The Church as a Workplace

Navigating Competing Ideas and Practices within Religious Employment Institutions

Lenore M. Knight Johnson, Trinity Christian College

Abstract

The church, as an institution, is a religious community informed by certain beliefs and values but for clergy it is also employer. Drawing from interviews with 79 pastors and spouses, this paper explores the competing dynamics between congregational employment practices and clergy ideologies and expectations. While pastors are forthright in describing ministry as a job, many hold the church to a higher standard compared to secular employers, drawing from a set of ideas and values I call an "ideology of community." I examine the consequences stemming from different congregational approaches, including churches mimicking secular institutions and churches operating as alternative institutions.

Keywords: clergy, families, congregations, work, sociology

Introduction

When Dena Lockwood, a single mother in Chicago, was fired from her job after taking a day off to care for her sick daughter, the story made headlines, leading to a successful lawsuit claiming discrimination against parents (Sachdev). Stories like Lockwood's illuminate the reality that work, family, and personal life frequently conflict, and indeed a wealth of research addresses how the structural realities of employment stand in tension with our family and personal lives. Work schedules do not align with children's school schedules, employers who fail to offer paid time off force people to work while sick, and family leave policies in the United States fall far behind those of other industrialized nations.

Lockwood's experience symbolizes a wider, societal problem and common issue for contemporary, working adults in need of advocacy and policy solutions. But work-life conflict also includes an ideological level, illuminating the contrasts between people's ideas about work-family conflict and the actual, material realities of lived experience. This present study builds upon current research on the conflicts between work and personal life, examining a population where these categories are intricately connected – Protestant Christian pastors and clergy spouses. Religion is one area typically relegated to personal life, but in the case of clergy, religion is woven throughout work, family, and personal life. And while religion varies in significance across the diverse contexts clergy families navigate, it also serves as a common thread shaping how clergy understand the role of the church as simultaneously a spiritual community and a workplace. Pastors are, all at once, religious individuals, members of religious families involved in a religious community, and religious workers who are employed by religious institutions. How, then, do they understand conflicts between work, family, and personal life when these realms are so tightly woven together?

Drawing from in-depth interviews with married, heterosexual, Protestant Christian pastors and spouses, this study focuses on the various ways churches function as employers and how pastors and clergy families experience a congregation in relation to their own ideas about work, family, and personal life. The analysis builds on an important body of research emphasizing work-life integration as an alternative to the conventional notion of work-life balance. I argue that compartmentalization – creating clear distinctions between work and personal life in order to maintain quality of life – is unrealistic for pastors because religion holds such a strong presence across life spheres. For clergy (and their spouses), religion represents a perspective that shapes how they think about work, family, and personal life. Families are brought into the life of the church, individual spirituality shapes how one does work and family, and the role of the church as a workplace complicates these dynamics. These ideas, in turn, impact how clergy families navigate the competing functions of the church.

While one may embrace particular ideas on how family or work should be structured, these ideas do not necessarily translate into actual practice. The relationship between ideas, values, and actual practice as it relates to work-life conflict is at the center of this paper. In examining how clergy engage with their congregations as employees, I consider how religious ideas and values shape the ways clergy assess the diverse but interwoven roles the church serves in their lives and that of their family. I look beyond the structural circumstances and consider the ideological perspective clergy families employ to make sense of work-life integration as well as work-life conflict. Do congregations, in their actual practice as employers, align with particular ideas and values, or do their practices conflict?

I call this an "ideology of community" because it represents a broader way of thinking that, in turn, justifies social actions and interactions. A "cultural tool kit," best exemplified in Ann Swidler's discussion on culture in action, is a set of ideas we draw from in response to unsettledness or conflict. While Swidler's exploration of culture is not limited to religion, her approach applies well to the myriad ways individuals draw from religious ideas and values to make sense of and respond to various social situations. Emerson and Smith, for example, utilize this concept as a foundation for their study of white evangelical responses to racial inequality, illustrating how a "white evangelical cultural tool kit" (76) informs how some Christians understand and address racism as an individual, rather than systemic, problem.

