ABSTRACT

Investigating the Relationship between Religious Motives and Rhetorical
Activism: An Ethnographic Study of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and
Poverty

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This ethnographic study investigates the religiously-motivated rhetorical

action of the central office staff of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and

Poverty (BCHP), a research-based nonprofit project of Baylor University.

Knowing that the BCHP staff were at least religiously *affiliated*, I sought to

understand whether or not they articulated their religious identity, beliefs, or

commitments as motivation for their work in a field devoted to social good. This

study sought to address two questions: *What role do religious motives play in civic

engagement?* and *When present, how do religious motives animate rhetorical social

action?* After determining whether the staff articulated religious motivations for

their work, I sought to understand how, if present, those religious commitments

might animate the organization's specific rhetorical practices.

This study draws from interviews with the ten BCHP central office staff members; however, it focuses primarily on one: the BCHP's founder and executive director, Jeremy Everett. Interviews and textual data reveal that Everett's theological commitments formed the basis for his founding of the organization and actively form its work today. Everett's experience of divine calling to the poor and his theological beliefs in enacting the Kingdom of God, considering the Levitical practice of Jubilee, and realizing the *imago Dei* (image of God) in all people, have led him to hold central to his life and work the theologically-animated values of equality, common ground, and humility. Those values—which are shared by many of the BCHP central office staff—then animate Everett and the organization's rhetorical strategies of rhetorical presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism.

This study concludes by considering possibilities for the study's findings in the university writing classroom. The study's findings reveal that religious commitments can and do motivate social action and that religiously-animated values can prove rich resources for animating rhetorical action. As the field of Rhetoric and Composition seeks to prepare students to be rhetorically capable, socially responsible citizens, I argue that students should be encouraged to examine their religious and ideological beliefs and values and to consider how

those values might animate their rhetorical strategies as they seek to do good in

the public sphere.

Investigating the Relationship between Religious Motives and Rhetorical Activism:
An Ethnographic Study of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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DEDICATION

To Ted Mashburn, who has shown me for over a decade that
"what is more important than knowing and believing is love"

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Stephen Parks says that higher education's changing goal is forming

citizens who are capable of and committed to using their personal, academic, and

vocational goals and abilities to foster greater societal, public, and civic good

(xxvii-xxix). This emphasis on the formation of civic-minded students is not new

in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Rather, as Cheryl Glenn discusses,

teachers of rhetoric have, for millennia, "tried to define precepts of a rhetorical

education that would enable students to govern knowledgably and virtuously

both their own households and the commonwealth" (vii). As Parks notes,

however, there is currently an interdisciplinary *rejuvenation* of the conversation

about academia and civic formation in the social, cultural, and political context of

the twenty-first century.

The divisive cultural climate, the ubiquity of old and new platforms for

rhetorical activism, and the variety and accessibility of pressing and worthy

social causes creates an exigent moment for civic-minded work and rhetorical

education, a moment full of both challenges and possibilities. If instructors in

Rhetoric and Composition agree with Glenn's assertion that rhetorical education

ideally "shapes all citizens for public participation" (viii), we must consider how

we can help form citizens who are aware of the integral role that rhetorical

practices play—and the creative possibilities they afford—in advocacy and

activist work in this historical moment.

Before instructors can adequately guide students to be civic-minded

rhetors, we must first consider how rhetorical civic action works. We need to

understand how social justice advocates employ various rhetorical strategies and

to what effect. And much good work has been done to explore these questions.

But we also need to know *why* those who work for social good do so. We need to

know what motivates[1] advocates and activists and their rhetorical strategies.

From a range of possible motivations, this study explores religious motives

for civic work. Better understanding religious motives can lead us to be more

nuanced observers and discussers of the religiously-motivated action that takes

place around us every day and better teachers of religiously-committed students.

And, while there are many questions undergirding my interest in rhetorical

activism and education, the questions guiding this study are *What role do religious*

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[1] I conceive of a "motive" as the value or belief undergirding a sense of inclination or responsibility that necessitates and results in taking particular action.

motives play in civic engagement? and *When present, how do religious motives animate rhetorical social action?* These questions access an under-explored area of inquiry.

I am interested not only in questions about religious motives but also in how the rhetorical knowledge of advocates in the civic sphere can impact approaches to rhetorical activism in civic life and rhetorical instruction in the classroom. Thus, this project explores how religiously-motivated rhetorical activism takes place in the civic sphere and what the writing classroom can learn from such work.

To investigate the connections between religious motives, theologically-animated values, and rhetorical strategies, I undertook an ethnographic study of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) as a site of religiously-motivated rhetorical activism.

The BCHP is a faith-based, (Baylor) university-affiliated, interdisciplinary organization that works with government and community partners to eradicate hunger and food insecurity. The BCHP works at the intersections of public and private; local, state, and federal government; the academy and the broader community. The BCHP also works with university students, volunteers, politicians, nonprofit staff, businesspeople, and academics. The diversity of the BCHP's work, combined with their faith-based roots and work with university students, makes the BCHP a fascinating site for study.

In this study, I conducted two years of ethnographic research on the ten central office staff members of the BCHP, inquiring through interviews into their motivations for their work in a social justice field (anti-hunger/anti-poverty advocacy), observing their work, and collecting samples of texts they produced. I sought to discover whether the staff—who are all Christian-affiliated—named aspects of their religious commitments/identities/faiths as motivators for their work, and, if so, if/how those religious commitments manifested rhetorically in that work.

A Rhetorical Education Origin Story

In retrospect, my interest in this project originates in my own undergraduate education, though I could not have foreseen at the time how those four years would lead me to this study. For my undergraduate education, I attended the University of Mobile—a small, generally conservative Baptist university in the Southeast. Despite the university's general conservatism, I found myself in the company of what I often refer to as a "rogue pocket of moderates and progressives" in the humanities. The faculty and fellow students with whom I spent my years at the University of Mobile were on a continual search to understand how Christian faith could and should inform engagement with the world and commitment to addressing injustice. For me, most of this work to connect religious commitments with civic action took place in rhetoric-

and literacy-focused humanities courses: English, philosophy, and religion classes, especially. All of these classes were centered around reading, discussing, and writing, and my experiences of wrestling with ideas while reading, discussing, and writing in those courses upended and reshaped my understanding of my faith and my responsibilities as a citizen and neighbor.

I arrived at graduate school with first-hand knowledge of undergraduate education's possibilities for challenging—in rich, productive ways—religious identity and civic responsibility. However, upon arrival in graduate school, I had never set foot in a *writing* classroom. My undergraduate institution's honors program allowed students to skip first- and second-year writing courses in favor of those in literature and philosophy. Thus, as is the case for many graduate student writing instructors, my introduction to writing courses was as a teacher.

In my first years as a teacher in Baylor's writing program, I began to fall in love with the writing classroom and to immerse myself in scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition. At that point, my interests in the university classroom as a site for exploration of the intersections between religious identity and civic engagement began to strengthen and take on a new sense of possibility. I felt that while my undergraduate friends and I had been given tremendous gifts in our literature, philosophy, and religion courses, our lack of explicit rhetorical education in the form of writing courses had deprived us of an incredibly rich

site for the very explorations that our professors wanted us to embark on, explorations of our positionality, commitments, values, and responsibilities.

The more I taught, read scholarship, and conducted my own graduate coursework research, the more I realized the gaps—and therefore the possibilities—in the existent scholarship on rhetorical education, civic engagement, rhetorical activism, and rhetoric and religion, gaps into which I wanted to explore.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Rhetorical Education and Civic Formation

Cheryl Glenn writes, "Two of the most obvious questions one confronts when teaching rhetoric are 'Why does rhetorical education matter?' and 'What can rhetorical education do?'" (xi). This project contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversations that answer those questions by describing how rhetorical education can and should help form citizens who are prepared to engage responsibly in civic life. Erika Lindemann asserts that "all human beings practice rhetoric and come under its influence. Every day we use words to shape attitudes and encourage people to act in certain ways" (37). The ubiquity of rhetorical practice and its importance—because it is ultimately about persuasion—in motivating or dissuading action has led many contemporary

6

scholars and teachers of rhetoric to "explore the impact of language on political and social relationships, viewing rhetoric as an instrument of social change" (Lindemann 53). This line of thinking—that rhetoric's impact on social and political life means that rhetorical education is critical to forming responsible citizens—is not new.

William Denman notes that "the history of rhetoric makes clear that the teaching of rhetoric was an instrumental part of the development of [the] civic persona, the 'citizen-orator,' whose skills were at the service of the community" (3). Scholars like David Fleming and John Duffy have also challenged the field to consider the ways in which rhetorical education can be used to foster more engaged citizens. Fleming suggests reinstating Rhetoric—"the study of speaking and writing well, a historically prominent and remarkably consistent program of instruction involving both theory and practice and aimed at the moral and intellectual development of the student" (172)—as a course of study: "a multi-year, integrated process of character formation" (172), the telos (end, goal) of which is "the development of a certain kind of person: engaged, articulate, resourceful, sympathetic, civil" (172). This "focus on the language user as citizen," Fleming argues, will "revitalize rhetorical education" (184). Duffy encourages Rhetoric and Composition teachers and scholars to think about our work in terms of the "virtue ethics" branch of moral philosophy (230). Such a

focus would foster, Duffy argues, "the discursive practices of virtue, the

expression in speech and writing of honesty, accountability, generosity, and

other qualities. Like the virtues from which they are derived, the rhetorical

virtues reflect the traits, attitudes, and dispositions we associate with a good

person, speaking or writing well" (235).

These scholars argue broadly for rhetorical education to emphasize the

formation of responsible, thoughtful citizens. Other scholars in the field focus on

particular pedagogical approaches for enacting such an education, such as

community-based writing.

Community-Based Writing (CBW) and Service Learning (SL)

From the social turn in Rhetoric and Composition in the 1980s and 1990s,

which rejuvenated the above conversations about rhetorical education's

responsibility to cultivate capable, civic-minded students, Community-Based

Writing (CBW) and Service-Learning (SL) emerged as major pedagogical

approaches (see Jacoby; Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters; Deans; and Butin).

Though diverse in options for implementation, CBW/SL pedagogies generally

advocate that students use writing as a tool for social change by engaging in

activities in the writing classroom that integrate community service and writing

assignments and that establish partnerships with community organizations.

David Coogan argues that SL extends the desires of scholars like Fleming for rhetorical education to make good citizens; Coogan says that SL does not simply "make good citizens" but, rather, enables "student-citizens to write for social change" (667). Community-focused courses do this, Coogan argues, because "when methods of effecting change include public advocacy, community organizing, or collaborative writing with nonprofit groups, these courses may be further defined in rhetorical terms as efforts aimed at discovering the available means of persuasion" (667-668). James M. Dubinsky believes that "when used with care and reflection, service-learning can be a bridge or a path toward virtue and can create ideal orators in the classical sense...orators and citizens who put their knowledge and skills to work for the common good" (258). Laura Julier, Kathleen Livingston, and Eli Goldblatt agree. They define community-engaged pedagogy as "a kind of experiential learning grounded in the understanding of writing as a situated, social act" (56), that, while it may take many different forms in different contexts, will require that "students work with a community-based organization or initiative, to write for purposes that are shaped or defined by the public sphere" (57). Thus, students in CBW/SL courses are placed in diverse civic contexts and thus challenged to develop characteristics of civic responsibility—such as respect, humility, integrity, the ability to listen and learn—while also being challenged to consider particular rhetorical

situations and write in meaningful and persuasive ways in diverse situations and contexts toward the end of the good of the community with whom they are partnering.

Community-engaged pedagogies are complex, with innumerable variations, ethical considerations, and, sometimes, opportunities for negative outcomes such as colonialism, appropriation, misrepresentation, or lack of reciprocity between all partners. Thus, CBW/SL approaches must be engaged with care and thoughtfulness. But CBW/SL are incredibly effective ways to cultivate rhetorical ability alongside commitment to the civic good. Jenny J. Lee and Michelle M. Espino found from their qualitative study of three cohorts of undergrads from two different R1 universities that students who took a SL course reported both individual and societal gains; the "human interactions" the students had during their SL course generally "raised the students' critical consciousness as they viewed themselves as part of a larger struggle to create a more just and equitable society. This raised consciousness then translated to a greater commitment to social change" (7).

While the field's devotion to the formation of citizen-rhetors is energizing, as are the innovative pedagogical approaches in CBW/SL that scholar-teachers are utilizing to accomplish such work, there is a substantial lack of scholarly attention to the fact that, for many students, their religious traditions also compel

them to become engaged citizens, working for the social good. Most (if not all) major religious traditions contain imperatives for their adherents to engage in social life by alleviating suffering and working for justice and peace. To be sure, religious adherents have all too frequently ignored these calls and done the opposite: perpetuating suffering and injustice and violence. But religion is, for much of the world's population, a rich potential source—whether tapped or untapped—of moral and, therefore, civic resources, and would thus be an appropriate and fruitful additional site of inquiry in the writing classroom focused on civic life. However, the field of Rhetoric and Composition, has, until recently, been wary of or hostile toward explorations of religious identity in the classroom.

Religion in Rhetoric and Composition

The writing classroom can be an excellent place to begin exploring the connections between religion, learning, and community engagement, and the need for this kind of work is highlighted by the significant increase in composition scholarship that addresses issues of student faith and learning. The past fifteen years in particular have seen an increase in composition scholarship that seeks to examine the religious university student. Scholars such as Elizabeth Vander Lei, Michael-John DePalma, Heather Thomson-Bunn, Mark Alan

Williams, Paul Lynch, and Jeffrey M. Ringer seek to change the academic

discourse surrounding these religious, and more specifically Christian, students.

Each of these scholars is responding to the fact that the composition

classroom (and indeed academia at large) has often been a place where religious

students are at best, ignored—at worst, attacked. Research conducted by Tobin

and Weinberg revealed that "faculty feel warmly about most religious groups,

but feel coldly about evangelicals and Mormons" (2), with evangelical Christians

being the "only religious group about which a majority of non-Evangelical

faculty have negative feelings" (2). Frequently seen as ignorant or

unwilling/unable to engage other perspectives critically, religious students—

especially conservative Christian students—pose a significant problem to many

university faculty, especially in the composition classroom where the focus is

student writing and argumentative expression of ideas and beliefs. Thomson-

Bunn describes how, via a survey of forty writing instructors at a state

university, she discovered that instructors expressed that Christian students

often did not meet their expectations in four major areas: critical thinking,

audience awareness, appropriate use of evidence, and tolerance (280). While

Thomson-Bunn argues that we need more "useful ways to mediate the differing

discursive expectations of" Christian students and writing instructors, she

nevertheless acknowledges that many faculty focus on the ways that "Christian

students seem to violate some of the academic norms that instructors expect them to follow" (279). The dominant discourse in composition studies regarding religiously-committed Christian students throughout the '80s and early '90s was what Phillip Marzluf calls the conflict narrative. In this narrative, created by "Composition research, teacher lore, and politically conservative commentary about U.S. higher education," (Marzluf 266), "secular, liberal teachers"[2] are juxtaposed against "their narrative counterparts, fundamentalist Christian and conservative students" (267). Marzluf and many other scholars criticize this narrative for its oversimplification and misunderstanding of the nature of religious identity and belief, among both college students and faculty. Marzluf and others also, however, note the narrative's prevalence.

The conflict narrative is perhaps best represented in the work of scholars like Chris Anderson, David Bleich, and Gilbert S. Fell, all of whom in some way represent religiously-committed students and, indeed, religion itself as simplistic or dualistic. Even as Anderson *attempts* to reject some of the harsh criticisms religious students often fall under in the academic classroom, he argues that the religiously-informed writing of a committed Christian student is "appropriate in *other* settings, as testimonial during a church meeting, in prayer discussions, and

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[2] Though it should be noted that, as Gross and Simmons point out, more academic faculty are religious than are non-religious—"even at elite [secular] schools" (124).

so on. It is a kind of code, produced by and proper in certain situations; the problem is that [the student has] applied this code to the wrong situation" (13, emphasis added). Ronda Dively, however, critiques the conflict narrative perpetuated by scholars like Anderson, Bleich, and Fell, describing how "although the postmodern academy publicly denounces unreflective marginalization of students' voices, their voices are frequently marginalized in the composition classroom when issues of religion or spirituality arise" (56). Dively rejects the association of "religious belief with unsophisticated discourse" (56), arguing instead that "to assume religious inquiry will necessarily or even probably elicit simplistic, unsophisticated discourse is to perpetuate a stereotype that denies the diversity and potential complexity of religious subjectivity" (57).

Lizabeth A. Rand and Amy Goodburn also challenge the conflict narrative by, in some way, pushing forward the fact that the academy seeks to *emphasize* student experience and identity as relates to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability and disability, but fails to include religious identity as an equally important source of identity. Both Rand and Goodburn argue that this is not only a disservice to students but is antithetical to the work of the university. Rand, for example, argues, "religious belief often matters to our students and […] spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood more than a few of them draw upon in making meaning of their live and the world

14

around them" (350). Goodburn describes how religion is "a construct which intersects and envelops [other identity categories such as race or gender] in many students' lives" (333). These arguments, by scholars like Rand and Goodburn represent what I describe as the turn away from the conflict narrative and toward the acceptance or tolerance narrative, a narrative that essentially argues that religious identity matters in many students' lives and therefore should not be excluded from the classroom.

With the context of this scholarly conversation in mind—the trajectory from the conflict narrative to the acceptance (or at least tolerance) narrative—Vander Lei calls for the conversation to continue even further, into a narrative of rhetorical and educational possibility. Vander Lei summarizes the conflict narrative metaphorically: many composition instructors view their field as "an urban center surrounded by uncivilized space," or, if they are willing to concede a modicum of civilization to religion, they might view "composition and religious faith as remote civilizations separated by dangerous space" ("Where the Wild Things Are" 66). This perceived breach between the academic and religious spheres is the root of the divide between university faculty and religious students. Vander Lei suggests that many "scholars 'monster' Christian students…by drawing attention to their patched-together nature, a hybridity that results from their membership in both religious and academic communities"

(78). Vander Lei notes, however, that faculty are not the only ones who are unsure of how to navigate their students' participation in both religious and academic communities: "Students, too, rely on a figured world of composition as a city when they imagine a figurative wall separating school from the rest of their lives" (70).

Because faculty and students often see the academic and religious spheres as two separate things, causing each to "monster" the other, Vander Lei proposes a new possibility: a "third version of the figured world," a space that "locates religious faith and rhetoric in the territory outside the traditional boundaries of composition." In Vander Lei's third figured world of composition, "religion and rhetoric are a frontier for students and instructors to explore and map…Scholars who invoke this figured world encourage instructors and students to explore the topics and arguments that shape their daily existence" (80). Thus, Vander Lei seeks to help students and faculty members see the ways in which religion and rhetoric do not occupy separate, mutually exclusive spheres of existence but are instead closely related and even interdependent realities for those whose day-to-day lives involve both strong religious commitment and participation in university life.

This desire to foster a more thoughtful, productive relationship between religious belief and academic study—particularly in the composition

classroom—has grown in the past decade, pushing even further beyond the

tolerance/acceptance narrative and into what I call the possibilities narrative, a

narrative whose loudest voices are those of scholars like Vander Lei, DePalma,

Williams, and Ringer. Vander Lei says her goal in co-editing *Negotiating Religious*

Faith in the Composition Classroom was "an optimistic one—to search for ways in

which academic scholarship and religious faith might work together to

accomplish the stated outcomes for our composition courses" ("Coming to

Terms" 3). DePalma, too, wants to increase the possibilities for seeing "religious

discourses as resources on which students might draw to enrich their academic

work" ("Re-envisioning" 223).

Mark Alan Williams concentrates his work on highlighting the

"differences between religious students, religious discourses, and their popular

representations" (338). Williams recognizes that "writing students, instructors,

and scholars all struggle to recognize and represent religious difference against

the background of religion's popular representations" (338), and he seeks to

"find ways to help students who feel so out of control, so in the grasp of static

representations and structures, retrieve a fuller sense of religious responsibility

and possibility" (343). By helping religious students recognize that they are

actually constantly writing and *changing* the ways that religion and religious

commitment are understood and enacted, Williams hopes to foster in students a deep sense of rhetorical awareness and ability.

And Jeffrey M. Ringer also seeks to demonstrate in his work that religious commitment does not preclude honest academic inquiry; instead, he says that "it is possible to ask honest questions while maintaining humble commitments to deeply held beliefs, beliefs that so often comprise our students'—and our own—identities" ("The Dogma of Inquiry" 363). The turn by these and other scholars toward understanding and respecting students' faith commitments and, even further, considering possibilities for extending the connection between student faith and learning has been a positive, productive, encouraging one, and it has been accompanied by an increased interest in intersections of religious rhetoric and civic and community engagement.

Religion, Rhetoric, and the Civic Sphere

As understandings of student religious identity in the classroom have extended toward possibility in the past decade or two, so, too, have scholarly efforts to consider the possibilities for spiritual and religious rhetoric and public discourse. One scholar interested in these areas, Kristine Hansen, claims that "politics—including the religious convictions that might inform a person's politics—can legitimately be the focus of a composition course," and she suggests that "rather than set religion aside as irrelevant or inadmissible in the teaching of

rhetorical arts, we confront the fact that religion matters to many students…we need to help students find the language that will allow them to bring religious values into public discourse without crippling the dialogue that a democracy depends upon" (32-33). Hansen's interests are in helping students identify the ways in which their religious commitments and rhetorics can be used productively in the public sphere, particularly in politics.

Mark Allan Steiner seeks to provide, with his "Faithful Witness Model," evangelical Christians with just such a way to utilize "particular beliefs and values from within the evangelical faith tradition" in order to more productively approach "the challenges of living in a pluralistic and democratic society" in a way that "would not be a compromise but actually a profound affirmation of their faith" (314). T J Geiger II uses the process of "the free exercise of rhetoric"—which "means recognizing that religion is rhetorical, discursive, and political as well as personal" (254)—to "work with students' personal commitments and enhance their rhetorical practice" (249). Geiger wants "to assist students in developing their abilities to read, write, and speak in the mess of competing and disparate discourses that make claims on their attention and lives—discourses they might reposition themselves within and/or against" (264). Geiger ultimately concludes that "Rhetorical education is ethical education," and he hopes that "we can teach a *just* writing that enables ethical world-making" (264).

Finally, DePalma and Ringer also see the need and potential for composition instructors and students to explore the connections between religious rhetoric and civic discourse and engagement. They state that "Given the importance of religious voices in public discourse, the study of religious rhetorics ought to be a central priority for rhetorical theorists…through the study of religious rhetorics, scholars of rhetoric might be better positioned to promote pathways to mutual understanding and tolerance in the public sphere" (281-282). DePalma and Ringer "see foregrounding religious identity, affiliation, motivation, commitment, and influence in rhetorical scholarship as significant because it prompts a novel set of concerns about religious rhetorics. Broadly speaking, it urges us to ask what difference it might make when rhetorical action is motivated by religious traditions and assumptions" (282). Since writing this recommendation for further research into the connections between religion and rhetorical action in public life, both DePalma and Ringer have begun to answer the call they put out. DePalma has written about rhetorical education, articulating how we might reimagine it by providing students opportunities to articulate their religious beliefs and values, consider the implications of those values for civic life, redefine religious discourses and identities, and cultivate the rhetorical resources necessary to communicate their values "across religious and worldview differences" ("Reimagining" 253). Ringer's 2016 book, *Vernacular*

Christian Rhetoric and Discourse, explores, via three case studies, the question of "how [evangelical Christian students'] faith might inform or align with the kind of creativity that offers hope for civic engagement" (169). Specifically, Ringer wants to teach "[millennial evangelicals] how to draw on their faith-based values, beliefs, assumptions, and identities in meaningful, creative ways toward deliberative ends" (3), and he uses case studies to argue that students are both capable of doing so and are already doing so.

It is this conversation about possibilities for exploring religious beliefs and values in the composition classroom in order to foster more responsible, thoughtful civic and community engagement, that this project joins.

Exigency and Significance

We occupy a period of simultaneous social and religious divisiveness and increased (and increasing) religious diversity.[3] In such a time, better understanding of religious motives and how they are enacted can enrich public and academic discourse by fostering more nuanced analysis and understanding of how people enact their beliefs (as well as, perhaps, prompt readers to reflect on their own religious or values-based motives for where they invest themselves). An increased understanding of the roles that religious motives play

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[3] For more about religious diversity in America, see Jones and Cox.

in how individuals choose to invest their time, energy, and money in various social causes will contribute valuably not only to the field of Rhetoric and Composition but to all fields interested in what motivates engagement in the public sphere.

Indeed, if part of the job of the teacher of rhetoric is to concern herself not only with teaching rhetorical concepts but with the formation of a person of *character* who will then enact that character in civic life, we should be concerned with what beliefs and values motivate people to engage in the public sphere. Greater understanding of the motives underlying social good work is also valuable for advocacy groups and anyone engaged in activist pursuits, as such understanding can contribute to more effective recruiting, more honest articulation of purpose, deeper analysis of methods and ethics, and more committed, sustained engagement.

Additionally, this project seeks to examine *how* the religious beliefs and values motivating advocacy or activism affect the ways in which that work takes place rhetorically. As scholars such as DePalma, Ringer, Geiger, and Williams have observed, religious motivations and commitments provide valuable resources for rhetorical engagement, education, and expression. However, these scholars' arguments focus largely on the work of composition instructors and religiously-committed students in the classroom. This study extends their

arguments about the possibilities of sources of "vernacular religious creativity" (Ringer), to examine how, specifically, religious motivations are rhetorically enacted in civic contexts.

Increased understanding of how religious beliefs are articulated and rhetorically enacted in civic contexts yields insights into the rhetorical strategies used—consciously or unconsciously—by those whose religious beliefs motivate their actions, and these insights have value for our work as scholars and as teachers of students who also have beliefs and values that serve as motivations for their words and actions—words and actions we hope they carry into meaningful work in the public sphere. As we teach students to argue persuasively by taking into consideration the rhetorical situation surrounding their arguments, we can challenge students to consider the beliefs and values that undergird their actions and strategies and to consider how those values might be articulated to diverse audiences.

By studying the BCHP's rhetorical practices, I gained insight into possibilities for how rhetorical education can take place to better equip students for effective civic engagement. By examining the rhetorical strategies utilized by the BCHP, and to what effect, I examined the kinds of rhetorical practices and strategies necessary for effective engagement in the work of the BCHP. If an instructor wishes to educate students effectively for civic work but does not have

any knowledge of what kinds of rhetorical strategies organizations utilize and require, the rhetorical education for public good that is accomplished in the classroom will be incomplete. However, by examining the rhetorical strategies of an organization doing the kinds of work many of us teachers hope our students will engage in, I gained insight into exciting possibilities for engaging students in rhetorical practices that will prepare them for such work.

Roadmap: Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two of this dissertation is a thorough explanation of my ethnographic methodology and my interview and data collection methods for this qualitative study. I also explore my research framework—Community-Based Research—and my research stance; I do so to make clear in a study focused on beliefs, values, and commitments, what my own are.

To understand this study, you must understand the organization at its center and the context for the organization's work. And so, in Chapter Three, I provide a thorough introduction to the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) and the state of hunger and poverty in Texas and in America. First, I explain the origins of the organization; then I discuss the cultural and political context into which and because of which the BCHP was created. I describe the first decade of the organization's existence: its structure, staff, mission, values, and work. And, finally, I discuss the organization's evolution in

those same areas and conclude with the staff's vision for the BCHP's future. Thus equipped with the necessary background knowledge, you will be prepared to engage the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the role of theology and religiously-animated values in motivating the BCHP's work. This chapter explores the religious calling and identity of the BCHP's founder, Jeremy Everett, and the connections between his theological beliefs and his values. Jeremy's beliefs in the Kingdom of God, the Levitical practice of Jubilee, and the *imago Dei* (image of God) form the basis for and animate his deeply-held values: equality, common ground, and humility. The argument of this study is that those values then animate and motivate his and the organization's use of four specific rhetorical strategies: rhetorical presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight are each devoted to a specific theologically-animated rhetorical strategy utilized by Jeremy and the BCHP staff in their work. Each chapter defines and discusses the focal rhetorical strategy; demonstrates how the strategy is an enactment of the theologically-animated values of equality, common ground, and humility discussed in Chapter Four; and provides examples of the strategy in the work of the organization.

Chapter Five is a discussion of the BCHP's use of rhetorical presence to establish ethos and demonstrate solidarity. Chapter Six describes the BCHP's

strategic use of storytelling to challenge myths about poverty and to reimagine common biblical texts in ways that compel readers/hearers to act justly. Chapter Seven elucidates the BCHP's inter- and intra-organizational collaboration. And Chapter Eight discusses the organization's gradualist approach to social change.

Chapter Nine concludes the body of the study by discussing the implications of the project's findings about theologically-animated rhetorical strategies for work with students. In this chapter, I discuss the BCHP's student trip model of rhetorical education and extrapolate from the model and from the organization's rhetorical practices possible adaptations of the BCHP's rhetorical strategies for the writing classroom.

Finally, in keeping with my commitment to reciprocity in my work with the BCHP, a brief Afterword outlines some major implications of this study for the BCHP and similar organizations.

CHAPTER TWO

Conducting Community-Based Research with the Baylor Collaborative on
Hunger and Poverty (BCHP): Framework, Methodology, and Methods

Project Overview

This project investigates the relationship between the religiously-animated

values and the rhetorical strategies of the staff of the Baylor Collaborative on

Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). The research questions guiding this work are: *What*

role do religious motives play in civic engagement? and *When present, how do religious*

motives animate rhetorical social action?

Site of the Study[1]

This project is a study of the BCHP, a Baylor University-affiliated but

independently funded collaborative devoted to addressing both the root causes

and symptoms of poverty and hunger in America, broadly, and in Texas,

specifically. The BCHP has field offices across the state and a central office in

Waco. The organization has a small staff of, on average, 20-25 people, with about

half of those staff at the Waco central office and the other half around the state at

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[1] Full profiles of the settings of this study—Waco, TX, Baylor University, and the
BCHP—begin on p. 37.

regional offices, most of which have between one and three staff members. The ten staff members who, at the start of this project, comprised the central office staff are the participants in this study.

I define the BCHP, broadly, and the ten central office staff, specifically, as a community (perhaps more accurately, the central staff are a smaller community within the larger community of all BCHP staff) in accordance with Etienne Wenger's definition of a community as a "social configuratio[n] in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence" (5). In fact, Wenger specifically identifies workplace colleagues as communities of practice: "Workers organize their lives with their immediate colleagues…Although workers may be contractually employed by a large institution, in day-to-day practice they work with—and, in a sense, for—a much smaller set of people and communities" (6).

Project Aims

My aims in this study were to investigate the motivations the BCHP community named for working in a social justice field and to discover and analyze the rhetorical strategies they use to get work done in the world. By investigating whether the religiously-affiliated staff of the organization named their religious beliefs as motivations for their work and by investigating how those religious motivations—if present—impacted, animated, or motivated their

rhetorical strategies, I intended to extend the scholarly conversations in Rhetoric

and Composition related to the intersections of religious beliefs and values and

civic participation. In light of the scholarly interest in cultivating rhetorically

capable and responsible citizens, I particularly desired to uncover—by studying

religiously-affiliated people already doing the kinds of social good work many

instructors hope our students will engage in—new possibilities for engaging

with religious beliefs and values in the university rhetoric and writing classroom.

Toward this end of investigating motivations for civic good work and how such

motivations animate rhetorical strategies, I undertook an interview- and textual

analysis-based ethnographic study of the BCHP central office staff.

Methodology

Ethnography and Ethnographic Perspective

For this study, I adopted an ethnographic perspective, by which I mean I

assumed an approach that adopts ethnography's methodological tools,

procedures, and traits—observation, interviews, flexibility, study of an entire

community, lengthy duration—but with a more focused approach (Green and

Bloome 183). By "a more focused approach," Judith Green and David Bloome

mean doing "less than a comprehensive ethnography," by "study[ing] particular

aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group" (183).[2] Rather than conducting a "comprehensive" ethnographic study, I began my research knowing that I intended to investigate a "particular aspect" of the BCHP's work: their rhetorical practices and the relationship of those practices to staff's articulated identities and motivations for their work. Thus, I began the project and data gathering with a scope more expansive than case study allows, but narrower than that of researchers conducting "comprehensive ethnographies."[3]

In part, I chose ethnographic perspective for the methodological flexibility it provides. Rather than limiting my study to only a few people, events, or texts, my project's scope was broad and open to boundary negotiation, enabling me to gather and consider any relevant information, from a variety of contexts and situations, to form the basis for my analysis and argument. I interviewed all ten central office staff members, attended and observed staff meetings and speaking events, and read written materials from a variety of contexts—web copy, scholarly research, reports, memos, emails, etc., only narrowing my scope to particularly relevant participants, texts, and events as answers to my research questions began to emerge.

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[2] I first encountered the concept of "ethnographic perspective" in Sheridan, p. 80.

[3] For more on the similarities and differences between case study and ethnography, see MacNealy, chapters 10 and 11.

Another reason that I chose to work from an ethnographic perspective is the methodology's emphasis on "inter-relationships." Mary Sue MacNealy notes ethnography's focus on "relationships between inhabitants and between the environment [of the community] and its inhabitants," relationships she calls "the main area of interest in an ethnography" (215). Mary P. Sheridan agrees, and contributes more nuance to what "relationships" might mean: "what is distinctive about ethnography is its orientation to understanding the rich visible and seemingly invisible networks influencing the participants in the study" (73). In examining the motives of the BCHP staff and the relationship of those motives to their rhetorical practices, I sought to make visible—to understand—that which has gone unexamined.

Studies of motives for civic work and the possible connections between those motives and the rhetorical strategies adopted to conduct such work are few. What ethnographic perspective as a methodology provides is the means to examine these connections that have been unexamined. Ethnographic methodology provided the richest way to conduct such study because, rather than developing hypotheses from a case study of a select few employees or from a detached perspective (e.g. from textual analysis alone), immersion in the full community via observation and interviews allowed for each member of the BCHP staff to think through and articulate their motivations for their work and

to speculate about how they think their motivations intersect with or diverge from those of others. I sought through this project to examine inter-related, often "invisible," aspects of the work done by the BCHP. I sought to extend ethnography's inherent interest in relationships—typically between members of the community or culture and between the community's environment and structures—to include understandings and relationships, invisible networks, *within* a single staff member and work community: the intrapersonal relationship between motives and rhetorical practices as well as the inter-organizational relationships between the goals and motivations of the BCHP and the rhetorical practices and strategies employed by the community.

There are costs to conducting research from an ethnographic perspective. Sheridan notes what ethnography demands of a researcher: "the extended time, the personal entanglements, the sheer messiness" (82). Indeed, I will soon address some elements of the "sheer messiness" of this work; however, despite the ethical and logistic challenges ethnographic methodology presents to studying writing, Sheridan says, "the rewards are great, most notably gaining emic perspectives that support, challenge, or most likely complicate public pedagogies about language and culture in telling ways. Few other methodologies provide such benefits, benefits that can help our field learn about the people and literacy practices we hope to engage" (82). I agree.

Data Collection and Analysis

Overview

Because I sought to understand how BCHP staff members understood their motivations for their work, whether they would identify religious beliefs or commitments as part (or all) of those motivations, and how their articulated motivations might manifest in their rhetorical strategies, I primarily utilized interviews and textual-analysis as the data for this project.

Interviews

Because this project attempts to discern the connections between values, religious beliefs and motivations, civic engagement, and rhetorical practice, interviews were the primary source of data collection for this project. In order to get at these deeply personal and internal realities, equally personal and reflective questions must be posed and participants must have the space, time, and relative privacy to consider and share. Thus, I conducted all interviews in person in each staff member's office in order to maximize the flexibility of the method. Being in person allowed me to "read the room," sense discomfort or hesitation, and generate questions or initial small talk from items—books, pictures, art—around each staff member's office. Holding interviews in each participant's office reinforced the study's focus on the organization's work and was intended to

foster increased comfort for each participant, as I was entering their space, not the other way around. I also audio-recorded each interview to reduce the possibility of misremembering or misinterpreting information in the moment.

To prevent the potentially serious problem that a poorly worded question, memory lapse, or mishearing could lead to significant miscommunication, inaccurate information, or misinterpretation of information, flowing in either direction between researcher and participant, I had my initial interview questions[4] prescreened for researcher bias by my dissertation committee and Baylor's IRB office. While this doesn't eliminate the possibility of inaccurate or biased questions or answers, question review reduces that chance.

My interview questions were designed to be open-ended and subject to participant reflection. For example, rather than asking the closed, directive question: "Are you motivated by your religious beliefs to work for the BCHP?"— which is, in fact, what I wanted to know, but which would be a leading and, therefore, unreliable/unethical question in this context—I asked, "What initially motivated you to come to work for the BCHP?" and then, "What motivates you to continue working here after ___ years/months?"

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[4] See Appendix: "Interview Questions," p. 259.

In conducting interviews focused primarily on people's personal motivations for their work and the ways in which they make rhetorical decisions regarding that work, "accuracy" as a concept is made more complicated by the subjective and intensely personal nature of the questions and responses. Though I asked questions designed to prompt reflection and "accurate" reporting, I also asked them to reflect on and share their own experiences and perceptions related to my research questions. Thus, the data must be trusted as it is, while also being recognized for what it is: limited and subjective. I did, however, offer for each participant to examine the transcripts of her or his interview to verify accuracy. And the final copy of this project was sent to BCHP leadership and communications staff for fact-check, assurance of confidentiality, and review.

I chose to conduct structured but flexible interviews: I had planned questions, but did not limit myself to those questions. My planned questions were all open-ended questions, designed to investigate understandings of the mission of the organization, motivations for pursuing that work, and choices made in rhetorical practices at work. Closed questions were asked only where follow-up or clarification was needed. My planned questions were kept in a notebook, which I always had out during interviews, with a pen, but which I rarely used, only occasionally using the list to keep me on track or the notebook to jot down a few notes. Because I rarely used the notebook, I asked the same

35

questions a bit differently from subject to subject. However, the differences in

wording were minimal, and if I suspected that the way I worded a question

caused confusion, I reworded it or read the version written in my notebook.

Finally, I conducted interviews in several rounds. In the initial round, I

individually interviewed each member of the BCHP central office staff, asking

both organizational and personal questions about the mission of the BCHP,

perceived or understood individual and organizational motivations for working

at the BCHP, any personal values that each staff member experienced as present

or absent in their work, and the rhetorical choices staff make in their work. I then

conducted second and third round interviews with some participants as relevant

follow-up questions arose from the work, usually because I needed further

clarification or elaboration or because a new question or thought or theory

emerged to which I wanted answers or insights. For example, I conducted a

follow up interview with Jeremy Everett following the release of his book, as I

wanted to ask questions regarding some of the rhetorical choices he made in

writing it. During follow up interviews, I sometimes recorded and sometimes

simply took notes, depending on the nature of the questions I was asking.

All unattributed quotations in this study are from BCHP staff interviews.

Transcription

I utilized two methods of transcription for my interview audio files. The first method, which I used on just a few of the files, was to upload them to Happy Scribe, an automatic transcription software service. However, the automated software was highly inaccurate. So, I would use the text generated by Happy Scribe and then go back over it, making substantial corrections as I listened to the file. This method allowed me to work from a textual base. Ultimately, I had transcriptionists from a well-known transcription service, Rev, transcribe the majority of the audio files. Though Rev guarantees ninety-nine percent accuracy of transcription, I read through each finished transcription, marked any places where I had questions about the accuracy of the transcription, and used Rev's audio software to double-check each paragraph, sentence, and/or word of concern. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, all audio files and transcriptions are stored in a password protected, personal Rev account; all Rev transcriptionists sign Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs); and all data on Rev's site is encrypted.

Other Data Collection: Texts from the BCHP

In addition to interviews, I also collected texts from the BCHP staff in order to analyze the staff's rhetorical choices. I collected web-copy, emails, presentation scripts, PowerPoints, reports, academic journal articles, newspaper

articles, videos of speeches, social media and blog posts, among others. Initially, I

cast a wide data net, drawing in and reading various materials as I worked

through interview transcripts, looking for connections between what subjects

were articulating as their motivations for their work, the values that arose from

those motivations, and the rhetorical strategies they employed. Some texts I

gathered by asking participants to send me texts representative of their work or

something we discussed; sometimes staff simply sent or recommended texts to

me. At the midway point of this project, the organization's founder, Jeremy

Everett, published a book, *I Was Hungry*, which became one of my most

significant data sources.

Textual Analysis

For this project, I analyzed interview transcripts, notes, and other collected

texts, defined broadly to include all manner of multimodal presentations and

compositions. As I read interview transcripts and other forms of data, I began to

code the material by common themes and patterns.[5] As I did the reading, sorting,

and connecting work, I began to analyze texts in search of what was interesting

and got at my research questions. For example, because I sought in part to see

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[5] For an excellent discussion of the complexities of coding, the ways in which coding is inaccurately conceived of as objective, and an argument for making "coding loosely equivalent to reading" (273), see Grant-Davie.

whether the staff would name their religious identities as motivators for their work, I looked for any reference to religion, theology, God, faith, or religious texts. I also coded for values as they were articulated. For example, I established patterns within and across interviews of references to "equality," "equity," "an even playing field," and "opportunities for all."

Thomas N. Huckin's six "recursive" steps of conducting context-sensitive text analysis most closely mirrors my own analytic process: 1. "selection of an initial corpus"; 2. "identification of salient patterns"; 3. "a determination of interestingness"; 4. "selection of a study corpus"; 5. "verification of the pattern"; 6. "functional-rhetorical analysis" (90-92). According to Huckin, "interestingness" can be determined by usefulness and originality. If a pattern or finding in the data might be useful in answering the problem a study is set up to address and if it is original—fresh, new, insightful—it counts as interesting. Huckin's sixth step: "functional-rhetorical analysis" is the step during which the researcher is tasked with "constructing a plausible, if tentative, explanation" of the patterns identified in steps 2-5. I followed these steps, in a recursive way, throughout my project: collecting and reading data, identifying patterns and items of note, determining those patterns' relatedness to the questions of this project, narrowing the scope for deep study to the closely related data that it would be feasible and exciting to analyze, and digging deeper into the material

39

in order to arrive at plausible explanations and theories for what emerged (and was constructed) from the data.

In the kind of thematic, context-sensitive analysis that I conducted, I sought to conduct a rigorous but flexible study that offers plausible theories and observations about the connections between identity, motivation, and rhetorical strategy, while also being honest about the fact that such a study raises as many new questions and possibilities for inquiry as it answers. I am all too aware of the contextual, intersectional nature of the questions I ask in this project, complex questions about identity, values, motivations, work, and rhetoric. Thus, my project seeks not to offer definitive answers, but to provide insight into complex realities, to probe aspects of work and identity that have often gone un-probed.

Methodological Limitations and Delimitations

Four Common Ethnographic Errors[6]

Sampling error. I avoided sampling error—which occurs when care is not taken to ensure that the sites or subjects of data collection are representative of the researched community—by interviewing the entire community I studied, by

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[6] I derive the general definitions of these four ethnographic errors from MacNealy pp. 226-227.

planning and conducting my research on an unrushed timeline (moving my graduation date back by nine months once it became clear that my original timeline would not allow for the thoroughness good work requires), and by noting any abnormalities and limitations in both my methodology and the results of the data analysis.

