as an adult to Catholicism, she married Leo Brinninkmeyer, a member of the highly successful Danish-German Brenninkmeijer-Brinninkmeyer family, which owns the massive international clothing chain, C&A, among other companies.

[66] McGurk, June 2021.

[67] Ibid., 2021.

"Beloved Sons of the Faither"), men's roles (Week 17: "Paternal Expectations"), or masculine actions (Week 6: "Take Hold of Eternal Life"). While still others depart from explicitly masculine or male-oriented titles toward the more explicitly theological, the language nonetheless tends to connote action or power (Week 26: "Imperishable Crown of Glory" or Week 21: "The Wounding of the Heart").[68]

Some of WWP's language also mirrors this war-like rhetoric. *Fearless and Free*, for example, is a six-lesson Bible study for Lent advertised as "the most personal and transformative study that Walking with Purpose has offered so far."[69] It teaches readers to recognize the "need to WRESTLE with the battle in our minds—bringing our thoughts in captivity to Christ" and "need to be strengthened as WARRIORS so that we can move forward in life—not just surviving, but flourishing." This language draws from the imagery of the Book of Ephesians, in which Paul entreats the church of Ephesus to "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). At the same time, *Fearless and Free* is a pale pink book, with a darker pink cursive font and an image of a bird flying from an open birdcage.[70]

When I asked Thomas to reflect upon the success of these gendered programs, he began by discussing WWP rather than TMIY. "There's been so much change in the role of women in the last 50 years," he began, "There needs to be a forum to have that kind of conversation that they all have only experienced. And I think that drives WWP." On "the flip side," he continued, the changes in women's social, familial, and political roles since the mid twentieth century "can't

[68] "The Fight of Faith" brochure and syllabus, That Man Is You!, Paradisus Dei, 2021. Copy provided to author by Thomas McGurk.

[69] "Fearless and Free 6-Lesson Bible Study," Walking with Purpose, https://shop.walkingwithpurpose.com/collections/study-guides/products/fearless-and-free-6-lesson-bible-study, accessed June 6, 2021.

[70] *Fearless and Free*, Walking with Purpose, 2018, https://shop.walkingwithpurpose.com/collections/study-guides/products/fearless-and-free-6-lesson-bible-study, accessed June 6, 2021.

happen independent really of men. They're influenced by that as well." Although changing gender roles in society affect both men and women, he suggested that the uniquely gendered experiences of these changes necessitated single-sex spaces for reflection, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Thomas described the programs' success as a recipe of comfort, trust, and shared experience. The single-sex program reflects "just kind of a natural thing in life. We all have different roles. When we talk about things that are deep and important to [participants], there's an element of trust that has to be established." As single-sex programs, WWP and TMIY centered the growth of this trust as central to the revitalization project at both the individual and parish level.[71]

This logic draws heavily upon Catholic theologies of gender complementarianism. At its core, gender complementarianism essentializes "ontological, psychological, and spiritual sex differences" between men and women, while nonetheless maintaining their equality.[72] Anatomical difference corresponds with innate and essential differences between men and women, defining their complementary "gifts and inclinations."[73] In 1988, Pope John Paul II expounded upon the Book of Genesis to explicate this "unity of the two" of humanity. He wrote, "In the 'unity of the two,' man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist 'side by side' or 'together,' but they are also called *to exist mutually 'one for the other*.'"[74] "Man and woman" complement one another in theology, society, and, critically, in their distinct masculine and feminine roles in a heterosexual marriage oriented towards reproduction, and thus

[71] McGurk, June 2021.

[72] Mary Anne Case, "The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican's Anathematization of Gender," *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 161.

[73] Katie M. Grimes, "Theology of Whose Body?: Sexual Complementarity, Intersex Conditions, and La Virgen de Guadalupe," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32. no. 1 (Spring 2016): 77.

[74] Pope John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year," https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.

fatherhood and motherhood, respectively. As Mary Anne Case, a legal scholar, has illustrated, although contemporary gender complementarianism has the veneer of age-old Catholic theology, it is in fact a much more recent development. Catholic thought on gender and sexuality prior to the twentieth century tended either to eschew essential sexual difference with an eye toward spiritual equality *or* to emphasize women's subordination to men based on essential difference. However, in opposition to movements for contraception, feminism, LGBTQ rights, and women's ordination in the mid to late twentieth centuries, Case argues that popes Paul VI (1963-1978), John Paul II (1978-2005), and Benedict XVI (2005-2013) began to promulgate gender complementarianism as a means of clarifying Church positions on these issues.[75]

WWP and TMIY materials shy away from engaging these thorny political, social, and theological issues in explicit ways. Gender complementarianism is nevertheless central to the programs' revitalization repertoire, particularly in the emphasis on the unique needs of men and women in marriage and parenthood. In WWP, TMIY, or other Catholic programs, this theology serves to distinguish the revitalization materials as clearly participating in a certain type of Catholic discourse. WWP and TMIY may share the self-help language of a wider American spiritual culture, but the emphasis on Catholic Mass, sacraments, and gender complementarianism cements the revitalization repertoire as drawing upon a religious framework sounder than a nebulous Christian-inspired spirituality. Instead, the programs prompt laypeople to conceptualize and work toward the revitalization of their faith in relation to their lives *as* wives and mothers or husbands and fathers in the Catholic Church. As Dan of ReEngaged Ministries has argued, the future of Catholicism among younger generations relies upon their

[75] Case, "The Role of the Popes."

parents' active and personal engagement with the Church and their faith. The intimate spaces and relationships of home and family are a starting point for Catholic revitalization.