The ideology of community is also rooted in a sociological perspective that religion serves as a set of beliefs and values that inform and actively shape our understanding and engagement with the social world, in line with Peter Berger's sacred canopy where "everything 'here below' has its analogue 'up above'" (34). Recognizing how clergy families more accurately integrate rather than balance competing realms of life fits with this canopy image. I use the term community specifically to stress the values of mutual care, commitment, and investment stemming from religious beliefs and values. Clergy in this study largely view the church as more than a congregation they serve, and spouses view churches as more than their wife or husband's employer. It is not a one-sided relationship but rather one built on mutuality, trust, and shared commitment – a community. The tensions that clergy in this study encounter between work, family, and personal life are partly about time, schedule, and financial constraints, but these tensions play out amid a set of ideas – an ideology – framing the church as an institution grounded in values of community and care. Their assessments, then, of the actual functions of the church as an employer are less rooted in the structural conflicts between work and personal life (since work and personal life intersect so deeply) and more in the conflict between this ideological tool kit and actual reality or lived experience of working in a church.

Among participants in this study, pastors and clergy spouses frequently compare congregations to communities. As clergy families consider how churches function in comparison to other organizations, they draw from this ideological perspective that congregations represent a different model of employer. In the eyes of clergy, congregations are not simply voluntary organizations or social gathering sites, but communities of like-minded people who gather around shared religious beliefs and values (Becker; Ammerman 2005), and this sets churches apart more than any other characteristic. Yet the pastors and spouses in this study find that congregations function much like secular employers, and many find themselves navigating the conflicts between what they expected or hoped (an ideological framing of the church as employer) and the reality that churches are no different from secular employers. Indeed, congregations follow many of the same patterns and guidelines as secular employers: negotiating salaries; offering health, dental, and retirement benefits; conducting performance reviews; and maintaining standards for paid time off. Clergy families recognize this reality at the same time it stands in conflict with their ideas about the church as a countercultural institution. These ideas and values around what the church ought to be in the eyes of clergy families represent the "ideology of community" and serve as the lens through which pastors interpret and experience the church as a workplace in both positive and critical ways.

When congregations offer care and support for clergy and their families, they set a standard beyond a typical business or organization, which clergy positively align with their ideas and values of what the church ought to be – the ideology of community. However, when churches function in ways similar to secular organizations, clergy families in this study express a sense of conflict, tension, and in some cases betrayal. I argue that these tensions are partially rooted in structural conflicts, such as managing family time or self-care, but are more broadly rooted in a conflict between the ideology of community and the actual reality of congregational operations. The myriad roles the church plays for clergy families, and the way religion is woven throughout work, family, and personal life reflects the problem in approaching these spheres

of everyday life as isolated entities that can be balanced rather than intertwined elements. Ideas and values are an important part of understanding work-life conflict and this study illustrates the importance of including an ideological analysis in efforts to create greater quality of life around work, family, and personal life.

Research Foundations

Sociological research on the intersections between work, family, and personal life serves as a backdrop for this study. Work, home, family, and personal life are organized in ways that foster a sense of separation between these spheres, reinforcing powerful cultural ideologies. But the actual, lived experiences within contemporary families show that the boundaries between public and private life are fluid social constructs (Nippert-Eng). Myriad conflicts exist for those who participate in the paid labor force as "public life" and manage demands of family and personal life (Blair-Loy; Christensen; Folbre; Garey; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Jacobs and Gerson; Townsend; Williams), typically around parenting (Correll et al.; Crittenden; Deutsch; Gornick and Meyers; Williams) and challenges with securing adequate and affordable childcare (Edin and Lein; Hansen; Hays; Uttal). Indeed, categories we may experience as "opposites" like family life and paid labor are more accurately understood as "interpenetrating" (Rapp) in that the ideas and practices in each realm influence each other. For example, the important advances and expanded opportunities for women in the paid labor force are limited when the gendered division of labor in the home remains constant (Hochschild 1989; Gerson 2002; Stone). Such conflicts lead to heightened stress for working adults, mostly women, trying to manage a career alongside personal responsibilities. And when dual-career couples who share economic equity establish more egalitarian home arrangements, childcare, housework, and other responsibilities of "private life" transfers to lower income women who fulfill these roles for middle and upper middle-class families (Hertz; Hochschild 2000; Thistle). Indeed, care work is no longer a private responsibility (if it ever was), evolving into another market-based commodity to buy and sell (Hochschild 2003, 2013).