Researcher error. I sought to minimize researcher bias by seeking input on the reports of my data from those within the BCHP community and from my dissertation advisor, as well as by disclosing my methods in this chapter. I also address the possibility of forwarding an unwarranted degree of certainty about my judgment, interpretations, or findings by offering this study's conclusions as informed hypotheses, rather than objective facts.

Interpretation error. In my project's earliest stages, my dissertation committee preemptively helped me consider ways in which I was planning to collect more data than I needed or could use effectively, helping me avoid interpretation error, which often results from having too much information, missing information, or conflicting information. Limiting the scope of my project in the pre-research phase helped ensure that I was designing data collection to specifically address the questions I was asking. In the case of missing data, I sought answers: conducting further interviews and gathering more data. Rather

than sweeping conflicting information under the rug or assuming cause-and-effect, I took these kinds of information and pursued them, asking further questions. I also minimized the risk of interpretation error by providing BCHP staff with opportunities to review my interpretation and analysis of data collected from or relevant to each of them.

Unbalanced methods. I designed this study so that the data I collected was best suited to the questions I was asking. Such study design reduces the error of unbalanced methods, which occurs when a researcher focuses unevenly or inappropriately, for a given study, on qualitative and quantitative data collection and emphases. Additionally, I have been, throughout this project, conscious of and transparent about both the limitations of the study and my ardent support of further work in these areas of scholarship and even in these very research questions.

Participant Observation

A common aspect of ethnographic research is the concept of the researcher as a "participant observer," a role that is notoriously challenging to navigate. In my work I sought to minimize the fuzziness of my role as a participant-observer in the following ways: discussing with my advisor and the BCHP leadership my already-existent role as a BCHP research fellow, having the

initial role-defining conversations with the BCHP that are discussed in later sections of this chapter, and disclosing my relationship with each research participant as is relevant.

As someone who, prior to the beginning of my research, had been involved with the BCHP in some capacity for several years, my positionality at the onset of this project was already, in some ways, on the line between insider (commonly used to mean "member of the community") and participant observer.[7] I had insider knowledge of aspects of the BCHP's work (e.g. student trips) but little to no substantive knowledge of many other aspects (e.g. grant writing and policy work). Similarly, I am a BCHP research fellow, and thus have a bio on the BCHP's website, but there are more than forty fellows, scattered across the country, and each researcher's affiliation with the BCHP is as substantive (or not) as the researcher chooses for it to be; there are no formal requirements attached to the research fellowship. Thus, my positionality as a research fellow squarely falls into the "participant" category, not the "insider" one. Finally, I was already casual[8] friends with a few BCHP staff members, had

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[7] For more on this, see pp. 47-49.

[8] By "casual friends," I mean something along the lines of sharing mutual friends, attending social functions at which the other is present, and casually talking at such social functions. Casual friends does not entail socializing or communicating one-on-one, except as relates to this or another project.

participated in BCHP-related events or work with a few staff members, was acquaintances with others, and knew others by name, role, and reputation only.

The benefits of the insider elements of my perspective were familiarity, strong working relationships, and ease of access to staff and information. I was also aware, however, that the insider elements of my role could potentially cloud my judgment, as could the facts that my own religious background and beliefs are Christian, that I am personally and intellectually aligned with many of the BCHP's overall goals and concepts of poverty, poverty-reduction, and social justice, and that most of the BCHP staff either knew or assumed my religious and social-justice likemindedness. However, my experiences with the BCHP were still *limited*. I had previously interacted with only half of BCHP's ten central office staff members, and none of those interactions were explicitly related to my research topics. Similarly, though I was always warmly welcomed in the BCHP's offices throughout the duration of this project, my presence was always talked about and identified by staff as that of a researcher, an evaluator, an observer. I began this project conscientiously, seeking to identify both positive and negative biases, and I continued seeking to identify and address those biases as I worked through the project.

The Settings of this Study

This study took place in three overlapping settings: Waco, TX, Baylor University (located in Waco), and the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP; a project of Baylor). Consideration of each of these overlapping contexts will facilitate the most robust understanding of this project.

Waco, TX

Waco is located in Central Texas, halfway between the DFW metro area (90 miles to the north) and Austin (100 miles to the south). The population of Waco proper is approximately 138,000 ("QuickFacts"), with a metro area population of approximately 270,000 ("Waco, TX Metro Area").

Until very recently, most national knowledge of Waco has been the result of the tragedies that have occurred in or near the city in the last hundred years: the lynching of Jesse Washington in 1916; the "Waco siege," aka the Branch Dividian stand-off in 1993; and, more recently, the 2015 rival biker gang shootout in the parking lot of a restaurant, Twin Peaks, which left nine dead, more than twenty critically injured, and an astounding 177 arrested (Flynn). Indeed, at the time of this writing, when one types "books about Waco" into Google, the first

titles that come up are *The Ashes of Waco*; *Waco: A Survivor's Story*; *Armageddon in Waco*; *The Waco Siege*; *The Davidian Massacre*; and *The First Waco Horror*.[9]

While these tragedies have significantly influenced popular understandings of Waco, Wacoans know that they are in no way representative of the city as a whole. Waco is home to many attractions, such as the 400+ acre Cameron Park; the Waco Mammoth National Monument, designated by President Obama in 2015; and Baylor University. Most recently, however, Waco has gained national, and even international fame, as the home of Chip and Joanna Gaines, the HGTV stars of *Fixer-Upper* and owners of Magnolia Market. *Fixer-Upper* ran from 2013-2018 and catapulted Waco back into the nation's field of vision, this time with different connotations. The Gaines' store, Magnolia Market, which opened in 2015 has driven the astonishing uptick in tourism in Waco: in 2014 (pre-Magnolia Market) Waco saw about 650,000 tourists; in 2018 that number had more than quadrupled, to 2.7 million for the year (Copeland).

In 2018, Waco's population was primarily white, Latino and Hispanic, and Black, at 43%, 32%, and 22% respectively ("QuickFacts"). Waco's population is currently 11% foreign-born ("QuickFacts"). In 2018, the poverty rate in Waco was

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[9] By Reavis; Thibodeau; Wright; Rosewood and Walker; Moore; and Bernstein, respectively. All of which are about the Branch Davidians except for *The First Waco Horror* (Bernstein), which is about the lynching of Jesse Washington.

approximately 26.8% ("QuickFacts"), two and a half times the national average

of 11.8% (Semega et al. 1). However, the poverty rate in Waco is on a decline

from the early 2010s when it hovered around 30% (Smith).

Waco is in McLennan County, a county that went 61% for Donald Trump

and 34% for Hilary Clinton in the 2016 election (Bloch et al.). However, like many

urban areas and areas with high minority populations, Waco proper went blue in

2016, with the surrounding parts of McLennan County going deep red. For

example, my precinct in Waco went 56% for Clinton and 38% for Trump, while

precincts less than a mile further outside of the city had nearly inverse results

(Bloch et al.).

Waco is, like many Texas cities, full of churches. As the home of the

world's largest Baptist university (Baylor) and as a city in Texas, a state that

identifies as 77% Christian with 31% of that being evangelical Christian ("Adults

in Texas"), Waco's religious context is similarly mostly Christian and

significantly Baptist. For example, the Waco Regional Baptist Association church

directory lists 92 member Baptist churches ("Waco Regional"). Similarly, Baylor's

Spiritual Life department website lists 87 churches from 16 Christian

denominations as options for students looking for a congregation ("Local

Churches").

Baylor University

Chartered in 1845, Baylor University is the oldest continually operating

university in Texas and is proud of its designation as the largest Baptist

university in the world. Undergraduate enrollment in Spring 2020 was 13,221,

and an additional 4162 graduate students put Baylor's total Spring 2020

enrollment at 17,383 ("Spring 2020 Headcount"). Baylor is a NCAA D1 school

and a part of the Big 12 conference.

Baylor's student body is comprised of approximately 38% minority

students, broken down and rounded into the following percentages in these

primary categories: 6% Black, 11% Asian, 16% Hispanic, 5% multiracial ("Profile

of Undergraduate"). The 2019-2020 freshman class—3307 students—had a mean

ACT score of 28.8 ("Profile of First-Time"). Baylor students come from all 50

states and 91 foreign countries ("Profile of Undergraduate"). Just under 90% of

Baylor's undergraduate student population in 2019 reported Christian religious

affiliation with one of 36 denominational options, with the largest groups being:

Baptist (24.7% of students), Christian, no affiliation (19.6%), Catholic (16.9%), and

non-denominational (8.2%) ("Profile of Undergraduate"). As of Fall 2019, only

.5% of Baylor's students self-identify as atheists, while another 4.8% claim no

religious affiliation. Other major world religions claim small percentages of the

student body's religious affiliation: Buddhism (.5%), Hinduism (1.1%), Judaism

(.1%), and Islam (.8%) ("Profile of Undergraduate"). Undergraduate cost of

attendance at Baylor for 2019-2020 was $65,503 ("2019-2020 Undergraduate").

Data from the early 2010s demonstrated that 7.1% of Baylor's student body came

from the top 1% (families that made $630,000/year or more), and 57% of the

student body came from the top fifth (20%) of socioeconomic brackets (families

that made $110,000/year or more) ("Economic diversity"). Although Baylor's

student body is diverse, it is also fair to say that many Baylor students are

academic high-achievers, identified in some way with Christianity, and from

relative financial affluence.

Baylor's reputation has traditionally been influenced by its status as the

world's largest Baptist university, its academic rigor, and its relatively recent

major athletic successes. Baylor's elite women's basketball program and, in the

early 2010s, rise to football prominence with Heisman winner Robert Griffin III

catapulted several of Baylor's most popular sports to elite status.

Baylor's rise to top-ten-team dominance abruptly halted, however, in 2016

when Baylor was thrust into the national spotlight for failing to appropriately

handle claims of sexual assault (Britto). Investigations into the alleged Title IX

violations found that the university was guilty of mishandling and covering up

Title IX allegations of many types, many of which were perpetrated by Baylor

student athletes. The result of these investigations was massive institutional

change: the university's president Ken Starr (most famously known as the General Counsel during the Clinton impeachment) resigned under pressure, head football coach Art Briles was fired, as were many other campus officials, including the head of the athletic department.

The Baylor sexual assault scandal (as it is popularly called and which is the title of the event's Wikipedia page) shook the university, forcing challenging and ongoing conversations about institutional leadership problems and the tensions between Baylor's identity as a premier Christian university and its horrific mishandling of sexual assault. Though the university took appropriately serious action in addressing its noncompliance and failure to enact its Christian values, the shadow of the scandal, though receding, will likely continue to follow Baylor for years.

Under the university's new administration, led by Dr. Linda Livingstone and Provost Dr. Nancy Brickhouse, Baylor is continuing difficult conversations as it seeks to negotiate the tensions in its identity as a Christian university, a university that aspires to R1 status, and a university that seeks both academic and athletic excellence.

Baylor's Christian heritage is of central importance to the university. As the world's largest Baptist institution of higher education, Baylor seeks to cultivate in its students, faculty, staff, and other affiliates an understanding of the

relationship between faith and learning. The university's mission statement

explains that Baylor was "established to be a servant of the church and society,"

which is reflected in the University's motto: *Pro Eccelesia, Pro Texana* ("For

Church, For Texas"; though it is now more frequently interpreted "For Church,

For World") ("Mission Statement"). The way that Baylor seeks to fulfill its calling

is threefold: "through excellence in teaching and research, in scholarship and

publication, and in service to the community, both local and global" ("Mission

Statement"). Thus Baylor seeks to fuse two areas—rigorous academic study and

deep faith—that are often seen as antithetical to one another.[10] Though many in

higher education eschew religious commitment, Baylor "seeks to provide an

environment that fosters spiritual maturity, strength of character and moral

virtue" by "affirming the value of intellectually informed faith and religiously-

informed education." Baylor's commitment to helping students see their spiritual

and intellectual lives as deeply connected is mission-driven: "integral to its

commitment to God and to the church is Baylor's commitment to society…Baylor

strives to develop responsible citizens, educated leaders, dedicated scholars, and

skilled professionals" ("Mission Statement"). Baylor makes clear that it

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[10] See pp. 9-15.

understands faith, education, and community engagement and service as interdependent, each informing and, in many ways enabling, the other.

Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP)

Chapter three of this project is a thorough introduction to the primary site of this study, the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP), as well as the context for its existence, so I will provide only a short introduction here.

The BCHP was founded in 2009 as the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) by Jeremy Everett, a graduate of Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. In 2019, the organization changed its name (which will be discussed shortly and again at a later point in this project) to the BCHP.

The organization seeks to eradicate food insecurity in the state of Texas, specifically, but also to provide models of effective anti-poverty work that can be utilized nationally. The BCHP staff conduct research and support anti-hunger advocacy coalitions throughout the state of Texas in an effort to ensure that all Texans have predictable and stable access to three full meals a day.

For the duration of its history, the BCHP has been (and continues to be) affiliated with and housed by Baylor (in the School of Social Work) but the organization is 100% externally (grant) funded (including staff salaries). Staff of the organization are, however, technically Baylor employees and therefore are expected to articulate a general commitment to some form of Christian faith. The

ten staff members of the BCHP's central office were the participants of this study.

At the time, central office staff consisted of nine people. However, I also

interviewed one other staff member, who alone comprises the Waco field staff. I

interviewed this staff member, despite their being field office staff, because they

are housed with central office and is therefore an active part of day-to-day life at

the central office of the BCHP. Since my data collection for this project

concluded, one central office staff member has left the BCHP to pursue a PhD,

and the BCHP has brought two more staff on board at the central office; I did not

collect data from those two individuals. Of the ten staff members I interviewed,

nine are white and one is Black; five are women, and five are men. The staff age

range is currently late twenties to mid-fifties. Staff pseudonyms for this project

are Brian, Jackson, Jess, Kyle, Leslie, Liz, Melanie, Nathan, and Rebecca.

Before moving forward, I offer a few explanatory notes regarding

terminology. For the first decade of its existence—from its founding in 2009 until

October of 2019—the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) was

named the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI). As of October 2019, however, the

organization has been rebranded and restructured and is now known as the

Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). Under the new

organizational structure, THI remains a *branch* of the work of the BCHP.

However, while THI previously included the central office staff (who are the

focus of this study) as well as the organization's regional field offices and their

staff, "THI" now officially refers only to the field offices. The change, which will

be discussed at greater length in a later chapter as a rhetorical strategy, took

place—from idea to implementation—during the course of this project, and it has

provided both possibilities and challenges. The first BCHP staff meeting I

attended after beginning this project was the meeting in which Jeremy Everett,

the founder and executive director of THI/BCHP announced to the central office

staff that he and other leadership were exploring a rebranding and restructuring.

The official change then took place during the writing of this study.

The rebranding has confronted me with quite a dilemma regarding

terminology. On one hand, the majority of my data collection was conducted

when the organization was still called THI and it is, thus, THI specific: THI is

what the organization is referred to by staff in interviews, THI was the name on

the website, etc. However, the central office staff, who are the focus of this

project, are now BCHP staff, not THI staff (with the exception of one staff

member who is housed in the central office but who is the staff member of the

Waco field office and is thus still under the THI branch of the BCHP).

Additionally, the organization will henceforth be broadly known as the

BCHP, and, to enable the official organization name to be represented accurately

in research moving forward, I have made the following decision regarding

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terminology: to provide as much continuity as possible, I will refer to the

organization as the BCHP, even when discussing the years during which it was

officially THI; when specific context demands it, however, I will use a bracketed

version—[BCHP]—which will serve as an indication that the text in question

(interview transcript, website, etc.) actually said "THI." Additionally, I use the

real name of the organization's founder and executive director, Jeremy Everett,

but all other staff member's names are pseudonyms.[11]

Research Framework and Research Stance

Though unorthodox, I extend this methodological chapter to include

discussions of the research framework—Community-Based Research (CBR)—I

used to design this study and the research stance I adopted as a part of that

design. I include these sections for several reasons. First, the CBR research

framework I adopted for this study argues that a researcher's choices regarding

methodology and methods ultimately stem from their research framework and

the commitments—positional and ethical—of their research stance. Second, but

closely related to the first: making explicit the connections between personal

understandings/commitments/values and actions is the central aim of this

project's inquiry and thus, it seemed appropriate to begin my research with such

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[11] This decision is explained in depth on pp. 63-64.

an inquiry into my own motivations, values, and actions as a researcher. Finally,

I hope that these sections demonstrate my commitment to articulations of

methodological decisions that are thoughtful, intentional, and transparent—

decisions to work hard to create ethical, coherent research designs, while

remaining honest about how challenging and complex such choices are.

Research Framework: Community-Based Research (CBR)

My dissertation project was designed to exist in the set of methodological

approaches[12] Jeffrey T. Grabill collectively terms *community-based research* (CBR)

(211). Grabill considers CBR an off-shoot of action research (AR),[13] and, as in all

forms of AR, CBR researchers work "with people to answer questions and solve

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[12] Grabill defines "approach" as "a collection of associated methodologies" (218).

[13] Greenwood defines AR as "neither a method nor a technique; it is an approach to living in the world that includes the creation of arenas for collaborative learning and the design, enactment, and evaluation of liberating actions" (131). This "approach to living in the world" Greenwood elsewhere describes as "a strategy for conducting research that engages professional social researchers and other professional experts with the local stakeholders from an organization, a community, or a coalition in a co-generative process of knowledge creation, action design, and evaluation of outcomes…AR combines action and research, reflection and action in an ongoing cycle of cogenerative knowledge creation" (133). This strategy of AR is intended to move any AR project toward AR's "central aim": "the creation of more democratic, just, fair, and/or sustainable human situations" (133). Because AR's strategies and aims are situational and context-specific—rooted in the specifics of particular communities and their needs—"there is no one ideal form of AR" (134); instead, AR "is a broad array of practices, epistemological beliefs, ontological commitments, and processes" (134). For more on AR see Greenwood; Schafft and Greenwood, especially pp. 22-23; and Blyth, Grabill, and Riley, especially pp. 273-276. For more on the relationship between CBR and other types of AR, see Stoecker.

problems—as opposed to researching 'on' people and their problems…research

projects tend to move between capacity building, problem solving, and

theorizing" (Grabill 212). In CBR projects, *both* the community participating in

the study and the researcher are invested in the research question/s, and

collaboration during the study is intended to benefit all parties. As AR researcher

Davydd J. Greenwood says, "Learning in AR processes flows in all directions"

(142). The mutual learning that happens in CBR is intended to make progress

toward a specific, if intangible, goal. In fact, what connects CBR so closely to AR

is the fact that, in being "action driven, activities like education, political and

social change, and policy making are often explicit project goals" (Grabill 213).

The critical distinction between CBR and AR is the emphasis in CBR on

the intentional foregrounding and consideration of the relationships involved in

the study: relationships within the community, between the community and

others, and between the community and the researcher. In CBR, a researcher

makes a commitment to "moving slowly and committing oneself to know

people, listening to people, and demonstrating one's usefulness before the more

formal processes of research design can begin" (Grabill 215). While an AR

researcher may collaborate with a community but *center* the goal of a project, a

CBR researcher centers the community, cognitively aware of developing

relationships, "identifying and understanding—indeed, constructing—community" (213).

This specific project was initially born out of my relationship and collaboration with the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). At every stage of the project, I collaborated with BCHP staff members to design a project that answered research questions of interest to me *and* to the organization: what motivates engagement with civic problems and how do those motivations manifest rhetorically? As I explained in previous sections of this chapter, I derived my findings directly *from* staff or in tandem with staff in interviews, rather than solely from observation and speculation. Before explaining my *research stance*, a concept Grabill argues is crucial to CBR, I more thoroughly overview why my project fits into the CBR framework.

Project origins. Though my interest in questions related to the intersections of public life, religious commitments, deeply held values, and pedagogy had been simmering for several years, this specific project arose from a 2017 invitation to join the inaugural class of BCHP Research Fellows. The BCHP fellows program was designed to increase collaboration between the organization and interdisciplinary university faculty, at Baylor and at other universities and institutes. My previous collaboration with the BCHP had put me on their radar.

I had previously, out of an interest in extracurricular social justice

learning, travelled with the BCHP on their first Hunger in Texas trip for students

(2015), a trip led in partnership with Baylor Missions, a service department of the

university. After participating in that trip and witnessing the transformative

ways that first-hand immersion learning affected me, the BCHP staff who led the

trip, and the students who attended, I then, the following year (2016), led a

similar trip, this time partnering with the BCHP Lubbock regional office. My

enthusiasm for the work of the BCHP, the relationships I cultivated with some

BCHP staff members, and their knowledge of my intent to pursue academic lines

of inquiry relative to their work led them to extend an invitation to become a

research fellow.

The BCHP formed the fellows program because it wanted an invested

group of interdisciplinary researchers whose expertise the organization could

draw on for various projects. Additionally, because the BCHP is *at* a university

but *as* "an initiative," not an academic department, the BCHP added the fellows

program to help put the BCHP more fully into Baylor's academic paradigm:

increasing university and public awareness of the academic involvements and

components of the BCHP's work. Finally, the fellows program was formed

because Jeremy Everett, the founder of the BCHP, had heard from faculty over

the years of their desire to partner with the BCHP in producing published

academic research for the greater good. Thus, researchers collaborating with the BCHP will conduct research that interests them and, ideally, get published—benefiting their personal and career goals, while also aiding the research goals of the BCHP, disseminating information about the organization and that will aid the organization's work, and increasing the BCHP's credibility both within and outside of the university. Therefore, the BCHP research fellows program is ripe with possibility for a CBR researcher, with opportunities for partnering with a community, allowing research questions and projects to emerge out of that partnership, and mutually benefiting all participating parties.

Project aims. Upon accepting an invitation to join the inaugural class of research fellows, I began to develop this project, realizing the many benefits such a project would hold for myself, my field, the BCHP, and its field. In my pursuit of completing my doctorate, I intended to conduct dissertation research that mattered to me, addressing questions I found exigent, interesting, and, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, relevant to the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I also, in line with CBR and other forms of qualitative research, and in accordance with my role as a research fellow for the organization, wanted my research to benefit the BCHP and to contribute meaningfully to other fields involved in social good work.

In initial conversations with BCHP leadership about my research questions and project, they shared with me their sense that the project would contribute meaningfully to the organization. The leadership were excited by the possibility of a study of their rhetorical strategies and motivations, because, as Jeremy explains, "The ways in which we are communicating are, in fact, communicating. And we are getting people that are rich and poor, and conservative and progressive to buy into this cause. Why? What is it about what we're doing that can pull that out?" By attempting to name, categorize, and distill the organization's rhetorical strategies and what motivates them, the staff are hopeful that they can more mindfully cultivate and apply those strategies to other contexts and issues as the organization moves into its second decade of existence. I am interested in how rhetoric and composition are used to advocate, to stir up, to encourage, to challenge, and to produce; likewise, the BCHP and similar organizations will benefit from an exploration of this topic as well, because better understanding what motivates particular rhetorical strategies and how those strategies get work done in the world can increase the effectiveness of completing that work.

Research Stance

Because "[to practice CBR is to] construct a methodology around a set of obligations and commitments and to then practice that research with some

thoughtfulness and care" (217), Grabill believes that the most important

distinction between CBR and other methodologies is something he terms a

research stance: "a position or a set of beliefs and obligations that shape how one

acts as a researcher" (211). Given that researchers' stances will, consciously or

unconsciously, affect their methodological choices. The more conscious the

stance—the more "researchers have a sense of who they are and why they are

researching before forging ahead" (215)—the better their methodological choices

are likely to be in the "interactive" and "recursive" dance "between stance and

method" (215).

Thus, I crafted my research stance by following a template Grabill

provides[14]: "one's stance as a researcher is an answer to these questions: 1)

researcher identity. Who am I personally? as a researcher? in relation to my

discipline? 2) purposes as a researcher. Why research? 3) questions of power and

ethics. What are my commitments with respect to research?" (215). In answering

these questions, a researcher essentially lays down a "plumb line" "through the

mess of research itself, providing guidance for decision making and even for

tracking when and how one's stance changes" (215). In crafting a research stance,

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[14] I have altered this quotation by numbering the questions. In the original text, the three sets of questions are bullet-points, separated from each other and the rest of the text by double-spacing.

I thus draw from commitments to frameworks, concepts, methods, theories, ethical codes, epistemologies, and methodologies, but, by considering all of these together, the research stance requires more reflection and connective work than any of the above requires on its own.

My research stance—my answer to Grabill's three questions—for this project is as follows:

Researcher identity: Who am I personally? as a researcher? in relation to my discipline? These questions about author positionality are deceptively complex. The seemingly straightforward question "who am I personally?" has a few factual answers: my name, my age, my biological sex and gender identity, my status as a doctoral candidate. But even those objective answers carry subjective realities: my experience of my name, the experiences that result from being a cis, female doctoral student in her late twenties. Because we make decisions based on the complex understandings we have of the world and the ways we experience it from the intersections of our identities, I found this question startlingly hard to address. Thus, I offer here only the messy commitments and explanations I deemed most relevant to understanding my choices of project and methodology.

Personally, I am a woman most interested in the world becoming a more compassionate and just place, something I think language use—rhetoric,

writing—makes possible.[15] Thus, a project focused on the motivations and rhetorical practices of a group of people trying to do just that—make the world a more just place—is a natural fit for me. My desire for a more just world also facilitates a natural fit into CBR, because, according to Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Kirk Riley, a hallmark of AR (of which CBR is a variant) is "the researchers' commitment to social justice[16]" (274).

I am a curious person, one who enjoys learning and who has been deeply shaped by my experiences in higher education, and so I have made a series of choices that have resulted in my positionality in academia. The most energizing part of life in academia, to me, is teaching. As a teacher, I hope to help expand the frames of reference[17] through which my students understand and experience the world. When researching, I am almost always thinking, "what impact does/can/should this knowledge have on the classroom?" Underlying this project

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[15] Just as language (rhetoric, writing) has enabled the great injustices and horrors of the world.

[16] The authors define "social justice" as, in their words, "the term is typically defined": "empowerment for the oppressed" (274).

[17] Though the concept of "frames of reference" is widely known and used, I owe a great debt to Pipher, whose specific use of the phrase in the introduction to her book *Writing to Change the World* has stuck with me since I first encountered it while teaching the book in an upper-level writing course. Pipher writes: "We all understand the world from our own point of view, our own frames of reference, that allow us to make sense of what our senses take in. Writers help readers construct larger, more expansive frames of reference so that more of the world can be more accurately perceived" (8).

is my preoccupation with teaching well and encouraging and preparing students to think critically about and engage courageously with the world.

Impacting every intersection of my identity is my commitment to, and quarrels with, the Christian faith. There is no aspect of my personhood that is untouched by my experiences as a life-long Christian, active in the Baptist denomination. The challenges and possibilities that religious commitments present for engagement in civic life are of great personal importance to me, as are the evolutions of faith commitments and experiences, how those evolutions happen, and where they lead. These personal experiences and commitments impact the kinds of research questions I ask, such as the research questions for this project, and the kinds of questions I ask as a teacher, such as *what does all of this mean for teaching a diverse body of students, with a diverse range of backgrounds, commitments, and worldviews?*

As a researcher, I hope to be, to use Ellen Cushman's phrase, "an agent of social change." As someone who cares deeply about the ways in which civic work and social justice can be enacted and sustainably engaged in culture, I believe considering the motivations for such work and the articulation of those motives is critical. To teach, encourage, or foster more sustained civic engagement in ourselves, our students, or our communities, we must understand what motivates someone to engage civic work and how that motivation is

understood, communicated, and enacted. If we know this information, I believe we can better help foster similar commitments, care, and engagement in others. It is my beliefs in active civic participation and in the potential of rhetorical practices for shaping and articulating work in the civic sphere that motivates this project. In that sense I am both a researcher/observer of the work of the BCHP and a participant in both the BCHP's work and the broader social good to which the organization seeks to contribute.

Relative to my discipline, I am happy to count myself among the scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Though I sometimes feel that my interests and work are on the outskirts of the field—at risk of stumbling into another discipline, like sociology, social work, political science, religion, or community development—I think it likely that I would feel similarly in any other academic discipline. I am a connective thinker—seeing problems, topics, people, and events as intersectional, complex webs of other problems, topics, people, and events—and thus I am much more comfortable in interdisciplinary groups. The academy remains heavily segregated by discipline, field, and sub-field. In this academic world, I sometimes struggle to place myself. For example, in this project, I am asking questions about rhetorical strategy, religious identity and motivation, and pedagogy, in the hopes that my work will have implications for social good organizations and the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

However, the project raises equally compelling questions about politics, organizational structure, and community organizing. A tangle of diverse, interdisciplinary questions arising out of research is not unique; what perhaps is more unique is my desire to personally untangle them all. [18]

The field of Rhetoric and Composition, however, is a good fit for me. The field is more overtly flexible than many disciplines, easily allowing interdisciplinary study because it is primarily concerned with language and language use—which words are used in a particular context, arranged how and in what number, what can be learned from them. And my preferred way of studying the many things I'm curious about is to consider how people understand, articulate, make sense of, and communicate their experiences. I am still primarily concerned with rhetoric and composition in the world—what they do, and what we can do with them. Because language mediates human experience, there are few limits on the possibilities for valid inquiry in Rhetoric and Composition.

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[18] I am in no way implying that I am alone in the interdisciplinary interests and preoccupations discussed here. Other scholars in Rhetoric and Composition, and many other fields, are also considering interdisciplinary questions and moving fluidly between related sub-fields. There are many scholars, in many fields, resisting the attitude that a researcher must pick a lane and stay in it. Hence why I say my discomfort is likely the result of traditional academic attitudes/structures, rather than anything unique to the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

Purposes as a researcher: Why research? There are several layers of answer to

this question. The most straightforward layer for this study is, perhaps, the

pragmatic: I research to have material for a dissertation, which I want to

complete in order to receive my degree and get a job. Though this level is, or

should be, obvious, I think it important to mention. If honesty builds credibility, I

think more researchers would do well to admit that all research is driven at least

in part by pragmatism: to finish a project and get a degree, to get published, to

get tenure, to get promoted. Honesty about this first level answer to "why

research?" is not a formality; the pragmatic reasons for research shape studies.

This project narrowed in scope significantly from its inception during the

dissertation brainstorming and prospectus process. The narrowed scope of this

project was determined by pragmatic limitations: of experience (never having

completed a project of this type initially meant over-estimating what could be

accomplished in the dissertation genre and timeframe), of resources (lack of

money to travel to the BCHP's regional offices to conduct interviews and

observations, for example), and, most crucially, of time. Thus, my project and

methodology are inherently affected by the fact that part of my answer to the

question "why research?" is "to finish grad school and get a job."

The second level answer to the question "why research?" is, I think, better

understood as an answer to the question "why is research valuable?" I could

answer this question in many ways, but, for the sake of simplicity and brevity: I

believe many types and areas of research can function to make people more

compassionate, by increasing the frames of reference[19] through which they see

and experience the world, and to make the world more just. Because I believe

research can accomplish these aims, even in small, incremental ways, and

because these are commitments I hold, I want to conduct such research. When I

first drafted my research stance, I was afraid that such a rationale sounded too

sentimental or naïve. However, other researchers express similar commitments.

Blythe, Grabill, and Riley, for example, argue that "action-research projects can

then be described by the ways they manifest two hallmarks: (a) the researchers'

commitment to social justice and (b) the relationship between researchers and

participants" (274). Though the authors allow that different researchers definitely

"reveal different senses of, and commitments to, social justice[20]" (274), a

commitment of some kind is considered a "hallmark" of such research.

Greenwood also identifies the "central aim" of AR as "the creation of more

democratic, just, fair, and/or sustainable human situations" (133). I, too, want to

conduct work that contributes to these ends.

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[19] See fn. 15 on p. 52.

[20] See fn. 14 on p. 52.

My answer to the third and final level to "why research?" is my answer to the more nuanced "why *this* research, *this* project?" I've previously discussed some of the answers to this question, particularly how my role as a BCHP research fellow impacted my decision to pursue this project. Here I will offer some of my other reasons for pursuing this study.

In seeking a viable dissertation project, I wanted to, first and foremost, conduct research that interested me and that contributed meaningfully to the field of Rhetoric and Composition. My interests are widely varied, but when I looked at some of the most enduring questions in which I was interested, some questions rose to the top, questions about the intersections between civic engagement and responsibility, faith commitments, education and composition pedagogy, social justice, rhetoric and rhetorical strategies, identity, diversity, and politics. From those questions, I explored possible projects. As a faith-affiliated organization that works with diverse community partners—including those of other denominations, other faiths, no faiths, both major political parties, local, state, and federal government agencies, etc.—the BCHP was a research site where the questions I was asking about the intersections between religious commitments and rhetorical practices were easily foregrounded.

As discussed in Chapter One of this study, questions about the personal creative and rhetorical resources religious identity provides are exigent in the

field of Rhetoric and Composition. Issues at the intersection of religious identities and civic engagement continue to shift into clearer view, both culturally and academically. Considerations of these intersections and what better understandings of religious motivations for civic engagement can provide to composition pedagogy are timely and important.

Finally, the methodology and methods I needed to utilize to ask the research questions this project asks necessitated qualitative research, an area in which I had great professional interest but no experience. Given the intersectional, complex, and deeply individual/personal nature of many of my research interests, it is likely that my career will foreground qualitative research. This study provided a natural first step into that research methodology.

Questions of power and ethics. What are my commitments with respect to research? Writing about people's lives is a form of exerting power over them, and that power "comes with political and ethical consequences" (Sheridan 78). Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter similarly argue that "research ought…to understand its ethical and political positionings, and, further, it ought to aim to 'do good' and 'avoid harm'" (109). This project entailed interviewing people about their motivations for their work and how they conduct that work, arguably one of the most important aspects of an individual's life and identity. When we talk about work we talk about what many people do for the majority of their

waking hours every day. To request that participants self-examine in response to

my questions and share their reflections with me was a significant ask. And for

me to interpret and translate their meanings grants me a significant measure of

power. One key commitment I hold is to try to be as honest and transparent as

possible, with myself and others, about the power dynamics and ethical

considerations of a given project. I will elaborate here on the ethical

commitments I hold when researching: respect, which includes non-coercion,

transparency, and non-instrumentalization; reciprocity; minimization of risk;

confidentiality; and accuracy of representation.

Respect. First, I am committed to respecting research participants. Respect

for subjects is, in part, a natural effect of recognizing their expertise in a field or

in a set of experiences that are not your own. My understanding of respect also

includes the concepts of non-coercion, transparency, and non-

instrumentalization. I did not coerce or pressure subjects to participate in my

project. Each potential participant was informed at the outset of my project of its

existence. I attended a BCHP staff meeting[21] early in my research process and

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[21] Not all of the BCHP central office staff were in attendance at this meeting. One participant would not be hired for another month and a half; one was on parental leave; and one came in halfway through the meeting, after I had given my presentation. Nevertheless, each of these three participants agreed to an interview, and I built extra time into each of these interviews

explained my research, my methods, and my goals.[22] I gave an initial call-to-

participate at that staff meeting, made a one-page project overview available to

anyone who wanted it, and then followed up with individual interview

scheduling requests via email. Though I did have to repeatedly reach out to some

participants who didn't initially respond to scheduling requests, no one declined

to participate. I also began every interview with the university's required IRB

consent form, stating aloud that participants were volunteers and thus could

decline to answer any question or discontinue their participation at any point. I

also communicated respect by making the consent process and interview

questions[23] as transparent as possible and by always verbalizing when I was

turning my audio recorder on or off.

I derive another of my considerations in respecting participants from

Sullivan and Porter, who, drawing from liberation theology, call the "ultimate

sin" "instrumentalizing people as things," an act they define as "failing to take

into account distinct person-ness (needs, identity, character, gender, background,

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to offer a more in-depth explanation of the project and to allow as many questions as participants wanted to ask.

[22] This puts my project in compliance with MacNealy's recommendation that, when researching a workplace, "a reasonable explanation of the purposes and benefits of the research effort should be prepared in advance and announced or circulated to the co-workers" (221).

[23] See more on interview questions in the "Interviews" section of this chapter, pp. 27-30, and in the Appendix on p. 259.

experience)" (111). In this view, participants must not be mere things you use to accomplish an end (graduating, getting published). I sought to minimize the risk of instrumentalizing in several ways. I conducted each interview in person and tried to schedule more time than I anticipated needing for each interview. These two factors combined to give me time to interact with participants, get to know them, look at the pictures of their families on their office walls, peruse and discuss the books on their bookshelves—to establish connection. In some interviews, the "small talk" of getting to know each other lasted merely a few minutes, while in others, it made up the first thirty minutes of our scheduled time. Any tendency toward instrumentalizing (a form of dehumanizing) someone is challenged when you have sat in their space, made them laugh, seen what makes them roll their eyes, heard their different tones of voice. For this particular project, too, I had an advantage when it comes to seeing people as people, because I already personally knew, knew about, or had mutual friends with most of the BCHP central office staff prior to my project.[24] Even when minimal, I already knew some of the aspects of my participants' "distinct person-ness" before the project began. Finally, my genuine interest in participants' answers to my questions also prohibited viewing participants as means to an

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[24] Though this, of course, complicates and adds additional ethical considerations to the project, too, as discussed on p. 36.

end. I began this project curious about the beliefs, values, and commitments that motivate the work of the BCHP, and I collected data—i.e. conducted interviews, had conversations—to see what arose from participants answers and stories; I was genuinely curious about their experiences. Instead of beginning this project with a formed hypothesis and searching for data that confirmed that hypothesis—which is one of the easiest ways to, intentionally or unintentionally, instrumentalize—at the outset of this project I mostly had curiosity.

Reciprocity. Another key component of ethical consideration prior to beginning any research, but perhaps particularly research in which you are asking a community for their time and access to their lives and work, is reciprocity. As discussed previously in this chapter, my commitments to the principles of CBR involved reciprocity with the community I was engaging. I intended to conduct research I found meaningful and that would propel me further in my career, and I designed my project to contribute to the BCHP: helping elucidate some of the practices of its community, allowing more conscious decision-making about rhetorical practice and a sharpening of focus and rhetorical strategies.

Minimizing risks. The potential risks to participants in my project were minimal, but warrant discussion. Risks primarily included the vulnerability of

75

answering personal questions and the fact that this project is related to staff's

employing organization. In asking staff to discuss their values and beliefs with

me, their motivations for the work that they do, and other work-related choices

they make, I was asking participants to engage in vulnerable reflection and

communication. Risks associated with this included making participants

uncomfortable and misinterpreting important personal information or values. I

sought to minimize these risks by ensuring participants that they had control

over what they answered or did not answer and over how much information

they provided. I also asked follow-up questions whenever I felt unsure about a

participant's meaning. Perhaps the greater risks in the project were those

associated with asking participants to discuss values and beliefs they hold that

may or may not align with the religious positions assumed by their employer—

Baylor—and the fact that those exact values and beliefs are central to the study.

Several participants expressed concern that certain parts of their interviews be

left out or their identity obscured. There is substantial uncertainty at Baylor

about how much disagreement between the individual faculty/staff member and

the institutional religious and political line will be tolerated, especially

considering that the level of difference tolerated often depends on the issue at

hand. To minimize perceived threats to job stability and security, I complied with

participants' wishes to redact information/interview material and I did not use

76

identifying information for participants other than the organization's founder (a

decision that will be discussed in the next paragraph). Ultimately, I sought to

minimize risks by remaining in collaborative relationship with participants,

ensuring they felt respected and comfortable bringing any concerns to my

attention.

Confidentiality and accuracy of representation. Though many qualitative

studies change the names of organizations and individuals to protect

confidentiality, this study takes a mixed approach. The organization's name and

the name of Jeremy Everett, the organization's founder and executive director,

are unchanged. All other staff names are pseudonyms. Each of these

representation decisions was made in collaboration with BCHP leadership after

multiple discussions. The decisions to use the real organizational name and

Jeremy's real name were made for several reasons. First, the BCHP leadership

want to increase awareness of the organization. Second, the unique nature and

position of the organization makes disguising it challenging, if not impossible. To

fully understand the project, the reader must understand the BCHP and the story

of its founder, Jeremy Everett, on whom much of the information in the chapters

that follow is focused. Jeremy also recently published a book, *I Was Hungry*,

which is a significant data source for this study. Thus, he and I decided that his

identity would be nearly impossible to conceal, and he did not want me to

conceal it, as increased exposure for the book is also a welcome benefit of the

project. The identities of other staff members, however, could be concealed as

best as possible without altering the sources or information I could use, and

using other staff's real names posed no benefit to them or the organization, as

using Jeremy's did.

To address other risks involving breaches of confidentiality and accuracy

of representation, I provided complete drafts of my project to several BCHP staff

members in order to have them evaluate the accuracy and quality of the report as

well as to ensure that no confidentiality had been breached. Additionally, I made

available to each individual I discussed in the project the pages/sections/chapters

relevant to them for their evaluation. Additional support in considering

confidentiality and representation was provided by my dissertation director,

who continually reminded me to read and listen charitably and carefully, always

remaining truthful, but also being mindful that bears should only be poked when

necessary for the sake of truth and argument.

CHAPTER THREE

An Introduction to the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) and to the State of Hunger and Poverty in America: The Context of the Study

The BCHP's Origins

The BCHP was founded as the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) in 2009 by Jeremy Everett. Jeremy grew up the son of a Baptist preacher, attended a Baptist liberal arts university in Birmingham, Alabama, and then moved to Waco, Texas, to attend Baylor's moderate Baptist George W. Truett Theological Seminary (commonly known as Truett). During his undergraduate and graduate studies, Jeremy's awareness of his "calling to the poor" increased, as did his knowledge of what such a calling might look like. As a college student, when Jeremy first realized a calling from God to the poor,[1] he was not sure what that meant in practice. As his sociological and theological understanding evolved in graduate school, Jeremy became increasingly interested in work that put him in direct proximity with the poor: living in low-income neighborhoods, working for nonprofits, and immersing himself in conversation with theologians and Christian community organizers who were working to address poverty. Jeremy,

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[1] This story is discussed at length in Chapter Four of this study.

who describes himself as a "serial social entrepreneur," then moved to San Antonio where he worked as a community organizer at a Baptist social service agency.

When Jeremy was in San Antonio, in 2005, he had the formative experience of working on the frontlines of disaster relief following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina; and this experience laid the practical and ideological groundwork for the BCHP's formation a few years later. In his book, *I Was Hungry* (2019), Jeremy describes Katrina, its aftermath, and the efforts to assist those affected by it as "chaotic" (Everett 5). Jeremy explains: "The first responders…all spoke different work languages and struggled to coordinate their efforts. No one knew who was in charge or how to give directions. Evacuations were directionless, shelters were overcrowded, medication was inadequate, and volunteers were disorganized. Everything was a mess, and what we desperately needed was a coordinated response" (5). Learning from the chaos following Katrina, organizations and first responders spent the next several years on "proactive coordination" so that by the time Hurricanes Gustav and Ike hit in 2008, federal and state agencies, nonprofits, and disaster relief volunteers were better prepared (5). This "coordinated response," Jeremy explains, "made all the difference" (7).