The New Ethnic Parish and Restorationism: Comparing Repertoires of Renewal

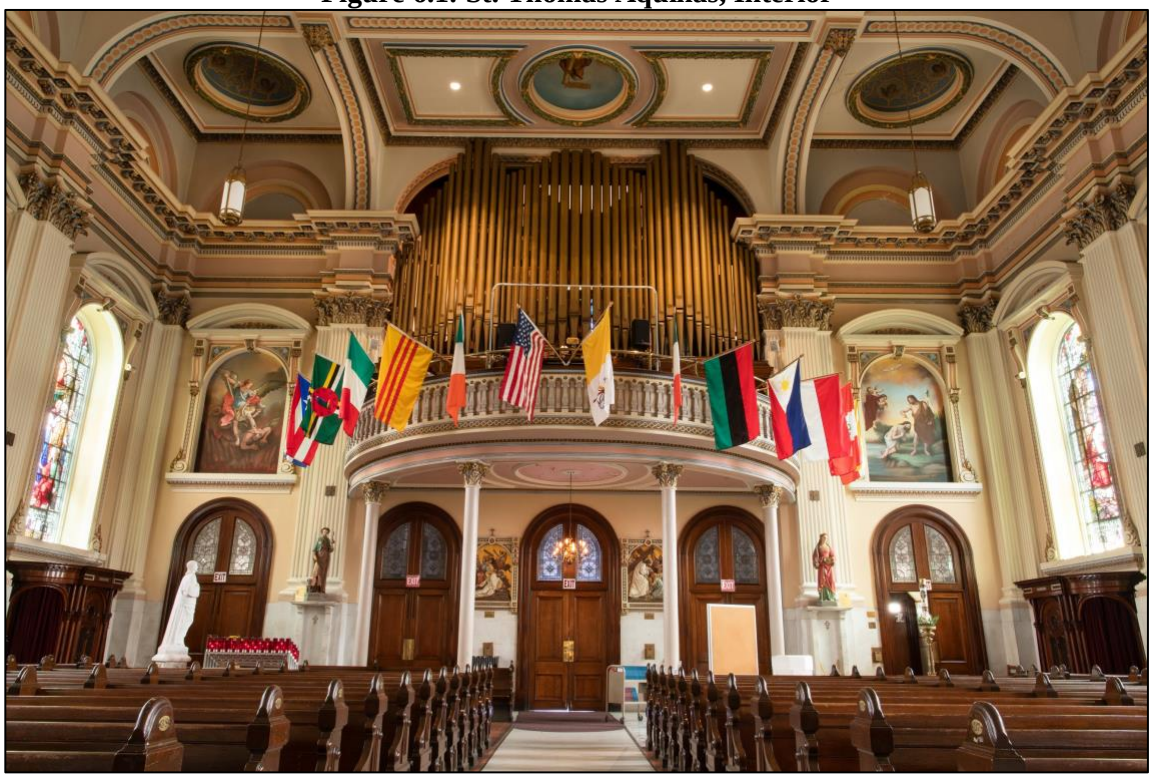
The organizations and programs heretofore discussed in this chapter participated in the repertoire of revitalization. Among the repertoire's shared strategies are the frequent creation of physically and stylistically accessible materials, the emphasis on meeting the layperson "at home," pursuit of the New Evangelization through small groups and personal self-reflection, and the prominence of gender complementarianism, all toward the goal of a revitalized parish. But the repertoire of revitalization is only one of several orientations towards reinvigorating the Catholic Church for the twenty-first century. Before concluding, this chapter will consider two additional renewal repertoires at work both in Philadelphia and the American Church more broadly. These are the repertoires of the new ethnic parish and of restorationism.

St. Thomas Aquinas was established in 1885 in South Philadelphia as a parish predominantly serving Irish and Italian Catholics. By 2021, the parish offered Mass and Confession in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Indonesian (Figure 6.1). Among the English-speaking community was a robust Black community, which led a gospel Mass one Sunday a month, as well as many second-generation Filipinos. According to Dr. Bethany J. Welch, a local community leader, the English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Indonesian-speaking communities at St. Thomas Aquinas parish each "have their own parallel structures, leadership councils, youth groups, marriage prep groups, Bible study groups, Marian societies. So, it's really like four parishes running side by side."[76] Within each community, Welch told me, "you have different

[76] Bethany J. Welch, interview with author, Philadelphia, February 11, 2020.

socio-political realities. So, you would have folks who are undocumented. You would have folks who came as refugees and are now citizens. You would have asylum seekers. You would have folks who maybe are coming out of incarceration and so they lack some operational citizenship in the sense of voting or other privileges." Welch credits Father Arthur Taraborelli for establishing "the mission of welcoming the immigrant and the stranger" during his years as priest of St. Thomas Aquinas from 1988 to his death in 2006.[77]

Figure 6.1: St. Thomas Aquinas, Interior



Source: Photograph courtesy of Sarah Lerner.

St. Thomas Aquinas is an example of the new ethnic parish for the twenty-first century. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has moved away from the establishment of ethnic parishes in the last century, with the exception of Chester County's St. Rocco, established in 2010 by Cardinal Rigali as the Archdiocese's first Hispanic parish—and as the first official ethnic parish

[77] According to Bishopaccountability.org, Father Taraborelli was accused of sexually abusing a minor in the 1970s. The claim settled in 2019 in the low six figures.

established in the Archdiocese since the 1924 founding of St. Andrew in Fairmount, Philadelphia, for the Lithuanian community. Instead, the Archdiocese, like other dioceses across the country, has encouraged different ethnic, racial, and linguistic communities to *share* parishes, offering Masses in multiple languages and tailoring other services to communities' needs. These models are often referred to as bi- or multicultural parishes, with most offering English and Spanish services. In 2016, Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that approximately 36 percent of American parishes were bicultural, a percentage that has, undoubtedly, grown in the intervening years.[78]