Workplace policies and practices impact the dynamics of family and personal life, just as family life affects one's experiences in the paid labor force. Work-life conflict and its impact on career trajectory is perhaps most noticeable among parents of young children (Moen and Yu; Voydanoff), though caring for aging parents or other relatives can also detrimentally affect workplace engagement (Grzywacz et al.). Mothers in particular face penalties in advancement, furthering the gender wage gap (Budig and England; Correll et al.; Crittenden) and encounter negative assumptions around their level of career commitment (Blair-Loy; Stone). Men increasingly notice how family life impacts work, especially among heavily involved fathers living with their children (Eggebeen and Knoester). Women are most noticeably influenced by the way work functions as a gendered institution (Acker) and the gendered assumptions underlying notions of an "ideal worker" (Williams), but there are negative consequences for men as well, particularly those desiring fuller participation in family life (Cohen; Coltrane).

The distinction between ideology and lived experience provides a useful framework for understanding why people continue to struggle over the intersection of work, family, and personal life, and serves as a central, theoretical foundation for this study. The paid labor force and, more broadly, social policy are structured around a family model that is no longer dominant and perhaps never was (Coontz; Stacey; Thorne). Most notably, the single income,

male breadwinner family is a limited interpretation of a normative family, and yet as an idea this family form still shapes the ways many people make sense of their own experiences. For example, Hansen shows how people strive toward an independent nuclear family, believing this is the norm, but in actuality most families are more "interdependent," relying on outside help to maintain career, parenting and personal responsibilities. While such kin networks have long served as effective ways of managing competing demands (Stack), the ideological emphasis on individualism overshadows the benefits of such models.

Other research highlights the ideological pressures on mothers in senior career positions who sense criticism from both sides as they seek to focus on both work and family (Blair-Loy). Gerson suggests that women make choices regarding work and parenting based on an "interaction between socially structured opportunities and constraints and active attempts to make sense of and respond to these structures" (1985: 192), stressing the fluidity of institutions in relationship to personal life. The reality for most workers is one of ongoing negotiation between entangled roles and responsibilities amidst a context where paid labor, care work, parenthood, and gender are interconnected (Jacobs and Gerson). Rather than assuming working adults "balance" exclusive tasks, the image of "weaving" (Garey) or "integration" (Friedman; Kreiner; Kreiner et al.) offer more fitting descriptors.

While all workers struggle with blurred boundaries to some degree, for clergy families, these issues add a level of complexity. Not only are religious communities integral in shaping dominant notions of family (Ammerman 1987; Bartkowski; Christiano; Edgell; Gallagher; Gallagher and Smith; Wilcox), but vocational ministry represents a very particular type of work where pastors embrace a sense of call to a lifestyle and families are integrated into the church on multiple levels. Consequently, the church operates simultaneously as a spiritual community for the clergy family and a workplace, further complicating the dynamics between work, family, and personal life. Clergy families are not unique in the ways they, too, must negotiate time and schedules around work and family responsibilities but the ideas and values linked to religious beliefs play an important part in how they engage with and manage competing demands. The role of ideas and values in this process of negotiation is the focus of this paper.

Methodology

Between 2008 and 2010, I conducted 79 in-depth interviews with married, heterosexual, Protestant pastors and spouses in five regions throughout the United States, exploring how clergy families navigate the complex boundaries of work, family, personal, and religious life. A first group of respondents (46 individuals), interviewed in the fall of 2008 through the spring of 2009 in Illinois, spans five denominations – four respondents from the United Church of Christ (UCC), four United Methodist Church (UMC) respondents, 20 respondents from the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), two respondents from the Free Methodist Church (FMC), and 16 respondents from the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). In the summer of 2010, I expanded the sample to include 33 additional individuals from Evangelical Covenant congregations in four states – Connecticut (six respondents), Minnesota (10 respondents), Nebraska (six respondents), and Washington (11 respondents). The research protocols for each of the two waves of data collection were reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board.