While working in San Antonio, Jeremy was approached by Dr. Jon

Singletary, then faculty member—now Dean—of Baylor's School of Social Work

(SSW). Jon was on the advisory board for Baylor SSW's Center for Family and

Community Ministries,[2] had recently heard Jeremy speak, and wanted to know if

Jeremy was interested in coming back to Waco to run the Center. Jeremy

declined because he wanted to do more community organizing work, rather than

primarily academic work. He and Jon, however, remained in touch about

possibilities for work and partnerships. Meanwhile, Suzii Paynter—who is, in

Jeremy's words, a "powerhouse" in moderate and progressive Baptist life—was,

at the time, the Director of the Texas Baptist's Christian Life Commission (CLC),

which was (and still is) the ethics and public policy group of the Texas Baptists

(or, the BGCT: Baptist General Convention of Texas). The CLC wanted to get

more involved in anti-hunger work, so Suzii asked Jeremy if he would come

share some ideas with her. Jeremy doesn't remember exactly when he and Suzii

met, though he guesses it was at a Texas Baptist young leaders retreat or

conference of some sort, but, whenever it was, he and Suzii "clicked" and built a

relationship, and so, when she asked, Jeremy went and shared with Suzii his

ideas for coordinated responses to social problems, ideas that were based in his

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[2] Now: Center for Church and Community Impact, or C[3]I.

experiences with hurricane relief. Suzii asked if he would be interested in moving to Austin and starting a 501(c)(3) anti-hunger nonprofit with seed money from the CLC. But Jeremy had hesitations.

Practically, Jeremy didn't think starting a 501(c)(3) was the way to go, because, if you start from the ground, it can take years to even build the infrastructure and name recognition to start working. However, Jeremy was still also in conversation with Jon Singletary, so Jeremy proposed a meeting between himself, Suzii, Jon, and Diana Garland, then Dean of the Baylor School of Social Work (and now it's namesake: The Diana R. Garland School of Social Work). From that meeting, ultimately, the BCHP was formed.

The plan was that the CLC and Suzii would provide seed money for three years and the Baylor School of Social Work would provide office space. At the time, Jeremy recalls, no one thought the project would last more than about three years. Jeremy even wonders to what extent the different parties' agreement to start the project was perhaps politically motivated—for optics, a partnership of Baptist "powerhouses" doing work for social good. Jeremy calls both Diana and Suzii Baptist "powerhouses" and describes his father as a "significant figure" in Baptist life; so, Garland and Baylor plus Paynter and the CLC plus Everett seemed like a good equation.

In addition to logistics, there was, however, initially another hurdle to jump. When Suzii first brought him the idea of starting an anti-hunger advocacy nonprofit, Jeremy was skeptical: "I was like, hunger? That's not the issue. The issue's poverty. Hunger's just a symptom of poverty." Though he did not initially buy-in, Suzii convinced him by explaining the bipartisan support anti-hunger advocacy has.

As Jeremy was working through ideas for anti-poverty work and having conversations with Jon and Suzii, Barack Obama was running for the presidency. Because of Obama's candidacy and history as a community organizer, people began to talk more broadly about community organizing, and the field of community organizing became more widely associated in popular discourse with political leftism. Jeremy describes the national climate during the BCHP's inception, during and after the election of President Obama, as a period when "you couldn't talk about poverty—organizing around poverty issues—in mainstream America, because if you did you were labeled a socialist and no one wanted anything to do with you." Jeremy describes how "Republicans would not utter the word 'poverty.'" Jeremy is equally critical of Democrats' failure to act on issues of poverty during the same period, noting that Democrats didn't have a cohesive plan for addressing poverty and "hadn't really done much since LBJ. They'd really just kind of been riding off the coattails of what happened

during the war on poverty." So, Jeremy felt personally called to confront

poverty, but he was confronted with the political realities of the late Bush, early

Obama United States: the economic crisis of the Great Recession, with its

accompanying fear, political contention, and finger-pointing, and overwhelming,

increasing poverty rates (all of which will soon be discussed in detail).

What eventually sold Jeremy on an anti-hunger organization was Suzii's

explanation that, as opposed to poverty, *hunger* is a social issue you can motivate

all communities to organize around, despite differing theology or political

ideology. In looking around, Jeremy realized this seemed true: "most Baptist

churches have a hunger ministry, even if they're super conservative. Most

communities have a good number of food pantries." At the time, Jeremy

identified more than four thousand organizations addressing hunger in Texas,

most of them food pantries. Jeremy concluded that, while the existent types and

structures of anti-hunger organizations were mostly "not getting the biggest

bang for the buck," there did seem to be an obvious "willingness out there to

address this particular symptomatic issue of a larger issue of poverty." Upon this

realization, Jeremy began to see the possibilities of working around an issue that

could garner bipartisan, widespread support. He remembers thinking, "If we

could go about it wisely, we could introduce and help people understand their

collective calling to the issue of hunger and point to the larger issue behind it,

and really begin to organize communities to address poverty, even though you're coming at it from face value around the issues of hunger. Because hunger was palatable." So, as a way of addressing poverty, the BCHP was founded.

Hunger in Texas, Poverty in America

Overview

Hunger—in Texas, in the U.S., and around the globe—is one of the nastiest manifestations of poverty, and both poverty and hunger were on the rise in the U.S. in 2009 when the BCHP was founded, and—though state-wide and national progress have been made in the last decade—continue to be problems today. In his book, Jeremy explains that ten years of immersion in research about hunger and its effects has led him to the following position: "Gandhi called poverty the harshest form of violence. I believe hunger is the harshest form of poverty. Hunger is debilitating. It stimulates physical pain, anger, lethargy, and depression. It will keep you up at night and ironically cause drowsiness during the day" (8).

The National Commission on Hunger

In 2014, then Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio) appointed

Jeremy to the newly created National Commission on Hunger[3] at the

recommendation of two US Representatives from Texas with whom Jeremy had

formed working relationships: Bill Flores (R-TX 17th) and Mike Conaway (R-TX

11th). Congressman Conaway's recommendation of Jeremy for the Commission

especially carried weight as Conaway was then a ranking member of the House

Agriculture (Ag) Committee and would become, in 2015, the Ag Committee

Chair. The Commission was created thanks to the efforts of Representative Frank

Wolf (R-VA 10th), a long-time advocate of anti-hunger work.

Jeremy explains that the creation of bipartisan commissions was popular

in the early 2010s because Congress was deadlocked in the early Obama years

and not getting much done. Congressman Wolf was retiring and, as one of the

last things he did as a member of Congress, he pushed for the formation of the

National Commission on Hunger, which passed as part of the *Consolidated*

Appropriations Act, 2014 (Division A, Title VII, section 743).[4] The Commission

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[3] For more about the Commission, see "Welcome to the National Commission on Hunger website."

[4] See in Bibliography: United States.

consisted of ten bipartisan congressional appointees[5] who were to work together

to study food insecurity and hunger in America with the end goal of offering

policy recommendations to the federal government. At the time of his

appointment, Jeremy's five years of direct experience in the anti-hunger field and

his bipartisan collaborations with organizations and elected officials made him a

valuable addition to the Commission, and, in turn, his appointment also helped

him further his own understanding of the problems the BCHP addresses,

enriching the BCHP's work.

The appointees were an interdisciplinary group, ranging in expertise from

the academy, medicine, consulting, and both the for-profit business and

nonprofit sectors. As a result of these diverse backgrounds and perspectives, the

Commission writes, "we often saw and learned the same things but reached

different conclusions" (National Commission 9). However, they continue, "We

have sought to set those differences aside in favor of reporting on what we did

agree upon, and we have synthesized it to present an overall picture of hunger in

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[5] The Act specified that three committee members were to be appointed by the Speaker of the House, three members were to be appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, two members by the minority leader in the House, and two members by the minority leader in the Senate. Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio) appointed Jeremy, Dr. Susan Finn, and Robert Doar (co-chair of the Commission). Senator Harry Reid (D-Nevada), then Senate Majority Leader, appointed Dr. Mariana Chilton (co-chair of the Commission), Cherie Jamason, and Ricki Barlow, who later resigned for personal reasons and is thus not listed in most descriptions of the Commission. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-California), then Minority Leader in the House, appointed Dr. Deborah A. Frank and Billy Shore. And Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), then Senate Minority Leader, appointed Spencer Coates and Russell Sykes.

America today" (9). The Commission articulates that their "goal was to develop

recommendations to Congress and the USDA that had the unanimous, bipartisan

support of all our members" (4). This is the spirit in which the Commission

sought to fulfill the duties required of them in the Act, which charged them to:

> (A) provide policy recommendations to Congress and the [USDA]
> Secretary to more effectively use existing…programs and funds of the
> Department of Agriculture to combat domestic hunger and food
> insecurity; and (B) develop innovative recommendations to encourage
> public-private partnerships, faith-based sector engagement, and
> community initiatives to reduce the need for government nutrition
> assistance programs, while protecting the safety net for the most
> vulnerable members of society. (United States)

The Commission set about accomplishing these goals by meeting monthly

with each other, meeting frequently with representatives from the USDA,

hearing eighty testimonies from experts on hunger and poverty, visiting eight

cities across the country, and holding public hearings at which 102 members of

the public testified. The Commission visited Oakland, CA; Albuquerque, NM; El

Paso, TX; Little Rock, AR; Washington DC; Portland, ME; Albany, NY; and

Indianapolis, IN. In addition to holding public hearings in seven of these eight

cities, the Commission conducted site visits of various government, community,

faith-based, and nonprofit hunger relief programs (National Commission 6-9).

Their research was rigorous, and, in 2015, the Commission published their report

of "Recommendations of the National Commission on Hunger to Congress and

the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture" entitled *Freedom from Hunger: An*

Achievable Goal for the United States of America (National Commission). In this report, the Commission outlines what hunger in America is (and isn't), why hunger is a problem, what causes hunger, who hunger in America impacts, and what might be done to address the issue.

Definitions

The Commission is clear at the beginning of the report to define their terms according to USDA guidelines. In defining "hunger" in America, the Commission "wish[es] to be very clear that the situation we call hunger in America is not the equivalent of famine and the resulting malnutrition seen in developing countries" (National Commission 3). Rather, *hunger* in America, as defined by the USDA and the Commission is "*very low food security*, which occurs when eating patterns are disrupted or food intake is reduced for at least one household member because the household lacked money and other resources for food" (3, emphasis added). "Food security" is defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" (86). To be "food secure" is to have "high or marginal food security"; to be "food insecure" is to have "low or very low food security"; to be *hungry* is to have "very low food security" (3).

Food Insecurity in Texas and America

When the BCHP was founded in 2009, the rate of very low food security

(i.e. hunger) in Texas was 6.4%, statistically significantly above the national

average for 2009 of 5.7% (Nord et al. 20, III). By the time of the Commission's

publication in 2015, Texas' very low food security rate averaged 6.2% (the

national average for the same year, 2014, was down to around 5.6%) (Coleman-

Jensen et al. 20, 6), and now, at the time of this writing, the USDA Economic

Research Service's 2018 data records Texas' hunger rate at approximately 5.4%

while the national average for 2018 was 4.3% (Coleman-Jensen et al. 23, 19). The

2018 data demonstrated that Texas was still among the ten states whose hunger

rates were statistically significantly higher than the national average (27). And

despite the data's demonstration that the rate of food insecurity returned for the

first time in 2018 to pre-recession levels (11),[6] an average hunger rate of 4.3% is

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[6] The Great Recession had a significant impact on national poverty and food insecurity rates. In 2007, the national food insecurity rate was 11.1% (approximately 13 million households) and the hunger rate ("very low food security") was 4.1% (approximately 4.7 million households), which was "essentially unchanged from [the same rates in] 2005 [11.0% and 3.9%] and 2006 [10.9% and 4.0%]" (Nord et al. 4, iii). However, in 2008 the food insecurity rate had jumped to 14.6% (approximately 17 million households) and the hunger rate to 5.7 (approximately 6.7 million households) (Nord et al. iii); these rates were "the highest [rates] recorded since 1995, when the first national food security survey was conducted" (i). Similarly, the poverty rate in the US in 2007 was 12.5% (approximately 37.3 million people) (DeNavas-Walt et al. 12), but the poverty rate jumped to 13.2% (39.8 million people) in 2008 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 13), and jumped again in 2009 to 14.3% (43.6 million people) (DeNavas-Walt et al. 14). Thus, a section of the Census Bureau's 2009 report, a section titled "Impact of the 2007 Economic Downturn," summarizes that "the poverty rate and the number in poverty increased by 1.9 percentage points

the equivalent of 5.6 million hungry *households* (5). Thus, while progress is being

made to eradicate food insecurity, millions of American families and individuals

struggle to have stable, reliable sources of food.

The National Commission's 2015 report also outlines a variety of root

causes of hunger: labor market forces, job availability, family structure,

education, violence, historical context (which includes race, ethnicity, and

gender), and personal responsibility (12-17).

The populations of specific concern that the National Commission's report

on hunger addresses are seniors, single parent families with small children,

veterans and military members, people with disabilities, American Indians, those

affected by high incarceration rates, and immigrants (19).

Poverty in America

Even a cursory knowledge of poverty in the United States elucidates the

correlations between rates of poverty and those of food insecurity. For example,

the US Census Bureau report on *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018*,

released in September of 2019, makes clear major demographic discrepancies

between poverty rates. The 2018 official average poverty rate in the US was

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and 6.3 million between 2007 and 2009" (DeNavas-Walt et a. 14). This increase is "larger than the
increase in the poverty rate during the November 1973 to March 1975 recession" but "smaller
than the increase in the poverty rates associated with the January 1980 to July 1980 and July 1981
to November 1982 combined recessions" (14).

11.8% (Semega et al. 1); however, the poverty rate for women was 12.9%, versus

the rate for men at 10.6% (13). Poverty rate differences among races are

particularly striking: white Americans experienced poverty in 2018 at a rate of

10.1%, while poverty rates for Blacks were more than double that at 20.8%, and

the rate for Hispanics was 17.6% (15). The poverty rate for non-citizens was

17.5% (16); for Americans with disabilities the rate was 25.7% (17). Family units

comprised of married couples experienced poverty at a rate of 4.7% while a

single woman experienced poverty at a rate more than five times that (24.9%)

and a single mother[7] experienced poverty at a rate of between 39.1% and 47.7%,

depending on the age of her children (the rates for single fathers vary from 18.7-

19.7%) (14). Poverty and hunger are strikingly correlated.

The First Ten Years

While the BCHP evolved and changed some over the first ten years of its

existence (as THI), many elements of the organization stayed fairly consistent.[8]

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[7] I use the term "mother" here broadly to include any female caretaker of children to whom she is related.

[8] Thus, while this section will be an oversimplification of the dynamism inherent in any organization or work designed to be responsive to shifting social needs, I provide here the necessary background information on the BCHP's structure, mission and values, and work for the first ten years of its existence, before moving on in the next section to discussing the major evolution the organization is currently undergoing.

The BCHP's Situation in Its Field

The BCHP is unlike other organizations in anti-poverty and anti-hunger work. In their book, which is an introduction to community organizing, Aaron Schutz and Marie G. Sandy define different modes of "community improvement strategies" that social good organizations take up (31): legal action, activism, mobilizing, political campaigning, advocacy, community development, direct service, community building, movement building, nonpartisan dialogue, and lifestyle changes (31-43).[9] The BCHP, however, does not fit neatly into any of these categories.

The BCHP is difficult to categorize for several reasons. First, the staff themselves identify their organization and their work in different ways, ways that are often dependent on the staff member's role within the organization. At one point Jeremy puts himself in the category "justice advocate." Another staff member, Nathan, identifies himself as a "community organizer" but, specifically, "an organizer of service providers." Others describe the organization as a "nonprofit," "a collaborative-building organization," or "a nonprofit/research institute hybrid."

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[9] Schutz and Sandy's goal in laying out these definitions is to distinguish the above types of work from community organizing, which, they argue, is a form of social justice work that is frequently misrepresented by being used synonymously with one or multiple of the above forms of organizational strategy or action.

The BCHP staff have not arrived at their differing frameworks for

understanding the organization's work by accident or carelessness: the BCHP's

work is just *that* diverse. Some organization staff conduct political advocacy;

many regional offices engage in community development-type work, such as

community asset-mapping[10]; the organization pushes for nonpartisan dialogue

on local, state, and federal levels; the BCHP consults with organizations on best

practices in the anti-hunger/anti-poverty field; and the BCHP fosters

collaboration and helps build coalitions between direct service providers,

government agencies, religious organizations, nonprofits, and businesses. What

perhaps makes the BCHP most unique, however, is its attachment to a major

research university, allowing it to combine all of the above work with high-level

research. Indeed, this connection to university-level research is what Jeremy,

Leslie, Brian, and some other staff articulate as the most unique thing about the

BCHP, how it most fills a niche in its field of social good work.

Organizational Structure

For most of the first ten years of the organization's history, the BCHP's

structure was fairly straightforward. The organization was attached to Baylor,

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[10] See Kretzmann and McKnight.

but was entirely externally funded, and consisted of central office staff (located in

Waco) and regional office staff in various field offices across the state.

Baylor. Since its inception, the BCHP has been a project of Baylor

University. The relationship between Baylor and the BCHP has been, in the

words of one staff member, "very, very complicated." The relationship between

Baylor and the BCHP presents both challenges and possibilities, constraining and

creating options for the organization.

The majority of the BCHP staff are quick to point out the many benefits of

being affiliated with Baylor. Though their salaries come from grant money,

BCHP employees are Baylor employees, complete with tuition waivers for

dependents and Baylor employee benefits. The BCHP's central office is also

physically housed in a wing of Baylor's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work.

One staff member, Leslie, explains that attachment to Baylor and the reality of

Baylor employee benefits have made hiring easier, even though the BCHP is

100% externally funded. The attachment to Baylor, Leslie says, "makes soft

money *seem* less soft."

However, the fact that the BCHP is completely externally funded is a

point of tension between the organization and Baylor. Other than employee

benefits, Baylor does not contribute to the BCHP's operating budget. Instead, the

BCHP is almost completely grant-funded,[11] and, as such, working for the BCHP

can lack long-term stability, job security, and predictability. The BCHP's

complete reliance on soft money, however, is juxtaposed with the *appearance* of

stability and financial security inherent in being affiliated with the state of

Texas's oldest continuously operating university and one of the nation's 100

wealthiest schools. In 2018, Baylor's endowment was around 1.3 billion, leading

Baylor to outpace some major research universities more than two times its size

(Barham). One BCHP staff member is particularly concerned that now that the

organization has been renamed the *Baylor* Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty,

potential funders will assume the organization's attachment to Baylor means that

the BCHP is financially "set" and will choose to award/give money to less well-

connected projects. On the other hand, the BCHP staff also recognize that once a

potential funder understands the BCHP's financial situation, the attachment to

Baylor becomes a form of legitimization, or "street cred" as Leslie says, relieving

any concerns a funder may have about organizational legitimacy or potential

financial mismanagement.

Despite the somewhat strained financial relationship between the two, the

BCHP's connection to Baylor lends the organization forms of ethos that are hard

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[11] The exception is small-dollar individual donations, mostly in the tens and hundreds of dollars.

to monetize and provides something that sets the BCHP apart from other anti-hunger organizations. Because the BCHP is uniquely situated at a major university, and, more specifically, a major *religious* university, the BCHP has in-roads to academia and academic research *and* faith-based and religiously-affiliated organizations.

Baylor's status as a nationally recognized research university and as the largest Baptist university in the world means many possibilities and potential partnerships for the BCHP. Baylor's connections to faith-based organizations, such as the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and the presence of a Baptist seminary at Baylor—Truett—provide the BCHP not only with possible partnerships and resources but also with credibility and name-recognition (perhaps especially now that the BCHP has "Baylor" in the title). Additionally, because the BCHP is attached to a major research university, there are a wealth of academic researchers who can partner with the BCHP, informally or as research fellows, and there are nearly endless possibilities for data and research resource acquisition through the university's research infrastructure. Finally, Leslie explains that "Baylor Nation" is, in itself, a tremendous resource. "Baylor Nation," a term which indicates the vast network of Baylor alumni and supporters, spreads across the US, and the BCHP has intentionally and unintentionally connected with members of Baylor Nation who have shown their

allegiance to their alma mater by pitching in to help the BCHP in ways as diverse

as giving small dollar gifts and helping create rapport with congressional staff.

The BCHP's attachment to a university also attracts people who are

themselves interested in and/or committed to academic research. Six of the ten

BCHP staff members that I interviewed for this project have received

undergraduate and/or graduate degrees from Baylor and/or have taught at

Baylor.[12]

However, no one on staff at the BCHP is tenured faculty, which has posed

another problem for the organization. Leslie explains that because most of the

staff don't hold terminal degrees and aren't academics—and, because even the

staff who are terminal degree holding academics aren't tenure-track—it has been

harder to gain legitimacy as a research-based organization. Part of the BCHP's

answer to this dilemma was to form the Research Fellows program, which is

comprised of 40+ fellows, the majority of whom are university faculty.

Jeremy, and other staff such as Leslie and Brian, believe that the Research

Fellows program—the engagement of university faculty in the work of the

BCHP—is one of the greatest possibilities of being attached to Baylor. Not only

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[12] Of the staff I interviewed, two received both bachelor's and MSW degrees from Baylor; one BCHP staff member is affiliate faculty for the SSW; two BCHP staff have MDiv degrees from Truett Seminary; and one staff member I interviewed received bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from Baylor.

does the university's faith commitment mean that the BCHP and fellows can, as Jeremy says, openly "lean into our faith perspective," but Jeremy also explains that he believes faculty at Baylor, because of their faith perspectives, want their research to make an impact with ripples beyond their academic peers and fields. This wealth of committed, talented researchers, Jeremy says, is one of the best parts of being affiliated with Baylor.

Funding. The BCHP's work is primarily funded by grants and has been for the duration of its existence. At the time of this writing, the BCHP's funding includes grants from the following organizations/foundations: the USDA, the Walmart Foundation, Share our Strength SIF, the Zarrow Foundation, United Way, the Waco Foundation, the Trisons Foundation, the Shield-Ayres Foundation, and Alliance Data Systems. These grants range anywhere from $5M to $25K. Other financial contributions are limited to small-dollar individual donations, many given on Baylor Giving Day (a fundraising day during which Baylor Nation is invited to give to various university projects and departments). No religious congregations currently give to the work of the BCHP.

Offices and staff. The BCHP has historically been comprised of central office—located in Waco, the staff of which were the participants in this study— and field offices. Current field offices are located in Austin, Dallas, Houston,

Lubbock, McAllen, San Angelo, and Waco. Until 2016 there were twelve field

offices. However, upon non-renewal of a substantial state grant, the BCHP was

forced to close four field offices and downsize several others (since then one

other field office has closed, not out of financial necessity). Most field offices have

anywhere from one to three full-time staff members and several field offices also

have an AmeriCorps VISTA position. There is usually at least a Regional Director

and a Child Hunger Specialist for each field office.

Mission and Values

Until the restructuring and rebranding of the organization in October

2019, upon opening the [BCHP] website,[13] the initial descriptor of the

organization read:

> Addressing hunger is complex, and knowing how to engage is difficult.
> We all have some of the tools necessary to alleviate hunger, but none of us
> have all the tools. This is where the [BCHP] comes in. [The BCHP]
> conducts university-based research to determine what interventions work

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[13] The specifics of the content of the [BCHP] website discussed here and subsequently
were originally pulled from the organization's website on September 11, 2019. The website has
since, as a result of the name change and organizational restructuring, been substantially—
though not completely—overhauled.

     Many of the quotations I pulled in 2019 are still on the BCHP website at the time of this
study's finalization in the spring of 2020, though they may have moved; I have included the
current citations where applicable.

and provides the support and expertise to coordinate work in communities and put those programs into action.[14]

Embedded in this initial greeting are the elements of the BCHP's mission. From this description, the reader understands that the BCHP has done research on this difficult social issue and is ready to help those seeking to do something to alleviate hunger. The statement also makes clear the centrality of collaboration, because "none of us have all of the tools" needed to address this problem. So, the reader understands that the BCHP uses research-informed practices to work with communities to create effective programs to address hunger.

There were many versions of a sort of organizational mission statement during the first ten years of the organization's existence, though none was publicly, explicitly labeled as an official mission or vision statement on the organization's website; if such an official version existed, it was not publicly and clearly accessible. The BCHP's mission statement versions in various places were quite similar, but not exact matches. In another place on the BCHP website, the following statement appeared: "The [BCHP] provides the expertise and support to foster collaboration. We convene, train, inform and support communities to assess local hunger, and evaluate barriers to food security, in order to become a

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[14] This quotation can still be found—as of March 2020—on the Texas Hunger Initiative tab of the BCHP's website. See "Texas Hunger Initiative."

Hunger Free Community."[15] This statement, too, emphasizes collaboration and

research, while also emphasizing the BCHP's educational aims. In yet another

place on the website, the organization's purpose was explained:

> Baylor's calling dictates that we teach, pursue research, innovate, and
> serve with full awareness of the needs of others, and at the [BCHP] we are
> using our expertise and resources to address systemic problems facing our
> community, specifically food insecurity. We are working so that everyone
> in Texas, and across the country, has access to three healthy meals a day,
> seven days a week. ("Who We Are")

> The BCHP directly aligned itself here with the calling, or mission, of

Baylor: "The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for

worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and

Christian commitment within a caring community" ("Mission Statement"). And,

in a document[16] written at the request of then Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (a

document which will be discussed at greater length shortly), the BCHP describes

itself in the following two ways, one at the beginning of the document and

another at the end of the document:

> For nearly eight years, Baylor University's [BCHP] has been working to
> coordinate state and federal systems to serve the least of these in our

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[15] This quotation can be found on the organization's homepage (see *Baylor University Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty)*, under the subtitle "Locations."

[16] This report—"Recommendations for Reducing Poverty in America"—is not publicly available. It was emailed to me by BCHP staff member Rebecca.

communities and provide better, more efficient paths for individuals to move themselves out of poverty…

Baylor University's [BCHP] is a capacity-building, collaborative project dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to end hunger and reduce poverty through policy, education, research, community organizing and community development. [The BCHP] convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas ("Recommendations for Reducing" 2, 12).

As these varied statements demonstrate, the articulation of the organization's mission during the first ten years was consistent in many ways, but also varied. Some elements of mission or purpose, such as research and collaboration, seemed to be ever-present, while others, such as policy, were sometimes included and sometimes not. The diverse articulations of the organization's purpose were also reflected in interviews with staff.[17]

The articulation of the BCHP's mission, as deduced from various places on the website and in written documents, as combining research and public policy in a capacity-building, collaborative way was central to the BCHP staffs' understandings of their work. I asked the staff what they understood to be the mission or purpose of [the BCHP]. Of the ten staff members I interviewed, five

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[17] Primary interviews, including all of those discussed in this section, were conducted prior to the organizational restructuring and name change.

(50%) articulated "capacity-building[18]" as part of the BCHP's work and/or

mission. Similarly, 50% articulated the forming or "building" of "coalitions" as

part of the organization's work/mission. Five (50%) staff members explicitly

described the BCHP's mission and work as involving policy. Six (60%) of the ten

staff members directly discussed research as key to the BCHP's mission and

work. Five (50%) staff members described the BCHP's work as "advocacy." And

six (60%) described the BCHP's work as "collaboration-building" or

"collaborative." One staff member used all six of these "buzzwords" in our

conversation. Two staff members used five of the six terms. One staff member

used four of the six. Three staff members used half of the six terms. And then one

staff member used two terms, another used one term, and another no terms.

It is important to note here, too, that the above discussion of

terms/buzzwords is limited to those *explicitly* stated by the staff. However, if a

staff member did not articulate one of these key words, that does not mean that

staff member didn't essentially say the same things. Of the staff members I

interviewed, only one did not use a single one of these "buzzwords" directly, but

that staff member said: "I think our overall goal is to bring organizations

together and make them work together more to have a more holistic approach to

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[18] Some of these words and the examples that follow may be derivatives. E.g.
"collaborative" or "collaboration" or "collaboration-building"; "advocacy," "advocating," etc.

hunger and not just addressing symptoms but try to address systems."

Embedded in this response is the emphasis on capacity-building, coalitions, collaboration, and, by virtue of wanting to address systems-change, policy. The staff member then immediately says, "And even bigger than that, using hunger as a way to figure it out and then apply it to other areas of poverty or anti-poverty work," and this answer reveals the research component: piloting a program to see what comes of it and how it can be implemented and/or worked into policy in other places.

The fact that the answers I received were both so similar and so varied is indicative of the first ten years of the BCHP's existence: a generally unified set of goals and sense of purpose but also a context-sensitive, practically evolving set of goals, purposes, and definitions, as well as a diversity of roles within the organization. One staff member, Kyle, when asked what he understood the mission of the organization to be, first responded by saying: "I couldn't clearly give that you. I couldn't. I can't concretely give that to you." When asked why not, he responded, "I think, primarily, currently, because there are so many ways that we have to answer that question to so many different people, that there's not—If it were a Venn diagram, you wouldn't have your area of overlap in all three places." He eventually offered *his* understanding of the organization's mission, but maintained that he was not sure that all staff were on the same page.

105

He then told me that he didn't think "anything has changed since 2009 to now," functionally (i.e. he believed the organization was still doing what it set out to do), but that he did think that the increased number of people, funders, and organizations that the BCHP was "beholden to" had made the "internal understanding" of the BCHP's mission "a bit more nebulous than it should be."

The variation in understanding or ordering of the organization's mission and goals is simply indicative of the highly flexible nature of the BCHP. As discussed previously, the organization is hard to define, largely working at the intersections of collaboration, advocacy, policy, research, and consulting. The variation of the organization is also reflected in the work it conducts.

Work

For the first decade of the organization's existence, and I believe this will remain true going forward as well, the BCHP's work has been varied, all subsumed, however, under the categories of research and collaboration toward the end of hunger and poverty reduction. Each regional office has autonomy to engage the projects its community needs, and staff in both regional and central offices have jumped at diverse opportunities for collaboration, research, and partnership as they've arisen. Thus, it is inaccurate and misleading to talk about the work of the BCHP as a static set of practices or initiatives. However, there are

general categories of work that are common and consistent in frequency and across field offices.

For the first decade of the organization, there were eight major areas of focus:[19] Child Nutrition, Hunger Free Community Coalitions, Public Policy, Research, Research Fellows, Opportunities for Students, and Consulting. Another major programmatic aspect of the BCHP is its annual Together at the Table Summit. In this section I outline these areas of work and provide examples of each from the first decade of the BCHP's existence. Many of these areas of work will be discussed in greater depth in Chapters Five-Eight.

Child nutrition. The BCHP's work in child nutrition has been primarily to increase understanding of, access to, and use of child nutrition programs. Examples of the BCHP's work in child nutrition includes increasing local government and school district knowledge of available government funds for in-school breakfast and after school meals. The BCHP has also worked to increase the number of summer meal sites around the state of Texas and to increase participation in the summer meals program. A clear example of the BCHP's work in maximizing child nutrition programs is two staff members' research on

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[19] Each has a tab on the website, see: "What We Do" (which links to six of the areas), "Research Fellows," and "Together at the Table."

why only a small fraction of the 3.1 million Texas students who received free or reduced-price lunch at school were taking advantage of their eligibility for school breakfast. The BCHP researchers concluded that a significant reason students were foregoing in-school breakfast was the stigma of "being a poor kid eating in the cafeteria before school" (Everett 59). They found that, when school breakfasts were offered in the classroom, to all kids, participation in in-school breakfast doubled (59). The BCHP shared these results across the state. Because of the collaboration between BCHP researchers, field staff, and school districts across the state, "390 million additional breakfasts were served to children between 2009 and 2017" (59). In part because of the BCHP's work and partnerships over the past decade, "one hundred million more meals are being served annually to Texas children than in 2009" (Everett 131, emphasis added).

Hunger Free Community Coalitions. The Hunger Free Community Coalitions model is designed to foster collaboration between organizations and individuals from all sectors—government, business, faith-based, educational, nonprofit, etc.—who are working to end hunger. The vision for Hunger Free Community Coalitions is that they "strategically assess the structure and procedures of local food delivery systems, identify resources and gaps, make decisions for change, and implement action plans to ensure that more people have access to healthy and nutritious food" in their communities ("Hunger

Free"). To foster the formation of these coalitions, the BCHP created *A Toolkit for Developing and Strengthening Hunger Free Community Coalitions* (Jacobson et al.), a sixty-four page document of how-to tips, check lists, and sample agendas (among other tools), available for free on the BCHP's website. The BCHP's Network of Hunger Free Community Coalitions is now comprised of more than fifteen coalitions from around the state ("Network of Hunger Free").

Public policy. A key component of the BCHP's work is the promotion and support of state and federal food programs and systems. The BCHP has worked with partners to increase participation in government nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Because of this involvement in government programs, the BCHP has also been involved in public policy. BCHP staff have testified before Congress and worked with U.S. and state senators and representatives on legislation regarding food, food systems, and nutrition. A major component of the BCHP's engagement with public policy is educating elected officials about issues contributing to food insecurity and poverty. I have personally participated in two BCHP meetings with government officials; both meetings were with staffers to inform the elected officials and their teams of the amount of available money for their districts being left unused for nutrition programs; the state-wide statistics regarding food insecurity; and the work of the BCHP. Long-standing

partnerships from the BCHP's first decade include partnerships with

government organizations like the USDA and TDA (the Texas Department of

Agriculture); these partnerships mean that the BCHP has an opportunity to

speak into policy conversations.

Research and research fellows. One frequently cited hallmark of the BCHP,

an element that separates it from other organizations, is the addition of program

evaluation and academic research to its work. The BCHP's attachment to a

research university plays a critical role in this work, as the leader of the BCHP's

research is a Baylor PhD and as the majority of the BCHP's research team is

made up of researchers from the Research Fellows program. There are more than

forty BCHP research fellows, most whom are academic faculty from Baylor and

other universities. The BCHP's vision for the Research Fellows program is that it

play a key part in Baylor's aspirations to "leverage its capabilities and expertise

to address systemic problems facing our world" ("Research Fellows"). The

research fellows are an interdisciplinary group of researchers who seek to

"impact food insecurity through 1) the facilitation of interdisciplinary

collaboration among scholars and 2) the strategic dissemination of research

findings to stakeholders and policymakers" ("Research Fellows"). The [BCHP's]

published research includes briefs and reports, academic journal articles

(published in journals such as the *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, *Food*

Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, and the *Journal of Family and Community Ministries*), and book chapters.

Opportunities for students. Other facets of the BCHP's work that stem from its attachment to Baylor are ongoing opportunities for student engagement in the work of the organization. The BCHP provides students with opportunities **"**to connect your classroom learning and desire to serve with hands-on experiences" by offering "a variety of opportunities for you to gain skills working with and learning about hunger and poverty—helping you connect your education to your sense of mission" ("Opportunities for Students"). The BCHP website offers five ways students can be involved in the work of the organization: by participating in week-long trips co-hosted by Baylor Missions and the BCHP; by taking an independent study course attached to the BCHP/Baylor Missions Hunger in America trip to Washington, D.C.; by serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA, a federal program "often referred to as a domestic version of the Peace Corps" ("Opportunities for Students"), in one of the several THI regional offices that have VISTA positions; by working as a Graduate Assistant; or by completing a graduate or undergraduate internship in the Waco office or a regional office elsewhere in the state. Two of my former students have participated in the BCHP/BU Missions trips, at my recommendation, and then gone on to work for or intern with the BCHP.

Consulting. An area of work that the BCHP hopes to develop and grow is consulting work. The organization does a lot of informal consulting with organizations, politicians, and other leaders about issues related to food insecurity and poverty, but the BCHP has also started to do more formal consulting. For example, in 2017, one BCHP staff member researched and compiled a ninety-two-page report for Hunger Free Oklahoma, a new statewide anti-hunger organization in Oklahoma (Nolen). The report ends with the BCHP's recommendations for the work of Hunger Free Oklahoma. As the BCHP develops models, strategies, and research that improves the effectiveness of anti-hunger work, the BCHP intends to continue consulting with other organizations and states to transfer and scale-up those findings.

Summit. The final major segment of the BCHP's work is the annual Together at the Table Summit. Summit is an annual conference, hosted by the BCHP at Baylor, that is attended by several hundred community organizers, social workers, government officials, researchers, faith leaders, nonprofit staff, and others who work in fields related to poverty. Summit is the event where the elements of the BCHP's work come together: child hunger advocates and school district staff, members of Hunger Free Community Coalitions, elected officials, nonprofit directors, university researchers, students, and other partners gather for three days of plenary sessions, food, networking, breakout sessions, and

workshops, all designed to foster greater collaboration and innovation in anti-

hunger work.

The Evolution of the BCHP

As discussed previously,[20] the first staff meeting I sat in on for this project

was the meeting in which Jeremy pitched to the staff the possibility of a

restructuring/rebranding of THI. Fourteen months later, the organization

announced at the 2019 Together at the Table Summit that the rebrand would be

taking place, effective immediately, and thus THI is now subsumed under the

new parent organization, the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty

(BCHP).

Interestingly, the new title both does and does not change the work of the

organization. In fact, the new organizational structure more accurately reflects

the work that the organization is already doing, while also opening opportunities

for other/new/different partnerships. While the restructure is functional to a

degree, it is primarily a rebranding rhetorical strategy, which will be discussed at

greater length in Chapter Seven. I briefly overview here the newest iterations of

the BCHP's structure, mission, values, and work.

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[20] On p. 44.

Organizational Structure

Baylor. Perhaps most obviously, with the rebranding comes a more explicit

connection to Baylor. What was the Texas Hunger Initiative is now the *Baylor*

Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty. Despite the name change, nothing

functional has changed, to date, about the organization's relationship to Baylor.

As the BCHP heads into its next decade, the staff are interested to see what, if

anything, changes in that relationship.

One staff member explains that what remains to be seen is whether or not

the organization's name change is indicative of increased "political will to

institutionalize." Many BCHP staff believe that Baylor is "getting a lot" from its

connection to the BCHP. Gone are the early days of the organization's smaller,

patchwork projects and funders; the BCHP now holds millions of dollars in grant

money and is the Baylor appendage with the third largest amount of research

expenditures. The BCHP is, as one staff member says, "very relevant" to Baylor

at this point in the university's history, because it is "a living expression of the

university's new direction." This staff member is referring to Baylor's Academic

Strategic Plan, *Illuminate*, which is the second phase of the university's ongoing

vision *Pro Futuris*. Key aspects of *Illuminate* are aspirations to R1 status—or,

becoming a "preeminent research university"—and increased informed

engagement in civic life.[21] The BCHP is increasingly active in research for societal

good and believes it has and will continue to contribute in valuable, relevant

ways to Baylor's national reputation and achievement of its strategic priorities.

Several staff emphasized in their interviews the possibilities for the

BCHP's emphasis on research and innovation to contribute to Baylor in

increasingly relevant ways. However, they also articulate the constraints that

being attached to the university has that might not necessarily be altered by

increased institutionalization. One staff member says, "we're the Chihuahua on

the Titanic," by which they mean the BCHP's flexible and dynamic work is

designed to be "disruptive," innovative, "quick and nimble," and

"entrepreneurial." That Chihuahua-esque energy doesn't make the Titanic

change direction any more quickly. Another staff member elaborates that Baylor

is a large, traditional institution, and that the fast-paced, innovative, culturally-

responsive nature of the BCHP doesn't always fit well into a big, slow-moving

institutional bureaucracy. However, as the university makes strides toward R1

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[21] In an introduction to *Pro Futuris*, the Baylor website explains: "As Baylor strives to prepare students to make a difference in our world as citizens and leaders who have the faith and integrity to do what is right in the face of competing pressures and to have a passion to apply their knowledge to ends that transcend mere self-interest, *Pro Futuris* calls Baylor to be a place where academic excellence and life-changing experiences ignite leadership potential that increases our students' desire for wisdom, understanding of calling, and preparation for service in a diverse and interconnected global society" ("Baylor's Vision"). For more on *Illuminate* and/or *Pro Futuris*, see "Illuminate," "Baylor's Vision," and/or "Baylor's Academic."

status, where research and innovation are premier goals and thus where ideas are dynamic and ever-changing, there is also the chance that elements of the university's institutional system will have to change to keep up.

Funding. Funding for the BCHP remains, to date, unchanged.[22] The organization's funding is soft, grant money and individual small dollar gifts.

Offices and staff. Under the new BCHP, THI—which will now officially consist only of the regional field offices—will be a branch, along with the Hunger Free Community Coalition network, the Global Migration Network, the Research Fellows Program, the Nonprofit Excellence Project, and the Hunger Data Lab,[23] most of which are still in the early phases of brainstorming and planning and which are not subjects of this project. BCHP leadership are also leaving open the possibility for more areas/projects to be adopted into the BCHP family.

Under the new structure, many of the existent staff—both in Waco and in the field offices across the state—have been shuffled around or given new titles, and a few staff members were added toward the close of this project. Under the new structure, all of the staff I interviewed are now BCHP staff, rather than THI

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[22] See p. 81 for the BCHP's current grants.

[23] See left-hand column of tabs on "What We Do."

116

staff, except for one, who remains, as the Waco regional office staff, part of the THI branch of the BCHP. The BCHP is, at the time of this writing, now composed of a five-member executive team and a four-member central office staff.

Mission and Values

In a presentation on the organizational rebrand at Summit, Leslie walked through a PowerPoint[24] with the BCHP's new, streamlined vision, mission, values, and priorities. The BCHP has refined its vision down to a simple statement: "Hunger is solvable." Leslie verbally adds to this, as she presents, that the vision of the BCHP is *to help people and organizations believe* that hunger is solvable and to believe that they can and should be participants in solving hunger (more on this vision/goal in the next chapter).

The BCHP's new mission statement is simple and succinct: "to end hunger through research and collaboration." So, there is, at this point, a formal mission statement that was presented (via PowerPoint) to some Summit attendees; however, these streamlined vision and mission statements are still not, at the time of this writing, on the website. Instead, the text on the website remains

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[24] At the time of this writing, Leslie's PowerPoint, presented on October 3, 2019, is not publicly available.

117

minimally revised since the rebranding, with the primary revisions being the organizational name change.

The BCHP also now has explicit organizational guiding values[25]: "1) Discovery: we are guided by research and are always learning; 2) Innovation: we advance new ideas and never settle for the status quo; 3) Teamwork: we collaborate to leverage collective know-how; 4) Equity: we strive to level the playing field and remove barriers for all." These values echo or replicate many of the elements of the organization's mission and organizational values that staff articulated to me prior to the rebranding: collaboration and research for the sake of ending hunger and poverty. However, the new articulation emphasizes innovation, which was not heavily emphasized in the interviews I conducted. The list of values is also not currently available on the website.

Work

The BCHP's articulated strategic priorities since the rebranding are as follows[26]: "improving outcomes for populations that are food insecure"; "growing awareness with funders and stakeholders by strengthening the understanding of what [the BCHP] does and who it serves"; "expanding reach

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[25] From Leslie's PowerPoint presentation, October 3, 2019.

[26] From Leslie's PowerPoint presentation, October 3, 2019.

by increasing media coverage and publications"; "improving management by developing an advisory board and increasing transparency"; "achieving sustainable and diversified funding with a balanced use of resources."

These priorities are not necessarily new and the BCHP's work for now continues primarily in the eight areas previously articulated. However, as also discussed above, the BCHP is continually open to new work and ideas, new projects and partnerships. And, with new official branches of the organization in the early stages of development—branches such as the Global Migration Network, the Nonprofit Excellence Project, and the Hunger Data Lab—the work of the organization is likely to keep growing and shifting in the coming years.

The BCHP, Moving Forward

As the BCHP moves into its second decade, the organization is looking forward to continuing the work it is already doing and to forming new partnerships and engaging new possibilities. In a February 2019 interview with the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, Jeremy describes how, when he started the BCHP in 2009, his "hope was maybe one day we would have 18 to 20 people and a $1 million budget. I had no idea that my dream wasn't big enough" (Crum). With more organizational branches and a burgeoning group of researchers, the BCHP is dreaming bigger moving forward.