As St. Thomas Aquinas in Philadelphia demonstrates, this new model of a shared parish has resonances with the ethnic parish of the previous century. In addition to the spiritual and theological care of the parishioner, this model also often emphasizes providing for their social, political, and economic needs, particularly of new immigrants. According to Welch, the future of the Catholic Church requires a flexibility and "prophetic imagination" to consider new uses for old spaces, new forms of community, and new avenues for parish development and support. She was the founding director of the Aquinas Center, which repurposed the convent at St. Thomas Aquinas to a community center. Since its inception in 2012, the Aquinas Center has preached and practiced a socially just Catholicism through its language classes, Bible studies, parish societies, and sacramental preparation. The Center's projects have targeted food justice, building a local greenhouse and providing educational programs on food deserts and Philadelphia's soda tax. After the 2016 presidential election, the Center began tackling emerging concerns for parishioners, including advocacy and support around deportation. "[W]hat was becoming this

[78] Mark Gray, "Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, October 2016, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/upload/Cultural-Diversity-Summary-Report-October-2016.pdf.

really wonderful education and empowerment space…[changed] to just crisis mode," explained Welch.[79]

The parishes and centers that engage this perspective on Catholic parish life have developed the repertoire of the new ethnic parish. Like WWP or Dan Tarrant's ReEngaged Ministries, Welch argues that Catholic sustainability requires substantial engagement with the concerns that attract people to the Church—as well as those that drive them away. Yet, unlike the repertoire of revitalization, Welch names access, support, and representation at the social and institutional level as important concerns *alongside* those of the personal and familial needs of the individual. Addressing systematic practices and histories of marginalization in the Church—and in society more generally—are key to the repertoire of the new ethnic parish. The "parachurch space," like the activities and programs of the Aquinas Center, provides a site for this type of holistic engagement, as well as for encounter with different communities, theologies, and practices. The new ethnic parish, then, often provides services in multiple languages and addresses the social needs of a population. A narrative of inclusion and welcome authorizes these practices, particularly through interpretations of both Catholic and American histories as inherently and historically diverse. The affective appeal to inclusion often dervies from the intentional incorporation of the histories and practices of the community's diverse groups, such as including their music and food traditions. While Welch praised Archbishop Charles Chaput for balancing the Archdiocese's finances, she lamented the "intractable xenophobia" and institutional racism that had historically laced many archdiocesan policies of decline, including parish closures. Until the Archdiocese embodied a spirit of inclusivity, Welch presented the new ethnic parish as a means to shape the Catholic Church at the local level.[80]

[79] Welch, February 2021.
[80] Ibid.

If both the Catholic devotional media and the Aquinas Center share an emphasis on lay community and development, Catholic renewal elsewhere has proceeded in a different direction. In Philadelphia, Archbishop Chaput permitted the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) to serve the Latin Mass at St. Mary Church in Conshohocken. Previously the home of St. Mary parish, a Polish parish active from 1905 until its consolidation in 2014 with the territorial St. Matthew parish, the church became the site of a new "quasi-parish" (c. 516) in 2018. [81] In designating it a quasi-parish, Chaput charged the community with establishing its financial and demographic sustainability before the Archdiocese would officially establish it as a personal parish, serving any Catholic with an interest in the Latin Mass. Erected in 1988 by Pope John Paul II, over 300 priests of the FSSP serve more than 130 diocese worldwide, "with the faithful celebration of the traditional Mass and Sacraments (Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite) at the center of their charism."[82]

The repertoire of restorationism has grown in visibility since the 1980s. Adherents of this approach have focused primarily on the restoration of the Traditional Latin Mass after the liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council. These Catholics tend to identify as restorationist, traditionalist, or radical traditionalist ("rad-trad"). Many proponents of the Latin Mass favor an interpretation of the Second Vatican Council that echoes Bishop Barron's critique of "beige Catholicism." As described earlier, the restorationist frame interprets the adoption of the vernacular translation, the emphasis on lay-led initiatives, and the diminishment of the role of the clergy as having emptied Catholicism of its distinctive power and appeal to Americans. By

[81] In 2014, Chaput merged St. Mary parish with nearby St. Matthew, a territorial parish established in 1851. The two churches are located about a half-mile apart. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Decree of the Merger of Saint Mary Parish, Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, with Saint Matthew Parish, Conshohocken, Pennsylvania," Archdiocese of Philadelphia, May 28, 2014, https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/, accessed September 30, 2021.

[82] "Who We Are," the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, https://fssp.com/who-we-are/, accessed April 8, 2022.

returning to the preconciliar practices, they argue that the Church will restore a more meaningful spiritual experience.

During the tenures of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) and Pope Benedict (2005-2013), many restorationist Catholics in the United States and worldwide celebrated the easing of restrictions on the use of the Latin Mass. John Paul II first allowed for the limited use of the Mass in 1984. In 2007, Benedict granted all priests, rather than their bishops, the authority to initiate the practice of the Latin Mass. Both John Paul II and Benedict also directed edits to the vernacular Mass, which moved closer to an exact and, at times, notoriously technical translation of the Latin. As scholar Andrew H. Walsh has argued, neither pope, however, appeared to desire the entire dismantling of the vernacular or "Ordinary Form" Mass, instituted by Vatican II. Instead, "Benedict seemed to anticipate the eventual adoption of a new Mass text that wove together [the Ordinary Form and the Extraordinary Form]."[83] Thus, for many restorationists, the popes were disappointingly sparing in their reforms of the Mass. Pope Francis, in turn, has been less receptive to the restorationist movement, instead insisting upon the permanence of the conciliar liturgical reforms. In July 2021, Francis reversed Benedict's 2007 ruling, returning authorization of the Latin Mass to bishops. Additional restrictions followed in December.