Although the largest number of respondents in the first wave of data collection are from PCUSA congregations, the final sample combining the two waves of data collection is majority evangelical, specifically Evangelical Covenant. The reason for such heavy representation among ECC clergy families stems from a partnership with the denomination for the second wave of this project. The Louisville Institute Project Grant for Researchers award, which funded the second wave of this project, included a collaborative effort between the researcher and the ECC denomination to develop resources for clergy families. As such, the findings primarily offer insight into this particular tradition and subset of clergy families.

I identified potential participants through publicly available church listings on denominational websites. For the larger denominations in the first wave of the study (PCUSA, UCC, UMC), I contacted a random sample of clergy families within a 50-mile radius of Chicago and an additional sample within a 100-mile radius, seeking participants that span urban, suburban, and semi-rural contexts. For the smaller denominations (FMC, ECC), I included all clergy in the Chicagoland area in my list of contacts (I did, however, eliminate a few ECC pastors with whom I have prior acquaintance). The second wave of data collection focused only on ECC clergy families and I used similar sampling techniques in creating a list of potential participants. For Nebraska and Connecticut, where fewer ECC churches exist, I included all clergy families around a determined region, however I generated a random sample of contacts in Washington and Minnesota due to the large number of ECC churches in those states.

Pastors were mailed an invitation outlining the study, its goals, and assurances of confidentiality. Clergy were invited to share the letter with spouses and jointly consider participating in a one-on-one interview. Each contact received at most two follow-up emails. All couples that responded and accepted the invitation were included in the study with two exceptions (one spouse and one couple due to scheduling constraints). Out of 102 couples contacted for the first wave of the research, 23 participated for a response rate of 23%. For the second wave data collection, I contacted 67 couples and 17 participated in the study for a rate of 25%. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for key themes. Given the nature of the study as one focused on clergy families, the letter noted the requirement that participants be married. To maintain a level of consistency in congregational posture, I intentionally selected denominations that ordain women, veering away from more conservative evangelical groups such as the Southern Baptists or non-denominational megachurches. To create consistency around family structure, I also did not actively seek out gay clergy since a significant aspect of the study included analyzing gender differences – for instance, considering how the male spouses of clergywomen experience expectations compared to the wives of clergymen. The final sample is majority evangelical (though centrist given support for women's ordination) with a small number (14 of the 40 total families in the study) of centrist and progressive-leaning mainline clergy families. The findings, then, are by no means universally applicable to all clergy, all congregations, or all denominations. This is a study focused on a specific group of clergy serving largely traditional, mainstream congregations and denominations (mostly ECC) with culturally normative family structures and patterns.

Rather than interviewing couples together, I conducted the interviews individually to avoid one story from overtaking another or limiting the depth and honesty in each reflection.

At the time of the interviews, all participants were part of married couples involved in some capacity in parish ministry. Twenty-nine of the couples included a pastor married and a spouse working in the paid labor force and four couples included pastors married to either a full-time parent or spouse who is not employed. In other words, a large majority of the families in this study are dual-earner couples. Seven families are clergy couples, where both spouses are involved in vocational ministry. In the final sample, seventeen pastors are women and thirty are men. Throughout this paper, all names and identifying information have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants. I identify clergy and spouses by their role as an evangelical or mainline pastor, clergy spouse, and/or member of a clergy couple.

The data collection and analysis processes are informed by grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss; Strauss and Corbin) where I entered the study with some general concepts in mind but primarily allowed participants' stories to shape the study. The interviews were semi-structured, comprised mostly of broad, open-ended questions on areas such as work, family, relationships, religious practice, and identity. Because each individual and family is unique, I sought a narrative that reflected the lived experiences of each participant, touching on these general areas while at the same time allowing people's experiences to guide the conversation. I used an open-coding approach to the data analysis, drawing out patterns in the transcripts and using these themes to form the arguments represented here.