While the organization plans to expand its reach and engage new opportunities, the BCHP moving forward is in many ways still the same organization that began ten years ago as THI. As staff articulated: the rebrand was largely rhetorical and visionary, with streamlined organizational mission and value statements. The staff described how they expect to largely keep doing the work they've been doing.

The body of this project looks at that work: first, at the theological motivations for the founding and work of the BCHP, and then at how those theological motivations and values animate the BCHP's rhetorical strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Structure of Religious Identity: Calling, Theology, Beliefs, and Values

Introduction

Jeremy says that the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP's) work "is very much an articulation of [his] theological perspective and calling." So, from Jeremy's experience of calling and his theological beliefs comes the shape and work and goals of the BCHP, and thus those goals—the BCHP's mission—take a similar shape: the belief that in order to create long-term change, actions must be rooted in internal, conceptual realities. The tension and balance between immediate goals and long-term goals, between the material and the conceptual, is evident in multiple layers: Jeremy's understanding of himself, his sense of calling, and his sense of what it will take to end hunger. Foundational to Jeremy's life and work are commitments to Christian understandings of the concepts of the Kingdom of God, Jubilee, and the *imago Dei* (image of God). Those beliefs lead Jeremy to adopt core values—equality, the establishment of common ground, and humility—that animate his and the BCHP's rhetorical strategies.

Two Tiers of Goals

Jeremy consistently articulates two tiers of goals for the BCHP: short- and long-term. He explains, "what we do is we try to end hunger right now, but the long game we're playing is trying to change cultural responses to hunger and poverty."

Jeremy describes that the immediate goal of the BCHP, to affect an immediate reduction in hunger, is the primary focus of the organization's field offices. The work of immediately reducing hunger involves many of the tangible, measurable outcomes discussed in the previous chapter: increased access to nutrition programs and education, the writing and passing of anti-poverty legislation, the creation of community coalitions and partnerships. But nuts-and-bolts hunger eradication is not Jeremy's personal primary focus.

The BCHP's long-game is more conceptual and is the focus of most of Jeremy's work: "you also have to think about, how do you change our theological perspective on the issue, that actually is more in line with a Christian theological perspective, or I mean, you could say any faith perspective really

deals with this issue very pertinently.[1]" Jeremy articulates the need for

perspective change many times, in many ways. He says "what I feel like is really

primary is we have to change *culture*. We have to change our cultural response to

believe that hunger and poverty are not acceptable socioeconomic conditions."

When describing his day-to-day work as the BCHP executive director, Jeremy

repeats this idea, summarizing that his work is "different moment-to-moment,

day-to-day, but it's all about, ultimately, how do we change the cultural mindset

of that [sic] hunger and poverty as acceptable socioeconomic conditions?

Everything in my job goes towards that lens." Again, he later says that his work

"points to" "helping that, help [sic] reframe cultural understanding."

Cultural Context: The Starting Point[2]

      Jeremy references the need for popular—and especially popular

Christian—cultural understandings of and responses to poverty to change. These

popular understandings include myths such as: America is a land of

opportunity, so if you work hard enough you'll prosper (and therefore that

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[1] Though certainly beyond the scope of this project, for an enlightening look at how, in fact, different faith and philosophical perspectives conceive of and address poverty, see Galston and Hoffenberg's collection, *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*.

[2] For more on these attitudes and myths, see pp. 178-183.

laziness is the cause of poverty); or: the poor would *rather* live off government

assistance than work.

These myths and others like them are pervasive, and statistically even

more pervasive among white Christian Americans, who make up a significant

percentage of Jeremy's likely and target audience. In 2017, Julie Zauzmer

described how, "Christians, especially white evangelical Christians, are much

more likely than non-Christians to view poverty as the result of individual

failings." In fact, Zauzmer writes that when asked whether personal failings/lack

of effort or difficult circumstances are more to blame for poverty, 53% of white

evangelical Christians blamed the former. Overall, Christians were 2.2X more

likely, and White evangelicals 3.2X more likely, than non-Christians to blame

poverty on lack of effort/individual failings. And, while the percentage of

atheists, agnostics, and religiously non-affiliated Americans who primarily

blamed the individual in poverty more than her/his circumstances, is much

lower, at 31%, a third is still substantial.[3] Attitudes such as these about poverty

are those that Jeremy seeks to change/subvert.

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[3] This data is incredibly stark, too, in political, racial, and gender differences. Democrats, Blacks, and women are much more likely to blame circumstances for poverty. Republicans, Whites, and men are much more likely to blame the individual. For more, see Zauzmer. For a conservative evangelical's explanation/defense of such a position, see Forster. For conservative evangelical pushback to the individual laziness myth, however, see Corbett and Fikkert.

Why Culture Change

Jeremy explains *why* he seeks culture change as the primary goal of the

BCHP. Culture, he says, "incorporates policy making, it incorporates theological

perspectives." From culture, from popular understanding, the argument goes,

comes action: policies and responses to people and issues and crises. Jeremy

recognizes that general cultural understandings, part of which are formed by

theological perspectives, are what dictate actions. When Jeremy says "culture,"

he means the invisible forces—beliefs, values, understandings—that have very

visible ramifications—policy, action. Jeremy says that without changing "our

cultural disposition towards people who are poor," social action is taken only to

later be undone: "until we can [change cultural understandings of poverty], we

can expand access to SNAP and then we can lose it again…So, we have to change

culture."

To illustrate this point, Jeremy suggests looking "at how we have changed

laws about race, but we haven't changed hearts and minds about race in our

nation to the degree where we have seen a cultural change." Jeremy expands on

his example of racial justice and Civil Rights:

> it's the same families that were largely adversely affected during
> Reconstruction in the [1860s and 1870s] that are your biggest proponents
> of racist hatred today. It's just generations later…The Civil Rights
> Movement, you know, we changed laws which were of utmost
> importance. We had to do it, but we didn't finish the job, and finishing the
> job was to change hearts and minds.

In Jeremy's understanding, cultural change is the only way to produce long-term actions and results because action grows out of something deeper: "hearts and minds," beliefs, values, understandings.

To understand the complexities of why Jeremy chooses a life of justice advocacy and how he forms and shapes such work—given his statement that his work is an outgrowth of his "theological perspective and calling"—this chapter explores Jeremy's account of his calling; the theological beliefs that Jeremy consciously considers and names as commitments; and, finally, the values derived from and animated by those theological commitments, values that then take shape in the world by animating rhetorical practices.

Jeremy's Calling: A Twentieth-Century St. Francis

Calling, an Overview

When asked what first motivated him to start the BCHP, why he pursued this kind of work, Jeremy responds, "I experienced it as calling."

In Christian thought and tradition, there are different ways of thinking about calling and vocation[4] (terms often used synonymously). Some

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[4] See Schwarz pp. 344-348 for an overview of various understandings of work and vocation throughout church history.

The brief overviews of Christian understandings of calling here and in the body of the text are just that, brief overviews, and are thus limited. Frequently, whether because a Christian is

Christians—Jeremy among them—generally conceive of God's call broadly.[5] For

example, Christian thinker Frederick Buechner writes, "the place God calls you

to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"

(119). Drawing from Buechner's framework, Amy L. Sherman identifies

Christian calling as the "sweet spot" where three Venn diagram circles overlap;

those three circles are "God's Priorities," "The World's Needs," "My Passions

and Gifts" (106-111). A defining feature of this view of calling is flexibility and

evolution: as your understanding of God's priorities, the world's needs, and your

own passions and gifts develops, so, too, does your understanding of what God

is calling you to. Jim Wallis, a Christian writer whom Jeremy frequently

references and whose books line Jeremy's bookcases, holds this view of calling

and writes: "Seek to develop a vocation and not just a career. Discern your gifts

as a child of God, not just your talents, and listen for your calling rather than just

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actively wrestling with the concepts of calling and vocation or because she has never really considered what she means when she uses those terms, a Christian may not articulate a unified conception of calling.

      I also do not imply that Christians are the only people who use the terms "calling" or "vocation." However, because Jeremy is a Christian, I am focused on Christian understandings of those terms.

      [5] While other Christians conceive of calling with fairly narrow parameters, understanding God as calling them to a specific job at a specific organization; God calling them to marry a specific person; God calling them to move to a specific location. Brooks articulates another feature of this line of thinking about vocation: "A person does not choose a vocation. A vocation is a calling. People generally feel they have no choice in the matter" (24). Though something of an oversimplification, generally, in this conception of vocation, God calls you to something or someone or someplace specific and your task is simply to obey.

looking for opportunities. Remember that your personal good always relates to the common good" (298). Wallis uses active verbs to describe vocation and calling: seeking, developing, discerning, listening, remembering. Wallis reminds readers that, like Buechner and Sherman identify, an individual's calling should impact the common good—the "World's Needs" or "the world's deep hunger."

Another variable in Christian thought regarding calling is *how* the calling comes about. Some Christians articulate their experience of calling as an event— hearing or sensing a call at a definable point in time. Others experience calling as a dawning, gradual realization. Jeremy experienced his calling as "a moment," but, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, a broad calling that began in a moment has continued to gradually change and evolve over two decades.

Jeremy and St. Francis

Jeremy explains that his experience of calling followed his junior year of college and occurred when he encountered on TV the story of St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis, or Francesco di Bernardone, was born in late 1181CE or early 1182CE and died in October 1226CE.[6] Francis grew up the son of a wealthy cloth

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[6] Much of the information here is from Vauchez's comprehensive biography of St. Francis: *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint.* For more on St. Francis and his legacy, read this book.

merchant, enjoying the status and privilege money afforded. Francis wrote little

about his youth, saying only that he lived "in sin." After going to war several

times, in pursuit of fame and glory, Francis fell ill and, eventually, experienced a

sequence of events that contributed to his conversion to Christianity. The most

significant of these events was an encounter with lepers. As André Vauchez

notes, "In the Middle Ages, lepers were considered the dregs of society" (23).

Francis writes that he, like his contemporaries, was disgusted by lepers until,

Francis writes, "the Lord led me among them" (Vauchez 22). Francis's attitude

toward society's outcasts was changed by his experience with lepers, and, over

the course of his life, he became a champion of the poor and outcast. Francis' life

change was radical. He renounced material goods, moved outside the city gates,

and lived among the poor and diseased. His father, baffled by his son's behavior,

broke relationship with him. And so, "at a time [in history] when the individual

existed only in relation to his extended family and by virtue of belonging to it"

(9), Francis was disowned by his father and faced the world without material

possessions, the safety of the town's protection, or familial identity. Francis went

on to found the Franciscan order, a monastic order characterized by mirroring

Christ in his intense devotion to the poor and outcast. St. Francis as a figure has

lived on in highly diverse ways across different periods of Christian history.

Vauchez concludes his biography of St. Francis with words that attest to

Francis's power as a historical and mythic figure: "he has not ceased, since the thirteenth century, to exercise a real fascination on people. And he constitutes even today a figure to whom individuals and societies look to compare themselves in order to find in him, to use the Gospel term, *nova et vetera*: old truths and new ideas" (336).

When Jeremy encountered the story of St. Francis, he "realized that that was my calling, that I felt called to the poor." Jeremy describes his experience of calling as "a moment," rather than a gradual realization. The story begins when Jeremy, a rising senior in college at Samford University and youth minister at a church outside of Birmingham, Alabama, decides to relax one summer morning following an exhausting week of youth ministry. Jeremy turns on the TV and finds a movie in progress. Jeremy says that, because this was "before Google," he didn't know what the movie was or that it was a retelling of the story of St. Francis. All he knew was that he identified with the kid, Francesco, in the movie. Jeremy recalls identifying with Francesco's preoccupation with material possessions, status, and popularity. Then, Jeremy explains the trajectory of the story: Francesco falls ill, eventually awakens from a coma, and realizes "that it was his possessions that were prohibiting him from loving his neighbor as himself." So, "[Francesco] gave everything away and then moved outside of the safety of the city gates, and with the poor and the lepers." Jeremy recalls, "It all

just resonated with me immediately, to the point where I literally gathered up…all my possessions of value, loaded them up into my car and drove over the mountain into downtown Birmingham, which is where the homeless would hang out…and I gave all my stuff away." Jeremy "knew at that point, 'I'm called to the poor.'"

Eventually, Jeremy found out that the movie was *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*[7] and that Francesco was St. Francis. Jeremy explains that he then read "everything he could find" about St. Francis and committed to a "life of simplicity," the life St. Francis modeled. When asked what "living simply" meant to him then, Jeremy says that he followed Francis's lead and gave away "any possession that was a possession of status," which included his "fraternity kid" stuff like Polos and North Face clothing, and his beloved backpacking equipment which he realized he only used on occasion, while "homeless people could use this every day." In addition to giving away possessions and committing to simplicity, Jeremy recalls other ways he modeled his new life on St. Francis': Jeremy fell in love with nature; had a "very tenuous" relationship with his parents, who did not understand his new commitments; and realized that to be called to the poor meant to be in proximity with the poor, sowing the seed for the next several

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[7] Paramount Pictures, 1972.

decades of living in low-income communities. Jeremy describes the effect of Francis's story as having, not a "ripple effect" but a "tsunami effect for me."

The story of St. Francis is how Jeremy has framed, and thus understood, his moment of calling. Just as Francesco woke from a literal coma with a new understanding of the world and his relationship to it, so Jeremy's experience of the world post-*Brother Sun, Sister Moon* was different. And just like Francesco's new understanding produced new patterns of action, so, too, did Jeremy's. He says, "You've seen those detergent commercials when it's like, 'it makes white whiter' and everything? It's like, that was what [life after calling] was. It was like, life was brighter and clearer, and I was at that period of time completely given over to the good. If it was good, I just did it…taking very literally to love my neighbor as myself."

Same Calling, Developing Theology

Starting the BCHP was and still is primarily about what happened the day Jeremy stumbled upon a movie about St. Francis; it's about calling, about "feeling called to the poor." When he first experienced this call to the poor, however, Jeremy wasn't sure what it meant: "I had never heard of the nonprofit industry or network or anything. I just knew that I felt called to addressing poverty." Though his calling remains the same today, the key difference between then and now is that Jeremy can now, with the benefit of more than twenty years

132

of growing and evolving, construct and articulate this experience and define terms; now he has a narrative of calling *and* theological concepts and beliefs for understanding that calling.

As he narrates the experience of his calling now, decades later, Jeremy defines it as "a calling to say, if we're going to move towards the Kingdom of God, or whatever language you want to use, it has to be socially just." And he immediately defines "socially just" as: "Everybody has to have access to housing, food, and healthcare, and some of these basic necessities." As an example of social justice enacted, Jeremy describes the Jubilee, a Levitical concept that has ignited Jewish and Christian imaginations for millennia. And Jeremy's commitment to honoring others as the image of God is a belief that permeates all parts of his life.

A common understanding of belief is that articulated by evangelical theologian Roger Olson: "*Belief* is simply the assent of the mind to a proposition or set of propositions. A proposition is a truth claim" (20). Belief as intellectual assent to a claim about what is true, while a common conception of the term is, I think, too reductive. Writer Kathleen Norris agrees, noting that too often "believe" is used synonymously with "think"; so, "what do you believe about _____?" comes to mean, simply, "what do you think about _____?" Norris argues that, because "at its Greek root, 'to believe' simply means 'to give one's heart

to,'" we would be better served by determining "what it is we give our heart to." Then, she says, "we will know what it is we believe" (62). Though this definition of finding out what we believe—examining "what it is we give our heart to"—may seem too sentimental and subjective from an academic perspective, it is, I think, a much more accurate way of understanding belief.

I argue that beliefs, while affirmations of truth claims, are also more than that: that they are animating and guiding forces, often derived from and/or related to deeply held ideologies, philosophies, theologies, and experiences. To determine what one has "given one's heart to," I would argue one must simply look at where one's time, attention, and resources go—at how one chooses to spend one's life, to act.

Moving toward the theological concepts of the Kingdom of God, Jubilee, and the recognition of the *imago Dei* (image of God) is how Jeremy now articulates the aim of his calling, and thus of the work that he does; the pursuit of these goals is how he chooses to spend his life. Embedded in these theological beliefs are the motivations and goals for Jeremy's work and thus the work of the BCHP, as "an articulation of [his] theological perspective and calling."

The Kingdom of God and Jubilee: The Telos *of Calling to the Poor*

Jeremy articulates his framework for thinking about poverty and justice in synthesis with ideas and stories from Judeo-Christian scripture and tradition. To

134

understand where Jeremy wants to end up—the telos (end, final aim) of the work

he does and supports—one must understand the interrelated Christian concepts

of the Kingdom of God and the Jubilee.

Both the Kingdom of God and Jubilee are biblical ideas closely tied to

conceptions of justice for the poor and oppressed. Because these concepts are

central to millennia of Christian thought and imagination, because they animate

much Christian justice work, and because Jeremy understands and articulates

them as he describes his calling, I overview both concepts. The explanations I

provide are mere slivers from centuries of theological conversations. I provide

overviews of these conversations for several reasons: 1) to indicate the richness

and texture of the history of these theological concepts, 2) to describe common

theological tensions and interpretations that have influenced Christians

concerned with justice work, and 3) to illuminate some of the theological logic

underlying Jeremy's narration of his calling, beliefs, and values.

The Kingdom of God

In conversation and in his book, Jeremy frequently references and

discusses "the Kingdom" (or, alternately, "the Kingdom of God" or "the

Kingdom of Heaven").

John Bright notes that the concept of the Kingdom of God is "an idea of

central importance in the theology of the Bible" and "involves, in a real sense, the

total message of the Bible" (7). The centrality of the idea of the Kingdom (or

Reign) of God (or Heaven) does not, however, come with accompanying clarity

of meaning. In fact, ideas about how to define the Kingdom of God and/or which

aspects of the Kingdom of God to make central to Christian life and teaching

have preoccupied theologians for millennia.

Bright joins a long line of theologians who emphasize that, while the

phrases "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" are distinctively New

Testament, Christian phrases, the concept of God's coming reign, the coming of a

kingdom to be ruled by God, permeates Jewish faith and thought from ancient

times. Bright explains, "the Jews looked in particular for a Redeemer, or Messiah,

who should establish the Kingdom of God victoriously." Then, in the New

Testament, Christians believe it was revealed that "Jesus *was* that Messiah who

had come to set up his Kingdom" (18).

According to Christian tradition and Scripture, the Kingdom Jesus set up

was, however, not what Israel expected. Rather than a powerful, victorious

national Kingdom, freeing the Jews from the oppression of the Roman Empire,

Jesus "summoned men to the Kingdom of the Servant" (Bright 210). Jesus'

message about how life should be in the Kingdom of God, his ethical and

hermeneutic codes and practices, defied expectations. Throughout the New

Testament accounts of his life, Jesus preached a message of good news,

acceptance, and aid to the poor, the prisoner, the slave, the prostitute. He challenged the powerful, the self-righteous, and the privileged. He said that in the Kingdom of God, which he was establishing, the "last would be first and the first last" (Matthew 19:30), that to be great you had to become like a little child (Matthew 18:3), that it was harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than it was for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24).

As William K. McElvaney says, "Jesus uses the image or paradigm of the Reign of God as the framework of God's justice…All the signs of God's New Order are subversive of present unjust social realities wherever they occur" (6). The Reign of God, McElvaney continues:

> is at once both religious and political. It is religious because it comes from beyond human origin or control. It proclaims economic justice but is more than the ideology of class struggle because it is grounded in God's steadfast love and hope for true community…The Reign of God is profoundly political because it demands justice in both procedural and distributive ways in order to restore true community, thus disturbing existing unjust power arrangements…Good news to the poor is bad news for the rich unless and until the wealthy accept God's rearrangements of existing disparity that dehumanizes the poor. (6-7)

Christians sometimes refer to the Kingdom of God as the "upside down Kingdom," referencing the ways in which Jesus declared an economic, political, and religious reality that completely upended much conventional religious wisdom and many contemporary understandings of scripture.

Such a Kingdom, characterized by religiously-motivated political action

has ignited the Christian social imagination throughout the Christian church's

history. Jeremy is heavily influenced by the late nineteenth, early twentieth-

century Social Gospel movement, during which adherents developed a

reawakened commitment to realizing the social and political dimensions of the

Kingdom of God. Thus, when Jeremy says "if we're going to move towards the

Kingdom of God"—by which he means further enact it or bring it to pass, make

the world more and more like the Kingdom of God—then it has to be "socially

just." For Jeremy, commitment to the message of Jesus: the Kingdom of God,

must entail a social and political dimension.

Belief in a religious and political Kingdom of God is a rich theological

resource to draw from because it's complexity requires devoted study and

imaginative work. Nicholas Perrin notes that while uniformity of interpretation

is an impossible goal, [8] "For those of us leading other Christians in any capacity

whatsoever…we can only become more effective leaders by having a clearer

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[8] Christians typically agree on several things about the Kingdom of God: 1) Jesus
established it when he arrived on earth; 2) the ethics and values of the Kingdom are different
than the traditional wisdom and values of the world; 3) the Kingdom is "already, but not
yet"; and 4) the Church—the followers of Jesus—are to further advance the Kingdom.
However, *within* several of these basic tenants there are differences and tensions between
historical periods, denominations, and traditions.
    See Willis's collection for a look at twentieth-century interpretations of the Kingdom
of God. See also, Norman Perrin for substantial overviews of theological perspectives on the
Kingdom of God beginning with Schleiermacher in the 1820s.

vision of the kingdom" ("What the Kingdom"). This "clearer vision," however, is

challenging because, as Kevin Hart writes, "[The Kingdom of God] is a dynamic

notion, and one that resists any single or simple formation" (1). Hart overviews

many of the tensions of this theological idea:

> Part of [the strangeness and mystery of the concept of the Kingdom of
> God] is its plurality: a reign that is here yet not here, that breaks into the
> world yet is itself unworldly, that is within us and outside us, that we are
> enjoined to help establish on earth while recognizing that it abides in
> heaven,9 that attracts philosophers committed to reason and
> contemplatives in love with God, that has a distinct beginning and end
> that are held to be in history (the Ascension and the Second Coming)
> while transcending all temporality. (4)

Some of the complexities of the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God

provide rich imaginative possibilities for imagining and enacting a socially just

world, but it's ability to be interpreted in multiple ways has also caused tensions

and differing interpretations among Christians, some of which have created the

culture Jeremy is seeking to change.

For example, Bright explains that the "Kingdom is a present and

victorious reality" but that it is also "a thing of the future and far from

victorious" (231). This line of thinking goes: Jesus established the Kingdom and

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[9] As Hart overviews, what and where, exactly, that Kingdom is remains debated by
Christians. Nicholas Perrin notes in *The Kingdom of God* three major schools of thought: 1) that the
Kingdom is an internal reality following conversion and is thus focused on "the soul, the interior
life" (23-24); 2) that the Kingdom is a public reality, "a social ideal, characterized by certain
practices, values, and attitudes" (24); and 3) that the Kingdom is neither private nor public but
rather "future post-mortem bliss" (24).

said it was "at hand," so it is a present reality; however, the *fulfillment* of the Kingdom, the *full* Reign of God, will not happen until the eschaton: the end of time. So, as Sherman says, "we need to remember that the kingdom of God is both *now* and *not yet*" (44). This presents a substantial challenge for various Christian traditions and denominations who have often chosen to center their understanding of the Kingdom as more "now" or more "then." More progressive and liberal Christians often emphasize the "now" aspect of the Kingdom, seeking to do justice on earth in the present, living into the Kingdom on earth.

Conservative Christians, on the other hand, often emphasize the eventual return of Christ and, as James W. Skillen writes, "the climax of the revelation of God's kingdom" (ix). For Skillen, a conservative Christian, this look forward to the return of Christ, coupled with the distinction of God's Kingdom from the kingdoms of the world, raises many questions: "what is the relation between this age and the age to come? And how should Christians think about and conduct their lives in the societies in which they live now?...Should the church keep itself separate from the world or become fully immersed in it? Should Christians be

trying to reform society or focusing on evangelization and strengthening the church to keep itself pure in a godless world?" (ix).[10]

The conservative evangelical interpretations of the Kingdom of God as eschatological are, if not solely, at least substantially responsible for the cultural attitudes about the poor that Jeremy wants to change. If the Kingdom of God is primarily a future reality that will only be experienced by those with a personal relationship with Jesus after they have died, evangelical Christians see their primary duty as evangelism, not overhauling oppressive political, religious, and economic systems. This emphasis on individual salvation thus removes focus from the political, social-justice dimensions of the Kingdom of God that Jeremy understands as the heart of his calling and the BCHP's work. Because Jeremy believes lasting cultural change comes only from changed understandings, and because these eschaton-focused theological perspectives on the Kingdom of God have contributed to the cultural understandings Jeremy believes must be changed for long-lasting justice work to be accomplished, he reacts by *intimately* connecting social justice work with his understanding of the Kingdom.

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[10] For more conservative, evangelical responses to this "already but not yet" tension, see *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, edited by McIlhenny.

Another historical theological tension is over how the church can/should enact the radical way in which Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom of God challenged established religious and political norms. As Brian D. McLaren describes:

> conventional religious morality ("the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees") is about not doing external wrong: not murdering, not committing adultery, not committing divorce, not breaking sacred oaths, not getting revenge on the wrong people. But the kingdom manifesto calls us beyond and beneath this kind of morality; we must deal with greed and lust, arrogance and prejudice in the heart. And more, instead of merely not doing wrong, with a changed heart we will be motivated to do what is right. (122-123)

Bright, too, describes how the Kingdom of God is "not only the goal of all history and the reward of all believers" but it is also "the norm by which all human behavior is judged, it is a new order which even now bursts in upon the present one and summons men to be its people" (223). This new order is demonstrated by Christ's challenge to the religious structures and common scriptural interpretations of his day, as he repeatedly proclaimed: "you have heard it said, but I say to you…" (see Matthew 5).

The relationship between Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom, the New Testament texts making sense of a world after the life and death of Christ, and the ethical code established in the Old Testament—which Christians traditionally also consider the Word of God—has presented many tensions for Christians regarding moral norms and imperatives. Christians have wrestled with each

other and themselves for centuries over the relationship between the Old and New Testaments; over Jesus, Paul, and the other New Testament writers' use of the Hebrew Scriptures; over the temptation to reduce morality to lists of rules; and over the tendency to erect new, powerful religious and political structures similar to the very ones Jesus tried to dismantle.

Many Christians believe that they are to provide the world at least some foretaste of the full Kingdom of God, to enact the values of the Kingdom and to advance its reach, which necessitates challenging powerful, oppressive systems. John Howard Yoder explains, "The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately" (*The Priestly Kingdom* 92). In implication, Yoder says, "If in the wider society we call for the overcoming of racism or sexism or materialism, then the church should be the place where that possibility first becomes real" (93). As a part of enacting the ethical code of the Kingdom, which so differs from the code of the world (which too often favors the rich and powerful), Yoder hopes "The church cultivates an alternative consciousness" (94). Similarly, Wallis says

> The Christian mission is to proclaim and live the kingdom of God…The church is supposed to be saying, and the church is supposed to be showing, that our life together can be better…Jesus is indeed calling us to a completely different way of life that people are supposed to be able to see. He called it the Kingdom of God, and it is a very clear alternative to the selfish kingdoms of this world…that better way of living was meant to benefit not just Christians but everybody else too. (22-23)

143

Despite this call, though, Christians—like many people—often seem to prefer the structures that are antithetical to the Kingdom of God, structures that favor power and privilege, that provide money and status. As Michael W. Stroope notes, "While territorial and political Christendom may have disappeared, enclaves of cultural Christendom still exist, where Christians maintain a vision of a kingdom on earth in which they are entitled to the best life possible, political advantage, and freedom from suffering or inconvenience" (374). Wallis pushes against the resistance among Christians to an orientation toward the Gospels and the Kingdom that calls for the dismantling of oppressive systems: he writes, "A gospel message that doesn't try to change the world and that concentrates only on individuals works only for those who don't *need* the world to be changed. Therefore, it ends up being too white, too privileged, too male, and too American" (59). Bright, too, strongly refutes the Christian who will not work on behalf of the oppressed: "Christ's own are those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, shown mercy to the prisoner and outcast—who have, in sort, done the works of Christ" (221).

This is the realization St. Francis had while fighting the Crusades, that Jeremy had while serving as a youth minister and attending a Christian university: a form of Christianity that seeks ease, comfort, power, and status, is not the justice work practiced and demanded by Jesus. The Kingdom of God, a

144

textured and rich concept, is both religious and political in nature, demanding

changed hearts, minds, *and* action. Though as this section has demonstrated,

there is much debate over these elements of the Kingdom of God, Jeremy

describes another theological concept, a concept closely tied for many

theologians to the Kingdom of God, that provides further evidence that he

envisions the enactment of social justice necessary for furthering God's

Kingdom. That concept is the Old Testament Levitical idea of Jubilee.

The Year of Jubilee

The biblical concept of Jubilee comes from one chapter in the book of

Leviticus, the third book of the Christian Old Testament (Jewish Torah). The Old

Testament's reputation is often reductive, restricted to it containing impossible

rules, the abuse of women, and God-ordained slavery and violence. While there

are many factors that contribute—in many cases, *rightly*—to this reputation,[11]

this view of the Old Testament is an oversimplification. Prominent Old

Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann—whose books line the shelves of and

whose name comes up frequently with the BCHP staff; Jeremy names

Brueggemann as a significant theological influence in his life—notes that in the

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[11] Among them: ancient tribal culture, patriarchy, relationships with other Near Eastern cultures and religions.

Old Testament, "*Love of God* comes as *love of neighbor* with an immediate,

concrete, economic dimension" (*Journey* 42). Brueggemann describes God and

God's interest in these immediate, concrete, and economic concerns[12]:

> YHWH is the one with active verbs. YHWH is the one with remarkable
> adjectives: "I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the
> earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord." Jer 9:24. So here is
> YHWH's triad, which we first might state in Hebrew: hesed, mispat,
> sedaqah. Steadfast love (hesed) is to stand in solidarity, to honor
> commitments, to be reliable toward all the partners. Justice (mispat) in the
> Old Testament concerns distribution in order to make sure that all
> members of the community have access to resources and goods for the
> sake of a viable life of dignity. In covenantal tradition the particular
> subject of YHWH's justice is the triad "widow, orphan, immigrant," those
> without leverage or muscle to sustain their own legitimate place in
> society. Righteousness (sedaqah) concerns active intervention in social
> affairs, taking an initiative to intervene effectively in order to rehabilitate
> society, to respond to social grievance, and to correct every humanity-
> diminishing activity. This triad hesed, mispat, sedaqah, is everywhere
> present in Old Testament talk about divine purpose and about Israel's
> covenantal life in the world. (Journey 63)

Sherman, too, describes how the righteous (*tsaddiqim*) in the Old

Testament are those who "steward everything…for the *common good*, for the

advancing of God's justice and shalom" (17). Sherman, referencing Proverbs

11:10, describes how "dancing-in-the-streets rejoicing occurs when the *tsaddiquim*

advance justice and shalom in the city in such ways that vulnerable people at the

bottom stop being oppressed, start having genuine opportunity and begin to

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[12] I have slightly reformatted this quotation, embedding fluidly in the quote the three
terms that are listed in bullet points in Brueggemann's book.

enjoy spiritual and physical health, economic sufficiency and security" (18). Even

most of the Old Testament scholars who find the biblical texts deeply

problematic are firmly united in their belief that these ancient scriptures do

indicate an understanding of a God who is concerned with justice.

Leviticus is a book primarily concerned with laws by which the Israelites

were (and, orthodox Jews, are) to govern themselves. Leviticus 25 contains

instructions for the practices of the Sabbatical Year (25:1-7) and Jubilee (25:8-55).

The Sabbatical year provided that every seventh year would be "a year of

complete rest for the land" (vs. 6), in which no sowing, harvesting, or pruning

was allowed.

The Jubilee year, the concept Jeremy discusses, takes this care for the earth

and extends it much further. The instructions for Jubilee state that, after forty-

nine years (seven times seven), the fiftieth year should be "hallowed" and that

the Israelites should "proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property

and every one of you to your family" (vs. 10). In addition to the same sabbatical

practice of letting the land rest, the Jubilee included provision for "the

redemption of the land" (vs. 24). This provision stipulated that if anyone had,

due to hardship or poverty, sold a piece of land, during the Jubilee year that land

would be returned to its original owner (or his family; vs. 25-28). The commands

147

also include expectations for the humane treatment of Israelite bondservants (vs. 35-38), and the requirement that, during the Jubilee year, all Israelite bondservants and laborers—whether indebted to a fellow Israelite or a "resident alien"—will have their debts cancelled and be free to "go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property" (vs. 39-41).[13] In this chapter, the Levitical preoccupation with the holiness of Israel extends to and is extended by the practice of Jubilee. Brueggemann describes how, in the Jubilee commandments, "holiness becomes a practice of neighborly justice" without which "there is no other chance for entry into the presence [of God]" (*An Introduction* 73, 74).

Like the Kingdom of God,[14] the Jubilee is a concept with a rich, textured history of theological and hermeneutic interpretation. John Sietze Bergsma

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[13] I would be remiss not to note that, despite the astonishing humanitarian commands here, the Jubilee freedom does not extend to any foreigners the Israelites have enslaved. While any *Israelite* who is in hired bondage to a fellow citizen or "resident alien" is to be freed during the Jubilee year, foreign slaves are allowed to be kept "as a possession for your children after you…These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness" (vs. 44-46).

[14] The fact that Jeremy articulates both the Kingdom of God and Jubilee as theological influences is unsurprising. Many New Testament scholars draw parallels between the Levitical Jubilee and Jesus' proclamation of Good News: the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Ringe describes how "the content and the pattern of [the Gospel proclamation is] rooted in the Jubilee and sabbath-year traditions of Hebrew Scriptures" (xiv). In Jubilee, she argues, "liberty is presented in economic, social, and political terms: freedom for slaves, release for captive peoples, cancellation of debts, redistribution of land, care for the poor, food for the hungry, and healing of physical ailments. The language is primarily the language of ethics, dealing with values, social

describes some of the ways that, "In various times and places throughout history, the ancient Israelite jubilee year has exercised a powerful influence on the religious imagination of Jews and Christians" (1). This influence of the Jubilee has extended to "contexts as diverse as the African American spiritual tradition, the cultic calendar of the Catholic Church, and the writings of modern liberation theologians" and has "served as a symbol of freedom, both spiritual and material, and inspired efforts to attain it" (1). While some Christians and theologians might quarrel with the broad extension of the Jubilee idea and imagery to so many contexts and periods outside of the original, Bergsma points out that, despite some scholarly disagreement about how exactly Jubilee in ancient Israel was conceived of and practiced,[15] "What the biblical data does indicate […] is that the meaning of the jubilee for the people of Israel developed over time" (1). Thus, Bergsma concludes, "the reinterpretation of the jubilee in

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relationships, and the establishment or restoration of justice" (xiv). Ringe makes a direct connection between Jesus and Jubilee: "Jesus as the Anointed One (Christ/Messiah) of God is presented as the herald announcing the beginning of God's new reign, and proclaiming liberty to all who participate in it…To portray Jesus as the proclaimer of the Jubilee links recognition of Jesus as the Christ with response to the Jubilee message itself: to confess Jesus as the Christ is to participate in acts of liberation" (xv). Yoder, too, connects Jesus and his political action to the Jubilee, calling Jubilee the "precursor" to the Kingdom of God (*The Politics* 61).

[15] See Bergsma for a thorough survey of the history of the reinterpretation of the concept of Jubilee "from the roots of the jubilee year in ancient Near Eastern law and practice, to its original formulation in pre-exilic Israel, through its various re-uses in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Second Temple literature, and Qumran writings as a legal, ethical, chronological, eschatological, and messianic concept" (1).

more recent times—for example, as a metaphor for the question of African-

Americans for full civil equality—stands in a long tradition of jubilee

reinterpretation throughout the history of ancient Israel and early Judaism, as the

religious needs and experience of the community changed and developed" (1).

Also like the Kingdom of God, the Jubilee is a concept with many possible

interpretations. Bergsma describes several "senses" in which the Jubilee concept

was used in Israelite history and literature,[16] among them: a *legal/socioeconomic*

sense, an *eschatological sense*, and a *messianic* sense. In the *legal/socioeconomic sense*,

Bergsma, writes, the Jubilee "was intended as earnest legislation reflecting the

values and structures of pre-monarchic tribal Israel, regardless of the extant [sic]

to which it was practiced or enforced" (2). In the *eschatological sense*, the Jubilee

was first understood as a "[reapplication of] the concept of the jubilee from the

individual Israelite debtor to the nation as a whole, viewing the anticipated end

of the exile and return to the land as a corporate jubilee for the nation" (2). In

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[16] Fager also describes four meanings of the Jubilee: "its apparent anti-latifundism" (112); "the way in which it attaches the people to the land" (113); "its focus on the economic viability of individuals (and presumably their families)" (113). Here Fager pauses to clarify that "[the focus on economic viability] is not to claim for the jubilee an individualism similar to that found in the modern Western world, but the jubilee does not abandon the individual to the general welfare of the corporate body. Each individual family is an important economic unity that ought to have its integrity as a viable body maintained" (113). To prove this point, Fager writes, "Counteracting any tendency toward a 'rugged individualism' characteristic of contemporary America is the fourth aspect of the jubilee tradition—familial solidarity. The laws calling for the redemption of land or person declare that people are responsible for the basic welfare of members of their family" (113).

later Judaism, however, the eschatological sense shifted in focus: "The association of the jubilee with liberation is not lost, but eschatologized. The liberation that the jubilee represents becomes identified almost exclusively with the dawning of the eschaton" (304). In the later *messianic sense*, Bergsma explains how, in Isaiah 61:1-4, "notions of an anointed [redeemer] figure are associated with the realization of the justice, equality, and general *shalom* [peace] of which the jubilee has become a symbol or 'type'" (3). Bergsma's discussion of these possible senses for Jubilee illuminates the ways in which this concept, like that of the Kingdom of God, provides fertile ground for interpretations that diverge, converge, and interweave.

As with the Kingdom of God's primarily eschatological interpretation, a solely eschatological interpretation of the Jubilee indicates that all will be well at the end, but does not require much immediate social action. This is not Jeremy's interpretation of Jubilee; his interpretation is that Jubilee has theoretical/imaginative *and* material dimensions: providing both a way of thinking about poverty and justice *and* accompanying guidance on what action to take.

Jeremy says, "I really do love the whole Jubilee idea that we find in

Deuteronomy, in Hebrew scriptures.[17]" Jeremy summarizes Jubilee as: "the idea

of, kind of giving every generation an opportunity to make it on their own."

Jeremy "really see[s] the holy benefit of that kind of system." This system, as

Jeremy understands it, provides a framework in which both systemic *and*

individual responsibility are necessary for a fulfilling economic, social, and

personal life.

The theological concept of Jubilee not only impacts Jeremy's thoughts on

just social systems, but also how he conceives of himself: "I'm a work guy. I'm

not just a 'give everything to everybody.' I find work to be very empowering.

And you unlock some potential in your own self that you oftentimes didn't

know was there. So, I'm a work guy. I've had a job since I was twelve and I

believe that that's super important." Jeremy's identification of himself as a "work

guy" speaks into sociopolitical conversations about who is responsible for

lowering the poverty rate. On the extreme ends are those who believe that the

ones responsible for eradicating poverty are the poor—who should work

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[17] Here Jeremy simply incorrectly references the concept. While the Sabbatical Year
practices described in the first part of Leviticus 25 have a correlative in Deuteronomy, the
Jubilee commands are found only in Leviticus.

harder—and those who believe that "the system," by which is usually meant the

government, is solely responsible for inequality and for fixing it.

Here Jeremy identifies himself as a moderate, in-between those extremes,

someone who is a "work guy," but also someone who recognizes that many

people in poverty are not currently in positions to be successful, no matter how

hard they try. After he says he is a "work guy," Jeremy continues: "*But* I think

that putting people in a place where they can be successful, whether they're

academics, whether they're nonprofit administrators, whether they are working

in oil fields or laying pipe or whatever. That to me is, I want to set people up to

be able to live into who they're created to be." Jeremy recognizes that the playing

field is not even, not everyone is "set up" in a way that will enable them to

succeed. Thus, Jeremy recognizes how broad systemic overturning of oppressive

structures and systems will be necessary for justice, in addition to individual

work and effort. Jeremy holds space for systems to require corporate *and*

individual responsibility.

However, Jeremy writes in his book that cultural understandings of

poverty—that poverty is largely an issue of personal responsibility—are mostly

incorrect (20, 44, 50-52). Thus, Jeremy thinks more systemic work needs to be

done, more Jubilee years, rather than more acceptance of individual

responsibility. Who/what you hold accountable for reducing poverty explains who/what you blame for poverty. Jeremy does not blame the poor.

Similarly, Jeffrey A. Fager offers some thoughts on what the Jubilee both does and does not say about poverty:

> The jubilee does include broader and more general admonitions for all Israelites to protect the dignity of all other Israelites—poor Israelites are not to be charged interests on loans, and Israelites are not to be sold as slaves but hired as free laborers and treated well. All of this is stated without a word of judgment concerning the individual in poverty. Whether that person became poor because of crop failure, financial mistakes, imprudence, incompetence or laziness, the community is responsible for keeping that person from falling into a state of abject poverty and the indignity of slavery. (114)

It is these "venerable truths" of the Jubilee that Fager hopes new studies and researchers will "be able to apply…to a world that seems always in need of assistance" (122). As Fager notes, one of these truths is that the Jubilee—economic and social justice—is not limited only to those who "deserve it," and in fact such a judgment is not required or encouraged. This fits well with Jeremy's framework of resistance to cultural narratives about poverty that claim that few in poverty are deserving of help because most are responsible for their situation. Jeremy and other Christian justice advocates have been influenced by considerations of the radical traits of Jubilee and will likely continue to imagine new ways these principles can be adapted for contemporary contexts.

154

The threads are strong that connect the Jubilee, the Kingdom of God, and justice work as the heart and core of Christian faith and practice. Sherman describes how "[God] wants us to realize that the kingdom of God has begun to break into *our time and space*" (18, emphasis added). In strikingly similar language, Sharon H. Ringe writes:

> Jubilee images, as images, transcend their own times and places of origin, and by their cultural and historical particularity they call us more fully into our own time and place. They challenge us to live with the rhythms of liberation and to proclaim good news to the poor at the particular points of pain, oppression, and alienation in our society and world. In doing that, we…confess Jesus as the Christ who is the herald of the Jubilee, messenger and enactor of liberation. That liberation, in turn, is our first encounter in all times and places with God's sovereign will for humankind. (98, emphasis added)

In light of the theological richness of the concepts of the Kingdom of God and Jubilee, laced as they are with provisions for the dismantling of oppression and the promotion of human flourishing, it is no surprise that a committed Christian justice advocate, like Jeremy, would find these concepts so generative in understanding and constructing his calling and work in his particular time and place.

There is one other crucial piece of Jeremy's theological framework, one other key belief, that emerges from his discussion of Jubilee. Embedded in the conclusion of his statement about Jubilee is a hint at the belief underlying all of Jeremy's commitments: the *imago Dei*, image of God. As mentioned previously,

155

after describing himself as a "work guy," Jeremy says, "But I think that putting people in a place where they can be successful, whether they're academics, whether they're nonprofit administrators, whether they are working in oil fields or laying pipe or whatever. That to me is, I want to set people up to be able to live into who they're created to be." Social justice—the dismantling of oppressive systems in order to "set people up" in just ways—is ultimately intended, in Jeremy's understanding, to help set those people up to "to be able to live into *who they're created to be.*"

<p style="text-align:center;">*The Underlying Belief: The* Imago Dei</p>

Jeremy is primarily motivated by his deep conviction that all humans are created in the image of God. This belief motivates his commitments to enacting the liberation of the Kingdom and Jubilee, and from these beliefs are drawn the values that animate Jeremy and the BCHP's words and actions.