Although these liturgical debates have resulted in little change in worship for most American Catholics, restorationism has had a more marked effect on clergy. Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., reviewed surveys and studies conducted about American priests in recent decades. She noted that there are strong associations between a priest's generation and ordination year and his ecclesial orientation. Older priests, whom Schuth calls "Vatican II priests," are more likely "to favor collaborative leadership, Vatican II liturgical practices, community outreach, and a broader

[83] Andrew H. Walsh, "Catholic Worship in a Contentious Age," in *The Future of Catholicism in America*, edited by Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 263.

interpretation of church teaching." In contrast, younger, "John Paul II priests," tend to exhibit "[a] more authoritarian style of leadership, more devotional practices, less emphasis on community participation, and a narrower understanding of the church's tradition."[84] Put simply, a generational divide among clergy demonstrates the appeal of the Latin Mass to the country's younger clergy.

Although much remains to be studied about Catholic restorationism, it appears to attract different demographics than the revitalization repertoire. As the generational divide among priests suggests, restorationists are frequently younger Catholics, drawing from generations born well after the Second Vatican Council. Restorationists also often promote a gender complementarianism that exceeds that of Walking with Purpose or That Man Is You!, insisting more firmly upon modesty, particularly for women. Restorationists, for example, may require or expect women to veil themselves in church. And whereas Thomas, Jillian, and Father Zlock emphasized lay-led initiatives as crucial to Catholic revitalization, both lay and clerical restorationists often promote priestly authority and decreased lay leadership.

Despite this increased clerical authority, however, lay restorationists are powerful voices in extending the movement. Among Millennial and Gen Z proponents, the social media app TikTok has become a site for sharing videos and information about Catholicism and the Latin Mass. Popular hashtags include #catholic, #eucharist, or #veiling. Others aim to influence American life on a more systematic level. The Napa Institute, for example, was established in response to Archbishop Chaput's 2010 article, "Catholics and the Next America," shortly before he became Archbishop of Philadelphia. Although "traditionally, religious faith has provided the basis for Americans' moral consensus" and thus "policy and law," Chaput wrote, "….In the

[84] Katarina Schuth, "Who Pastors: The Priest, the Context, and the Ministry," in *The Future of Catholicism in America*, edited by Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 158.

coming decades Catholics will likely find it harder, not easier, to influence the course of American culture, or even to live their faith authentically."[85] In response to this vision of a more secular and potentially anti-religious nation, the Napa Institute offered high-paying clients "access to high-ranking churchmen" to mobilize on behalf of "religious freedom, traditional marriage and the unborn," as Dan Morris-Young of the *National Catholic Reporter* reported in 2014.[86] The promotional language of the Napa Institute shares remarkably much in common with that of WWP, TMIY, or Dynamic Catholic, promising "to serve as a leaven in educating, forming and networking Catholics who, in turn can be sources of renewal for their parishes, schools, neighborhoods and small communities of which they are a part."[87] Unlike the revitalization repertoire, which avoids overtly political concerns, wealthy Catholic restorationists have, in contrast, advocated financially and legally for theological-political ends, perhaps most notably to limit abortion access through American courts and legislation.[88]

As politically, theologically, and socially diverse as this chapter's organizations, practices, and programs are, each has drawn on a repertoire of practices and language oriented towards the renewal of the Catholic Church. They also share a common contention that the future vitality of the Church requires a Catholic practice and community that extends beyond the postconciliar Mass, either by investing in the personal and home lives of laypeople through easily accessible and varied formats, by engaging in the social and political concerns of growing

[85] Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., "Catholics and the Next America," *First Things*, September 17, 2010, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2010/09/catholics-and-the-next-america.

[86] Dan Morris-Young, "Napa Institute gathers US church's well-heeled and high-ranking devout," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 15, 2014, https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/napa-institute-gathers-us-churchs-well-heeled-and-high-ranking-devout.

[87] "About the Napa Institute," Napa Institute, http://napa-institute.org/about/, accessed June 29, 2021.

[88] Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, "In Rift with Biden, a Dramatic Show of Force by a Conservative Catholic Movement," *The New York Times*, updated June 29, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/20/us/biden-abortion-catholic-church.html; Christopher White, "Major Catholic funders and power brokers spearhead voert suppression efforts," *National Catholic Reporter,* April 8, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/major-catholic-funders-and-power-brokers-spearhead-voter-suppression-efforts.

Catholic communities, or by restoring a worship style and clerical authority seen as traditional. Each is a response to and reckoning with perceptions of Catholic decline—or even failure—among Americans since the late twentieth century.

Conclusion: The New Suburbanization

In March 2021, of the 33 parishes hosting an official Walking with Purpose Bible study in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, only two were within the city limits of Philadelphia: Resurrection of Our Lord and St. Katherine of Siena. Both parishes, however, are in Northeast Philadelphia, a neighborhood long considered more suburban than urban. The remaining 29 took place in the suburban Chester (11), Montgomery (10), Bucks (5), and Delaware (5) counties—which also, according to the 2010 US Census, happen to be, in the same order, the four wealthiest counties in Pennsylvania. This suburbanization is unlikely to be true only for WWP programs. As Father Charles Zlock reminded me, parishes engaging in innovative practices and programs require staff, financial robustness, and technical resources that are unevenly distributed across the archdiocese. Even Dynamic Catholic's book program can easily still amount to thousands of dollars to ensure the lowest-cost deal, and other revitalization efforts likewise require a hefty, potentially prohibitive time commitment from participants and parish leadership.

As different practices of Catholic revitalization adapt to twenty-first century technologies and challenges, this geographic divide will continue to present a critical test of archdiocesan policy and vision, as it has since the mid twentieth century. "We're not growing," Father Zlock admitted of St. Monica, "but the only parishes that are growing in Philadelphia are the largest big suburban parishes that have lots of land, like [Dan Tarrant's St. Andrew in] Newtown." He added, "those parishes are growing, quite frankly, not necessarily because they're cutting-edge

parishes, but because of demographics, or a combination of both." Recognizing the challenges his small parish faces, Zlock urged his leadership team and parishioners to engage in innovative practices and technologies, so that when the time comes for further parish restructuring initiatives, St. Monica will survive.[89] What, then, is the future for parishes with neither the demographic nor the financial capacity to meet these twenty-first century standards of Catholic vitality? Increasingly, these parishes are in the same pockets of urban Philadelphia where the Church has historically and systematically withdrawn its support. Without deep reconsideration of the standards by which the Archdiocese support or closures a parish, Catholic Philadelphia is likely to increasingly favor a White, wealthy, suburban demographic.