The analysis begins with a description of the ideology of community as a significant theme that emerged in the interview narratives, followed by a discussion on the ways pastors assess their experiences as church employees vis-à-vis this perspective. Clergy talk about churches with especially generous and supportive employment practices through the lens of community, noting how the congregation's approach aligns their own belief that a church is more than a conventional workplace. On the flipside, when pastors experience the church as an inflexible employer, they voice disappointment and frustration because the congregation's approach conflicts with the pastor's ideological notion of church as a mutually supportive community. Overall, clergy speak less about scheduling conflicts and more about the conflict between their ideological expectations of the church, rooted in values of reciprocal respect and commitment, and the actual practices of the congregation.

Interestingly, clergy selectively draw from the ideology of community. While they promote particular ideas and values within the church and encourage laypeople to embrace this vision, clergy admit there are limits to their own participation in the mutuality that comes with this notion of community. While they are part of the congregation along with their families, the church represents more than a spiritual home – it is also a place of employment to which a pastor is accountable. I discuss several examples demonstrating these limits to illustrate how deeply intertwined the elements of everyday life really are, and the complexity within the relationship between ideas and lived experience. Just as work, family, and personal life cannot be viewed as isolated or balanced entities, neither can the various roles the church plays for clergy families. Drawing from these complex relationships, I close by arguing for the importance of bringing ideas and values into discourses on work-life integration and how other professions can benefit from recognizing the broader, cultural ideologies we use to understand the relationship between thinking and doing.

The Ideology of Community

The ideology of community is the lens through which the pastors in this study view their churches and functions as a perspective or tool kit for making sense of the intersections between work, family, and personal life. Because religion is threaded throughout these institutions for clergy and their family members, they use the ideology of community to navigate overlapping, conflicting boundaries. I call this perspective an ideology because it is deeply rooted in an idealized vision of what the church should be, and I add the notion of community to stress the assumed mutuality clergy families in this study seem to expect in the church as a workplace. The conflicts clergy encounter, then, are not only about the challenge of managing competing structural demands (such as scheduling), but also rooted in the broader issues that arise when ideas and values are incorporated into work-life conflict.

Drawing from the ideology of community, pastors view the policies and practices of congregations through the lenses of shared care and compassion. This perspective is grounded in the notion that people in a church should be open about their concerns and problems because the church is where one finds nonjudgmental support. Further, as people receive care from the church community, they are expected to reciprocate this care and support toward others. As examples, clergy families mention practices like inviting people over for dinner, providing meals in a time of need, and offering flexibility around parenting or other personal responsibilities.

Applied to workplace practices in the eyes of clergy, this means care for family and care for self are important components in how a church functions as an employer, promoting a healthy approach to work-life integration. The ideology of community is in many ways countercultural, challenging conventional norms where people are expected to pour extensive physical and emotional energy into their jobs often at the expense of familial and personal life. Instead, workers recognize how a healthy personal life supports a thriving professional life, and vice versa. When clergy experience the church as a type of alternative or countercultural employer, they draw from the ideology of community in analyzing their experiences in a positive way. Alignment between ideology and actual practice is most evident in churches that promote clergy self-care, offer flexibility for parents, and support personal and family life outside of work for pastors.

Respecting a pastor's need for time away from work is one example of the way churches promote self-care for pastors. Like most workers, clergy have designated days off and vacation time, but clergy emphasize especially generous or unusual examples as an extension of the congregation's beliefs and values of commitment and mutual care. For example, Kimberly, as a new mainline pastor, struggles to set limits on her work time by maintaining a regular day off. Yet she finds that laypeople are not the source of pressure and instead urge her to keep Friday as a day off work:

> I'm having lunch with a woman on Monday and she had suggested Friday. And I hesitated and said "Well Friday is my day off." And she was like "Oh, good for you. Let's do it another day." So it's really just me.

Beyond the fact that her congregation offers her a day off, Kimberly highlights how the idea of self-care is central to this woman's response. Similarly, Beth highlights the positive and supportive ideas undergirding her mainline congregation's personnel policy:

> People respect having the day off. They encourage it. Our personnel handbook has that we are to work towards having two days off. We should have one, we need to work towards two, but one is sort of sacrosanct kind of thing. So that's really positive.