The guiding motivating force for Jeremy is a belief in the "created-ness" of all people; this is the belief that emerged as central from his experience of calling and that is intertwined with the actions he takes toward the *telos* of Kingdom and Jubilee. The texture of this belief in the created-ness of all people, though, is richer, in both Christian tradition and in Jeremy's explanation of it, than a simple belief that humans are created (by God).

Traditional Christian doctrine holds that God created everything. Not only are humans created by God, but, according to traditional Christian belief people are also created in the *imago Dei*: the image of God. The understanding of the *imago Dei* originates in the biblical text of Genesis, the first book (in assembled order) of the Christian Old Testament. In the first chapter of Genesis, in the first of two biblical accounts of the creation of the world, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion…over all the wild animal of the earth...So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV). This creation of humans in God's image is an important tenant of the Jewish and Christian faiths; however, as Michael Welker explains, "it is not very clear what the image of God according to the biblical traditions really *means*" (327, emphasis added). Despite the ambiguity surrounding the biblical texts regarding the *imago Dei*, there are several prevailing theological interpretations of these passages that have influenced Christian thought and practice for millennia.[18]

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[18] For an in-depth discussion of various Christian traditions' understandings of the *imago Dei*, see *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*, edited by Howard.

Several focuses of Christian thought have emerged as theologians wrestle with what it means for humans to be created in God's image. One line of thinking is that the establishment of humans as created in the image of God is primarily, as Christoph Schwöbel says, a "[summary of] the place of human beings in the created order" (50). In this case, the *imago Dei* is primarily an articulation by Christians of what makes humans distinct from the rest of the created world and is thus the lynchpin belief in establishing human distinction from and dominion over the rest of the created world: the environment, natural resources, and all other flora and fauna.

A second common focus in reflection on the *imago Dei* is that humanity's creation in the image of God is the basis for an "assertion of human worth or dignity" that, as Thomas Albert Howard says, has been a constant "in Christian moral reflection about the human person, even if Christian practice has sadly fallen far short of Christian principle" (2-3). Nonna Verna Harrison, too, articulates this point of view: "as bearers of the divine image human persons are intrinsically endowed with royal dignity…[this dignity] belongs equally to all who are human, and it is not primarily about power or sovereignty. Rather, it is a gift from the Creator, the intrinsic value, honor, and splendor of the children of God that lies hidden at the inmost core of every human being" (188). In this point

of view, being made in the image of God is primarily about the value and dignity afforded to all humans.

Schwarz articulates a third major pattern of thought: that to be created in the image of God means "to be ethically shaped in conformity with God and to act in a manner for which God serves as the prototype" (23-24). Because humans are made in God's image, "As humans we are supposed to represent God and to model our conduct according to God" (24). Schwarz argues that, for the Christian person, the primary way to discover *how* to model conduct according to God is to model conduct on "God's ways as they are transparent in Jesus of Nazareth" (23-24). Thus, because humans are made in the image of God, they should strive to be more and more like God, better and better conforming to God's image as revealed in Jesus. The centrality of Jesus to this principle is that it is the New Testament's understanding that Jesus *is* God's image[19]—Jesus is not *in* God's image, but *is* God's image. Thus, whether to understand and respect the human person or to become more "Christ-like" is to recognize the *imago Dei*.

While there is much overlap between these veins of thought regarding the *imago Dei*, different people, traditions, and historical periods often tend to

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[19] See, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:3.

emphasize one over the others. Thus, it is, of course, possible for a Christian person to have a textured, varied understanding of the *imago Dei*.

For Jeremy, an increasingly rich understanding of the "created-ness[20]" of humans—far richer than mere "distinction and dominion"—is a critical part of his calling narrative, from that story's first moment as a college student in Birmingham, and is still present today, decades later. From Jeremy's textured understanding of "created-ness" come many of his values and, therefore, actions.

Following Jeremy's experience of calling, he articulates drastic changes taking place in his perception of the world. "It was as if the scales had been lifted from my eyes," he says, referencing the conversion experience of the apostle Paul in the ninth chapter of the New Testament book of Acts. According to that story, Paul is blinded by God for a three-day period during and after his conversion; then a disciple named Ananias lays his hands on Paul and "immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored" (Acts 9:18a). Jeremy says that whenever he hears that story, or hears people use the metaphor of scales falling from eyes, it resonates: "yeah, I know that." Like Paul, Jeremy sees the world in a new way following his calling. After the "scales had been

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[20] "Createdness" is a shorthand term Jeremy uses to discuss the *imago Dei*. Though the denotation of "created-ness" and the *imago Dei* are not the same, context and confirmation conclude that Jeremy intends them synonymously.

lifted" from his eyes, Jeremy says, "it was as if I was seeing people for the first time in my life. I could see their created-ness and see who they *were*, not who they were *to me*."

For Jeremy, seeing people "for the first time," seeing their created-ness means two interrelated things. He says the realization of created-ness meant 1. seeing people for "who they were," 2. as opposed to seeing people in relation to the self. Here Jeremy expresses his belief that creation in the image of God imbues people with intrinsic worth and unique qualities, the fullness of which is missed if people are considered only in relational or utilitarian ways: *who is this person in relation to me* (friend, enemy, helpful, harmful) and/or *what does this person offer or take away from me*? Jeremy remembers the tendency toward objectification of people falling away as the proverbial scales fell from his eyes.

Jeremy also identifies intricate connections between the *imago Dei* and the ideas of the Kingdom and Jubilee. He articulates that upon realizing the created-ness of people, he felt that for the first time he was seeing people for "who they were." As Jeremy says in his discussion of Jubilee, his goal is to "set people up for, to be able to live into who they're created to be." This, he continues, is part of "recognizing that we're all created in the image of God." So, being created in the image of God means that each person is unique, divinely gifted, and intended to

live a good life, true to "who they're created to be." For Jeremy, this is the endgame: enabling a full *living into* of one's created-ness.

Jeremy not only wants this full, good life for others, but he also articulates it as one of the primary goals he has for himself. Jeremy identifies the ability "to use my gifts to my fullest capacity as an individual," as "both what I want for myself and what I want for everybody, whether they're on my team, they're in my family, they're in a community. That to me is nirvana, or the Kingdom, or whatever you want to call it. That is when we're all able to live out our fullest creative value that we bring."

Jeremy equates the "Kingdom [of God]" with "nirvana" and defines both as being "able to live out our fullest creative value." Jeremy has already articulated that he understands his calling as "if we're going to move towards the Kingdom of God, or whatever language you want to use, it has to be socially just." So, for someone to move toward the Kingdom of God, that person must seek social justice, which Jeremy then articulates as "everybody has to have access to housing, food, and healthcare, and some of these basic necessities." This description of social justice is what leads Jeremy into the discussion of Jubilee, which culminates in his initial discussion of "created-ness."

If the end goal is "nirvana, or the Kingdom, or whatever you want to call it," and nirvana/the Kingdom is living fully into the self, the way to get there is

162

by social justice, by Jubilee, by giving everyone a chance to "make it." But here the "make it" is not make it to a six-figure salary or make it to prestige, but rather "making it" is being able to "live into who [one is] created to be." And the motivation for committing to such a justice calling is "recognizing that we're all created in the image of God."

For Jeremy, the implications of valuing every person as the image of God have developed and sharpened over time. Decades after first truly realizing the created-ness of people, values that animate Jeremy's life and work have emerged out of his belief in and commitment to honoring the *imago Dei*, a concept intertwined with his understanding of both *why* and *how* movement is made toward further realization of the Kingdom and Jubilee.

The Values of the Imago Dei

Old Testament theologian Fager writes: "The sociology of knowledge has taught us that our understanding of the world—how and why it exists and operates in the way it does—powerfully affects our behavior. That is to say, our world-view and our moral system are closely related" (84). For people with deeply held religious commitments and beliefs—people like Jeremy—those religious concepts often define their "understanding of the world—how and why it exists and operates in the way it does." Then, those understandings, those theological concepts and the beliefs that underlie them, impact our "moral

system," which, Fager notes, determines our behavior, or actions. This is not to say, of course, that only those people with religious commitments have deeply held values. Rather, I argue that for religiously-committed individuals their values are likely to be rooted in particular beliefs associated with their tradition.

I argue here and in the following chapters, that this is exactly the case for Jeremy and other staff members of the BCHP. Aspects of their religious identities—in Jeremy's case, in particular, his experience of calling and the theological concepts that his calling compels him toward: the Kingdom of God, Jubilee, and the *imago Dei*—animate the values they hold and the ways they seek to enact those values, rhetorically and otherwise.

Though a somewhat nebulous concept, for this argument I consider values the "principles or moral standards held by a person or social group" and/or "the generally accepted or personally held judgement of what is valuable and important in life" ("value, n."). Though no ideology or religion can lay claim to ownership of a particular value, the specific form of or rationale for holding a value can be rooted in one's religious experiences and beliefs. I argue that three primary values emerge as guiding principles and motivations for Jeremy's work, and that those values are rooted in his deeply held beliefs in the *imago Dei*, Jubilee, and the Kingdom of God. Other BCHP staff, too, articulate iterations of these same values and root them in their theological understandings and beliefs

164

(many of which are the same as Jeremy's), as will be overviewed in the coming

sections.[21] These values—equality, (establishing) common ground, and

humility—then lead to Jeremy and other staff's selection of and animate their use

of the rhetorical strategies discussed in the following chapters. Because of their

shared origins, the three values and the beliefs they are rooted in are all

intertwined, connected, and overlapping in a rich web of theological

connections—worth parsing out for analysis but also worth acknowledging as

greater (richer) than the sum of their parts.

Equality

There are several ways Jeremy hopes that seeing and experiencing people

as created in the image of God impacts his life and work. When explaining how

he "enact[s] [his] values" in his everyday work, Jeremy's first point is to equate

his belief in the *imago Dei* with the value of equality. He says, "I would say the

whole, going back to being created in the image of God. I hope everybody here

feels like that [sic] I experience them as an equal in this work. I know that my

name is on the top of the org chart, but I feel like I work hard to try to make sure

that everybody knows that I value their opinion." Understanding each person as

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[21] Brief examples from other staff provide critical texture, depth, and support to my
argument—demonstrating, however briefly, that my central argument extends beyond Jeremy.
However, due to the constraints and focus of the project, I stay centered on Jeremy, unable to
give such close attention to all staff, despite how rich such comprehensive analyses would be.

unique and intrinsically important inspires Jeremy to seek to ensure that the BCHP staff experiences work as a team of equals.

Unsurprisingly, given his articulation that the Kingdom of God is in part characterized by individuals being able to fully live into who they are uniquely created to be, Jeremy explains that what he wants to characterize the next ten years of the BCHP is "for myself and for our other staff, is for everybody to feel called or set apart to do their respective role." Jeremy extends this desire across the organization, from senior leadership to research fellows. He hopes that each person feels seen and needed as a unique individual who is "almost like an old missionary" being "sent out on behalf of this particular group of people to do this particular thing." Jeremy makes sure to note, too, that he wants the enactment of this value to extend beyond people who share his understanding of calling: "regardless of people's faith perspective, I want everybody to feel sent out by their colleagues and feel like 'I have something unique to offer and I'm able to offer that. My colleagues see this in me and they appreciate this about me and I'm going to go do it.'" Though this focus on individual calling, value, and giftedness is, perhaps, not the first way in which one would expect the value of equality to manifest for a justice advocate, it is deeply intertwined with Jeremy's conception of equality, as rooted in his understanding of the *imago Dei*, the Kingdom of God, and the Jubilee.

Perhaps the most predictable sense of valuing equality for a justice advocate is the sense of everyone deserving equal rights, equal access, equal opportunity. Jeremy holds this sense of equality, too, as evidenced by his discussion of the *imago Dei* as the great equalizer and of Jubilee as a symbol of the conviction that all people should get a chance to "make it."

Another BCHP staff member, Brian, also clearly and directly articulates the value of equality as equal rights. And though Brian holds very different theological beliefs from Jeremy, he, too, roots his understanding of the value of equality in theological experiences and understandings. When asked to describe the values he feels he enacts at work, Brian says, "I believe in equality. I believe in justice. I believe in a level playing field. I believe that I…have a responsibility to groups and individuals that are oppressed or underrepresented." For Brian, equality is related to justice: to the provision for the oppressed or underrepresented of a level playing field, where no one has an advantage or disadvantage from the start. Brian describes how, even though he has experienced substantial theological shifts since his youth in a conservative evangelical church and his membership in increasingly activist congregations throughout his young adulthood, he "embrace[s] the values and belief systems that were the values and the underlying truths that were associated with [the activist Christian belief that God 'moves actively in the world']." Brian then

clarifies that by "values and underlying truths" he means equality and justice, to which he adds, "I can say that I believe [equality and justice are] what God expects of me." Though, as he adds, "I suspect that when I say that, I mean something *incredibly* different than what many of the folks within a mile radius of me right now would mean."

Brian's location of his "embrace" of the values of equality and justice as rooted in his experiences in the Christian tradition and his description of God expecting justice and equality from him is especially interesting given the fact that Brian also pushes against the idea that these values need to be rooted in anything: "why does [belief in equality or justice] have to come from anywhere? Why can't it just be that this is a standing truth?" Without getting sidetracked into a discussion of why I believe all values or "standing truths" must be rooted in something—a religious belief, a philosophical or ideological tradition, etc.— for now it is enough to recognize that, despite Brian's resistance, he still ultimately roots his own commitments to equality and justice in his experiences in the Christian tradition and in God.

Jackson, too, names equality—and equality's derivatives: fairness, feminism, and antiracism—as his core values. He struggles to think through what is at the root of those values for a long time before finally saying, "I mean I think there's something to, just that we're all people who are equal and created

equal and should have a fair shot." Equality in Jackson's mind, too, is tied to equal created-ness.

Common Ground

In one instance, as Jeremy describes why he founded and continues in the work of the BCHP, he says, "Some people are completely resistant to finding points of commonality, but for me this whole deal is about calling, feeling called to the poor." Here, consciously or unconsciously, Jeremy sets up resistance to finding common ground as antithetical to a justice-oriented calling.

American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues that civic life would be better and more productive if people from different political and religious "teams" remembered that "each team is composed of good people who have something important to say" (366). Haidt's recommendation is that "next time you find yourself seated beside someone from another matrix…Don't just jump right in. Don't bring up morality until you've found a few points of commonality or in some way established a bit of trust" (371). Wallis also pleads for the ideologically committed to seek common ground for the common good. Wallis asks political opponents to "understand the other side's contributions to the quality of our life together" (16), and he reminds religious adherents that "religion has no monopoly on morality…we all must learn how the wisdom from other faith, spiritual, and secular moral traditions contributes to our

understanding of the common good" (18). This call for common ground for the common good comes directly from Wallis's belief that "The gospel of the kingdom creates disciples with public commitments…[causing believers to seek] the worth and equality of all made in the image of God…redefining those around them and around the world as their neighbors and even reconfiguring how they treat their enemies" (14-15).

Jeremy values (the search for) common ground and, for Jeremy, like for Wallis, that value arises out of his belief in the *imago Dei* and is thus also closely related to the value of equality: "if we're all created in the image of God, then we have more in common than we don't," Jeremy says. Created-ness is the great equalizer: no person is any more or any less created in God's image than any other. Jeremy believes that human created-ness is the central, distinguishing fact of humanity, and thus, common ground abounds. His beliefs in created-ness and common ground are what lay the path Jeremy wants all those doing justice work to follow: "trying to identify what is that point of commonality that we can identify in each other and then trying to work from there."

Jeremy is not the only BCHP staff member to name the necessity of finding and acting from common ground as a core value. Rebecca says, "one of the things I value about [the BCHP] is we've got people that run the gamut [of political perspectives]." She reflects and speculates a bit about where various

170

colleagues fall on a right to left spectrum, then says, "but there's some glue that holds us all together or draws us into this work." As to what this glue is, Rebecca thinks that what motivates the organization, collectively, is, "as we've been working in communities, [we] have really just developed, if we didn't already, a love for the communities and the communities as a whole, because you can't love your community well if you're not loving for and caring for everyone. And so I think that that's a pretty, I think that keeps us rooted." Rebecca names the BCHP's collective motivation, the common ground on which they stand despite their differences, as love and equality, which Rebecca also personally articulates as outgrowths of her Christian faith, which she describes as a "source of fuel" for her life and work. Rebecca says that she enacts her personal values at work by, "serving people well to serve the Lord well."

Humility

Jeremy articulates another value that is ultimately rooted in his belief in the *imago Dei*. Jeremy describes, "what's fundamental to [the BCHP's] theory of change is that hunger and poverty are too big for any one organization, one sector, one political party, etc. to be able to address by themselves. It's going to take us all." I have chosen to describe this value as humility that is rooted in an understanding of complexity. There is great humility in admitting *I (or we) cannot do this alone; we need your help*.

171

For Jeremy, humility is rooted in a dual understanding of 1) the complexity of the factors contributing to poverty in America and 2) the complexity of the reality that, if all people are made in God's image and thus are worthy and called and gifted in unique, divinely imbued ways, people have to work together and learn from one another. An example of this humility can be found in Jeremy's book. After he describes the results of significant work in child hunger that the BCHP has conducted, he says, "Though we have made major strides, we still have a long way to go. Hunger and poverty are pervasive in Texas, and inequity is extreme around our country…As much as we have learned and accomplished, there is still so much more that we need to learn and do" (131-132). Jeremy recognizes that poverty is a large, complex problem, and he has the humility to admit that there is still much he and the BCHP don't yet understand. But then Jeremy offers a vision of the socially just "kingdom of God"—where everyone who wants meaningful employment can find it, where everyone has access to the resources they need—and he reminds his readers that they: "have many opportunities to continue to address the crisis of hunger," and that they can do so, together, "with creative problem solving and a collaborative approach" (132-133). Jeremy humbly admits that he and the BCHP are unable to address the complex problem of poverty alone, and then he asks the reader, created in God's image, to come alongside him and the BCHP, establish common

ground, and humbly work together across and within their differences to enact a vision of a socially just Kingdom of God.

Many Christian thinkers and writers tie, in some way, the value of humility to the *imago Dei* or the Kingdom of God. Harrison notes: "Real humility is also a recognition in practice that God loves each of my neighbors just as he loves me, so each one is invaluable" (81). Kent Annan also urges against the paralysis that some justice workers experience in the face of imperfect understanding. He instead urges Christian justice seekers to "keep learning and adapting" (114), to simply "confess that we don't know the whole truth, so we're humble. [This] is part of the incredible invitation we each receive from God to participate in the coming of the kingdom as we love our neighbors" (115). Discussing Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the Gospels, Wallis describes how, in the upside down Kingdom of God, "it will be the humble, not the haughty who will be the favored ones," how "humility is one of the most underappreciated values in our intensely competitive culture, economy, and politics" (48, 49). In response to a request from several members of Congress, Wallis and other faith leaders from different traditions and political affiliations came together and created "A Covenant for Civility" (176). The covenant is the faith leaders's agreed upon "seven biblically based commitments, seven steps we

all could take for truth and civility today." The second and third of the

commitments are:

>2. We believe that each of us, and our fellow human beings, are created in the image of God. The respect we owe to God should be reflected in the honor and respect we show to each other in our common humanity, particularly in how we speak to each other…

>3. We pledge that when we disagree, we will do so respectfully, without falsely impugning the other's motives, attacking the other's character, or questioning the other's faith, and recognizing in humility that in our limited, human opinions, "we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Corinthians 13:12). We will therefore "be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). (177)

Immediately following the reminder of the *imago Dei* is the call for

humility. This humility, rooted in the belief in the image of God, is a key

component of advancing the Kingdom of God. Yining Chiu reflects on her

experiences as a Christian justice advocate, describing how she "wrestles" with

the idea that God's Kingdom is founded on the kind of humility that does not

strike back when provoked. In contrasting the Kingdom of God with "Empire"

(earthly kingdoms fixated on power), Chiu describes hallmarks of Empire as

being "adversarial toward those who disagree" and "vociferous in [efforts] to

convert them." Chiu expands: "I think the spirit of Empire is encapsulated in a

single idea: I know what's best. Not God. Not the people I am acting upon. I

know what's best, for me and for the world. What other assumption would lead

one nation to swallow another…?" Here Chiu describes the antithesis of

humility, because where Empire says *I know best*, humility says *there are things I don't know*; where Empire says *I'm going to use my power to act on my understanding of what's best*, humility says *we must work together because we're all valuable and all imperfect and all learning*.

Other BCHP staff also espouse humility in the face of complexity, humility that rejects claims to "know best" or have things completely figured out, humility that would rather find common ground than plough ahead alone. Nathan says of his values,

> I think a better answer to the problem of poverty or hunger is just like any other thing in life, is only gonna come after a lot of struggle and a lot of voices that disagree with each other coming together and hammering out, maybe not a—I don't like the word "compromise," and I also don't always like the word "third-way," but I think for this purpose—I think that a third, better way is only ever gonna happen if we all work together as much as possible rather than doing what a lot of [organizations] do, which is think that they have the way…even though they may speak the language of collaboration, really for them collaboration means, "here, come join us and what we're doing."

Nathan rejects false humility and seeks to enact the true humility found in people coming together in complex situations, willing to talk to and learn from each other. Liz also discusses valuing "the third way," which she defines as "balancing this knowing and not knowing, that there's tension in life that we have to hold." She says, "things aren't black and white, and so if that's the case, then how do we manage that gray space in a loving, open-hearted way?" Liz directly relates her desire to see this open-hearted humility, this ability to sit with

complexity, to "the teaching of Jesus," which she says was "all about the third way."

Implications

Considering Theologically-Motivated Values

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, there are rich connections between theological experiences (such as a sense or experience of calling), beliefs, and values, and, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, those values then animate rhetorical action that accomplishes civic good. Thus, one of the deepest wells from which people can draw resources to motivate and animate their civic engagement is their beliefs—theological or ideological. Asking students to explore and analyze their deeply held beliefs and to draw from those beliefs the values that make acting on those beliefs possible is thus possibly one of the most productive exercises a teacher in the writing classroom can undertake if her goal is to create civic-minded and rhetorically capable citizens.

The Evolution of Calling, Beliefs, and Values

Though Jeremy understands himself in some fixed, narrative ways—as conforming to a pattern of a St. Francis, for example—there are also ways in which, both subtly and explicitly, he is navigating the dynamism of human identity and experience. He articulates his narrative of calling almost identically,

consistently, in person and in his book, but, in line with the understanding of human experience that leads to the value of humility from complexity, Jeremy, like all humans, also wrestles with the tensions and contradictions inherent in the dynamism of human life. Analyzing the evolution of Jeremy's calling and some tensions in his understanding and articulation of his experiences surrounding calling and values challenges readers to consider the ways in which experiences and identities are shaped and understood, yet resistant to seamless narrative.

Jeremy identifies a moment of calling, but he also articulates that, because of his orientation toward the Kingdom of God, Jubilee, and the *imago Dei*, he wants "to set people up to be able to *live into* who they're created to be." The verb + preposition combination "live into" implies movement. To live into one's created-ness is a process involving dynamism, evolution, shifting understanding.

When Jeremy first encounters the story of St. Francis and senses a call to the poor, he recalls not knowing "what that meant." Of that early period, Jeremy says, "I had no clue. I was completely clueless." His call led him to immediate action—giving things away—but not to an immediate life plan. His grasp of a call to the poor has developed, shifted, and changed as he has.

Despite the "cluelessness," Jeremy says of the early days of his realization of calling that there was also "an innocence about that period." The innocence of the period is tied to "taking very literally to love my neighbor as myself." Jeremy

177

articulates this time period as one in which he was "living simply," something he says he did "for a long time." Of note is Jeremy's connection, intentionally or unintentionally, of innocence to literalism and simplicity. Jeremy explains how, as a college and seminary student, he took neighbor-love literally. He used a simple rubric—treat other the way you want to be treated, love your neighbor as yourself—to make decisions. If he made himself a sandwich, he made an extra and found someone to give it to. He gave away belongings he didn't need or frequently use so that someone who would utilize them more often could. He moved into low income areas and became friends with addicts and prostitutes, following, as literally as he could, the examples of Jesus and of St. Francis.

This sort of literalism led to simplicity: a simple rubric by which to make decisions. And, though Jeremy says of his life today, "I think simplicity is still reflected in my life to a degree," he also separates himself from that period, that experience, both when he says "to a degree" and when he says there was "an innocence about that period." Innocence can only be recognized in retrospect, when it is lost. Similarly, Jeremy says that he "was living" simply "for a long time," indicating that the time ended, that something changed.

Jeremy *is* different today. He and his family recently moved, for the first time, from a low-income neighborhood to the suburbs. He wears suits and ties, is an employee of a private university with a multimillion dollar endowment, has

178

been a congressional appointee to a National Commission, and spends many of

his days with people in positions of relative prestige and power: Baylor

administrators, CEOs, directors of nonprofits, media outlets, elected officials and

staff members at the local, state, and federal levels. In one of our conversations,

he describes an upcoming event in the Rio Grande Valley in which the BCHP

and their partners will show around "two private plane loads of billionaires and

millionaires." Jeremy's life now is different from his days giving away

backpacking gear in Kelly Ingram Park or hanging out on the streets of Waco or

San Antonio with his neighbors.

The changes in Jeremy's life can be viewed in several ways. The cynic may

identify Jeremy as a sell-out. The once-committed-to-poverty twenty-something

is now a successful, comfortable forty-something. While Jeremy could be accused

of hypocrisy, that would be, I think, highly inaccurate. What has happened in his

life is much more complex.

The loss of innocence Jeremy speaks about is a loss of naïveté, a loss of the

belief that everything can be simple and nonpartisan. Instead, Jeremy's

experience has led him to recognize life as complex and partisan. And it is that

very recognition of life's complexity and partisanship that have reinforced

Jeremy's core values that spring from the *imago Dei*: equality, common ground,

and humility.

179

Jeremy's increased understanding of the world as a complex, partisan

place has fostered the development of his values and the way he speaks about

and expresses them. As a college student, recognizing the image of God in

someone meant *seeing them*; it meant giving them a sandwich, too. As Jeremy's

understanding of his calling evolved to include broader and, thus, more

complex, spheres of influence, so too did his understanding of what valuing the

imago Dei in the other looks like. Now, one aspect of valuing the image of God in

everyone means, for Jeremy, that there is little room (if any) to dismiss other

people as unfit partners for collaboration. Jeremy's value of seeking common

ground necessitates an increased understanding that, just because people are all

made in God's image, they are not all already aware of their common ground.

As Jeremy's experiences led him to greater awareness of complexity, his

theological beliefs and values began a complicated dance, a negotiation, that led

him to where he is today. Humans are complex and social life is partisan; people

don't agree. However, all people are made in the image of God and therefore not

to be discarded or dismissed. So, the best way forward is to seek common

ground, a place where parties meet, swords sheathed, to discern a way forward.

To Jeremy, his core calling has not changed. As a junior in college, he

sensed that he was called to the poor. He articulates his calling in the exact same

way now. But, his understanding of what that calling means, of how to live into

it, has changed and developed. In one sense, his calling is static—always "to the poor"—but in another, that calling is fluid and shifting, being molded by Jeremy's increased understanding and living into of himself; being shaped by dynamic national, regional, and local contexts; moving with the shifting definitions and contours of best practices in the field of justice work. This understanding allows for calling to shapeshift, to be contextually sensitive, to prioritize and reprioritize.

Considerations such as this of the ways people change over time are exigent and important in multiple contexts and for multiple reasons. All adults would do well to consider the ways in which we ourselves have evolved, on what timetable, and with what as the catalysts for such evolution. Such considerations, if undertaken seriously, might lead us to greater graciousness for those around us who seem either to never change or to change too quickly.

There are implications for considerations of personal theological and ideological evolutions in the writing classroom, too. Current teachers and students are surrounded daily by "cancel culture," in which someone can be "cancelled" (shamed, cast out, and/or exiled—sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally, as from a specific social media platform) for a mistake, unpopular opinion, faux pau, or offensive statement, regardless of how long ago it was made or how well the context of their words/action is understood. In such

a culture, considering human ideological change provides a rich site of introspection and can foster discussions of the ethical complexities surrounding what offenses—especially past offenses—warrant current censure.

These conversations can also simply help students realize that contextual awareness is important. If you were just to describe and compare the appearance and external day-to-day life of twenty-year old Jeremy and forty-year old Jeremy, without the complex analysis of his calling, beliefs, and values done in this chapter, it would be much easier to make snap judgments (probably of the sellout variety) about Jeremy's evolution, and those snap judgments would, I believe, be inaccurate.

Students can also begin to write their way into understanding their own evolutions and how those evolutions relate to their core beliefs, commitments, and values. Prompting students to consider what has changed in their lives, what has motivated or catalyzed that change, and how those changes have interacted with, complicated, torn down, or fortified their beliefs and values is important, even critical work because, as has been demonstrated in this chapter, theological/ideological beliefs and commitments are deeply intertwined with values. And, as is the focus of the next four chapters, those deeply held values are the animating forces behind rhetorical action.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ethos and Solidarity: The BCHP's Rhetorical Presence

Overview[1]

In the previous chapter, I explore Jeremy's calling to the poor; the goals he

wants to move toward, the Kingdom of God and Jubilee; the animating belief of

the *imago Dei*; and the values that arise from his theological commitments:

equality, common ground, and humility. Thus equipped with an understanding

of *where* Jeremy wants to go and *why* he feels compelled to work toward that end,

the question now is how do those theologically-motivated values lead to and

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[1] An important caveat: I discuss Jeremy's rhetorical strategies by referencing his
strategies as he described them to me in interviews, as he practices them in speeches, and as he
writes in his book. I discuss other staff's and the organization's collective rhetorical strategies
based on similar information: interviews and my analysis of gathered texts. However, such
analysis is limited by the fact that it does not fully consider the editing and revision feedback staff
members may have offered each other as texts are composed.

Jeremy self-identifies his "voice" as "the most dominate voice at [the BCHP] in terms of
ideas and theory and all of that," but he follows that by describing how Jackson, particularly,
"has his hand on writing or editing" most of the organization's texts. And in the
acknowledgements of his book, Jeremy thanks two staff members whose work was integral to its
composition.

It is beyond the scope of this project to analyze the exact nature of the collaborative
writing done by the BCHP staff, and while I fully recognize the limitations inherent in calling a
rhetorical strategy specifically Jeremy's, the organization's, any other one person's, I do so
because of the dominance of Jeremy's voice, because of the explicit description and ownership of
rhetorical practices as told to me by individual staff members, and for clarity of argument.

animate the rhetorical strategies Jeremy and the organization use to accomplish

their goals? That question is the focus of the following chapters.

This chapter and the following three are each devoted to one of the four

theologically-motivated rhetorical strategies at the center of this project. I argue

that each of the four rhetorical strategies Jeremy and the organization utilize are

ultimately rooted in the values discussed in the previous chapter: equality,

common ground, and humility. And, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the

adoption of these values is theologically motivated. The desire to move toward

the enactment of the Kingdom of God and Jubilee, committed to the *imago Dei*,

necessitates enacting the values of equality, common ground, and humility that

underlie those theological beliefs. Thus, by "theologically-motivated rhetorical

strategy" I mean a rhetorical strategy that is rooted in commitments to the

animating values that are ultimately motivated by theological beliefs.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Jeremy articulates as major goals of

his and the organization's work, "changing our theological perspective,"

"helping reframe cultural understanding," "helping educate policy makers to

reframe cultural understanding." He cites an early realization that helped

convince him that an anti-hunger organization was a valid way to address the

complex issue of poverty: "if we could go about it wisely, we could introduce

and help people understand their collective calling to the issue of hunger and

point to the larger issue behind it, and really begin to organize communities to

address poverty, even though you're coming at it from face value around the

issues of hunger." What convinces Jeremy to pursue founding an anti-hunger

organization is a realization that such an organization could introduce people to

the issues stemming from poverty, help people "understand their collective

calling" to the issue, and then communities would be inspired to organize and act

based on their new understandings.

Jeremy feels well-equipped to do this work. He describes how he feels

"gifted at getting people to buy into something that's bigger than themselves."

Later he explains what he considers "probably [his] biggest strength":

> is charting a new path and helping people see maybe a different reality
> than the one that they had previously known, and then helping people
> take some courageous steps. Not helping, but sometimes persuading, but
> sometimes compelling, or sometimes just offering them the opportunity to
> take some steps into a new reality that maybe they intuited was possible,
> maybe they didn't. I think that's probably my biggest strength.

The focus of this chapter and the following three is on how Jeremy and the

rest of the staff seek to accomplish these goals.

Rhetorical Presence

Overview

A rhetorical strategy that is an integral component of the work of the

BCHP is the exercise of rhetorical presence. Presence is rhetorical in the sense

that it communicates, it argues. For the sake of this argument, I mean by *rhetorical presence* any act of presence, proximity, or other movement or situation in space that serves a rhetorical function. Though presence (and absence) can function rhetorically without the actors' intent, I am also discussing here *intentional* acts of presence, which, given their intended nature, can thus accurately be described as rhetorical *strategy*.

The relationship between presence and rhetoric has historically been considered primarily conceptually. Ralph Cintrón and Jason Schneider note, for example, that rhetorical "theorists have highlighted the ways that rhetors can draw on a range of artful strategies to perform a 'bringing-before-the-eyes'—a presencing—in order to enact persuasion" (117). In this understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and presence, "that which is far away in space and time—absent as it were—is made present 'before our very eyes' through figures of speech as if 'the thing' were actually happening/unfolding before us" (125). Thomas F. Mader engages Chaim Perelman's classic discussion of presence, in which Perelman argues that, in Mader's summation, "For anything to have presence for us we must be aware of it, and we will be aware of it only if it has meaning for us, and it will have meaning for us only if it satisfies one of our needs" (375). Thus, for Perelman, the study of presence in rhetorical studies is the study of how to rhetorically move a reader from merely sensing something to

experiencing it consciously as presence. Mader extends Perelman's argument and seeks to "emphasize the point that presence in argumentation involves more than the mechanistic application of rhetorical devices" because one must persuade one's readers to *act* on their new conscious awareness; it is not enough to simply make them aware (381).

Rhetorical discussions of presence have been extended, complicated, and nuanced beyond the textual and conceptual. For example, Grant Cos and Kelly Norris Martin argue that the presence of nonverbal visuals can make, extend, or complicate arguments. Thus, while they extend considerations of presence to visual rhetorics, they also maintain the classic understanding of "making the absent present": "Presence is an important rhetorical strategy for argumentation in which the rhetor selects certain words, figures, images, and so forth to make something that is absent 'present' to the audience" (1699). Cintrón and Schneider seek to complicate existing understandings of the relationship between presence and rhetoric by arguing for a regrounding of the discussion in the material world and in physical experience. They argue that "effective rhetoric cannot simply employ presencing as *bringing-forth-before-the-eyes*; it must also engage with a shared theory of material beingness, one that the audience accepts as connected to things of the world" (126). In short, they say, they "are arguing for the need to

recapture the commonsensical view that truth claims must be substantiated by lived experience" (126).

While these threads of scholarship are instructive and helpful, I seek here to primarily discuss physical, bodily, organizational presence as a rhetorical act. Though this strand of thought has received less critical attention than might be expected, there is striking scholarship considering presence in this way in Lisa J. Shaver's work on the rhetorical strategies of the American Female Moral Reform Society (AFMRS) of the nineteenth century. In her book *Reforming Women*, Shaver devotes a chapter to discussing AFMRS urban missionary Margaret Prior, who "repeatedly put herself in unlikely places, and her presence and fearlessness helped persuade those she encountered and those who read her missionary reports" (62). Shaver situates Prior's bodily presence in a long history of "individuals who feel excluded from political, economic, and other means of power, inhabiting unlikely places" as a rhetorical strategy (63). From "Southern lunch counters, factory floors, Wall Street, the streets of Washington DC, and town squares throughout the Middle East," acts of physical presence have made arguments and drawn "attention to broader societal problems" (63).

Shaver describes how, by inhabiting unlikely physical spaces, Prior created an "ethos of presence," that led to both a "situated ethos"—establishing her credibility with those in the communities she inhabited—and an "invented

188

ethos" with those readers of her reports "in which she intentionally constructed

her character" (63).

Prior was motivated by her Christian beliefs, and Shaver describes Prior's

physical presence as a way of demonstrating those religious commitments:

"Prior inscribed *who* she was—a good Christian committed to combatting sin and

suffering, by showing *where* she was—poor neighborhoods, prisons, brothels,

etc." (68, emphasis added). Shaver describes how Prior's work "demonstrates

how presence operates as public advocacy. Prior's regular presence in an

unlikely place captured attention, and she used this attention to persuade the

people she encountered and to make visible to [report] readers the inequitable

economic systems that existed and their consequences" (85). Shaver ultimately

concludes that Prior and other women reformers' presence in unexpected places

had a two-fold effect: "enabling them to establish ethos in the communities they

served and to transfer that ethos through print" (84-85).

The discussion of presence here will also tie directly to the next two

rhetorical strategies (the subjects of Chapters Six and Seven): storytelling and

collaboration. As with most rhetorical acts, the rhetorical strategies of the BCHP

are interwoven and multifaceted. The use of presence as a rhetorical strategy in

the BCHP operates on multiple levels. I discuss three: the individual, the intra-

organizational, and the inter-organizational. Each act of presence by the staff of

189

the organization—individually or collectively—is rhetorical in function and, I argue, rooted in the theologically-animated motivating values of, especially, equality and humility discussed in the previous chapter.

Three Levels of Situated Rhetorical Presence

The staff of the BCHP, though in different ways and for different reasons, express commitments to being present with communities and community partners. Though nuances of these ways and reasons is discussed shortly, there are two general realizations that undergird each commitment to presence: that presence leads to the most *effective* and most *ethical* forms of civic work.

The ethical considerations regarding presence with communities and partners is largely because "the most lucid analysis of social problems comes from those who are directly affected by them" and because "people-powered movements led from the frontlines of impact are the most reliable drivers of systemic change" (Reinsborough and Canning 3). Most forms of civic engagement now embrace the understanding that work with or on behalf of a community without direct knowledge of and participation from that community is a form of what is commonly called the "white-savior complex," a reference to (mostly) white missionary and service efforts that seek conversion and/or moral reform and/or cultural change via tools and processes of colonization. To avoid the tendency of such remote work to foster harm and oppression, the ethical

190

social change agent must have boots-on-the-ground knowledge of and partnerships with people in the community and a deep awareness of the contextual nature of social, cultural, and economic life and problems.

Similarly, proximity is simply more effective in accomplishing relationship-building and information-gathering. Just as some researchers choose ethnographic methodologies and news organizations send correspondents into the field to gain more accurate, situated information, so, too, is it easier to understand and accurately report on information from "the source."

With these general shared commitments in mind, I turn now to the three levels of strategic rhetorical presence utilized by the BCHP staff, individually and corporately, motivated by commitments to equality and humility.

The individual: solidarity and rootedness. The primary example of individual rhetorical presence is that practiced by Jeremy for over two decades of his life. After his experience of calling to the poor, catalyzed by his introduction to the story of St. Francis, Jeremy explains that he "decided the next step I needed to take was to move into an inner-city neighborhood. I knew that I needed to be immersed in the realities of poverty if I wanted to understand it. I had to learn from experience, from relationships" (Everett 31). This commitment to proximity as a way of learning and forming relationships aligns with centuries of Christian commitments to solidarity with the poor. Liberation theologian Gustavo

Gutierrez, a significant figure in Jeremy's life, writes: "If there is no friendship with [the poor] and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals" (Gutierrez xxxi; referenced on Everett 38). Solidarity with the poor involves "friendship" and "sharing of life," both impossible without presence and without a commitment to recognizing and honoring the equality of all people. So, when Jeremy determined that he was called to the poor, he followed the example of St. Francis and took up residence with the poor: as an act of solidarity emanating from an understanding that presence with the poor was an integral part of his calling.

After Jeremy began seminary in Waco, he and several friends moved into an old house in a low-income urban area of the city. This move functioned rhetorically, they situated their white, middle and upper-middle class bodies in a primarily black and brown, working class neighborhood. This move reflects an observation of Jeremy's that, "When you exist on the margins, it is easy to see the others who also exist there" (25). He and his similarly committed seminary friends positioned themselves, physically, in the neighborhoods and communities often ignored to learn, to really *see* the people who existed there— people created in the image of God—people that others choose not to see. Jeremy's move into a low-income community of Waco functioned as an

expression of his theological commitment to equality via solidarity with the poor and as a way of enacting humility by learning from and establishing ethos with the poor.

Of his seminary days in the house in urban Waco, Jeremy describes the relationship building that occurred as distinctly related to presence, to the positioning of bodies, of selves, in proximity to one another in space. In his book, Jeremy describes how the yard of the house he and his friends moved into was the yard on which the prostitutes in the community gathered in the evenings and from which they worked and were picked up. Jeremy describes he and his friends taking glasses of water out to the women and men who worked from their yard, talking with them, hearing their stories. Jeremy also spent many afternoons and evenings during that period playing basketball with men who were recently released from prison who were staying at the halfway house across the street. Finally, Jeremy and his friends began hosting periodic cookouts in their yard, inviting the neighborhood and seminary friends and professors. Eventually, these parties were attended by several hundred people, who Jeremy describes as, "People from all walks of life huddled in circles sharing stories" (33). Reflecting on this period, Jeremy believes that "The parties worked because people from very different worlds came together in our home to talk and eat, and in so doing, they recognized their common humanity" (34). The parties, the

193

gathering together of low-income and racial minority neighbors with primarily

white seminary friends and professors and their families, worked because they

took people who might otherwise remain at a distance and put them together in

space, "huddled in circles," eating and talking. And from this presence emerged

an increased understanding of "common humanity," which Jeremy primarily

considers in terms of "createdness" in the image of God. Jeremy and his friends'

parties asked people to gather in physical presence with each other as equals,

talking and establishing common ground across difference. Jeremy's seminary

years of presence among the poor "became a foundation for my life to come and

frame much of my understanding of poverty today" (39). The foundation for his

life—and for the work of the BCHP—was laid in and by the physical presence of

those with whom he felt called to be in solidarity.

Continuing Jeremy's "intensely focused" commitment to "immersing

myself in the throes of America's poorest communities" (104), when Jeremy and

his wife moved after grad school from Waco to San Antonio to work for a Baptist

social service agency, they moved into a neighborhood in San Antonio's West

Side: a low-income, primarily Catholic and Hispanic neighborhood. Jeremy

recalls with gratitude and humility the welcome of the community. He writes,

"As a Baptist, Anglo outsider in a predominantly Catholic, Hispanic community,

my presence could have provoked hostility. After all, for generations there had

been white people bearing witness to Christ who had done horrible things to

similar communities" (90). Jeremy is aware of the colonization and oppression

enacted by white, European-descended Christians on poor communities and

communities of color. And Jeremy reflects with deep thanks that, though his new

neighbors "knew their history," the history of being harmed by the white-savior

complex, the community still welcomed Jeremy and his family "with hospitality

rather than hatred" (90). However, though they were warmly welcomed, Jeremy

also recalls how the community "communicated clearly to me that I was to listen

first" (90). So, Jeremy "spent the first year networking with the community. I

learned the history and culture of the community. I visited hundreds of

organizations to see all the great things being done in the West Side" (92). These

acts of rhetorical presence in the form of exploratory site visits were enactments

of Jeremy's value of humility; for the first year in San Antonio, Jeremy did not

propose new initiatives or make recommendations for new programs, he simply

sat in the presence of the community, learning from them, hearing their history.