[89] Zlock, March 2021.

Conclusion |
The Futures of Catholic Change

"The church, at Ninth and Cambria Streets in North Philadelphia, has an ornately decorated sanctuary, a place where residents won't get mugged, where drug dealers don't hang out and crack vials don't crunch underfoot," wrote John Woestendiek and Kristin E. Holmes, staff writers for *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* in 1993, "But like white residents, safe streets, jobs and hope, the Catholic church is leaving this neighborhood."[1]

The church Woestendiek and Holmes mourned in their article was St. Bonaventure, slated for suppression that April. Located in the Fairhill neighborhood of North Philadelphia East, St. Bonaventure had been established by German Catholics in 1889. The parish hired Edwin Forrest Durang, the same prominent architect responsible for Fishtown's St. Laurentius, to design their church. Like the twin spires of its Polish counterpart, St. Bonaventure's eighteen-story clock steeple witnessed the neighborhood's rapid demographic changes during the twentieth century. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, a mostly Puerto Rican Latinx community moved into Fairhill, pushed northeast from their earlier settlement in Spring Garden by urban renewal efforts. Manufacturing jobs and White residents vacated as, more so than Fishtown, North Philadelphia East experienced some of the city's most severe consequences of deindustrialization. By the 1980s, North Philadelphia East had gained the pejorative moniker "the Philadelphia Badlands." The name identified this section of the city as the dangerous heart of the crack cocaine epidemic, an infamous reputation that would follow the neighborhood into the twenty-first century.[2]

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[1] John Woestendiek and Kristin E. Holmes, "Parish is Told Oasis Soon to Wither," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 5, 1993, A1.

[2] Stacey Van Dahm, "*Barrio* art: Telling the story of Latino Philadelphia through murals," *Latino Studies* 13 (2015): 421-433.

Similar to the accounts of those who protested the suppression of Black parishes in the 1980s and 1990s, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article recorded the connection parishioner Angelo Torres drew between broader forces of divestment in North Philadelphia East and the Archdiocese's 1993 suppression of St. Bonaventure. "I feel as if we've been strictly forgotten by the church," said Torres, "Where we need it the most, we are getting it the least." Another parishioner, Emilio Rodriguez, told the reporters, "I feel like they made a fool of us. That's not the way to preach the gospel of God. If you're preaching the gospel of God, you don't do it for the money….Instead of helping the poor, this is like taking them and slapping them and sending them right out into what you see here." Anibal Berrios likewise framed the suppression as abandonment. But the 21-year-old, who worked in St. Bonaventure's youth ministries, added another element to the record: the parish had been growing its attendance and offerings in recent years. On the morning the suppression was announced, *The Inquirer* reported that only 75 people attended St. Bonaventure's first Mass. Yet, "[s]everal hundred filled the church" for the second Mass, which priests conducted in Spanish. By 1993, almost 900 families, many of them Hispanic, belonged to the parish. "I just wish [Cardinal Bevilacqua would] give us another chance," said Berrios, "five years to prove we can do it."[3]

St. Bonaventure's suppression echoes many recounted throughout *Just and Grave Causes*. Eight years earlier, St. Bonaventure was even one of the parishes to which the Archdiocese had reassigned, upon its suppression, the former parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy, the predominantly Black North Philadelphian parish and school discussed in Chapter 2. Then St. Bonaventure suffered its own suppression, along with those of other parishes in North Philadelphia and in Chester, Delaware County. I have argued that these 1993 suppressions were

[3] Woestendiek and Holmes, "Parish is Told."

a turning point for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, after which the policy of unilaterally suppressing urban parishes in low-income neighborhoods of color became the subject of mounting criticism on local and national stages. Along with local coverage of the suppressions, protests by parishioners like St. Bonaventure's Angelo Torres, Emilio Rodriguez, and Anibal Berrios helped drive this shift.

The account of St. Bonaventure's suppression is a fitting way to conclude this study. It underscores what comes into focus when we attend to the history of Catholic policies and repertoires of decline in an American city like Philadelphia. A central aim of this study has been to argue that the standard narrative depicting Catholic decline as the natural evolution of a suburbanizing and Americanizing Church of European immigrants often casts Catholics, and especially diocesan hierarchies, as passive recipients of this process. *Just and Grave Causes* demonstrates instead how institutional policies and lived repertoires of decline have always shaped the racial and spatial composition of the local Catholic Church.

As Part One illustrated, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia under archbishops Cardinal John Krol, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, Cardinal Justin Rigali, and Charles Chaput implemented and developed closure as a central policy of decline. From the 1970s through the 2010s, the closure of parishes and parish schools dominated archdiocesan efforts to bring financial stability to the region. Additional measures, including the financial support of the Inter-Parochial Cooperation Commission (IPCC), the outsourcing of urban schools of color to private entities, the relegation and sale of former church buildings, and the sale of other diocesan properties, supported the maturation of closure as a policy that actively reshaped the Church's institutional presence across the region. Closures have often been framed as inevitable consequences of demographic shifts, such that this phenomenon appears as a *marker* of decline rather than a

policy. *Just and Grave Causes* counters this framework, emphasizing instead the archdiocesan decisions that developed this policy as a response to local, regional, and national pressures.