Knowing how easy it is for clergy to take phone calls or deal with church issues during scheduled time off, congregants frequently remind pastors to protect this time through both words and actions. Clergy situate these interactions in the ideology of community, stressing values of mutual support and care.

Beth's church extended further support when her husband, Walter, lost a grandparent. The funeral service was scheduled for the Saturday before Easter, and being out of state, it would be impossible for her to attend both the funeral and be back in time for Sunday services. Not only did the congregation allow for her absence on one of the most significant holidays of the year, but they handled the issue in a way that showed Beth her family is a top priority:

> There are moments when family gets submerged under church, particularly in a moment of crisis for the church but I have to say that I think the same would be true if there were a crisis at home. The crisis does win, but it would win either way. So when Walter's grandfather died, I was gone from church. And I was gone from church exactly when I needed to be. His grandfather died at Easter and they decided to hold the services on Easter Saturday, so I was in Texas for Easter, not here.

Beth shares this story as an example of her church going above and beyond what might be typical of a conventional workplace. Yet her point looks beyond the structural circumstances and focuses on the mutuality of the relationship, reinforcing alignment between the ideology of community and church workplace practices. Just as Beth would prioritize a church-related crisis, the congregation prioritizes a family crisis for the pastor. The decision is rooted in specific circumstances rather than an effort to keep all sides in equal balance. In her view, the church recognizes that she is more than a pastor – she is also an individual and part of a family – and these ideas and values frame family leave.

The ideology of community also involves openness and vulnerability, where clergy feel supported rather than judged amid personal struggles, again offering the same level of support for clergy as they are expected to offer laypeople. While interviewing for a new pastoral position, Jim, an evangelical pastor, encountered connection between the ideology of community and actual practice when he disclosed his personal struggle with addiction:

> So when I got here, when I had my first conversation here I said, "You folks need to know something right away and that is that I'm a recovering alcoholic. If that's okay with you that's great . . . If it's not okay with you that's fine. It's better if I don't pursue anything." They said, "Oh that's a positive, that's a plus." So I said okay, this must be a neat church.

Jim sees this congregation and its approach to vulnerability as positive, not just because they are willing to hire a recovering alcoholic but because the church acknowledges his humanity and views his openness as a benefit. Jim's assessment that "this must be a neat church" implies this particular congregation operates as a unique community and will not see him as just another employee, but rather one whose personal life is incorporated into his vocation in effective, beneficial ways.

Clergy also articulate a positive alignment between the ideas of the church as community and examples of congregations going above and beyond in support for pastors with small children. Austin, an evangelical pastor and his spouse Courtney, a children's program director, share an office at the church they serve together and the congregation allows them to bring their toddler son to work each day, an arrangement that offers numerous benefits for their family. In describing their situation, Courtney focuses on the care and support she experienced as a new parent:

> I think it was something that was just sort of assumed from the beginning because I only work part time. In terms of what I get paid, it wouldn't be worth it to pay someone for daycare. We'd pay just as much as I make, so they said, "Certainly just bring him with." And I can also work from home, which I do sometimes.

Courtney and Austin's decision to bring Tyler to work each day is partly financial, but they both discuss how much they enjoy spending days together as a family and appreciate the church for supporting their family in this way. In other words, while the structural arrangements are no doubt valuable to this family, they frame the flexibility and support through the ideological lens of community and care.

Annette, part of an evangelical clergy couple, describes how her congregation framed her paid maternity leave through an ideological lens:

> I like to brag about the church because they still paid me when I took off for maternity leave and I'm part time there. And part time people usually don't . . . That's very unusual I think for a place to still pay. And they were just so supportive of me and still have been. And they said it was a justice issue. They said, "You are still working. We're still going to pay you."