And, Jeremy writes, "Because I chose to buy a house in the community, to listen

and learn about the history and culture of the community, and not to show up

with an outsider view of the problem that only I could solve, trust was ultimately

established" (100). Trust and solidarity develop in mindful, humble presence.[2]

For Jeremy, presence is a rhetorical act. Thoughtful, caring, humble

presence in place establishes *ethos*, leads to understanding, enables the formation

of relationships, and further engenders a commitment to solidarity, equality, and

care. It is also part of humbly seeing and learning from those image bearers of

God who are marginalized and ignored

The BCHP: field offices, travel, coalitions. It should be unsurprising, given the

individual commitments of BCHP staff to rhetorical presence—particularly

Jeremy, who casts the organization's vision—that rhetorical presence is enacted

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[2] Another BCHP staff member, Nathan, also describes commitments to presence and place. When explaining his initial motivation for working for the BCHP, Nathan's answers are deeply place-based. Nathan says that his primary reason for taking a job at the organization "is just really simple: I wanted to stay in Waco and there was an available position." Before coming to the BCHP, Nathan experienced a painful professional loss in his previous job in Waco. But, rather than leaving town to get a proverbial fresh start, he wanted to stay. Nathan explains: "I really care about Waco…[I] have a lot invested in the town, emotionally, socially. Every area of life I have invested in town." Working for the BCHP, then, was initially about "keeping roots [in Waco], primarily." For Nathan, the second reason for working at the organization emerges out of the first: "I care about [Waco] and [working for the BCHP] was an opportunity to change things in town in ways that I didn't have an opportunity to before." Later, Nathan tells me that he is excited about the way some of the responsibilities of his position at the BCHP are shifting because he is going to be "freed up" to "focus on Waco, the city of Waco." Commitment to place, rootedness in place, is another enactment of rhetorical presence. Nathan's commitment to Waco and to working on behalf of the city are outgrowths of his commitment to "[his] values and beliefs…around community and people working together to solve a problem." Underlying Nathan's commitment to people working together is a commitment to establishing common ground and partnering across difference.

on the organizational level in several ways: the establishment of field offices across the state and consistent travel to communities and regions for site visits and town halls.

Drawing inspiration from the "incarnational organizing" of civil rights activists, Jeremy realized in the early days of the BCHP that the organization needed to be present, for the previously discussed reasons, in the communities it wanted to help. Jeremy explains "incarnational organizing" and his realization of its implications for the newly founded BCHP: "The idea was that civil rights organizers would live in the communities where they registered people to vote in order to strengthen trust and to forge collaborative efforts. That was [the BCHP's] path forward. Instead of working completely out of Waco, we would open regional offices that would be the hubs for our work across the state" (128). As demonstrated previously, this rhetorical presence establishes what Shaver calls "situated ethos." By being "on location," the organization could demonstrate its commitment to low-income and vulnerable communities, enact core values of equality and the establishment of common ground, and, recognizing the complexity of poverty's situated nature, humbly allow community members to teach them about the unique, situated context of different regions.

In his book, Jeremy discusses the broken streetlight theory, popular in community development. In the theory, a developer "has just started working in a neighborhood and must garner the trust of the community...the developer knocks on doors in the community to ask people what they see as strengths in the neighborhood and also what they see as ailing it" (21-22). What is crucial to note about this theory is that in order to establish trust and get an accurate understanding of the community, the developer must be present, going from house to house, interacting face-to-face with community members. Criminal justice reform and racial equity activist Bryan Stevenson recalls his grandmother telling him, "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close" (14). Proximity to the incarcerated has become a hallmark of Stevenson's work. The same principle applies here: Jeremy realized from the foundation laid by living in and learning from low-income communities for over a decade that poverty is too complex to understand from a distance. Theologically-motivated commitments to equality and humility would necessitate that the BCHP "get close." And so, the BCHP opened regional offices across the state, allowing the organization to learn about the different demographics, political and religious cultures, and manifestations of poverty in border areas like McAllen in south Texas, El Paso in the southwest, in urban areas like Houston, Dallas, and Austin, and in west Texas in cities like Lubbock.

198

Another way the BCHP enacts rhetorical presence is in travel. In the early

days of the BCHP, Jeremy and a USDA colleague maintained a grueling travel

schedule, traveling across the state and holding town halls to learn about poverty

and hunger in various communities (127). When a west Texas community called

the BCHP asking for help creating an effective summer meals campaign in their

rural mountain area, the BCHP staff and researchers who took up the project

flew to the area so that the community member organizer could "[introduce]

them to the community and [drive] them around to help them get a feel for the

challenges he was facing" (129). A BCHP staff member, Kyle, who is based in

Waco but who has spent years working directly with the regional field offices

made more than eighty visits to regional offices in four years. Though tiring,

Kyle emphasizes the importance for him of "going and…getting some eyes on

the situation, getting a context in order to make better decision making [sic]."

Kyle's description aligns with Jeremy's discussion of what happened when he

was appointed to the National Commission on Hunger, which enacted a similar

strategy, traveling the country to learn about hunger and poverty in different

areas: "What we discovered was not a surprise. For most people, their lack of

access to food was a direct result of their lack of access to money. However, their

lack of access to money was often contextual" (44). Because issues surrounding

poverty and hunger are highly contextual, like Kyle says, to have better decision

making processes you must understand a community's context. The best way to

do that is to spend time in that context.

And while Kyle works for the central office, not the regional office, his

travel back and forth to regional offices is intended to demonstrate to regional

office staff that central office understands and experiences regional staff as the

experts in their region and, thus, to make the best possible decisions involving

the organization, central office must send someone—often Kyle, but sometimes

others—to be present in those spaces, to learn and hear from the regional offices,

and to demonstrate, by taking the time and energy and resources to be physically

present, to the region that central office cares about and respects their work,

understands them as equals and is committed to humbly learning from them

about their areas of expertise. Traveling so frequently to enact rhetorical presence

is no small feat in a state the size of Texas; Kyle's roadtrips to the El Paso office,

for example, span more than six hundred miles and take almost ten hours of

driving time. However, the organization's theologically-motivated commitments

to humility and equality necessitate such work.[3]

Despite the cost in time and energy that such presence demands, the

BCHP advocates that organizations adopt the BCHP's coalition model (which

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[3] Another form of the BCHP's commitment to rhetorical presence via travel—student trips—will be discussed in the conclusion to this project (Chapter Nine).

will be discussed more in Chapter Seven), which requires the utilization of rhetorical presence. One of the steps to establishing a coalition structure is to conduct one-on-one outreach: "Meet with as many people as possible in a one-on-one setting in order to build relationships and identify what might interest them in getting involved with the coalition" (Everett 77). Another step is to incorporate community members who have experienced food insecurity because engaging these people "will give you a built-in reality check, add credibility to your effort, and make clear your commitment to a participatory process. Ideally, look for existing grassroots leaders who bring to the table both personal experience and strong relationships with community members" (77). This recommendation that coalitions bring in community members and grassroots leaders, is an enactment of an egalitarian participatory process where diverse people, created in the *imago Dei*, join together, humbly listen to one another, and seek to establish common ground.

The BCHP's presence across the state in regional offices, as well as the frequent travel by BCHP staff for site visits, town halls, meetings, and research serves multiple rhetorical functions. The organization and staff's presence is intended to create situated ethos: to demonstrate commitment to principles of equality and the establishment of common ground, and to resist colonizing tendencies to make uninformed, privileged decisions from afar by humbly

201

learning from community members about the complexities facing their

communities and then to join those efforts in solidarity.

The BCHP and other organizations: Together at the Table. The BCHP fosters

inter-organizational practices of rhetorical presence in several ways, one of

which is in the organization's Summit, a conference-style multi-day event that

typically brings between three- and five-hundred people together for plenary

and breakout sessions, meals, and field trips. I describe the BCHP's strategy of

multisector collaboration—much of which is fostered at Summit—in more depth

in Chapter Seven, but here I want to focus on specific aspects of Summit in which

presence functions rhetorically. While conferences containing plenary sessions,

breakout sessions, and meals are not unique, there are several aspects of the

BCHP's Summit that are intentionally designed to enact rhetorical presence in

striking ways,[4] ways that are motivated by theologically-based commitments to

the humble establishment of common ground.

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[4] One way Summit functions rhetorically is in its situatedness on Baylor's campus. The structure of Summit as an academic-style conference on a research university campus lends another form of situated ethos to the BCHP. The specific location of plenaries and meals at recent Summits is impressive: a five-hundred-seat conference hall on the top floor of the academic building that is centrally located on Baylor's campus. Three of the four walls of this conference hall are glass windows, allowing sweeping views of the rest of campus, downtown Waco's iconic Alico building, and even the Baylor football stadium across the river. By hosting Summit on Baylor's campus, the event and the work of the BCHP are imbued with a *visible* sense of academic and research credibility.

In his book, when Jeremy discusses the need for collaboration, he writes "We need to be willing to *sit together*, communicate with one another…" (74 emphasis added). Similarly, Jeremy writes that when he was on the National Commission on Hunger, a crucial part of breaking through the partisan tension that dominated many of the commission's early meetings was eating meals together after meetings. Jeremy describes this as "breaking bread together" (111), imagery derived from the Christian practice (sacrament) of communion, in which believers gather together to break a loaf of bread and drink from a common cup, reminding them of their unity and equality in Christ.[5] Jeremy writes of his experience "breaking bread" with the Commission members: "This bonding may seem trivial, but it is how we began to trust one another. It was over dinner that we realized our collective commitment to the poor and hungry in our nation, which in turn cultivated a commitment to one another" (111). Jeremy argues that physical presence—proximity—matters in relationship building, because it is only in proximity that we are *forced* to reckon with our common ground: shared experiences, commitments, and identities as humans equally created in God's image. Jeremy quips, "As a people, we are incredibly gifted at demonizing sectors of society that we rarely, if ever, come in contact

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[5] Another BCHP staff member, Rebecca, also uses the language of "breaking bread" in discussing the importance of families gathering together for meals.

with" (123). So, if one of an organization's central strategies is collaboration (the subject of Chapter Seven), that collaboration must start by being in contact with each other—by presence. Physical presence, sitting together, breaking bread together is especially important if the people coming together are from sectors that often "demonize" one another. Summit is just such an event, drawing community organizers and government bureaucrats; clergy and activists; organic farmers and CEOs.

Though known colloquially simply as "Summit" the official title of the annual event is "Together at the Table: Hunger and Poverty Summit." And, at this event, unlike similar academic or topical conferences, the emphasis on *togetherness at the table* is critical. This imagery pulls together a myriad of overlapping concepts: a family sitting down to eat together, religious imagery of gathering at the communion table, and community organizing, development, and activist rhetoric surrounding the need to "give everyone a seat at the table." The BCHP takes this rhetoric and enacts it literally at Summit: sitting together around tables at meals *and* plenaries is a critical part of the Summit experience. The 2018 Summit included a dinner titled simply the "Family Meal," where all interested participants journeyed to a local restaurant together and ate and conversed, without an agenda or speaker for the evening. Presence together, and

particularly presence together around the table, is a strategy the BCHP enacts

throughout Summit.

If Jeremy and the BCHP's ultimate aims are moving toward the Kingdom

of God, Jubilee, a reality where the image of God is recognized in every person

and where that realization leads to furthering equality, finding common ground,

and humbly admitting that, due to life's complexity and the complexity of

problems, we need each other's help, the way to start is by being present.

Animated by these values, attentive presence in solidarity with the poor and

marginalized, in partnership with colleagues and allies, and in openness with

those oriented differently toward social justice is a critical rhetorical strategy

utilized by the BCHP.

"Invented Ethos": Bearing Witness, Making Present

The final mode of rhetorical presence I discuss here—witnessing as

presencing—leads directly into our discussion of another of the BCHP's

rhetorical strategies, and the focus of the next chapter: storytelling.

Jeremy writes and speaks of the events and relationships formed during

his decades living among the poor; similarly, the BCHP shares through press

releases, speeches, and research what is happening in regional offices. Thus,

Jeremy and/or the BCHP rhetorically make present to physically absent readers

and hearers that to which the BCHP bears witness.

As Shaver concludes of Prior and other women's presence in unusual spaces, their presence enabled "them to establish ethos in the communities they served and to transfer that ethos through print" (84-85). Jeremy creates his, in Shaver's terms, "invented *ethos*" by bearing public witness—through speaking and writing—to the experiences he had and relationships he built when he was physically present with low income and other vulnerable populations. Thus, Jeremy's invented *ethos* is, in some ways, the most typical mode of rhetorical presence in that it does have to do with, as Cintrón and Schnieder write, "that which is far away in space and time—absent as it were—[being] made present 'before our very eyes' through figures of speech as if 'the thing' were actually happening/unfolding before us" (125).

The concept of "bearing witness" is multifaceted, evoking religious testimony, activism, and advocacy. The concept of witness is part of Jeremy's vocabulary; in his book he writes of people bearing witness, being faithful witnesses, or being prophetic witnesses in multiple places (for example: xiii, 117, 126). Common religious uses of the terms recall how the early Christian disciples and apostles bore witness to the life and death of Christ and how Christians throughout the centuries have had a responsibility to bear witness to Christ through their words and actions. W. James Booth writes, "In its ordinary sense, the witness is the eyewitness, the person who has firsthand experience of an

event and who reports what she has seen…But witnessing has a more extensive

sense as well: it can be bearing witness, which may be the person's own

recollection, or a received memory passed on to others, illuminated and

interpreted" (72-73). Booth thus distinguishes between witnessing in the judicial

sense—reporting a "factual" firsthand account—and bearing witness as an act of

remembrance, communication, illumination, and interpretation.

Booth also calls bearing witness "a gesture of defiance and resistance:

against the flow of time which distances us from what went before, against an

absorption in the present, and against the desire to forget or conceal" (73).

Whether the witness recounts information and memories to prevent their

slipping away or to bring to light a concealed truth, she practices "truth-

preserving resistance to forgetting, falsification, and erasure" (91). Booth reminds

the reader, however, that bearing witness is not only about not forgetting or

erasing; rather, "to carry a memory is also to bring it to someone. Witnessing is

not, or not only, a tie of a certain kind to what is borne in memory, but is also a

tie to those to whom it is brought" (87). Where witnessing something necessitates

no relationship, *bearing witness* requires the transmission, illumination, and

interpretation of the remembered experiences, stories, and information *to*

someone/s. The Gospels of the Bible, the accounts of Auschwitz survivors, the

collective voices of the #metoo movement, these are all bearing witness. And,

thus, to bear witness is to protect and communicate "something absent, for were it present and plain to see, then the work of testimony about it would not be necessary" (87).

Thus, bearing witness is frequently used in activist contexts because so much of bearing witness is bearing witness to avoid concealment and erasure, and the people and experiences most likely to be concealed and erased are those of the marginalized. Booth writes, "Bearing witness to [the oppressed] is not just a recounting of something about them, but is rather the result of assuming a responsibility to bring them and their fates to light and to a sort of continued presence" (97). Rosemary Hennessey writes that "To be an organizer or an ally in an organizing campaign is to bear witness. Both the bearing and the witnessing open you to a new position in history as you assume responsibility to others and carry their message to the wider community" (69).

Jeremy makes physically absent readers and hearers present to the marginalized by bearing witness to their experiences as witnessed by him in his presence and relationships with them. Jeremy creates this invented *ethos* by a two-pronged strategy of rhetorical presence: his decades of physical rhetorical presence among communities and his rhetorical presencing of those communities to his readers and hearers by bearing witness. Jeremy utilizes this invented ethos when he begins arguments with statements like, "For the past

twenty years, I have traveled the country and other parts of the world observing, researching, and addressing hunger and poverty" (7), or, "From my two decades of living and working in impoverished conditions" (50).

For Jeremy and the staff of the BCHP, their situated ethos in communities—via personal decades of physical presence in low-income areas, presence via field and regional offices, and firsthand experiences learning from and advocating for the marginalized—enables the invented ethos of making oppressed people present to their readers, hearers, and community partners. Jeremy and the BCHP team describe the foundational, critical role presence has played in shaping their understandings of poverty and marginalization. By utilizing multiple levels of rhetorical presence, by bearing witness, the BCHP staff renders impossible the prevalence of ignorance, denial, and stereotyping of poverty and the poor, forcing a reckoning. And they enact much of this rhetorical presencing via bearing witness primarily through storytelling, the subject of the next chapter.

Implications

The discussion here has illuminated how the BCHP's theologically-animated values of equality, common ground, and humility manifest and function in material, physical space. Beyond simply what one thinks, beliefs impact what ones does, physically, bodily. There are several possible implications for this

realization. Not only can the BCHP and Jeremy's theologically-animated

rhetorical presence provide a model for analyzing what beliefs and values might

be underlying other acts of rhetorical presence (from a business's location, to the

location of a protest, to where one positions oneself in a group of people), but,

perhaps more importantly, the discussion of rhetorical presence here illuminates

possibilities for considering—in the classroom and elsewhere—how one's values

compel one to act, what rich resources and commitments one might draw from

in determining how to orient oneself in physical space.

Jeremy and the BCHP's rhetorical presence also provides fascinating

insight into how faith commitments and theologically-animated values alter the

enactment of conventional practices. As noted earlier, there is nothing unique

about conferences like the BCHP's Summit: events that feature meals and

plenary and breakout sessions. However, the BCHP's underlying motivation for

otherwise typical elements of such a conference are theologically-motivated,

which thus has an impact on how they are enacted. Because of commitments to

enacting the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of equals united in love and care, the

BCHP *centers* participants' presence together at Summit, as opposed to the focal

point of the event being the content/knowledge participants are there to share.

Such a focus better fosters connections that may lead to long-term partnerships

between Summit attendees, centering relationships between equals created, with

dignity and gifts, in the image of God.

CHAPTER SIX

Resistance Storytelling at the BCHP: Changing Hearts and Minds

This chapter addresses the second of the four theologically-animated

rhetorical strategies at the center of this project. The BCHP's theologically-

motivated values of equality, common ground, and humility all animate the use

of the strategy at the center of this chapter: storytelling.

Storytelling for Social Change

In my first conversation with Jeremy, he told me that a significant focus of

the organization is,

> how can we build consensus? How can we build a collective will, or as
> Jeremiah would say, "the circumcision of the heart." How can we help
> people's hearts and minds be transformed, let them participate in
> addressing hunger and poverty in their local community regardless of
> their political, or racial, or socioeconomic makeup—recognize that
> everybody's a part of the solution. If we do that, then we see, I feel like,
> the things that we change or improve today can be built upon in the
> future and not just be undone again down the road.

To create *lasting* change, Jeremy says, you have to pay attention not just to

what you're saying and doing, but to *how* you do it. Figuring out how to best do

the work of the BCHP has been a decade's long endeavor. Jeremy spends a lot of

time thinking about "how do we take what's considered to be a progressive

212

issue—[and] because of our faith perspective make it available to people that are not, that would not self-identify as a progressive?"

As previously discussed,[1] Jeremy frequently states that a goal of the organization is to "change hearts and minds" about poverty and those that live in poverty. For the BCHP, this means taking larger cultural and religious (and even more specifically, evangelical Christian) narratives about those living in poverty and subverting them.

The goal of culture change via narrative shift is validated by community organizers and social strategists Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning, whose book, *Re:Imagining Change*, is devoted to "how to use story-based strategy to win campaigns, build movements, and change the world" (this is the book's subtitle). When it comes to changing someone's mind, Reinsborough and Canning argue, "in most cases, 'the facts' alone are not enough to persuade; assumptions, emotions, internal narratives, and preexisting attitudes can get in the way of the facts making sense" (57). Because people "have existing stories about their world that act as narrative filters to prevent them from hearing social change messages," Reinsborough and Canning argue, "people are conditioned to ignore information that doesn't fit into their existing framework for

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[1] On pp. 99-103.

understanding the world," a phenomenon known in psychology as confirmation

bias (47). And so begins the complicated dance of storytelling for social change.

As Reinsborough and Canning point out, "To reach new audiences your

narrative will have to be designed to move people with different assumptions

and worldviews than your base"; however, your narrative also has to

"authentically express the values and aspirations of your current constituencies"

because to amass support and momentum you have to gain new supporters

while retaining your existing ones (54). Thus, to create lasting change, one must

manage a precarious balancing act: subverting the common narratives people

have internalized that work against the change you want to make while also

maintaining a supportive base.

Storytelling as an effective rhetorical strategy has a complicated history in

rhetorical studies. Storytelling is often lauded by expressivist and process

pedagogues, but dismissed as romanticized or frivolous by other teachers and

scholars. Thomas Newkirk describes how many instructors believe that "To rely

on stories is to be unscientific, sentimental, impressionist, softheaded. Data are

solid, objective" (109). However, Newkirk argues, "Making 'sound' arguments is

crucially important, but they rarely can carry the day unless they both employ

narratives and embed evidence in broader stories that fully engage listeners"

(112). The BCHP, generally, and Jeremy's book, specifically, provide examples of

storytelling as rhetorical strategy at work in the world, complicating and creating

possibilities for thinking about, utilizing, and teaching storytelling as rhetorical

strategy in the writing classroom and beyond.

Stories serve many, often intertwined, purposes.[2] Marilyn Chandler

McEntyre describes how, "As Oscar Wilde observed, life imitates art. We derive

our basic expectations from the narrative patterns we internalize" (124).

Similarly, in her book on storytelling's possibilities as an anti-racist strategy, Lee

Anne Bell describes the impact that language has on our perceptions of reality:

"How we talk about race matters. It provides a roadmap for tracing how people

make sense of social reality, helping us to see where we connect with and where

we differ from others in our reading of the world, and it defines the remedies

that will be considered as appropriate and necessary" (4). Bell describes how

"Stories are one of the most powerful and personal ways that we learn about the

world, passed down from generation to generation through the…groups to

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[2] Reinsborough and Canning describe the relationship between story—"discrete and bounded accounts of events with a clear beginning, middle, and end"—and narrative, "a coherent 'system of stories'" (21), while also recognizing that the terms are similar and often used interchangeably. For simplicity, I mostly use "story" and "storytelling" here, but I will occasionally use "narrative," which I use synonymously with story, to mean a narrated account of events, relationships, or situations. Reinsborough and Canning's fuller, glossary definitions of the terms are: *narrative*: "an account of events, sequenced over time and space, often one that is fluid and meaningful enough to include multiple stories within it; a fundamental cognitive structuring process for the human mind to make meaning and relate with the world" (182); and, *story*: "a fundamental unit of human communication, an account of events, relayed from a specific point of view, usually with a beginning, middle, and end" (184).

which we belong. As human beings we are primed to engage each other and the world through language, and stories can be deeply evocative sources of knowledge and awareness" (16).

Part of story's power, too, is derived from its operation on both the "individual and collective levels." Because of this, stories "can bridge the sociological, abstract with the psychological, personal contours of daily experience. They help us connect individual experiences with systemic analysis" (Bell 16). Not only do stories help us form communities and common identity, but they also serve the interrelational purpose of fostering empathy across difference: "Arguments based primarily on statistics typically fail because we feel that these numbers refer to 'others,' and may even come from others…stories are more powerful than data because they allow the individuals to identify emotionally with people they might otherwise see as outsiders" (Newkirk 110). Newkirk also describes how persuasive arguments "often take narrative form because all important decisions and debates are located in time" (115). Thus, another benefit of arguing via story is that it forces considerations of the rhetorical situation that locate the argument and arguers in a specific context.

Jeremy uses stories in *I Was Hungry* to, among other reasons, establish his ethos, to elicit emotional responses, to challenge preconceived ideas, and to challenge long-held, culturally conditioned interpretations of stories in the

216

Christian scriptures. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jeremy's invented

ethos manifests in his book as he tells stories in which people from the margins

are his teachers in the spaces they inhabit together. This chapter primarily

focuses on how Jeremy uses his book to tell stories that challenge common

narratives and stale interpretations of biblical stories, motivated by and

encouraging in readers the humility to recognize the equality of all people

created in God's image and to establish common ground across seemingly

insurmountable differences.

Jeremy explained his goals for his book to me two months after its release.

He told me he was "writing to America," or, "a general domestic audience,"

elaborating that he wanted the book to be "accessible to people of all faiths" but

that he wanted to "especially hone in on people from my faith perspective—in

part because people of our faith perspective have caused a lot of harm in our

nation, especially to marginalized groups." In order to best reach "everyday

people," Jeremy decided the best structure for the book was to center it around

stories, while also consistently describing "what our Christian tradition says

through scripture." Jeremy chose story as his primary rhetorical strategy for the

book because, he says, "you can argue with my interpretation [of a story]" but

you can't argue with the story itself. If his book accomplishes one thing for each

reader, he says, he hopes it is that readers will have "increased understanding" that will lead them to "stop blaming the poor for their plight."

Because Jeremy's book is intended to challenge popular narratives regarding poverty and the poor, I first briefly overview again some of those narratives. Then I describe the concept of scapegoating, which is the theological lens through which Jeremy understands and describes the literal and narrative marginalization and misrepresentation of the poor.

Popular Narratives about Poverty

The BCHP, as a Texas-based, Baptist-affiliated organization, partners frequently with Southern, evangelical Christians and Christian organizations and congregations. Many evangelical Christians, like many Americans more generally, believe a particular set of popular narratives—what Bell calls "stock stories" (23)—about people who live in poverty.

Most stock stories about people who live below the poverty line are variations on the theme "lack of personal responsibility." People who lack material resources are thought to be lazy, addicts who refuse to get help, people who made poor choices and dropped out of school or ended up teenage parents. Jeremy describes how he frequently hears "excuses from people who inform me that they have compassion for the poor in developing countries, but poor Americans must simply be lazy because we live in a land of opportunity" (44).

Thus, what is a complex social problem caused by underemployment, lack of education, racism, lack of access to health care, violence, lack of affordable housing, and mass incarceration is reduced to an uninformed, drastically oversimplified, and, ultimately, racist argument that the poor must just be lazy, undisciplined, or lacking a sense of personal responsibility.

Many evangelical Christians, and non-Christian Americans influenced by evangelical Christianity, argue that it is the Bible that supports their belief that "God helps those who help themselves" (a proverb that is *not* from the Bible). From the Bible's supposed argument that God is committed to blessing those who are righteous and who work hard (an idea known commonly as the "prosperity Gospel"), came the Protestant work ethic, which has, since this country's earliest history, been intertwined with another stock story, the myth of the American Dream. Though the prosperity Gospel argument is biblically complicated, most intellectually honest readers of the Christian scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, come away quite certain that God is very concerned with the care and wellbeing of the poor.

The myth of the American Dream—that anyone can rise out of the ashes of poverty with enough hard work; that anyone can be anything they want to be—is so widely accepted that anyone who fails to achieve whatever they want in life is thought to simply not be accepting personal responsibility or trying hard

enough. Jeremy's response to this argument is that "Taking personal responsibility for oneself and one's family must occur for any intervention to work. Not taking personal responsibility is certainly a problem, but it is much less of one than we have been led to believe" (50). Jeremy concedes that, while people who are neglecting to assume personal responsibility, work hard, and accept the consequences of their decisions "do exist," from his "two decades of living and working" with those in poverty he can affirm that people failing to accept personal responsibility are "the exception" (50).

As a way of framing for his audience how the poor have been pushed to the margins—literally and narratively—in the US, Jeremy describes the biblical Levitical practice of scapegoating. Leviticus 16:7-10 describes a procedure by which the Israelites were to, every year on the Day of Atonement, place their sins upon a goat and banish it to the wilderness. Jeremy describes how, later, "the ancient Greeks stepped the practice up a level and would cast out a paraplegic or a beggar as a response to a famine, a plague, or an invasion of some kind" (50). Contemporary understandings of scapegoating come from this Levitical practice and generally mean the relegating of the guilt or responsibility of many to one person or a few people who bear the punishment of the collective.

Jeremy describes how a scapegoat "cleared the larger society of its debts and let the people move on with life without having to reckon with any true

220

causes of their situation" (50). Americans, Jeremy argues, have, "as we like to do," "one-upped the Greeks. We have scapegoated not one animal or even just one person; we have cast out an entire socioeconomic class of people" (51). Jeremy explains that American society does not distribute "economic hardships" evenly, but instead has created a system in which "the same families that struggle with bouts of hunger also do not have affordable health care. These same families send their children to schools where graduation rates are well below 50 percent and college readiness is in the single digits. They are also the same families that have lacked livable wage-paying jobs for generations" (51).

Jeremy draws the parallel more than figuratively, too; he explains that the poor are America's scapegoats, who have been "sent to live in deserted urban neighborhoods and the rural mobile home parks we avoid. We literally have paved our roads and interstates so we can circumvent neighborhoods full of our scapegoats and can avoid being confronted with the way our own selfishness has been cast on the impoverished so we can go on with our lives" (51). The poor are America's equivalent to Israel's literal goat—sent out of sight, bearing the weight of society's collective wrongdoing, usually ignored, sometimes completely forgotten.

In order to accomplish this scapegoating, Jeremy notes, in order to "push the poor out of our minds" and still be able to live with ourselves, "we have had

221

to dehumanize them" (51). This, Jeremy says, is where stock narratives about the poor and theologies that justify poverty come into play: "We have worked hard to classify the poor as lazy, to divide them as deserving and undeserving. We have developed theologies of prosperity to lift those who are rich in order to demonize those who are poor" (51). With these ideas and stories operative, it becomes "morally defensible'" to witness inequality and injustice, because we can blame injustice on the poor's immigration status or unemployment.

This is the origin of the welfare queen myth, too, a myth we have created as a justification for ignoring injustice. Jeremy explains: "According to this myth, the welfare queen, living off government programs, drives a Cadillac, owns an iPhone and a big-screen TV, and eats lobster paid for by food stamps funded by hardworking American taxpayers who receive no such benefits from the overreaching federal government" (51).

One problem with this approach, according to Jeremy, is that we "make the welfare queen, rather than people like my neighbor Juanita [whose story will soon be discussed], emblematic of all people in poverty" (51). In reality, the vast majority of the poor are not unemployed or lazy, nor are they living large on taxpayer money. The second problem with this approach, though, is that following the logic of the myth of the welfare queen, "The welfare queen is completely undeserving of compassion and is a construct of her own making.

This justifies our casting her out into the wilderness—the deserted place where only death lingers" (51). By establishing stock stories and myths that largely misrepresent the poor, "We are guilty of engaging in the generational process of dehumanizing the poor. Either we actively employ language and images to solidify these beliefs and attitudes or we perpetuate dehumanization because of a lack of awareness and critical consciousness" (52).

Lack of awareness, or, "choos[ing] not to see it," is not an excuse, rather it is, in Jeremy's words, something we must "name and overcome" (52). Jeremy argues that all privileged people are complicit in the dehumanization of the poor because "As a culture, this dehumanization has become our standard rhetoric—Christian and non-Christian alike" (51). Whether an individual's complicity in the rhetorical and physical dehumanization and scapegoating of the poor is "intentionally aggressive or unintentionally passive," the imperative is for all people to "recognize the ways systems are stacked against the poor" (52).

In *I Was Hungry*, Jeremy seeks to subvert many of the myths, the stock stories, that many of his likely readers and potential community partners probably hold—consciously or unconsciously—as justifications for the scapegoating of the poor. Jeremy calls out the myths of the Welfare Queen and the American Dream. And Jeremy uses story to chip away at the sturdy common narratives that have withstood generations of wear and tear. Jeremy undermines

223

these narratives by telling challenging first- and second-hand stories—by bearing

witness, and by engaging biblical texts, offering imaginative and accessible

interpretations that challenge commonly held beliefs. Jeremy is motivated to tell

stories and to tell the specific stories he does by his commitment to the equality

of the *imago Dei* in all people and his commitment to a Kingdom marked by

humility and justice.

Challenging Stock Stories, Revealing Concealed Stories

Reinsborough and Canning explain that the job of the story-based

strategist is not simply to tell stories, but to change them, and that, "More often

than not, this means challenging stereotypes and dominant cultural

assumptions" (84). Their framework for understanding the need to change

stories is to understand such a strategy as an intervention.

They define intervention as "an action meant to change the course of

events. It can take many forms, but generally means interacting or interfering

with a situation, physical space, institution, audience, social structure, system, or

narrative, with the intent of shifting popular understanding" (91). Reinsborough

and Canning describe how, typically, social change strategies succeed when

strategists can identify a point of intervention at which to act: "Points of

intervention are specific places in a system where a targeted action can

effectively interrupt the functioning of the system and open up opportunities for

change" (92). They discuss how social change campaigns often identify points of

intervention at

> physical points in the systems that shape our lives: the point of production
> where goods are produced (such as a factory or farm), the point of
> destruction where resources are extracted or an injustice is most visible
> (such as a coal mine or a site of police brutality), the point of consumption
> where products are purchased (such as a store or ticket counter) and the
> point of decision where the power-holders are located (such as a corporate
> headquarters or a politician's office). (92)

What Reinsborough and Canning want readers to understand, though, is

that using a story-based approach allows strategists to "see points of intervention

that operate not only in physical space, but also within dominant narratives"

(92).

Disrupting dominant narratives is crucial, because, Reinsborough and

Canning note, as Jeremy does, that "Historically, social movements have

succeeded in winning changes when [interventions at physical points of

assumption] have also changed popular understanding of the issue," which

results in "a repatterning of popular consciousness to a new story" (98). To

intervene at the narrative level requires reframing debates, offering new futures,

creating/subverting spectacles, repurposing existing narratives, and/or making

the invisible visible (99). Such interventions must be focused on "the narratives

that obscure, rationalize, or justify the injustices occurring at all the other points"

(99). What Jeremy does in *I Was Hungry* is just this; he seeks to intervene in

narratives that justify the scapegoating of the poor by making the invisible

visible and by repurposing existing, biblical, narratives.

In her book on anti-racist storytelling strategies and pedagogy, Bell

describes four story types and storytelling processes. And, while she focuses on

racism, she argues that her framework "can be used to critically examine other

issues of social justice" (6). I use her language and framework in conjunction

with Reinsborough and Canning's to consider the storytelling work that Jeremy

does in *I Was Hungry*. Bell describes four types of stories: stock stories, concealed

stories, resistance stories, and emerging/transforming stories. In Bell's

framework, stock stories are "the tales told by the dominant group, passed on

through historical and literary documents, and celebrated through public rituals,

laws, the arts, education and media" (23). Stock stories are what I have been

calling the "popular understanding." Bell describes concealed stories as those

that

> coexist alongside the stock stories but most often remain in the shadows,
> hidden from mainstream view…Through concealed stories people who
> are marginalized, and often stigmatized, by the dominant society recount
> their experiences and critique or 'talk back' to mainstream narratives,
> portraying the strengths and capacities within marginalized communities.
> (23).

Concealed stories "counter mainstream accounts" (47). The third type of

story, resistance stories,

are the warehouse of stories that demonstrate how people have resisted [injustice], challenged the stock stories that support it, and fought for more equal and inclusive social arrangements…Resistance stories include the reserve of stories accumulated over time about and by people and groups who have challenged an [injustice]…Resistance stories serve as guides and inspiration for the hard work ahead. (24-25)

Finally, emerging or transforming stories are "new stories deliberately constructed to challenge the stock stories, build on and amplify concealed and resistance stories, and create new stories to interrupt the status quo and energize change" (25).

I argue here that Jeremy's storytelling in *I Was Hungry* brings from out of the shadows the concealed stories that challenge stock stories, and that this act is a form of resistance storytelling, or bearing witness. Such storytelling requires readers to consider perspectives they may not have considered, urging humility and pointing out unexpected areas of common ground. Concealed stories are perfectly positioned to "challenge stock stories by offering different accounts of and explanations for social relations" (Bell 44). By bringing concealed stories alongside mainstream narratives, those "Stock stories can thus be destabilized through stories that voice the knowledge generated within [marginalized communities] and among [justice advocates and allies]" (Bell 37). Laying stock and concealed stories side by side "provides a vantage point for seeing differently, unsettling the presumptive truth in stock stories and showing them

227

to be as partial and incomplete as any other story—thus open for contestation"

(Bell 59).

In *I Was Hungry*, Jeremy works to reveal previously concealed stories,

stories that challenge popular assumptions about poverty and those who live in

it. As discussed previously in this dissertation,[3] there are certain populations that

are particularly vulnerable to poverty: Black and brown people, immigrants,

women, LGBTQ folks, and those with disabilities, among them. Jeremy uses

personal experiences and relationships, derived from his rhetorical presence with

the poor, to challenge points of assumption about certain demographic groups

who are frequently stereotyped by Jeremy's primary audience. He also

complicates stock stories using narratives whose central characters are those that

the likely reader of Jeremy's book would be sympathetic toward: veterans and

rural working-class communities.

Jeremy tells stories that challenge inaccurate and oversimplified

assumptions about often stereotyped people, and many of his stories challenge

multiple assumptions at once. To challenge the assumption that laziness is a

primary cause of poverty, for example, Jeremy tells a story about a neighbor,

Juanita, whose husband walked two miles roundtrip every day for dialysis for

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[3] On p. 75.

his severe kidney disease while she, a legally blind woman who was unable to drive, took a 5AM city bus every morning to work, sewing fatigues for troops in Iraq, took a 6PM bus home, and then used a cane to walk to nearby restaurants on the weekends to sweep for extra money (45-46).

Jeremy also tells stories that challenge assumptions about two groups of people who often receive the least sympathy from conservative Christians: immigrants and sex workers. Jeremy tells stories about women from the Texas *colonías*.[4] The women Jeremy talked to on a visit to the border typically fled Mexico after losing family members in severe gang and drug-related violence. Often the women or their children had faced the threat of, or experienced, sexual violence prior to fleeing. Upon arriving in the US, Jeremy writes, most of the women work 80+ hours in hotels, restaurants, and plants where they are sometimes not paid and often raped by employers or coworkers, threatened with deportation if they report to authorities (113-114). Jeremy also shares stories about the time, during seminary, when he and some fellow seminarians lived in a house in a low-income area of Waco and befriended a group of prostitutes who worked out of their corner-lot front yard every night. These women and men

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[4] The *colonías* are the thousands of village communities in South Texas along the Mexican border. Almost a million low-income people live in *colonías*, which often lack infrastructure such as potable water, electricity, sewage systems, and garbage disposal. For more, see Esquinca and Jaramillo.

shared with Jeremy and his friends stories of the violence they faced at the hands

of clients and pimps. Jeremy reflects on how getting to hear the stories of these

men and women challenged his own assumptions:

> One thing that dawned on me shortly after meeting [a prostitute who
> became a friend] and her daughter was that her daughter grew up
> knowing only prostitution as a way of survival. As we joke in my family,
> our family business is ministry. I was probably at seminary at least in part
> because that is what many of my family members, including my father
> and mother, had done before me. Was Daisy's daughter any different
> from me in that regard? (32-33)

Similarly, hearing stories from and getting to know a male prostitute in

the area, James, about his life, challenged Jeremy's own assumptions about sex

work as simply a lazy or depraved way of making money.

Jeremy honestly tells stories about his own assumptions and biases being

challenged, sometimes even with explicit "here is what I learned from this"

language, in an attempt to place himself, humbly and gently, alongside the

reader as he challenges long-held assumptions. Jeremy's storytelling that reveals

his own learning and formation results from and encourages the humility that

fosters increased recognition of the equality and "createdness" of all people.

Prostitution, which Jeremy's primary audience likely holds to be both a form of

sexual sin and a "lazy" or desperate way to make money, is not the place many

Christian readers, in particular, would find or trust religious devotion (despite

biblical stories that indicate otherwise). So, to further complicate the reader's

understanding of prostitutes and prostitution, Jeremy shares a story from a time

when he was "overwhelmed with the Spirit of God," a time when, after a late-

night talk on the front lawn with James and others, James urged Jeremy, who he

knew to be a seminarian, to read some scripture for the group. Jeremy initially

refused, tired, and simply invited James to come to church with him. But James

insisted. So, Jeremy retrieved his Bible and read from Matthew 6. Following

Jeremy's reading, James urged Jeremy to pray for the group. So, Jeremy did.

After Jeremy finished, James began praying, and Jeremy recounts that James's

prayer "seemed like it was taken straight out of the Psalms" (37). And it was

during James's prayer that Jeremy recalls feeling overwhelmed by God's Spirit.

Jeremy also tells stories to try to combat multiple misconceptions or

oversimplifications at once. One story, which Jeremy writes about and then also

tells, tearfully, in public speaking, is a heartbreaking story about a former

neighbor and friend, a story that challenges many stereotypes and also illustrates

the ways in which, as Jeremy says, "Poverty in the US is incredibly complicated,

involving myriad underlying issues such as wage rates, health care access,

housing costs, and hunger" (18). To Jeremy, it's crucial to address this reality

because "We often talk about people without health insurance or people living

with hunger or families in poverty as if there are subgroups dealing with each

isolated issue. The reality is that the same families live with all of these conditions" (18).

Jeremy's neighbor, Lupe, was the primary caregiver for her children and her aging parents. Lupe also volunteered consistently at her kids' school, because "She knew that the only way her children could escape the harsh realities of poverty was through education" (17). Lupe's husband worked a full-time job during the week in addition to a weekend job, a practice Jeremy explains was typical for the neighborhood: "Most people in the neighborhood did not have full-time employment with one employer, so they would piece together two or three jobs, sometimes working sixty to eighty hours a week, when they were lucky" (17). After Jeremy had known Lupe for several years, she developed an ear infection. With no health insurance and only one car, which her husband used for work, Lupe's infection was left untreated. When the pain was too severe to ignore, she finally took the inconvenient bus journey to an emergency room, where she sat, unseen, until she had to leave to get her kids. That night, Lupe's eardrum ruptured, infecting her brain, and she died.

Another story that illustrates the unseen, complicated web of poverty is a story Jeremy tells secondhand in the book, as it originates with his colleague, Doug's, days as a school social worker. Doug was mentoring a high school student who began to experience dramatic academic improvements as his

relationship with Doug developed. Then, however, toward the end of the school

year, the student's performance tanked and he began acting out at school. When

Doug, frustrated, asked the student what had happened to cause this drastic

decline in performance and increase in misbehavior, the student told Doug he

was sorry, but that, with summer coming up, he needed to be forced to attend

summer school so that he would have at least one predictable meal a day (60-61).

Finally, Jeremy tells stories that take a person, situation, or community his

audience is likely sympathetic toward and subtly complicates or subverts

expectations. Two examples from Jeremy's book include a story about a veteran

who credits the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as a

major player in his ability to transition from war to homelessness to "a more

fulfilling life" (63). Many staunch supporters of the military and veterans are also

highly critical of federal government programs. So, by demonstrating the ways

in which federal programs are beneficial to veterans, Jeremy widens the frame of

reference through which his readers understand both the veteran post-war

experience and the SNAP program. A story that draws stereotypically disparate

pieces together like this fosters common ground as readers with different

orientations can find themselves, together, in the story: as a veteran or pro-

military supporter, as a SNAP recipient or supporter.