Over the course of the past half-century, the Archdiocese's narratives and implementation of closure changed, interpreting different communities as the sources, solutions, or victims of this policy. This history has racialized the nature of decline. Although St. Bonaventure illustrates that the growing Latinx population also suffered from the Archdiocese's divestment in North Philadelphia, the city's historically large Black population bore the brunt of the racialization of the region's urban *and* Catholic decline in the late twentieth century. By the early twenty-first century, continuing religious changes—demographic shifts among clergy, women religious, and parishioners, as well as the impact of the clergy sexual abuse crises—had widened the Archdiocese's aperture of decline. The sources and solutions of decline were no longer limited to Black and Latinx neighborhoods in Philadelphia or Chester. Decline was instead increasingly interpreted as another challenge facing White Catholic communities, much like the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Thus, Catholic decline morphed into a White, and specifically "post-ethnic" White, concern.[4]

Throughout *Just and Grave Causes*, I have argued that lived responses to archdiocesan policies of decline have also played an important role in shaping the region's Church. Protests by parishioners like Adrienne Harris and Anibal Berrios could not save St Peter Claver in 1985 or St. Bonaventure in 1993 from the archdiocesan policy of urban suppressions. But their voices joined and informed a genealogy of parishioners' claims to ownership and authority in the local Church, claims that weave throughout the repertoires of decline examined in Part Two of this

[4] On the whitewashing of the abuse crisis, see Brian Clites, "Our Accountability to Survivors," *American Catholic Studies* 130, no.2 (Summer 2019): 4-7; Marian Ronan "The Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis and the Mourning of American Catholic Innocence," *Pastoral Psychology* 56, no. 3 (January 2008): 321-339.

study. Many Catholics continued to engage the challenge of decline in the second decade of the twenty-first century, asserting interpretive frames and developing practical strategies that supported, challenged, or transcended archdiocesan authority. As examined in Chapters 4 and 6, many locals have drawn upon the repertoires of legacies of the sacred and of renewal to make sense of decline. The practical, narrative, and affective strategies of these repertoires empowered them to make claims on local sites and the universal Church, as well as on the Catholic past and the Catholic future. Others, meanwhile, have become disillusioned with the Church. The sharp decline in the number of Black Catholics in Philadelphia, for example, should be understood in light of archdiocesan policies of decline, which located Black neighborhoods not as sources of renewal or growth, but rather as sites for divestment. The growing number of former Catholics has also hardened the association between religious decline and older age, as illustrated in Chapter 5. Yet, this trend offers an opportunity to think beyond young people's disengagement with Catholicism, to instead consider the often invisible religion- and community-making work of older Catholic women in parishes and other sites.

Attending to religious decline reveals these dense, overlapping layers of institutional and lived religion. This study is an invitation to scholars of American Catholicism, and American religions more broadly, to consider the role of decline in shaping religious communities, expressions, and practices. Far from inevitable or linear, decline is a dynamic process of decisions and responses that weaves together religious pasts, presents, and futures.

The future of the American Catholic Church is, indeed, interwoven with questions of decline. Between 2005 and 2010, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University reported that "[f]orty percent of all growth in registered parishioners in Catholic parishes…was from Hispanic or Latino/a Catholics. Many others are active in parish

life but are unregistered."[5] By 2009, Pew Research Center found that a third of American Catholics were Hispanic. By 2020, that percentage had grown to 40 percent.[6] This so-called "Hispanicization" of the American Church is the result of two simultaneous trends: the immigration of Latinx Catholics into the United States, shifting the centers of Catholicism to the South and West, and the increasing numbers of especially White Catholics leaving the Church in the Northeast and Midwest.

Philadelphia may not readily come to mind as a significant destination for Latinx communities. Historically, it has predominantly been a city defined as Black and White, as this study has shown. As of the 2020 Census, these populations comprised 41.4 percent (approximately 657,000) and 39.3 percent (approximately 618,000) of the city's total population, respectively. In comparison, those identifying as Hispanic or Latinx made up only 15.1 percent, or about 241,000 residents. The Latinx population is growing rapidly, however, with its share of the city population rising from only 5.6 percent in 1990. After Puerto Rico and New York City, Philadelphia is now home to the largest Puerto Rican community in the country.[7] Most live in the so-called "Badlands" of North Philadelphia East, which has, for decades, been the poorest section of the city. In the shadow of St. Bonaventure's steeple, Fairhill neighborhood has been at the heart of North Philadelphia East and these massive demographic changes.[8]

[5] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Fact Sheet: Hispanic Catholics in the U.S.," Georgetown University, https://cara.georgetown.edu/staff/webpages/Hispanic%20Catholic%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf, accessed March 30, 2022.

[6] David Crary, "US Hispanic Catholics are future, but priest numbers dismal," *Associated Press,* March 14, 2020.

[7] "White alone" and "Black or African American, alone." "QuickFacts: Philadelphia city, Pennsylvania," U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/philadelphiacitypennsylvania/RHI725220#RHI725220/.

[8] Pew Charitable Trusts, "A City Transformed: The Racial and Ethnic Changes in Philadelphia Over the Last 20 Years," June 1, 2011, https://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/philadelphia_research_initiative/PhiladelphiaPopulationEthnicChangespdf.pdf.

Latinx Philadelphians, however, know Fairhill by another name. They call the neighborhood's Fifth Street *el Centro de Oro,* or the Golden Downtown. Like *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s depiction of Fairhill, in other words, "the Badlands" obscures as much as it reveals about this area. The neighborhood was not only a site of cocaine vials and abandoned manufacturing plants. By the 1970s, Fairhill's growing Puerto Rican community had established robust networks of political, health, and business services. The *Taller Puertorriqueño*, established in 1974 to offer community-based arts and cultural programming, became known as *el Corazón Cultural del Barrio,* or the Cultural Heart of Latino Philadelphia. Religious communities were active as well. Prior to the migration northward to Fairhill, Latinx Philadelphians had worshipped and gathered in La Milagrosa, a Catholic mission established by the Vincentians in 1912, and the First Spanish Baptist Church, both located in Spring Garden.[9] Later, the Catholic parishes in North Philadelphia also became sites of Puerto Rican religious, political, and social activity. These included St. Bonaventure and nearby St. Edward the Confessor, another parish suppressed in 1993.[10]

Recall again the wish of Anibal Berrios—that Cardinal Bevilacqua would give St. Bonaventure five more years to prove itself. Granting Berrios' wish may have reflected a more social justice-oriented Catholicism concerned, as the parishioners articulated, with the social, economic, and religious needs of *all* members of the universal Church, including those in the city's poorest neighborhoods. The Archdiocese countered by arguing that redistributing and reinvesting the resources in other urban ministries better served this purpose. It is important to

[9] Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, "From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910-2000," in *Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, edited by Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 89-105.

[10] Kathryn E. Wilson, "Building El Barrio: Latinos Transform Postwar Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 3.2 (November 2003): 17-21.

note that the Archdiocese has not remained unresponsive to Latinx Catholics in the years since St. Bonaventure's suppression. By 2022, it claimed Spanish-language liturgies and services in 37 parishes and 3 worship sites. While impossible to guess with any accuracy, it is nonetheless worth pondering whether these numbers might have looked any different, had the Archdiocese left St. Bonaventure in the willing hands of Catholics like Anibal Berrios. What might the spatial distribution and demographic composition of the Church have been if the Archdiocese had actively *invested* in St. Bonaventure? The investment in St. Bonaventure, only blocks from the heart of *el Centro de Oro*, might have been a sign of the Archdiocese's investment in a Catholic future that was, even in the early 1990s, understood as likely to be increasingly Hispanic.[11] It is possible to imagine the active financial and social investment in Latinx parishes as serving both these communities *and* the Archdiocese's best interests, given the rapid growth of the Latinx population in the region. Instead, the Archdiocese closed Catholic institutions across North Philadelphia.

After St. Bonaventure's suppression, the New Life Evangelistic Church, a Black Protestant congregation, bought the parish's former church. In the years that followed, the Gothic church lost parts of its copper roof, windows, and water pipes to pillaging visitors, and the crumbling clocktower steeple, like St. Laurentius' pair of spires, became a severe safety liability. Local accounts of the church's deterioration frequently blamed the New Life Evangelistic Church for leaving St. Bonaventure vacant, "with what appeared to be very little effort to maintain the building."[12] Rachel Hildebrandt, a Senior Project Manager at Philadelphia's Partners for Sacred Places, offered a more nuanced interpretation. Commenting on the closures

[11] Kristy Nabhan-Warren, "Brown Catholicism and Brown America," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 22-25.

[12] Christopher Matthew, *Abandoned America: The Age of Consequences* (JonGlez, 2015), 138.

of the 1980s and 1990s, she told me, "I saw a lot of those buildings were transitioned into the hands of very aspirational, usually small, lower capacity congregations, right? So, maybe a pastor with like 20 people in his congregation [was] buying this building with faith that one day he'll be able to fill it up." Hildebrandt described this transition of properties as "really problematic," adding, "I wasn't there, but the optics of it now are: [the Archdiocese] closed a ton of churches in North Philly and West Philly, and then sold them to congregations that they didn't really fit….A number of them are now just in terrible condition or torn down." She described walking through St. Bonaventure in the early 2010s with New Life's pastor, Reverend Carswell Jackson. "And I was just like, 'Oh, man, this is a tough situation,' because it was just that—it was a pastor with a super small congregation who explained to us he bought it with faith," said Hildebrandt, "He had faith that he could turn it around."[13] The City of Philadelphia did not share Jackson's faith. In August 2013, the Department of Licenses & Inspections (L&I) ruled against New Life, slating St. Bonaventure Church, along with its adjacent school, for demolition. Rebecca Swanson, the L&I director of communications, told a local website, "The [New Life Evangelistic] church has not provided any evidence that it is capable of correcting the imminently dangerous conditions."[14] Jackson's appeals to the decision were unsuccessful, and in November, the demolition began (Figure 7.2).

Archdiocesan policies of decline, of course, were not solely responsible for the challenges facing Fairhill and the rest of North Philadelphia East. But neither was the Catholic Church a passive victim of the trends that stripped these neighborhoods of industries and systems of social and economic support. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has charted a course toward a

[13] Rachel Hildebrandt, Zoom interview with author, May 26, 2021.

[14] Christopher Mote, "Demolition Imminent At North Philadelphia Landmark St. Bonaventure (Updated)," *Hidden City*, November 6, 2013, https://hiddencityphila.org/2013/11/demolition-imminent-at-north-philadelphia-landmark-st-bonaventure/.