A similarly subversive story in Jeremy's book is that of Springhill, Louisiana, the home of Jeremy's grandparents. Jeremy tells readers about growing up traveling to Springhill to visit his grandparents. Springhill was, like many rural southern towns, a farming community that then became a thriving manufacturing community: the home of Springhill Paper. During the 1990s, however, Springhill Paper was bought out by a larger company and, over time, parts of the plant began to close and more and more community members were laid off. Jeremy summarizes: "Today the plant is almost completely closed, and the town is only a shadow of what it was during my childhood. The families who were once proud farming families, then proud manufacturing families, are now out of work" (20). After describing this scenario, one so familiar and widely sympathized with as a result of "The 2016 presidential election, the rise of populism, and the spotlight being put on the plight of southern, rural poverty, predominantly among white households" (19), Jeremy then pivots into more controversial claims, tying them to the Springhill story:

> Many residents of Springhill likely need government support to survive, but do not be mistaken, it is not because they do not want to work or because government programs are so enticing that people would rather depend on them than be gainfully employed. Anyone suggesting that a social safety net existence is something that people prefer has never spent quality time with the poor. Though it is true that a collective depression robs people of their hope and ambition to improve their situations, as they look around, there seem to be no good options. For many families like Lupe's and communities like Springhill, the deck appears to be stacked against them. Their schools have high dropout rates, and families lack

sufficient food and health insurance. Opportunities for upward mobility are scare, if not altogether nonexistent. The American myth of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps evidently does not apply to people who cannot afford boots. (20)

Jeremy tells a concealed story that is likely to arouse the sympathies of his readers, a story about a declining rural working community, and then uses it to pivot into a defense of federal programs, a complicating of simplistic understandings of poverty, and, ultimately, a concise challenge to one of America's most dearly held stock stories/myths: the American Dream.

Telling Bible Stories

Jeremy regularly engages in rhetorical practices that involve the texts and stories of the Christian scriptures. Reinsborough and Canning describe how narrative intervention "often requires reframing, which is the process of altering the meaning of the old story to tell a different story…interventions that successfully reframe might amplify new characters who previously haven't been heard, redefine the problem with a different set of values, or pose a new, more compelling solution" (100). Jeremy engages in this reframing, retelling of old stories—biblical texts—to offer explanations for social realities and to illuminate the ways in which the social realities of poverty are not actually acceptable conditions or conditions sanctioned by God or Christian scripture.

McEntyre argues that the heart of theology "is the recognition that we should not—indeed, we cannot—reason rightly about any situation without story" (121), and thus that "The old rabbinical response to life questions, 'Let me tell you a little story,' is one of the treasures of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Stories are the oldest and most valuable equipment we have as a human community and as a people of faith" (123). Stories are at the heart of religious traditions. And, for a tradition like Christianity, which has traditionally understood the Bible to be the Word of God, the stories contained in the Christian scriptures assume an incredibly high level of authority. Among most evangelical Christians in particular, the Bible is the primary revelation of God and is thus of utmost importance. The high level of commitment that many Christians—and, particularly, evangelicals—have to the biblical texts[5] makes the use of Bible stories to encourage critical thinking about equality, humility, and common ground particularly effective.

Kenneth Burke introduced the idea of casuistic stretching, where "one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles" (*Attitudes toward History* 229). Ringer applies Burke's concept to an evangelical student's use of a biblical text in a composition paper, highlighting

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[5] For more on this, see Hankins, p. 182.

the ways in which this student struggled in the tension between old and new

interpretations and possibilities for the text ("The Consequences"). I argue that

Jeremy, using his situated and invented ethos as a committed Christian,

persuades his readers—many of whom he assumes share his faith

commitments—by casuistically stretching and reframing biblical stories.

Before even the Table of Contents in Jeremy's book, there is a page that

contains only the text of Matthew 25:31-46.[6] It is from this passage that the book's

title is derived, and it is this story that anchors Jeremy's argument that Christians

are responsible to fight for justice for the poor. Jeremy uses his own positionality

as a Christian, as a seminary graduate, as the son of a pastor to credibly offer

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[6] [31] "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. [32] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, [33] and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. [34] Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; [35] for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? [38] And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? [39] And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' [40] And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' [41] Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; [42] for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' [44] Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' [45] Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

interpretations of biblical texts, but, by foregrounding the biblical text, it is the authority of the Bible itself that he appeals to and trusts that his Christian readers are committed to.

Jeremy begins his discussion of this story that Jesus tells in Matthew with the assumption that "Most Christians are probably familiar with Jesus's teaching in Matthew 25" (9). Jeremy is likely correct. However, many interpretations of this passage stop merely at a reminder to the Christian to treat everyone with respect and care because whatever the Christian does to the "least of these," they do to Christ. In other words, many discussions of this passage place it in the moral instruction category of the Scriptures. Jeremy would, of course, agree that this passage contains the heart of the Christian moral and ethical focus. However, Jeremy makes sure to include in his book the more often ignored parts of the passage as well: Jesus' framing of this story as the final judgment scene.

Jeremy describes that this story "is the only apocalyptic (or end-of-the-world) scene in Matthew. Jesus the King has returned, and he is sitting on the throne. This is the final judgment. All people are gathered, and Jesus is separating them—the sheep and the goats, the righteous from the accused" (9-10). To be sure, discussions of final judgment scenes are likely not unfamiliar to the Christian reader. What may be more confounding, however, is Jeremy's next interpretive move, which he anticipates and addresses by describing how Jesus,

238

too, said what Jeremy is about to say "To the astonishment of the people

gathered" (10). Jeremy then quotes M. Eugene Boring's commentary on the book

of Matthew, describing how, in this final judgment story "the criterion for

judgment is not confession of faith in Christ. Nothing is said of grace,

justification, or the forgiveness of sins" (Everett 10). Jeremy continues in his own

words, "Instead, what matters is whether a person has acted with love and cared

for the needy" (10). Then, engaging Boring again, Jeremy concludes, "These acts

are not just extra credit but 'constitute the decisive criterion for judgment.'

Essentially, 'when the people respond or fail to respond to human need, they are

in fact responding, or failing to respond, to Christ.' The calling of the faithful is

clear: feed the hungry and you will live" (10).

Here Jeremy subverts many common interpretations of both Matthew 25's

instructions and what will save the Christian from judgment on the Last Day.

Jeremy specifically quotes a scholar saying that this judgment scene says nothing

"of grace, justification, or the forgiveness of sins." Jeremy then reminds readers

that care for the marginalized (the hungry, naked, stranger, prisoner) is not

"extra credit" but, in Boring's words, "the decisive criterion for judgment"

(Everett 10). This is serious. Many Christians, particularly conservative

evangelical Christians, emphasize that individual faith in God's gracious

forgiveness of sins is the "decisive criterion for judgment," and that the biblical

moral imperatives—to feed the hungry, for example—are simply the natural and correct response to God's gracious salvation. Given the nature of conservative Christianity's emphasis on individual salvation and the final judgment and given Jeremy's hermeneutic work to demonstrate how this story, the only apocalyptic passage in Matthew, shows a more corporate, justice-oriented eschatology, readers are left to wrestle with the tension of being told an old story but having that story interpreted in what is, perhaps, a new, uncomfortable, and unsettling way.

Jeremy complicates this story even more when he gets, forty pages later, to his discussion of the Levitical practice of scapegoating, which we discussed previously in this chapter. After describing the origins of the practice of scapegoating, how a goat was banished into the wilderness bearing the sins of the community, and the ways in which American society has scapegoated an entire group of people—the marginalized—Jeremy recalls Matthew 25, reminding readers that in that story "The goats that are cast out in Matthew are those who did *not* give food to the hungry, the ones who did *not* provide shelter for the stranger or clothing for the naked" (52). After indicting American society—including Christians—for casting out scapegoats to the margins of our society to bear our collective sins, Jeremy reminds readers that Jesus' story in Matthew is one in which the oppressors and bystanders are the goats who will

ultimately be cast out. Jeremy then draws another striking parallel between the

concept of scapegoating and Matthew 25.

As previously discussed in this chapter, in his discussion of scapegoating

Jeremy describes how, in order to scapegoat an entire group of people, society

invents dehumanizing myths and justifications. After Jeremy condemns this

practice, the logical conclusion that a reader would draw from Jeremy's

discussion is that he is urging readers to rehumanize the scapegoats. But

rehumanization is not far enough. Jeremy again recalls Matthew 25. In that story,

Jesus describes how some will try to question their judgment as goats to be cast

out, justifying their neglect of the oppressed by asking, "Lord, when was it that

we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did

not take care of you?" And in the story, Jesus replies: "Truly I tell you, just as you

did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." After Jeremy

calls out the dehumanization and scapegoating of the poor, he reminds us that

the passage in Matthew "calls us not only to see the hungry as humans but also

to see the hungry as Jesus" (52). The marginalized are not merely human—they

are humans made in the *imago Dei*.

Immediately following his chapter-concluding reminder to readers that

the marginalized are the *imago Dei* and that those who fail to fight for justice on

their behalf are the goats to be cast out, Jeremy immediately begins the next

chapter with another passage of Scripture, printed in full, this time Luke 9:10-17,

a story commonly referred to as "the feeding of the five thousand."[7] Jeremy

opens this chapter with two pages of imaginative retelling of the story, with

some twenty-first century recontextualization. Reinsborough and Canning write

that "Believable storytelling relies on compelling characters that help audiences

see themselves reflected in the story" (67). Jeremy does some imaginative work

to help readers see themselves reflected in this, another very commonly preached

about and taught Bible story.

Jeremy begins his retelling with context from earlier in the biblical

chapter: the fact that Jesus had sent seventy-two disciples "across Israel to heal

the sick and preach about the kingdom of God" (54). Jeremy recasts the

beginning of this story, then, appropriately, as the disciples returning "from their

first mission trip without Jesus" (54). Evangelical Christianity places a high

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[7] "[10] On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. [11] When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured. [12] The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' [13] But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' [14] For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' [15] They did so and made them all sit down. [16] And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. [17] And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces."

emphasis on evangelism, and, thus, mission trips—whether local, domestic, or international—are very common, respected experiences in many evangelical circles; many readers from evangelical traditions are likely to have either participated in or supported a mission trip at some point. Jeremy describes how the returning disciples are energized by having "felt God move through them in ways they could not ever have imagined," and they are ready to tell Jesus all about their trip. Jeremy imagines Peter and the other disciples running to Jesus when they see him and asking if they can go to their "favorite desert camping spot" to tell him all about their "ah-mazing! Really transformational!" trip (54). (Jeremy also interjects in a parenthetical that, if this were him asking, his preferred deserted camping spot would be in Big Bend National Park.) Jeremy imagines Jesus laughing at their excitement and saying "Let's do it!" (54).

Jeremy recounts how, though they try to sneak away, like "a youth group returning from a great mission trip" the group of disciples and Jesus is simply too large and loud to be able to escape without thousands of people following them. Jeremy attributes this to Jesus being "the rock star of this community." Because so many people have followed them to the desert and because of Jesus' compassion, he begins to heal and teach and interact with the crowd of thousands. Here, Jeremy imagines,

> the eagerness of the disciples likely turns to resentment…Peter probably told Matthew and John, "These people are ruining our favorite place to

camp." John may have responded, "I bet they just want a handout from Jesus." Then Matthew probably chimes in, "Don't they have jobs? What aren't they working right now? They are so lazy! They don't deserve Jesus's help." (55)

Jeremy imagines the disciples grumpily sitting all day, until finally, they "have had enough of it. So Peter and his leadership team boldly walk over to Jesus. 'Jesus, enough is enough! Send everyone home. You were supposed to hang out with us, not them. Besides, we don't have a place for these people to stay or any food for them.'" Jesus tells Peter to feed the people, to which Peter responds with incredulity, given that they are more than five thousand people strong, in the middle of the desert, and the only food around are two fish and five loaves of bread provided by a young member of the crowd. Jeremy imagines Jesus "nonchalantly" responding, "That'll work. Sit everybody down, and let's get this buffet started" (55).

Jeremy humorously interjects himself and his readers in this retelling by imagining the story in a modern, American Christian context: returning from a mission trip, camping at a National Park with friends to tell them about how God "moved through them" on the trip, and angrily confronting your "rock star" leader with leadership team back up. But, amidst this imaginative retelling in which the reader is invited to place herself in the story, Jeremy also has the reader, as a disciple-character, assume the very myths about the poor and marginalized that Jeremy has just discussed in the previous chapter: that the

poor are lazy and undeserving, that they just want handouts, and that their

presence can ruin or contaminate spaces (i.e. that it would be better if they were

casted out).

Here Jeremy begins his commentary on the story, describing how even

though "The disciples have just witnessed Jesus healing the sick, and they have

heard him teach about the kingdom of God," their presence in a deserted place

leads them to "immediately resort to an ideology of personal responsibility" (55).

However, Jeremy says, "When the disciples see desert, Jesus sees opportunity.

When we see scarcity, Jesus shows us the way of abundance. Jesus often sees

resources and scalable solutions when his disciples see only barren wilderness.

That is why Jesus's witness has inspired revolutionary acts of loving-kindness

and resourcefulness for two thousand years" (55). Jesus, Jeremy reminds readers,

"ushered in an upside-down kingdom where the faithful like St. Francis of Assisi

leave the safety and security of the kingdoms of their world to join the

outsiders—the immigrants, the poor, the hungry, the mentally ill—resulting in a

peaceable kingdom build on a foundation of justice" (55).

After he finishes commentary on this desert story, Jeremy turns to

discussing a mentor of his who, like St. Francis and like Jeremy, chose to be

present with the poor, living in a low-income area that was also a food desert.[8]

Jeremy's retelling of the biblical story is thus used cleverly to transition from a biblical desert to a modern food desert, and to encourage readers to place themselves as disciples in the story, disciples who are at first resistant to the poor, believing harmful myths about them, but who are then reminded by Jesus of the creative abundance that is possible in loving presence and collaboration with the marginalized.

Implications

Bell's framework for considering stock, concealed, resistance, and transforming stories has wide-ranging possible implications. Bell intends her framework to, specifically, prompt writing teachers to reconsider how they teach storytelling for social change, with particular attention to power and marginalized voices. I argue that a still-underutilized component of storytelling—in the BCHP's work and in other popular storytelling realms—is carefully crafted, nuanced transforming story. The imaginative, visionary work required to paint a compelling alternative to current reality is difficult, and, therefore, visionary stories are often vague and clichéd, references to "a better

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[8] "Food desert" is a term used to describe an area—typically an urban, low-income area—where there is no easily accessible food other than that available at convenience stores.

future" with no clear, persuasive image of what such a future might look like. But compelling alternative possibilities are highly motivating and inspiring.

Challenging stock stories by revealing concealed stories is necessary. Providing resistance stories as models and motivations for engaging in justice work is inspiring. But social change is hard, and, as will be discussed soon, often long. Sustained momentum, energy, and investment in social causes requires vision. Religious traditions have been offering compelling resources for cultivating such imaginative visions of better futures for centuries, through concepts like the Kingdom of God and Jubilee. All change agents, but particularly those who are personally religiously-committed, can draw on the resources provided by religious imagery, concepts, and histories to craft more nuanced, compelling stories and visions for better social futures.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Strategic Collaboration: The BCHP's Search for Common Ground

Collaboration

This chapter explores the third theologically-motivated rhetorical strategy

utilized by the BCHP: collaboration. This strategy, like presence and storytelling

before it, is animated by the organization's commitments to recognizing the

equality of all people created in God's image, humbly admitting our (human)

interdependence, and therefore seeking to establish common ground from which

meaningful and respectful partnerships can form.

Overview

A brochure for [the BCHP] includes a vertical graphic that outlines one of

the organization's key strategies. The graphic is simple: the outline of a school

building, followed by a plus sign, followed by the outline of a church building,

then another plus sign, then a government building, another plus sign, a

corporate/industrial building, another plus sign, then the old THI logo (a Texas

state flag theme with an overlaid silhouette of a fork), followed by an equals sign,

followed by the word "change" in big bold letters.

The BCHP operates under the assumption that "Hunger is too big and too complex for any of us to address by ourselves; we have to work together in a coordinated effort if we are going to beat this thing" (Everett 122). Jeremy calls this his "pitch," and it is perhaps the BCHP's most frequently reiterated idea and, according to many staff, what they believe most distinguishes their work from similar organizations. The strategies of rhetorical presence and storytelling are largely intended to move people and organizations toward this anti-poverty strategy of widespread, multi-sector collaboration.

The reality is that multi-sector, bipartisan collaboration across ideological and other divides is not as common as conventional wisdom's emphasis on collective power would lead one to assume. Plenty of organizations collaborate with likeminded individuals and organizations. But, as is referenced daily in the news media and in general conversation, we are operating in a substantially divided, partisan, polarized culture. Leslie and Jeremy both describe how this is especially true in the economic context and realities of conducting social good work in the U.S. Leslie believes that the BCHP's multi-sector, collaborative nature is unique and vital, as is their recommendation that others adopt the same strategy, but that it is also incredibly difficult and uncommon because "the system is not set up to facilitate collaboration." She then clarifies that by "the system" she means capitalist economics. Jeremy, too, writes about how even

nonprofits who share similar goals—organizations that "should be strategically aligned and working together seamlessly"—are often forced to "compete against one another because they are applying to the same potential funders" (11). Thus, while the BCHP's collaborative strategy does not seem revolutionary, and, to be sure, is not theirs alone, it is unusual in both the centrality and scope of the focus it receives from the BCHP.

The BCHP's consistent and urgent call for collaboration is a direct outgrowth of commitments to honoring the unique image of God in everyone, establishing common ground from which to partner, and humbly admitting limitations and dependence on one another. The interdependence and collaboration the organization calls for is evident both inter- and intra-organizationally, both forms of which are critical for the organization's work. Because it is the most visible, I first describe how theologically-motivated strategic collaboration manifests in the public work and nature of the organization. Then I describe the collaboration *within* the organization, which, I argue, informs the BCHP staff's commitment to and encouragement of the widespread acceptance of collaboration as a critical social justice strategy.

Collaborative Partnerships and Coalitions

        It would be difficult to overemphasize the extent to which collaboration

forms the focal public strategy of the BCHP. Jeremy's book centrally argues for

the establishment of common ground in order to facilitate collaboration to "end

an American crisis" (his book's subtitle). A few examples of the organization's

emphasis on collaboration include: following the 2019 Summit, an article in the

prominent Baptist news site the *Baptist Standard* was titled: "Summit speakers

stress collaboration as key to fighting hunger" (Camp). The first recommendation

of the BCHP in their "Recommendations for Reducing Poverty in America" is the

increased establishment and support of public-private partnerships. I and seven

other people received an email from BCHP staff member Brian prior to the 2019

Together at the Table Summit that read "I'm thrilled that you will be joining us at

Baylor University's Hunger & Poverty Summit this year. In order to help our

guests maximize their networking potential, I'm pulling together groups of folks

who I believe will benefit from knowing each other. *Don't tell anyone, but this is*

the group I'm most excited about." My invitation was to sit at a breakfast plenary

table with seven other "women who are studying and preparing to make the

world a better place" (email). The eight of us were from six different educational

or research institutes and many of us might not otherwise have met. In line with

the work and strategies of the BCHP, Brian was doing the above-and-beyond

critical thinking work of drawing together potential collaborators and creating

space for them to be in each other's physical presence. Examples such as these

abound.

Collaborative partnerships take many shapes for the BCHP: collaboration

between central office and field offices, between field offices and their regional

community partners such as school districts, between the BCHP and elected

officials; researchers in the fellows program; and other local, state, and national

anti-hunger organizations. One of the BCHP's primary strategies is to get

communities across the state (and nation) to form coalitions. In testimony before

the House Committee on Agriculture—to argue for increased support for SNAP

and the 2018 Farm Bill—during a community listening session in San Angelo,

Rebecca's opening remarks[1] on behalf of the organization emphasized the

BCHP's collaborative and coalition focus: "We operate eight regional offices

across the state and are also consulting on a project in Oklahoma. We build

coalitions—bringing people together to help communities think strategically,

organizations work collaboratively, and programs function efficiently." To

further emphasize the collaborative work of the organization and to utilize the

strategy of rhetorical presence, Rebecca then continued her remarks by

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[1] Rebecca emailed me a copy of her opening remarks.

introducing one of the regional directors of one of the BCHP's field offices. Rebecca describes how, in Lubbock, a BCHP-affiliated coalition was able to bring together local farmers, government agencies, private funders, and families living with food insecurity to "stretch SNAP dollars, offer an incentive for SNAP recipients to purchase nutritious foods, and expand the customer base for local farmers."

The BCHP's primary coalition focus during the first ten years of the organization's history has been on Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCC). The concept and language of HFCCs was created by another anti-hunger agency and a partner of the BCHP: the Alliance to End Hunger, located in D.C. (Everett 76). The BCHP now supports a network of more than fifteen coalitions across the state, and other organizations can apply to join the network on the BCHP website. To further the collaborative potential of HFCCs, the BCHP took rhetorical action: developing and writing *A Toolkit for Developing and Strengthening Hunger Free Community Coalitions* (Jacobson et al.), a beautifully designed sixty-four page guide to developing collaborative efforts via HFCCs that is free and available for downloading on the BCHP website.

Though the BCHP and the Alliance to End Hunger have collaborated on developing the HFCC model, the BCHP took the lead on the toolkit, with four BCHP staff members primarily compiling and writing the toolkit (Jacobson et al.

63). The toolkit demonstrates collaboration on multiple levels: between the Alliance and the BCHP on developing the idea, between coalitions in helping develop the HFCC model over the years, and between the authors and compilers of the document. The toolkit also utilizes and demonstrates the BCHP's strategies of rhetorical presence and storytelling as well. Readers are informed that "This toolkit was created by the Texas Hunger Initiative based on research, education, and years of experience working with communities and building coalitions. THI staff members are working in communities every day to implement the tools and practices laid out in this toolkit and its contents were born out of their work" (63). The situated ethos of the organization, by its presence in the field, is used to convince readers to trust the years of collaborative experience and presence in coalitions that have contributed to the strategies available in the toolkit. Similarly, text boxes are located throughout the toolkit with brief stories from specific HFCCs, describing best practices for given strategies, showing the strategies at work.

From Initiative to Collaborative: The Rebranding

As discussed previously in this study, during my project, the organization at the center of this study underwent a major rebranding, from the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) to the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). The first staff meeting I sat in on during this project was, in fact, the meeting in which

Jeremy pitched the idea of a possible new restructuring/rebranding to the staff.

Fourteen months later, the organization announced at the 2019 Together at the

Table Summit that the rebrand would be taking place, effective immediately, and

that THI would be subsumed as a branch under the new organization titled the

Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). Interestingly, the new title

both did and did not change the work of the organization. In fact, the new

organizational structure was designed to more accurately reflect the highly

collaborative, diverse work that the organization was already doing, while also

opening opportunities for new collaborations and partnerships.

Under the new BCHP, THI—which now consists only of the field offices—

is a branch, along with the HFCC network, the Global Migration Network, the

Research Fellows Program, the Nonprofit Excellence Project, and the Hunger

Data Lab, many of which are still in formational stages. Jeremy and the other

leadership of the organization are also leaving open the possibility for more

areas/projects to be adopted into the BCHP family as new collaborations form.

While multi-faceted, the rebrand largely functions to center the organization's

title around the diversity and possibility that "Collaborative" connotes.

The rationale for the change was described to me in multiple ways, and,

even the reasons that seem initially unrelated to collaboration are, ultimately,

rhetorical decisions prompted by a desire for increased possibilities for

partnerships. Privately and publicly, people both within and outside of the BCHP staff told me the rebrand is first and foremost a marketing choice. As Bill Ludwig, a USDA official, said, applauding the name change in his opening remarks at the 2019 Summit: "'Texas' doesn't carry well in D.C., Denver, or Massachusetts." Baylor, however, is recognized nationally—and, as previously discussed, for both positive and negative reasons. But, among the positives, are: high output of high-quality research, overall high student and faculty satisfaction rankings, and academic rigor. Baylor is also a wealthy university, and a relatively large one for a private school. Thus, the prestige attached to Baylor's name comes first and foremost from being a nationally recognized university name and secondarily from Baylor's status as a D1, R2 school, edging its way toward R1. Additionally, influential alumni have served in a variety of government, corporate, and other capacities, spanning the ideological spectrum. Baylor has, in short, a broader, richer, more intellectual appeal than Texas does. Non-Texans often know and assume about Texas a variety of stereotypes, many of them attached to the kind of state-centric, "secede," "everything is bigger in Texas," wild west variety. There is, of course, merit to many of these stereotypes, but, like all stereotypes, they are incomplete. Similarly, "Texas" in the title of the organization seemed to limit the possibilities for collaboration to the state, which was not reflective of the organization's work. The reality is that rhetorical

presentation matters, and, driving the name change was the belief that a Texas-centric, somewhat ambiguous organization will not carry the same clout that a major university-centric collaborative on a variety of social issues will.

Another rhetorical benefit of the rebrand is that hunger *and* poverty in a title "sells" better than just hunger or poverty alone. Hunger alone, as in THI, is not enough to mobilize some people, perhaps particularly people on the ideological left, who recognize hunger as a symptom of poverty and who may be wary of an organization that is seemingly treating a symptom rather than a problem. Poverty alone, as Jeremy mentioned to me several times, carries connotations that often alienate the political right. Thus the ethos of attaching Baylor's name to hunger *and* poverty, in that order, can hopefully carry connotations of academic rigor, with appeal across the political and ideological spectrum, opening up increased possibilities for the establishment of common ground and collaboration.

The primary noun in the organizational name has also changed, strategically, from *initiative* to *collaborative*. Initiative, with its connotation of independently motivated work—particularly evident in what is perhaps the word's most popular usage "take initiative"—is, though accurate in the sense of the organization's relationship to Baylor and orientation toward innovating and experimenting, not as appealing or as indicative of the BCHP's desire to

257

collaborate across political, ideological, and disciplinary lines as "collaborative" is. In one sense, "initiative" may be more technically appropriate than the new addition of the "Baylor" label. The restructuring has not altered the fact that the BCHP, like THI, will still be 100% externally grant funded (at least for the foreseeable future). The initiative THI has taken over the years in seeking funding and opportunities, is thus perhaps more accurate than attaching "Baylor" to the organization name. The last two years of research fellows has certainly connected *more* Baylor researchers to the organization; however, those researchers are voluntarily joining the fellows program, and there is no monetary benefit or university incentive attached to the program in the form of stipends or grant funding.

Despite the reasons "initiative" works, "collaborative" is much more indicative of the work the organization does and the partnerships the organization is seeking to develop and foster on a range of issues related to hunger *and* poverty. For all of these reasons, the rebranding of the organization, which was largely an amalgam of public-oriented rhetorical choices, is intended to increase the enactment of the organization's primary tactic: collaboration across difference rooted in theologically-animated commitments to equality, common ground, and humility.

Intra-Organizational Collaboration

While collaboration is the guiding strategy the BCHP utilizes and

encourages to work toward social justice, and while that collaboration is most

often discussed at the inter-organizational level, commitment to collaboration at

the BCHP starts with the team.[2] In an early interview, Jeremy describes that one

way he enacts his value of equality at work is by being "personally deeply

invested in each individual [staff member] as a person." He continues, "I really

respect the people in our organization and trust them to be leaders in their

respective spaces. I think they know that. I think they've experienced that." He

explains that he hopes that "because of the community that [staff have] built with

their respective coworkers" and "because I do think they understand that I really

do care about them," the staff are often willing to trust Jeremy when he begins

steering the organization in a new direction, despite any personal hesitations or

uncertainties they may have. Of their collaboration and the trust that has grown

out of it, Jeremy says, "I'm grateful for their patience. I recognize that it is a gift

to be able to work with them."

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[2] For the scope of this project, when I reference the "team" or "colleagues" in this section,
I refer to the central office staff of the BCHP, the staff who participated in this study. There are
also interesting dynamics and forms of collaboration and tension between central and field office
staff; however, those are beyond the scope of this project.

Jeremy's articulation of gratitude for, trust in, and care for his colleagues is far from unique. Each of the ten participants in this study spoke well and/or affectionately of their colleagues, and seven of the ten answer the specific question "what motivates you to continue working for the BCHP?" with, as at least *part* of their answer, some variation on "my colleagues": 1) "I think ultimately what has made me stay is the people"; 2) "the people, I love the people that I work with"; 3) "You know, my first response would be, it's the people I work with…[I'm] inspired by the people I work with"; 4) "I like all the people I work with, so that's a huge motivator"; 5) "the people…you have to like the culture and you have to be a part of the culture. I have felt that here"; 6) "I like the people. Everybody's amazing"; 7) "I personally feel like we probably have the sharpest team in the anti-hunger business."

When I ask Jeremy, the one who said the BCHP team was the sharpest in anti-hunger work, to explain why he thinks this intra-organizational collaboration and care is so central to the office and to people's motivations to continue this work, he says: "Over the past ten years we've built this great team. We have really complementary skill sets…We're all good at very different things. So, we're able to overcome our own personal deficiencies because of our collective strength." Jeremy's answer reveals that not only is he "personally deeply invested in each individual as a person," reflecting his commitment to

260

recognizing each person equally as the *imago Dei*, but he is also operating from the value of humility: "knowing my skill set and knowing my gifts, knowing what I'm good at and trying to stay in those lanes," he says. Jeremy has sought to know himself and then to ask others, with different, complementary strengths, to come alongside him and each other, strengthening the whole.

Jeremy wants everyone on the team to experience his commitment to equality and humility by experiencing the BCHP as deeply egalitarian and collaborative. Of his egalitarian vision, Jeremy says, "going back to being created in the image of God. I hope everybody here feels like that I experience them as an equal in this work. I know that my name is on the top of the org chart, but I feel like I work hard to try to make sure that everybody knows that I value their opinion." Because of his commitment to equality and the humility of recognizing that one person cannot do this work alone, Jeremy sees that

> everybody is a leader in our organization in their own space…I'm not the leader…You are the leader…I'm coming there to learn from you…it is all relational, and so you are the leader in your region. There is space for every person in this organization to provide leadership, and there's a space for everybody in this organization to be a follower, myself included. That's how I wanted to set it up. I hope everybody feels that way.

Operating the BCHP office from an orientation toward equality and humility not only ensures that deeply help values are animating the team's collaborative work but it also maximizes people's sense of fulfillment, increasing their work satisfaction and motivating their work. Jeremy says, "you want to

give people growth opportunities as often as you possibly can. So, you're gonna

maximize people's potential when they're doing what it is that they feel like they

want to be doing at that stage in life." Jeremy wants to make space for people to

do "what it is that they feel like they want to be doing," maximizing their own

creative capacities, matching closely what he articulates as his vision of the

Kingdom of God and the enactment of the *imago Dei*.

Jeremy describes that a "desire" he has for himself and for the staff "is for

everybody to feel called or set apart to do their respective role." Here the

collaboration of the organization stems from calling and humbly coming together

collaboratively. Jeremy extends this in our conversation to me in his example of

what this vision might look like: "So that everybody says, 'okay, Sara, you're a

research fellow and we all believe in your ability to help us see our own story in

a new way that will help us be a stronger organization and be more committed to

people experiencing hunger and poverty.'" From himself to his colleagues to the

research fellows, Jeremy articulates that he wants staff "to feel like [they're] sent

out to do this for a particular group of people by a particular group of

people…So, regardless of people's faith perspective, I want everybody to feel

sent out by their colleagues and feel like 'I have something to offer and I'm able

to offer that. My colleagues see this in me, and they appreciate this about me,

and I'm going to go do it.'" Jeremy describes this model of work as his "dream,"

rooted in his vision of the Kingdom of God as a place where every person thrives in their ability to "live out [their] fullest creative value that [they] bring."

Interviews with the BCHP staff demonstrate that Jeremy's dream for inter-office collaboration animated by commitments to equality and humility is, largely, a reality. I was struck by how frequently staff explicitly articulated that they experience the realization of Jeremy's goals of allowing people to live into their own sense of giftedness and calling—including allowing for the flexibility of shifting job focuses over time—and of feeling valued and respected for their respective positions in the organization. Staff also frequently articulated how the BCHP "team" really does work collaboratively, with people's complementary skills, interests, and personalities leading to effective collaboration.

Leslie explained to me, "the older I've gotten and the longer I've worked, I've realized…I can kill a project with over structure and over controlling it…[In contrast to Brian] who is whimsical and impulsive and emotional, and all in good ways; I've had to learn how to make room for that in our work and in my work, and not to put a vice on everything." Leslie senses herself learning from Brian and others who are different from her, learning to collaborate for the strength of the team. Leslie also describes to me parts of her job she feels she excels at that she didn't anticipate enjoying, and, as she describes a particular area of giftedness she adds, "Jeremy has validated this in me." Clearly Leslie

feels encouraged by Jeremy—seen and validated—in her increasing realization of her gifts and interests. And, in corroboration of this, in an interview with me, Jeremy specifically pointed to Leslie as an example of someone who has developed skillsets that are crucial for the organization but that she previously didn't fully realize she possessed. Rebecca describes herself as "a team player. If you need me on shortstop, I'll go there, and so, I've been able to get my hands on a lot of different things and so that, I think, keeps me coming back. It's like every day is new, but then, also…I feel like I have a level of expertise and, I'm not saying that I feel like I'm *indispensable*, but, I feel like I bring *value*." She feels confident in her value, she says, because "the leadership here is very good at expressing that they feel that every person on the team is valuable." Rebecca and Leslie both validate Jeremy's vision of a workplace characterized by equality, humble collaboration, and the flexibility to actively live into a shifting, growing calling.

Contributing to the wellbeing of the BCHP team and collaborating to enable each person to do their individual work well, for the common good, is a recurring theme of conversations with staff. The BCHP staff describe this intra-organizational collaboration as incredibly meaningful. Rebecca tells me she finds fulfillment because "There are just glimpses of, glimpses of me being able to make a difference"; she feels like she is making a difference and "serving a

purpose, both [for her colleagues] but also for that greater community." Liz

describes the BCHP as "an invigorating place to be for people who are always

wanting to learn and do good"; she specifically attributes her love of her job to

her ability to lean into who she is, for the common good: "I like being the quiet

thinker, writer, analyzer. So, working at [the BCHP] has really enabled me to fill

that role and to support that value of doing things carefully and doing things

well, and discerning, and doing the hard work of sustaining the great work that

everyone else is doing." Liz feels that she serves a valuable role at the BCHP, a

role she is especially gifted in and equipped for, but that also works to sustain

the communal, collaborative team efforts. Melanie reflects, "it's nice to know that

if I do my job right, then everyone else can do their job…[I regularly think] 'I'm

working with such great people that are so caring and so able to just charge

forward and do this work.' That empowers me. I go, 'If I…do my stuff right, then

they can do their work and that's one less thing for them to worry about.'"

Melanie sees work at the BCHP as interwoven and collaborative: "We all have

our roles to play," she says.

Jackson explains his love for his job: "I get to grow and change and have

the flexibility to vision and dream for myself." He is also motivated in his work,

he says, because "we just work well as a team. And so, when we have a deadline

and are all coming together working as a team….that is fulfilling." He looks

around at the work his colleagues are doing and thinks: "I can claim to be a part of the team. It's rewarding and they're doing great stuff." Kyle, too, describes the BCHP as "such a great team of experts." He believes the organization thrives by "cultivating a space" for each of these experts to "do their thing in." He describes the highly collaborative, interdependent nature of his job by explaining,

> my role is not to be a visionary in this place, it's to cultivate an environment for people to be visionary—an expert. And that's a different level of leadership than being able to say, 'I gotta be like Jeremy, [because] that's what's valued here.' I can't be Jeremy. So, motivation is to make sure that what [Jeremy]—part prophet, part madman, what he calls into existence works. He's a visionary, and he needs a doer. He needs somebody who can help make things happen.

Kyle describes the BCHP environment as "servant leadership focused and a cultivating environment for experts and visionaries to thrive or to be developed." This description is, I think, a fulfillment of Jeremy's dream of a collaboration of equals made in the image of God, humbly following their shifting senses of calling and/or giftedness, giving of their abilities, recognizing their limitations, and learning from one another.

Implications

The BCHP staff are not politically or theologically monolithic, and they are a diverse mixture of personalities, yet they are a healthy team and work well together because of common commitment to theologically-motivated values. Their diversity coupled with their commitments to equality, common ground,

and humility has enriched their collaboration with one another, and thus their lived experience of collaboration across difference—within the organization—has informed and enriched their understanding of how diverse partnerships are possible and generative.

As discussed previously, wide-ranging collaboration is not as common as one might expect, so to see an organization like the BCHP practice and champion collaboration so inclusively is striking. After spending time in close proximity with the BCHP staff, however, and after speaking with them and observing their interactions, I began to hypothesize that their deep belief in the generative possibilities of collaboration likely arises out of the fact that they experience such respectful, caring collaboration across difference—of belief, training, personality, politics—every day in their own workplace. As this study makes clear, such a deep, unusual commitment to collaboration is animated by theological commitments to honoring all people as equally created in the image of God.

The everyday enactment of their theologically-animated values in the workplace has contributed to the BCHP staff's understanding of what is possible on a larger scale. Their collaboration with each other makes them believe more strongly in collaboration's possibilities. Thus, the everyday enactment of religiously-motivated values becomes a rich resource from which not only to draw meaning and enjoyment at work, but also a source of energy and vision for

what's possible on a broader scale. Other organizations and communities would

do well to similarly consider how their values might reveal possibilities for ways

of being and working for social change that are as unusual, striking, and effective

as the BCHP's collaboration.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The BCHP's Gradualist Approach

This chapter addresses the fourth and final theologically-motivated

rhetorical strategy the BCHP utilizes in its work: gradualism. Commitments to

humility and common ground, particularly, animate this strategy.

Gradualism

As briefly discussed previously in Chapter Five,[1] in Jeremy's book, he

describes the broken streetlight theory, popular in community development (21-

22). In this theory, a new community developer is going door to door, asking

community members to describe the strengths and needs of the community.

Community members begin to name overwhelming, systemic issues: access to

affordable health care, problems with the school system, lack of employment.

The developer hears many community members name these same issues over

and over, but realizes "[the issues] are simply too big to take on first" (21). The

developer is new to the area and has not yet formed a situated ethos, nor has she

amassed enough trust and relationships with people to organize on a large scale.

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[1] On p. 162.

However, the organizer also hears about a smaller-scale, but very real problem: a broken streetlight under which a drug dealer is capitalizing on the darkness to sell drugs, limiting the community's ability to feel safe in their neighborhood at night. The developer recognizes this smaller-scale issue as winnable, rallies people together, and they get the streetlight repaired. This win establishes trust and gives the neighborhood a sense of empowerment, enabling them to "take on more difficult issues" (22).

Jeremy introduces this theory as one of the many ways that he—and the other staff at the BCHP—discuss the role of gradualism as a strategy for the organization. Theories of "incrementalism" are most often discussed in the worlds of political science, administration, government, and international affairs to talk about the implementation of social policies and strategies.[2] To distinguish from these theories, I will use the term gradualism, though they can be used interchangeably without changing the meaning of my argument. When I name gradualism as a strategy for the BCHP, I mean any iteration and enactment of the idea that change takes time. Gradualist approaches are often—and, sometimes, *fairly*—decried as noncommittal, weak, or as supportive of the status quo.

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[2] See Bendor's "Incrementalism: Dead yet Flourishing" and Carstensen's "Ideas are Not as Stable as Political Scientists Want Them to Be: A Theory of Incremental Ideational Change."

However, the BCHP has had success in utilizing gradualist approaches for the accomplishment of their goals.

The gradualist approach taken by the BCHP is yet another manifestation of the values of equality and humility in the face of complexity that are rooted in the realization of the *imago Dei*. Jeremy articulates the need for a gradualist approach as an alternative to cancel culture: the dismissal and/or shaming of those who do not hold your views. Jeremy muses that to build the lasting cultural change that will move society toward enacting the Kingdom of God, the BCHP has to: "help people's hearts and minds be transformed, let them participate in addressing hunger and poverty in their local community regardless of their political, or racial, or socioeconomic makeup—recognize that everybody's a part of the solution." I've already discussed how Jeremy and other BCHP staff use presence, storytelling, and collaboration to work toward this goal. But, to make these deep cultural, ideational changes often takes time.

To describe why he feels that a gradualist approach to change is necessary, Jeremy uses an analogy. He tells me to think about his colleague, Kyle, an outdoor enthusiast and CrossFit coach:

> Kyle can probably bench press like 7,000 pounds, right? It doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter what you feed me, it doesn't matter what environment you have, it doesn't matter if I have the most high-tech sports gear, you put me under the same weight that Kyle can bench press and it will crush my chest. That's just a fact. I don't have that kind of muscle mass; I don't have that kind of muscle memory; I don't have

271

anything that would set me up to be able to max what Kyle can max right now. Now, if somebody…coached me for the next ten years, I still probably couldn't do it, but I might be able to at least make it squirm a little bit and not crush my chest.

Jeremy parallels the need for long-term physical training with the need for gradualist approaches to social justice: "Okay, just because James Cone[3] can lift, can bench press 7,000 pounds of social justice weight, that doesn't mean that [a conservative friend of Jeremy's] can. He's going to have to learn how to grow towards that."

Jeremy tells me he thinks activists and advocates too often try to foist "7,000 pounds of social justice weight" onto people too quickly. As another example, Jeremy uses a book he and I had previously discussed: "what happens is, we take a super progressive book like *The New Jim Crow*,[4] right? And we put it in front of the most conservative person, they immediately reject it, so we say, 'racist and a bigot.' You know? 'Told you so. We knew it all along.'" Jeremy contrasts this dismissal and shaming with the other, gradualist option "of helping somebody, recognizing that, okay, for most people they've got to slowly be exposed to, maybe, an area of sin that they didn't recognize was sin. That's never been told to them that that was sin." This slow exposure is necessary, in

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[3] Cone was a Black liberation theologian, thinker, and activist.

[4] Alexander, The New Press, 2010.

Jeremy's understanding, because it's the most effective (if not the only) way to

eventually get that person to change their "heart and mind" and become a

collaborator, *and* because to do otherwise—to "cancel" the person—is to

perpetuate injustice by arrogantly dismissing a person made in God's image:

> Ultimately, we need that person on board. That's where I think I disagree with a lot of my progressive brothers and sisters. I'm like, because that family, that person that you want to call a white bigot, or whatever, you have to get their bite. You may think that you have enough political power to do it without them, or to cram justice down their throat, or to steamroll, but that's not how it works…because when you do that, one, that small act of injustice has a ramification effect…but when you choose to try to help that individual see racist hatred and bigotry and so on and so forth, and you really take the time to be able to help nurture them, not only do you help change their mind, but you also—it's not, you can't change their mind, but you put them in a place where their mind can be changed.

The gradualist strategy manifests in the BCHP's very DNA as an

organization, in the organization's relationships with community partners and

politicians, and in their recommendations for policies and programs.