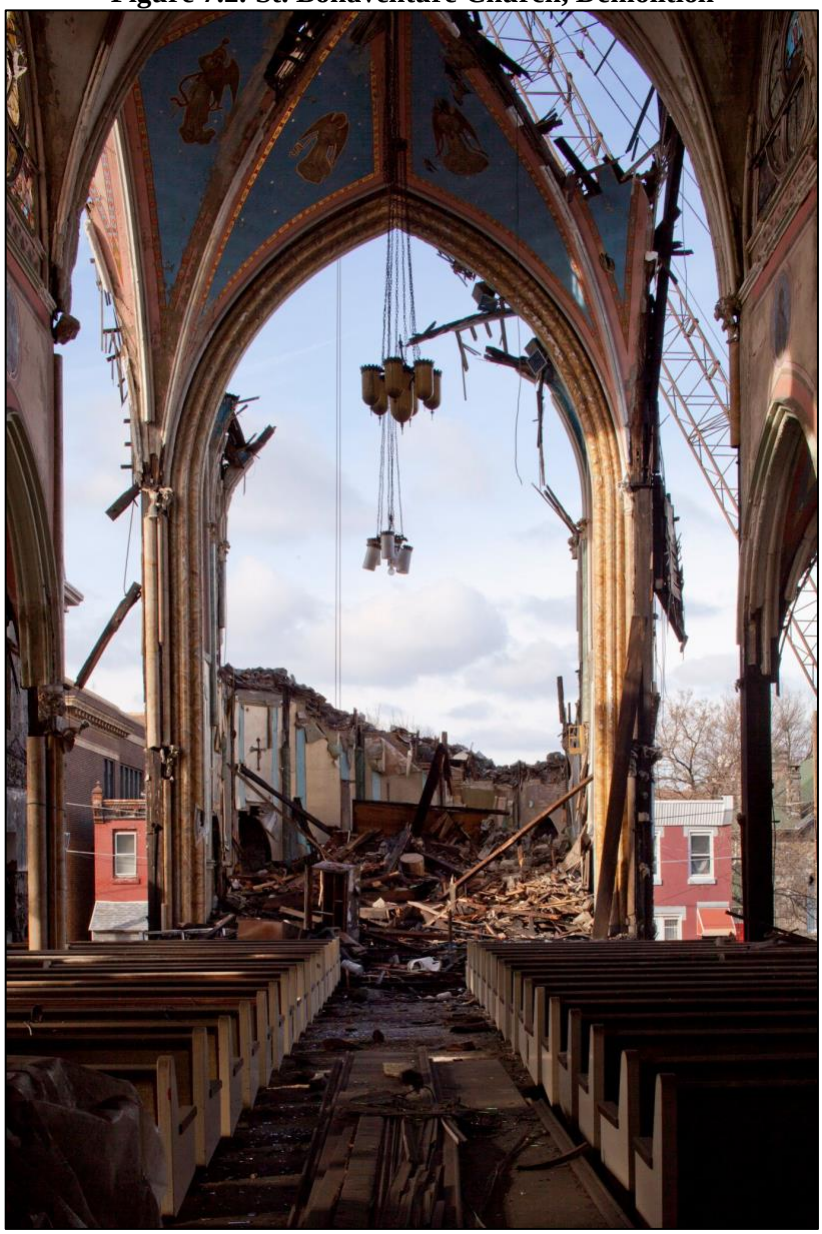
whiter and more suburban Catholicism in the twenty-first century, starting with its divestment in urban neighborhoods of color. The echoes of these policy decisions linger in the outsourcing of predominantly Black Catholic schools and, as Hildebrandt argued, the abandonment and deterioration of Church properties in low-income neighborhoods. Emerging models of sustainability will further privilege parishes able to commit time and resources toward renewal strategies. These are deep-rooted trends for the Archdiocese's offices for Hispanic Catholics (Oficina para Católicos Hispanos) and for Black Catholics to counter.

Figure 7.1: St. Bonaventure Church



Source: Photograph courtesy of Joseph E. B. Elliott photography.

Figure 7.2: St. Bonaventure Church, Demolition



Source: Photograph courtesy of Joseph E. B. Elliott photography.

The Hispanicization of American Catholicism also reveals the consequences of these trends. Polls in the 2010s revealed what Michael Paulson of *The New York Times* has described as the "seemingly mind-bending result" that "[e]ven as a rising percentage of American Catholics is Hispanic, a falling percentage of American Hispanics is Catholics."[15] Put simply, the

[15] Michael Paulson, "Even as U.S. Hispanics Lift Catholicism, Many Are Leaving the Church Behind," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2014.

Hispanicization narrative is not only a story of Catholic growth. The Church cannot take for granted that the Latinx—particularly second-generation Americans and later—will continue to replace the White and Black Catholics leaving the Church in the twenty-first century.[16] Many Latinx Catholics are already joining them in other religious communities or among the ranks of the Nones. While Church officials target American religious relativism and secularism as reasons for this demographic shift, I argue that this trend in Catholic growth is inextricable from a half-century's racialization of decline.[17] As seen in Philadelphia, by locating urban neighborhoods of color as the sites of and solutions for religious decline, the Church has perpetuated unequal systems of institutional access, representation, and investment into the twenty-first century. It is telling that despite the attention to the Latinx future of the American Church, for example, only about 7 percent of the United States' priests are Hispanic.[18] These types of statistics reveal the tensions between the racialization of Catholic growth and the communities in which the Church hierarchy has historically invested.

The study of decline, in short, is just as much about the past as it is about the future. Attending to the institutional and lived history of decline reveals the roles of race, the politics of urban and suburban space, and competing sources of Catholic authority and identity in how Catholics build the Church's past and future. In responding to decline, hierarchies and

[16] Pew Research Center found in 2020 that fewer Hispanic teens rate religion as "'very important.'" Two years later, Pew Research Center found that Black Americans are converting to *and* from Catholicism at a higher rate than White and Hispanic Catholics. Pew Research Center, "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals," September 10, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/09/10/u-s-teens-take-after-their-parents-religiously-attend-services-together-and-enjoy-family-rituals/; Jeff Diamant, Besheer Mohamed, and Joshua Alvarado, "Black Catholics in America," Pew Research Center, March 15, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/15/black-catholics-in-america/.

[17] Mary Ann Walsh, "Good News: Many Hispanic Catholics. Challenge: To Meet their Spiritual Needs," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Blog, May 5, 2014, http://usccbmedia.blogspot.com/2014/05/good-news-many-hispanic-catholics.html.

[18] Hosffman Ospino, "Hispanic Ministry in Catholic parishes," National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry (Boston: Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, 214), 21.

communities shift money, people, and resources across time and place according to practices of investment and divestment. Discursive frameworks gain or lose explanatory power, and practical strategies become more or less efficacious. Expressions of protest and adaptation, grief and hope influence patterns of engagement and apathy in structures of power. Together, these policies and repertoires of decline shape the city and the Church.

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