Strategic Gradualism: The Palatability of Hunger

In his book, Jeremy tells the story of a failed community development

venture during his early years in San Antonio's West Side (92-95). After a year of

presence with the West Side community members, hearing about what the

community most needed, Jeremy, several Baptist organization community

partners, and West Side community members began working on an immigrant

273

hospitality house—a safe place for newly arrived immigrants to go to receive

assistance. After work on the hospitality house was well underway, one of the

Baptist organization partners decided to rescind their support because "a

hospitality house for undocumented immigrants was too controversial for their

constituency to support" (93). Losing this organization's support meant the

project could not continue. Jeremy was outraged. How an organization could

pull the plug on a project in which they had invested so much and after hearing

"horrific stories of immigrants making their way to the U.S.," Jeremy did not

understand. As Jeremy expressed his anger at the Baptist organization and his

concern that he would lose the community's trust after this failed project, a

community developer and minister friend—Don—said Jeremy had probably

"asked [the Baptist organization] to take on too much out of the gate" (94). Don

asked Jeremy, "you grew up like these folks, right? You were raised with similar

values and concerns?" (94). Jeremy responded that yes, he had been raised

similarly and had similar beliefs, but that he no longer did. Don told him,

> I know, Jeremy…I am grateful for what God is doing in your life. But God
> is working in [the Baptists'] lives too. To be a good organizer, you have to
> listen first. I know you have spent the year listening to people from the
> neighborhood, but have you listened to the people who brought you [to
> work in San Antonio] in the first place? Your job is to really listen. Listen
> to us. Listen to them. (95)

So, Jeremy went back to the West Side community, apologized for failing

to deliver the hospitality house, and began hearing the need for another option,

one much more likely to garner widespread partner organization support: a coffee shop with internet access.

Stories of the result of this more gradualist collaboration, Guadalupe St. Coffee, are recorded in Jeremy's book (95-102). The coffee shop became a community hub, and, in 2008, even drew the attention of a young Senator from Chicago who visited the shop when he was running for President and seeking the Hispanic vote. Then Senator Barack Obama's energizing visit to Guadalupe St. Coffee reawakened Jeremy's dormant interest in politics and how politics "could be a vehicle for positive change" if approached in an effective, collaborative, gradualist way (105). Jeremy's reawakened conviction that politicians could be valuable partners, a conviction that has permeated the BCHP's work, might not have come about had Jeremy quit, as he wanted to, following the failure of the hospitality house instead of following Don's advice for a gradualist approach to social justice rooted in humility and commitment to establishing common ground.

These early experiences understanding firsthand the political and religious context of much of Texas and the accompanying need for social justice gradualism no doubt informed Jeremy's thinking at the founding of the BCHP. You may recall that Jeremy was initially unconvinced by the idea of starting an anti-hunger organization, knowing that addressing hunger was merely

addressing a symptom of the larger problem of poverty. However, thanks to the

mentorship of people like Suzii Paynter, Jeremy began to realize that "Poverty is

incredibly complex. And people in our nation are literally willing to kill one

another to strengthen their ideological agendas, but hunger has consistently been

a uniting issue for our nation and around the globe" (22).

Humility in the face of the complexity of poverty and the complexity of

the relationship between people's contexts, worldviews, and actions, led Jeremy

to realize that, because of his conviction that no one created in the image of God

could be dismissed as an unfit partner, it was necessary to begin this work on an

issue where common ground could be more easily established, fostering trust

and care. These realizations led Jeremy to the conclusion that "hunger is the

broken streetlight of poverty issues, and organizing a systemic response to

address hunger is an important step toward the larger goal of economic

opportunity for all people" (22). Just like the community developer in the broken

streetlight theory needed a manageable, winnable, uniting project to rally people

together, Jeremy believes that "we can learn to trust one another again by

working to reduce hunger, which will then empower us to face these other

debilitating problems with confidence that we can overcome what ails us" (22).

The very DNA of the BCHP, at the core of its early formation, is the gradualist

approach: addressing hunger as a way to address poverty. The fact that

gradualism permeates the organization's approach to relationships with

community partners and to policies is, thus, unsurprising.

Gradualism in Partnerships and Policies

Part of the BCHP's commitment to collaborating across ideological divides

necessitates a gradualist approach in partnerships. In the early years of the

BCHP, Jeremy met with a Congressman to discuss the dire food insecurity issues

in a rural Texas community. The Congressman's response was to dismiss the

claims, "If they really need food, they wouldn't live there" (Everett 115). He said

the hungry people should simply relocate from their rural area to a city with

more jobs. The Congressman's response demonstrates the cultural attitudes

surrounding poverty and hunger that the BCHP is working to change: that the

hungry and poor are either exaggerating their plight ("if it was so bad, they

wouldn't just stay here") or are simply lazy and unwilling to take initiative to

solve their own problems.

The Congressman quickly dismissed the BCHP staff from the meeting and

his office. Jeremy was discouraged and angry. Instead of publicly shaming the

Congressman—which was, Jeremy admits, his first impulse—he adopted a

slower, gradualist approach. Jeremy identified common ground in both men's

profession of Christian faith and then "spent time meeting with this

congressman over the next ten years, reminding him that we are our brother's

keeper and that this means we need to feed the hungry" (116). Jeremy explains

that his ultimate goal in this relationship building was "to slowly introduce him

to the complexities of poverty to see if I could change his mind" (116). Slowly,

over many years and conversations, things began to change. Eventually, at one

point the Congressman was present in his district and had a meeting with a

married couple, both retired schoolteachers, who told him their story of being

unable to have a stable, predictable supply of food. The Congressman told

Jeremy he was astonished that this couple, who had "done everything right" (by

working full careers, raising kids, and going to church), were still hungry. The

Congressman told Jeremy, "we gotta do something about this" (116).[5] The

Congressman's presence in his district and Jeremy's presence in meetings with

him over the course of a decade, the stories of the Congressman's constituents

and those Jeremy told him, and Jeremy's gradualist approach to discussing the

complexities of poverty eventually led the Congressman to more fully embrace

collaboration with the BCHP. Jeremy reflects that "History teaches us that *how*

we go about change should reflect the integrity of our desired outcome. When

we channel self-righteous indignation and anger and belittle those with whom

[5] Of course, this response by the Congressman—to be moved to help only after encountering hungry people who had "done everything right" (by his own standards)—is incredibly problematic. And yet, it still demonstrates movement from his previous position: that hunger in his district didn't exist, period.

we disagree, even when they are perpetuating an injustice, we do not win in the end" (117, emphasis added). For the BCHP staff, strategies must match values. A gradualist approach is reflective of the values that drive the work of the organization: humility, recognition of equality, and a desire to establish common ground; all of which are rooted in an understanding of common humanity, common createdness in the image of God.

The BCHP also advocates gradualist policy recommendations. In the organization's "Recommendations for Reducing Poverty," a report commissioned by and submitted to then Speaker of the House Paul Ryan's office, the BCHP offers nine recommendations. Utilizing, even in document layout, the broken streetlight, gradualist approach, there is an introductory note: "The recommendations are listed by priority, 1-3 being the highest priority and needing the smallest amount of time to achieve" (3). The organization recommends following the gradualist strategy of first accomplishing high priority but easier wins before moving on to more complex problems and solutions. Similarly, one of the recommendations itself reflects gradualism. Recommendation number five regards the need for an Earned Income Tax Credit and an increase in the minimum wage. The recommendation reads:

> One of the most prevalent problems we see through working with our community partners is working individuals who are utilizing government programs but are still not able to accumulate the savings necessary to exit poverty due to a low or minimum wage job. Slowly increasing the

minimum wage, then setting it up to raise annually at the cost of inflation, would avoid the economic shock of doubling the minimum wage immediately. Raising the rate over an eight-year span can reduce adverse effects of increased wages for employers while strengthening economic conditions for America's poorest labor force. (3-4)

The BCHP advocates a twelve-year plan in which the minimum wage is increased by eight percent each year for eight years; then, for the following four years, the wage rate would be increased for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (9). The organization advocates this approach both because "We are aware of the negative side effects of a large increase to the minimum wage" (9), *and* because the recommendation is being made to a Republican Speaker of the House. This gradualist approach to minimum wage increase stands in stark contrast to policy proposals that call for dramatic increases in the minimum wage, proposals that not only often call for the minimum wage to more than double but that also largely generate support from the left but disdain and dismissal from the right. By proposing gradualist policy for both pragmatic reasons and to help facilitate gradualist approaches to relationships with collaborators, the BCHP makes recommendations that further its short-term and long-term goals: pragmatic steps to reduce poverty and food insecurity and increased understanding of and commitment to the cause of anti-poverty work by, over time, changing hearts and minds.

Implications

Popular understandings of the history of social change are often highly revisionist, attributing to one person or event a cataclysmic shift in social understanding that was actually the result of decades (or centuries) of collaborative, gradual effort. An example of this is understanding the Civil War as the end of slavery, but being unaware of the abolitionist efforts and activists gradually working to complicate popular narratives about slaves and slavery and to push for change for decades prior to and during the 19th century.

The "stock story" of Rosa Parks as the catalyst for the Civil Rights movement is similarly revisionist, attributing the beginnings of a movement to the brave but random acts of an obscure working woman who just happened to be in the right place at the right time. However, Rosa Parks was no random working woman; she was already a Civil Rights activist. Her actions were also not random; the Civil Rights movement had been looking for just such a chance as the one she got, so she took it (Everett 83-84). The tendencies to erase or condense the gradualist parts of the histories of social movements are understandable in light of time and space constraints, the inability of the average person to hold encyclopedic knowledge of historical events, etc. However, for the social justice advocate, such knowledge is critical to prevent misconceptions about return on investment of time, energy, and money in social causes. The

BCHP's openly gradualist strategy challenges such misconceptions and, while it

may seem discouraging to imagine putting in a decade of work before seeing

results, such realizations may actually be reframed and understood as

encouraging and motivating. Rather than seeing lack of results as failure, one can

remember that most roads to social change are long and winding.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion: Implications for Research and Rhetorical Education

Overview

This study has provided insight into how religious commitments animate

the values that can foster meaningful rhetorical action in civic life. By

complicating reductive understandings of religious identity and the suitability of

religious commitments and beliefs for the public sphere, I hope to encourage

meaningful conversation about the many questions that arise at the intersections

of religion, civic life, and the academy.

In this conclusion, I briefly consider implications of this study for research

in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Then I devote the majority of this

chapter to some exciting implications of this study for rhetorical education.

Implications for Research

This project has, as the first study of its kind, raised more questions than

it's answered. I want to briefly consider some of the study's implications in two

primary areas of rhetorical studies: 1) reframing the scholarly discussion of

religion and 2) opening new areas of inquiry.

Reframing Inquiry into Religion

As discussed in the introduction to this project, religion is not a topic scholars of Rhetoric and Composition have avoided. However, the treatment of religion and religious identity has been limited and often restricted to several narrow channels, chief among them the problem posed by conservative religious adherents to academia. What I hope this study has done is to extend the work scholars like Vander Lei, Ringer, DePalma, and Geiger have done to see religion and religious commitments as full of rhetorical possibility. While I, of course, hope this project furthers the discussion of the rich possibilities that exploring religious identity has for the classroom, I particularly hope that inquiry into the intersections of religion, rhetoric, and civic life will also continue in more positive, generative, creative ways.

With more than 80% of the world's population self-identified as religiously-affiliated (Hackett and McClendon), explorations of religious identity cannot be relegated to "special topics." Religion is at the heart of many people, groups, and nations' identities, and, while those religious commitments have often been explored—and *rightly* so—for their negative impacts and the ways they cause division, violence, and conflict, religion has also historically been, and continues to be, a significant motivator of the good attempted and done by people in the world.

I hope this study has complicated "stock stories" told about evangelical Christians and those from evangelical backgrounds. While there is, as has been shown in many places throughout this study, merit to many of the criticisms aimed at evangelical Christians, the story of the BCHP staff—many of whom are from evangelical heritages, still identify as evangelicals, and/or work for an institution that is closely identified with evangelicalism—provides a resistance story of sorts to over-generalized conceptions of evangelicals as disinterested in social justice and ideologically inflexible.

I also hope, however, that my exploration of this particular religious heritage makes even clearer the need for similar complication of the stock stories told about other religious traditions. While Christianity, in general, and evangelical Christianity, in particular, often dominate popular discourse in American society for a reason (the sheer percentage of the population that identify with these traditions and their incredible cultural and political influence), religious diversity is a hallmark of American identity, is increasing (Jones and Cox), and deserves far greater scholarly attention than it has received in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Both our field and our popular discourse will benefit from closer, more nuanced examinations of how religious identities of all kinds animate rhetorical action.

Opening New Areas of Inquiry

Besides opening new areas of inquiry into religion and religious identity in public life, this study offers insights into other areas ripe for investigation, including increased investigation into the motivations of social justice advocates, the role of non-religious values in motivating rhetorical action, the preparation of our students and ourselves for productive engagement in civic life, and the uses and limitations of the rhetorical strategies discussed in this project.

In a world plagued by complex social problems and injustices, we need committed advocates and collaborators for justice. Understanding what motivates people to devote themselves to civic causes may better enable us to cultivate dispositions in ourselves and our students that will contribute to our willingness and ability to devote ourselves to advancing justice and solving social problems. While this study has examined the religious motivations of the staff of one organization (*focusing* on one staff member), there are opportunities for inquiry in the motivations of local, state, and federal politicians, nonprofit staff, community developers and organizers, grassroots campaigners, and any other number of advocates for the social good. While religiously-animated and other ideologically-motivated values seem likely candidates for motivations, more research is critical to understanding the textured and diverse possibilities for what motivates people to act on behalf of the common good. And such

research would then illuminate for those of us who are teachers the possibilities

for probing and cultivating such motivations in our students and ourselves.

More research into the uses and limitations of rhetorical presence,

storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism would contribute to understanding

how change happens in both the short- and long-term across diverse social

issues, regions, and demographics. Considerations of innovative new uses of

these strategies as well as their limitations would help not only those of us in

rhetorical studies and education, but also the organizations utilizing these

strategies for the common good.

More research is needed into the strategies used by other social good

organizations, as well. The four strategies at the heart of this project are only a

handful of the tools utilized by the BCHP, and the BCHP is only one

organization. Continuing to develop robust and nuanced understandings of the

rhetorical strategies and the kinds of literacies that are useful in social good work

could contribute to the field of Rhetoric and Composition and to any other field

investigating how work gets done in civic spaces.

Overview

The possible implications for the results of this study to animate work with students are numerous, and I intend to continue exploring those implications in future work. For this conclusion specifically, however, I want to focus on a model the BCHP has created for rhetorical education and that model's implications for the writing classroom.

As established in the introduction to this study, a long-standing goal of rhetorical education is the formation of responsible, engaged citizens. In the global cultural, economic, and political context of the twenty-first century, rejuvenation of interdisciplinary focus on cultivating civic engagement in students has intensified. Like all rhetorical acts, civic-oriented rhetorical education must be responsive to its context. The cultural moment of this study is one of profound concern about the state of civic life and social justice. The world is full of innumerable social ills, profoundly shifting communication landscapes (due largely to technological innovations), and substantial cultural divisions.

However, for many people there is also a renewed sense of and commitment to the possibilities for addressing the social problems, communication breakdowns, and cultural division characteristic of this historical moment. And there is a particular need for popular and scholarly attention to the

possibilities for such healing, justice-oriented work as an outgrowth of religious commitments. As this study has demonstrated, religious beliefs can be a rich resource from which people can draw to engage in rhetorical activism. And, for writing teachers who want to equip students—many of whom are religiously committed[1]—with the rhetorical knowledge, skills, and strategies they need to effectively and responsibly engage in civic life, an excellent place to look for models of such work is to the civic-minded individuals and organizations already conducting it.

Not only does the BCHP provide a model of effective theologically-animated rhetorical strategies at work in social justice fields, but the organization also provides a model for what it looks like to educate students in those rhetorical strategies. The BCHP did not *intend* to specifically create a model for rhetorical education when it began taking yearly trips with Baylor students to explore various hunger and poverty-related topics. However, as I describe in this chapter, the organization has many goals for its student trips, and those goals are, like all of the work of the BCHP, animated by religiously-motivated values and enacted on the trips largely via the rhetorical strategies at the center of this project. The BCHP student trips are thus incredibly rich sites of rhetorical

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[1] And, of course, investigation into motivating beliefs and values is important and valuable regardless of whether/how someone is religiously affiliated.

education—however unconsciously the organization intended them to be so—

and are thus full of possibilities for the work of rhetorical educators.

I briefly overview the BCHP's student trips, describe the organization's

goals for the trips, and explain their methods of achieving those goals. Then I

provide an outline for a writing course centered around the rhetorical strategies

of the BCHP, drawing inspiration from the BCHP's model for student rhetorical

education: their student trips.

A Model for Rhetorical Education: the BCHP's Student Trips

The BCHP's student trips are, like the other work of the organization,

motivated by the BCHP's theologically-animated values of equality, common

ground, and humility. The student trips also seek to cultivate those very values

in students. In this section, I overview the BCHP's student trips and their

structures; then I explain what motivates the trips and how they are rooted in

and teach the religiously-animated rhetorical strategies at the heart of this study.

Trip overview. The BCHP has had incredible success taking Baylor students

on learning-based service trips. Though not identified in this exact way by the

organization, the BCHP trips are designed primarily to teach/emphasize

rhetorical presence: to put students in the presence of community members from

whom they can learn about social problems. BCHP trips are week-long trips co-sponsored with Baylor Missions, a branch of Baylor's Office of Spiritual Life.[2]

The BCHP first partnered with Baylor Missions to create a Hunger in America trip, where students travel with BCHP staff to Washington D.C. to learn about advocacy, policy, and multi-sector collaboration. The BCHP then added an additional trip: Hunger in Texas. The Hunger in Texas trip typically involves traveling for a week to two or three different Texas cities, often hundreds of miles apart, learning about hunger and anti-hunger efforts in incredibly different regions of the state. Both the Hunger in America and Hunger in Texas trips are now annual. In 2019, the BCHP took its first international trip to Rome to meet

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[2] Baylor Missions is not what many people associated with evangelical Christianity—or the Baptist denomination—would think of when thinking about "missions" and "mission trips." Baylor Missions's trips are intentionally not evangelistic; instead, they are intended to foster learning experiences for students while giving them an opportunity to leverage their disciplinary skills in service to a community. Baylor Missions's mission statement is: "to shape Baylor's faithful engagement with Waco and the world by creating intentional opportunities to integrate faith, learning, and service within a broad Christian worldview" ("About Us: What is Baylor Missions?"). Baylor Missions believes that people "can participate in God's Kingdom work" by "finding situations that utilize our specific skills as well as living out the Christian life every day in the classroom, workplace & community, wherever that may be" ("About Us: Guiding Principles"). To this end, Baylor Missions adopts these guiding principles: discipline-specific missions, global partnerships, long-term commitments, reciprocity, and reflection/integration ("About Us: Guiding Principles"). Baylor Missions's model allows for flexible partnerships—working with non-academic departments at the university as well as with faculty, on domestic trips as well as international ones. Baylor Missions traditionally provides infrastructure, logistical support, and help recruiting student participants, and Baylor faculty or full-time staff typically lead trips.

with and learn from the World Food Program and several UN organizations about food insecurity and the refugee crisis. Trips are led by BCHP staff and take place over winter, spring, or summer breaks.

Trip structure. In keeping with both the BCHP and Baylor Missions's goals, these trips are primarily educational. The structure and activities of each trip change from year to year, and each trip leader is given great flexibility in creating the trip as long as it is in line with Baylor Missions's guiding principles.[3] The BCHP's trips, though, share many common threads: meetings with multi-sector collaborators, touring the work of and serving alongside community partners, attending trainings or lectures, and long debrief/reflection conversations among trip members and leaders.

Motivations. The BCHP staff who participate in work with students—primarily on trips, but also with interns or students taking independent study courses—give many motivations for such work. Among the reasons BCHP staff give are helping expand students' frames of reference for understanding the world and helping students make clearer connections between their academic/career interests and their ability to contribute to the good of society.

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[3] See previous fn.

These goals align with those of rhetorical educators who seek for rhetorical education to better equip students to ethically, effectively, and enthusiastically engage in the public sphere.

Brian, who originated the trips, says that, first of all, the trips are one of the best ways the BCHP can interact with the life of Baylor University and with Baylor students—and the BCHP's connection to a university is something Brian articulates as unique about the BCHP's role and work in its field. For Brian personally, though, his experiences as an educator led him to the trips: "I believe in travel as a methodology of not just learning, but of changing and growth, personal growth. I believe in experiences as a way of shaping our way that we understand the world and the way that we then have modeled for us ways to interact with the world." Experiential presence in new environments or circumstances serves a dual-focused pedagogical goal: expanding frames of reference for understanding the world and expanding methodological approaches for interacting and learning with communities. Brian believes the trips are good for students, for their formation and growth, but that they are also, for the same reason, "a great way to further [the BCHP's] cause" by helping students "at an impressionable moment of their lives, to understand a way of thinking and understand a way in which systems work in our society and our world works, and ways that they can plug into that and influence that." Helping

students gain increased understanding is the primary motivation for the BCHP's trips. Brian articulates it as "personal growth," Kyle (who also leads trips) calls it "a better consciousness," but both mean helping students better understand social problems and what they can and should do about them.

Another motivation for the trips is wanting students to realize that/how their disciplinary interests and fields are relevant and useful in civic work, regardless of what those disciplines are. Leslie tells me that students sometimes come to her because they become "very passionate, feel very called, and they want to do great things" to address a particular social issue. She says these students often "decide they're gonna change their majors and be a social worker." Leslie's response is,

> "No. No, no, no, no. You're a math genius. You're a math major. You love math…Stay in math." I mean, social work is fantastic and we need good social workers, but it's just—People that are called to a sense of wanting to do good through their occupation, I think we feel like you have to go to seminary or social work or whatever and we need some of those, but we also need some people staying in their fields of computer science or math or journalism or whatever it is, and then there are ways to apply that, it's just that we don't do a good job of telling those stories and showing those examples, and of helping people see that.

Leslie wants students to see that their diversity of interests and skills is an asset to social justice work, that there is a place for them and their academic discipline in civic life and that such diversity is crucial for collaboration. The BCHP trips are an excellent way for the organization to combat the fact that, as

294

Leslie says, too often the picture students have of someone equipped to work for the social good is too narrow and monochromatic. Brian gives a similar explanation of the need for greater realization of the multi-disciplinary ways to work in social good work, and he also ties it back to religious beliefs as well.

Brian says that because Baylor tends to attract students "who come from a strong faith background," he sees a lot of possibility for helping students realize the ways in which their religious beliefs and convictions can and, in his opinion, *should* be animating disciplinary and vocational choices. Brian explains that a student may become a business major simply because that's just "the way they grew up, that's like what you do." Once in the Business program, Brian says, the student may be "presented with an array of jobs that don't necessarily tap into…the better leanings of what a faith cause brought them here. They're not jobs about making the world a better place or serving humanity." Brian sees trips as one way to help students make connections between the commitments of their faith and their disciplinary and career choices. Brian recognizes that students only know what they've been exposed to: "If you only see that the skills that you perceive yourself having and the interests that you have, that this is the set of careers that are available to you for that, then this is where you're going to end up." However, he says, "if I can say, 'hey, you know what, those skills that you have and the strengths that you have and that knowledge that you're interested

in and this way of thinking about the world that you're interested in can also manifest in these kinds of ways and in these kinds of places.'" This, he hopes, is what the trips help do. By exposing students to the BCHP's multi-sector collaborators, students can see diverse people—politicians, corporations, community organizers, clergy members, and researchers—all working toward a civic goal: poverty reduction.

Brian gives a hypothetical example of helping a business student in Baylor's Supply Chain Management degree realize that the World Food Program has the second largest supply chain system in the world, second only to the U.S. military, and then introducing that student to the staff doing supply chain management work at the World Food Program. Brian believes students too often simply have no idea of the diverse ways their disciplinary interests can be leveraged in careers in social good work. He says,

> I have to believe that if we can figure out some ways to make better connections [between students' academic/career interests and jobs that utilize those interests for social good], that there will be students who are coming with these values that lend themselves at least to picturing how you make the world a better place, and present them with job opportunities for making the world a better place.

Theologically-animated rhetorical education. The BCHP's trips function to expose students to issues they may not know about in a way that minimizes the tendency for white savior complexes (which is perhaps particularly important in

religious institutions or traditions that have a history of evangelism—winning

converts—taking precedence over humility, learning, and human flourishing).

The BCHP's trips function in this way because they utilize the rhetorical

strategies discussed in this project—presence, storytelling, collaboration, and

gradualism—in ways that foreground the theologically-motivated values of

equality, common ground, and humility.

Ultimately, all of the trips engage in some way the theologically-animated

rhetorical strategies at the heart of this project. Rhetorical presence is practiced as

students are literally put in the presence of communities and asked to mindfully

learn from and reflect on the importance of that proximity. Kyle explains that

one thing that motivated the establishment of the Hunger in Texas trip was that

Texas is "just a big damn place. And [even if you grew up in Texas, you] don't

know much of it." Kyle said the BCHP staff wanted students to know "what's

happening in your own backyard." And, Kyle says, the way to get to see what's

happening in your backyard is to be present in the places you don't know: "it

just kind of came to be we wanted to go and be present, we want to get an idea of

what's on the ground, what's happening. So, be with the people that are serving

in these institutions, see if we can learn, glean experience, see something that's

happening as they're addressing hunger in systems." Kyle says the job of the trip

leader is to "put students in the situation and guide them and be present with

them, so that they don't go do something like this on their own and not know

what to do." The goal, according to Kyle, for students who participate in the

BCHP's trips is that "they walk away with a consciousness, and then they walk

away with a better understanding of what it means to be helpful versus hurtful,

and what are the ways to enter into community, and to be present in community,

and to be real with those folks." Kyle centers the trips' educational possibilities

around presence: taking students to be present in places and environments they

are unfamiliar with and being fully present with students in that learning.

Story-hearing and -telling are also important components of BCHP trips

as well: students hear and share stories from community partners, tell stories

from their days with their team members and leaders other during team

reflections in the evenings, and are encouraged to share stories of their

experiences and learning upon their return to Baylor. As a central strategy of the

organization, collaboration is heavily emphasized throughout the trips as

students are put in the presence of the BCHP's diverse collaborators. In one day

on a trip, students may visit a food bank and hear from its CEO, have a meeting

with local law enforcement to learn about their homelessness task force, give a

food insecurity presentation to the staffers of elected officials, and then end the

day eating a meal with a local religious congregation. All of the in-person

exposure, stories, and diverse collaboration helps students realize the nature of most social change: that it is the result of long-term, gradual, collaborative work.

Motivating the educational strategies of taking students to be present in communities, to engage with collaborators, to hear people's stories, and to realize the complexity of social problems and the gradual, often behind-the-scenes ways that change happens, are commitments to equality, common ground, and, particularly, humility. These theologically-motivated values not only animate the BCHP's trips but they are also the values the trips are designed to foster in students. BCHP trips are learning-focused, taking a much humbler approach than many mission trips. Students are taught that they are there to learn, to listen—not to fix problems or assume unwarranted levels of expertise. On these trips, students interact with and hear stories from people from backgrounds different than their own, challenging them to consider many forms and causes of inequality and to try to establish common ground across difference. And, because of Baylor Missions and the BCHP's focus on reflection/integration of learning, students are challenged to consider how what they're learning can contribute to their own understandings, commitments, and disciplinary/vocational goals. The BCHP teaches students, on trips, the strategies that they (the BCHP) know are effective. Thus the trips emanate from religiously-

299

animated commitments to presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism, and the trips educate students in those strategies.

Pedagogical Possibilities

There are innumerable possible implications for applying in the writing classroom the rhetorical education model developed by the BCHP in their student trips. The BCHP's student trip model teaches students about rhetorical presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism—the very strategies the BCHP staff themselves use to accomplish their work. Thus, if rhetorical educators aim to help students cultivate the rhetorical resources necessary to effectively engage in civic life, there is no better place to learn what such effective strategies are and how to implement them than to learn from the people and organizations already doing such work.

This chapter demonstrates how the theologically-animated rhetorical strategies of the BCHP and their student trip model for education in those strategies can be adapted for use in the university writing classroom. To demonstrate just a few of these possibilities, I have created a model for a writing course centered around the four rhetorical strategies at the heart of this study. The assignment sequence and the assignments themselves could easily be altered for varying levels of writing course (from first-year to advanced), various institutional contexts (religious/non-religious; small/large; public/private;

rural/urban), and for various themes/focuses. I provide here simply a template, intended to be creatively shaped in context-sensitive ways as we rhetorical educators cultivate increased civic capacities in our students and ourselves.

Assignment number one: This I Believe *essay.* NPR's *This I Believe* (*TIB*) series asks participants to write short essays explaining a deeply-held personal belief and how that belief is demonstrable in their lived experience. I have taught *TIB* essays in both first-year and upper-level writing courses as ways of investigating personal beliefs, values, and positionality. Students consistently report that these essays are both challenging and meaningful for them as they seek to more closely connect what they (at least *say* they) believe with what they do.

As this study has shown, the rhetorical strategies of the BCHP are motivated by theological and religious commitments. The work of a writing classroom devoted to citizen-formation would greatly benefit from asking students to investigate their religious and/or ideological commitments and how those beliefs and values can animate the rhetorical practices that create real change in the world. Similar conversations, about beliefs and values and what they might mean for justice advocacy, are had throughout BCHP student trips: in private writing and reflection time (in journals), in team sharing in the evenings, and in informal conversations throughout the trip.

A *This I Believe* essay is an excellent first assignment in a writing course. The composition of such an essay allows students to begin with what they assume will be an easy assignment: writing about what they know, themselves. And although the *TIB* assignment proves more challenging than many students anticipate, they also typically enjoy the opportunity for introspection and investigation. Beginning the semester with a *TIB* essay also requires students to enter the rest of the semester more mindful of their own positionality, and, for the purposes of a civic-focused course rooted in this study, understanding beliefs and how they animate values and rhetorical strategies is an essential part of discovering available rhetorical resources.

Thus, a 3-4 page *TIB* essay is an excellent start to a course on rhetorical strategies designed to enable civic participation and social change. In the essay, students are required to pick a deeply-held belief (religious or otherwise) and hone in on it, explaining to an audience who may or may not share their commitment what the belief is, how they understand or define it, and how it is evident in their lived experience. Students could then add on to the formal essay or to do informal investigatory work throughout the semester determining what values underlie their belief and what those values make possible for rhetorical action. As the result of such work, students investigate themselves and what

motivates them (essential work for social justice advocates) and reveal possible

internal resources of which they may have previously been unaware.

Assignment number two: social change analysis. Students are shown on BCHP

trips that much of the work behind the headlines of social innovations and

breakthroughs is being done in communities, by coalitions of individuals and

organizations that have been consistently and committedly working for equity

and justice, gradually, over the course of months and years and decades. These

revelations are so important because they counter the misconception that social

change typically happens quickly or as the result of one person or one group of

people. Such corrections in thinking are critical for sustaining long-term

commitment and engagement. Our expectations matter: if people expect

something to be easy or fast and it proves difficult and slow, they will be much

more tempted to give up. If we teachers want students to become citizens who

are willing to commit to the long-term work that much social change requires,

we need to be part of helping correct the misconception that most social change

occurs quickly, randomly, or single-handedly.

The composition classroom is a place with incredible potential for righting

(or, writing) the wrongs of revisionist social histories to foster greater

understanding in students about how change really happens. To teach the

necessary analytic skills required for effective rhetorical practice, a civic-focused

writing course modeled on the BCHP's strategies can adopt for an analysis essay a gradualist strategy focus. There are two primary options for how such an essay could be shaped.

The first option for such an analysis assignment is that students could be required to pick a social change movement or moment (at any level: local to global) and then look behind the proverbial curtain and write about who and/or what they find. Students can analyze the effect of the mostly unseen influences on their chosen social change campaign or analyze why they think such influences are largely unknown/ignored.

The second option is that students could be required to consider a social change they hope to see and then to write a long-term campaign strategy for addressing that issue on the local level, considering what gradualist strategies may be necessary or appropriate to accomplish their goals. The rigors of such an assignment may make it better suited to upper-level courses, but I believe it could be adapted for first-year courses as well, in the model of a problem-solving assignment, but one that focuses on social problems and local, gradual solutions.

An analytic assignment focused on gradualist social strategy allows students to develop many of the critical thinking, researching, and writing skills writing courses hope students learn: investigation (especially deep, behind-the-scenes investigation), analysis, cause and effect, and problem solving. Such an

assignment also, however, exposes students to more information about social change and social justice work, changing the frames of reference through which they understand who a social justice advocate can be and how social change happens.

Assignment number three: story-centered ethnography. The BCHP's student trip model teaches students *through* rhetorical presence about the efficacy of such a strategy. The BCHP trips also encourage students to listen and learn from the stories of the community partners and trip members, and then to tell their own stories when they return from the trip. All of this work on the BCHP's student trips requires collaboration from students: between them and the BCHP, with each other, and with community partners on the trips. As a result, the students work and learn collaboratively about the incredible diversity of collaboration in the work of the BCHP. There are many possibilities for combining these rhetorical strategies—presence, storytelling, and collaboration—in the university writing classroom. One option that is particularly energizing to me is that of a collaborative story-based ethnography.

In such an assignment, students would conduct ethnographic research on a microcommunity in some way involved with a social issue the participating student (or student*s*, if the assignment were conducted collaboratively) was interested in investigating (or that was assigned, in the event of a themed

305

course). Though the final ethnographic product would, as ethnography does, involve analysis, academic research, and an argument, the student/s would be encouraged to center the stories of the community members as a primary source of support for their argument.

Conclusion

Engaging the rhetorical strategies of the BCHP in the classroom would, like all forms of civic/community-focused pedagogy, demand attention to limitations and ethical considerations. Such work raises critical questions about positionality and reciprocity; and clear definitions, boundaries, and roles (of students, community members, the instructor) are likewise essential to ethical work with communities. Such ethical considerations are of critical importance and demand much labor (including unseen, unappreciated emotional and intellectual labor); however, the time and energy such endeavors demand are, at least to a significant degree, worth the results. In a social world in desperate need of intellectually-capable, rhetorically-competent, deeply empathic, committed agents for social good, we teachers can enact our own commitments to the greater good by equipping our students to become such citizens.

Brian remarks that the BCHP's trips—which serve as a model for the classroom education described above—are often so powerful, so formative for everyone involved, that he often thinks, "we wouldn't need to do the other stuff

that we do if we could take enough students through this experience." He reflects that the student trips themselves—these combined enactments of presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism—are so effective that he now realizes that they are "a valid way of accomplishing [the ultimate goals of the BCHP]."

This reflection is striking. By enacting the theologically-animated values of equality, common ground, and humility through educating students in the very rhetorical strategies that the BCHP uses in its other work in the world—presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism—the organization is helping change culture (student understandings) while also preparing students to be informed about and prepared to engage in ethical, effective civic work. Rhetorical educators frequently espouse similar desires and commitments to inform and prepare students to be responsible, justice-seeking citizens. And, those of us teachers who are committed to such ends often also want to—ourselves—engage actively in work for the social good. What Brian is saying is that in the very act of teaching and helping students prepare for active civic life, we—the educators, the trip leaders, the teachers—are accomplishing great work for the social good.

CHAPTER TEN

Afterword

Implications for the BCHP and Other Organizations

In keeping with my commitment to reciprocity, it is my hope that this project is helpful to the BCHP staff, who have collaborated so generously with me. I hope this study yields benefits for the BCHP and similar organizations in four primary ways: 1) by increasing knowledge of and exposure to the broad field of social good work and, specifically, the work of the BCHP; 2) by illuminating the successes, limitations, and tensions of four of the BCHP's strategies; 3) by encouraging critical reflection on the connections between values—individual and organizational—and strategies; and 4) by making explicit the BCHP's intra-organizational health and teamwork in ways that are generative for the BCHP's continued growth and for other organizations as they seek to foster similarly supportive, collaborative work cultures.

Strategic Success, Limitations, and Tensions

The BCHP is, by most any metric, a successful organization. Though this study has closely considered only part of the work of the organization, the four strategies discussed in this dissertation have contributed substantially to the

organization's robust contributions in regions around Texas, in Washington D.C., and—increasingly—nationally.

Hopefully, the illumination of these strategies, their possibilities, and their limitations will foster productive conversation at the BCHP. The questions this project raises regarding the BCHP's use of presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism are questions worth explicit consideration. The project raises questions that could lead to conversations regarding what presence might look like for the organization in its new structure, whose stories are still not being heard and told, what unexplored opportunities exist for collaboration, and how an organization maintains a gradualist approach when collaborating with many partners, many of whom are, from the beginning, operating from different places on ideological, theological, and political spectrums. These questions are just a few of the many questions this project raises for the BCHP.

All social good organizations would benefit from discussions of how the strategies used by the BCHP might be incorporated into their work. Presence, storytelling, collaboration, and gradualism have generated real change in the work of the BCHP; similar organizations might consider adopting and adapting these strategies for their own contexts.

However, these strategies are also rife with tensions and limitations as well, many of which deserve serious consideration. Regarding rhetorical

presence, questions about colonialism and imperialism are crucial, *particularly* when those establishing rhetorical presence are from a more privileged, powerful group. And this is often the case for the BCHP. Nine out of ten of the participants of this study are White. Most of the participants of this study are highly educated, with at least one advanced degree. One way to mitigate some of the possible harm the establishment of rhetorical presence—however well-intentioned—might do in less-privileged communities would be to diversify the BCHP staff. If more women (though this is the area of diversity the BCHP is most advanced in), people of color, people from low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ folks, and people from immigrant backgrounds were integrated into the BCHP staff, *their* presence in central office would then likely impact the rhetorical presence enacted by the organization, for the better.

Similarly, tensions abound in storytelling. Particularly, again, related to power and diversity: Whose stories are getting told and whose are not? Who has the *right* to tell a particular story? What are the ethical considerations of bearing witness, via storytelling, to human suffering caused by poverty and injustice? How can stories that seek to reveal and challenge exploitation and dehumanization accidentally end up perpetuating those very things, and how can this be avoided? These questions are critical for the work of all storytellers; and the BCHP—like all who tell stories—must continually consider them.

Collaboration and gradualism, too, are complicated. For example, while diverse collaboration leads to better solutions, and while the BCHP's collaboration is an outgrowth of deeply-held values, there are questions about the limits of such collaboration. Where are the boundary-lines drawn in collaboration? To what extent is it ethical to collaborate with someone in one area (or on one issue) when that person (or organization) is actively causing harm in another area? *Who* makes these decisions (draws the boundaries)?

Similarly, gradualist approaches are often fronts for maintaining the status quo or being afraid to challenge those in power. The tension between gradualism's efficacy and historical significance and its ease-of-use as a tool for hiding from discomfort or conflict are complicated, with no easy answers.

And, of course, there is also the tension between adopting a strategy because it aligns with your values and adopting a strategy because it is pragmatic. In the event that both are true (a strategy is adopted because it aligns with your values *and* is pragmatic), how is such a balance navigated and maintained? How far is an organization willing to go in one or the other direction before needing to course-correct?

Of course, there are no easy, clear answers to these questions. But they *must* be asked, debated, visited and revisited. My ardent support for the BCHP and my belief that the staff of the organization are actively working, in good

faith, to align their rhetorical practices with their theologically-animated values compels me to encourage and remind the BCHP—as I must consistently do for myself—to consider and debate and reconsider and discuss the ethical tensions and questions inherent in social justice work.

Connections Between Values and Strategies

The heart of this project has been demonstrating the connection between religious commitments and theological beliefs, values, and rhetorical strategies. The rich creative possibility these connections generate for action that is aligned with identity and values demands that organizations consider an explicit audit of their values—organizational and personal—and how those values are enacted.

Both individuals and organizations often espouse values by which they hope to operate and be recognized. There can be, however, a gap between a lived value and an aspirational one. This gap exists when there is no action, no evidence, that the aspirational value is being enacted, being lived. For individuals and organizations to more closely align their actions with their articulated values, they will need to conduct a careful examination of both: what they say/aspire to and what they do. This project can, hopefully, serve as a model for how such inquiry might be conducted. This inquiry could be conducted formally or informally, organizationally or individually; even the questions I

asked in interviews[1] could be generative questions to consider as an individual

and/or as an organization in order to gauge what is motivating work and how

those motivations—beliefs, values—are expressed in the work.

An organization need not be religiously-affiliated and individual social

change agents need not be religious for productive consideration of the

relationship between beliefs, values, and strategies. As many of the BCHP staff

themselves point out: religious identities and commitments are in no way the

only identities, commitments, and beliefs capable of animating meaningful action

in the civic sphere. The reality, though, is that all of us are acting from *some* form

of commitment, some values or beliefs, some narratives about the world and the

people around us. Explicit reflection on and identification of these animating

beliefs and values and how they might impact action can help clarify aims and

methods and reenergize and refocus listless efforts.

Finally, explicit considerations of strategies and the values that animate

them may also provide common ground for collaboration between partners who

may not otherwise have recognized commonality. Whether commitment to

equality stems from belief in the *imago Dei*, humanism, or democratic political

ideology, that commitment to equality can provide a launching point for

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[1] See Appendix on pp. 259.

collaboration. And, while differing origins of such a commitment to equality may change the approach to enacting it or the vision of its realization, the shared commitment can be enough to gather people together at the table.

Intra-organizational Health

Many organizations seek to foster a collaborative, supportive work environment. The BCHP central office staff has done so incredibly effectively. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the staff of the BCHP feel valued, and their sense of belonging and contribution to a team has been one of, if not *the* primary motivating factor in their work and commitment to their organization and cause.

As I was holding one-on-one conversations with the central office staff and hearing each staff member eventually bring up their love for their colleagues and/or their sense of contribution to the BCHP team, I sensed—even before interviews were complete—that this thread would be an important one. The environment Jeremy has sought to create—an environment in which each team member experiences herself as valued and has the flexibility to lean and grow into "calling" and giftedness—has, indeed, been created. I am under no illusions that there is no tension in the BCHP central office; nor, I think, are any of the staff. However, the staff repeatedly express affection, support, and respect for one another, and, as a result, many staff name this very environment as their motivation for their work.

As the BCHP grows, expands, and shifts, I hope this study's discussion of intra-office collaboration and the ways in which that environment is an outgrowth of theological commitment to the recognition of the *imago Dei* and guiding values such as equality and humility, provides helpful food for thought and conversation as the organization seeks to maintain and cultivate these collaborative work environments in the decades ahead.

Similarly, the BCHP can serve as a model for organizations seeking to cultivate healthier work cultures. Regardless of what commitments—religious, ideological, or otherwise—an organization's leadership and/or staff may have, the BCHP staff make clear that staff who feel seen, respected, and valued as individuals, who are allowed flexibility and leadership, and whose contributions to a team are recognized, experience their work culture in positive ways that foster productivity due to commitment to the team and to the team's goals. Belief in the *imago Dei* is not a prerequisite for cultivating such an environment; in fact, for the above reasons, sheer pragmatism may be enough of a commitment. But particularly if an organization *is* religiously committed and/or holds commitments similar to those articulated by the BCHP staff, the model described here may illuminate how work cultures can—and *should*—be places of equality, collaboration, and humility.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. What is your job title and what do you do at [the BCHP]?

2. If you're at a dinner party, and someone asks what you do [for work], what do you say? What's your dinner party answer?

3. What do you understand [the BCHP's] mission to be?

4. What, if anything, do you think collectively/organizationally motivates the staff to work toward [the organization's mission]?

5. What initially motivated you, personally, to work for [the BCHP]?

6. What motivates you now to continue working [for the BCHP]?

7. Do you, and if so how, find the work you do at [the BCHP] meaningful?

8. Do you, and if so how, feel that your personal beliefs and/or values are enacted in your everyday work?

9. What are the most common forms of writing that you do in your job?

10. What do you consider when deciding how to represent/articulate your work to others (especially in writing)? Examples?

11. How do you articulate your work differently in/according to different contexts? Examples?

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