She couches her appreciation as a response to the church's broader ideals, approaching maternity leave as justice rather than a practical or legal necessity. As Eva and Bruce's daughters were growing up, Eva's mainline congregation provided support beyond that of a typical employer when Bruce's work shifted, forcing him to travel out of state several days each week:

> When we first got the news that Bruce was going to have to go [out of state] for three days a week and one of those nights . . . Back then there was as much stuff on the calendar as there is now. One of those nights was a night I had to be here. And I went to the [church leadership] and I said, "You know, I don't know how this is going to affect things but I can't . . . I don't think I'm going to be able to keep up this schedule if he's gone three nights a week 'cause I need to be at home with my kids." And one of the members of the [church

> leadership] said, "The night you need to be here I'll be with them every time."
> And that whole year when were first getting used to that rhythm of that
> schedule, she came over at like 6:30 so I could come back and do my meeting
> and read to them and did homework with them and she did that every week.
> She was great.

Some congregations in this study acknowledge that parenting is never contained within the nuclear family, but rather is dependent on assistance from outside sources, a reality apparent in studies of contemporary families (Hansen). They are following the ideals of a community – built on values of reciprocal, mutual relationships – in recognizing the complex demands in work and family life that are not readily compartmentalized.

A supportive work environment, including family-friendly policies, lessens the strain between work and family (Hill et al.; Warren and Johnson), but there is more to these examples. While a growing number of workplaces are offering family-friendly benefits, people do not necessarily take advantage of these options. As Mary Secret suggests, the culture of the workplace helps predict the usage of family-friendly policies among workers (Secret). Churches differ from corporations and other workplaces in many ways, but clearest differences lie in the motivating factors. Corporations are motivated by profits, informing workplace policies typically structured to create the highest return within the human and material resources available. But clergy families in this study largely see churches as organizations motivated by religious beliefs and values and expect personnel decisions to follow suit. Clergy families experience alignment between this ideology and the actual practice of congregations when the church operates as a sort of countercultural employer, challenging profit-driven practices in favor of arrangements offering reciprocal care and support for its employees.

Conflict between work and family is a concern throughout life and does not only affect people with young children (Grzywacz et al.), and many churches offer other means for helping clergy better manage competing demands. For example, the ability to complete work-related tasks from a variety of locations – "flexplace," defined by Hill et al. (51) as "giving employees varying degrees of control over where their work is done" – is widely appreciated by pastors and adds to the positive side of work-life integration over work-life balance. Support for family and personal life outside of church is also implied through gestures and gifts. Members of Kimberly's church invite her and Charlie to join them for Thanksgiving each year, knowing they cannot travel for holidays with her pastoral commitments. Therese, an evangelical pastor who adopted her daughter from China, had a former missionary in her church offer language classes as a gesture of care:

> And a couple . . . a woman of a couple who had been a missionary in Taiwan
> for thirty years, as soon as I . . . I wrote in a letter to the congregation saying I
> was going to adopt from China. She said "I'd like to teach you Chinese before
> you go." And then even after we came home, we'd go to her house once a
> week just to speak Chinese, get her into the . . . keep her engaged a little. I
> don't think [my daughter] was hearing Mandarin Chinese in the orphanage.
> They spoke a dialect, so she didn't really know the Mandarin she was speaking,
> but that's kind of beside the point. They were generally very supportive of me.

Therese acknowledges the language itself was not necessarily useful but was grateful for this gift nevertheless because of the ideas and values of community offered by this layperson. Other examples of unique gifts include the vegetables and meat farming families bring to clergy families serving churches in small, farming towns. Others remark on especially generous gifts like museum memberships or vacations that are beyond what a typical clergy family can afford:

> We had some friends in [our previous city] who, I think because we were the family in ministry, they took us in to be their sort of adopted family and took us skiing with them every year to Breckenridge. I mean that is a really big deal. Okay, so our kids so benefited from that. They've all become good skiers and boarders and what a blast. Something we could never have afforded (Stephanie, evangelical spouse).

There is a clear connection between these gifts and an ideology of community, and the clergy and spouses in this study recognize the way congregations and laypeople are operating at a level above conventional employment and personnel practices. Gifts like a skiing trip or fresh vegetables and meat from a farm recognize that clergy are more than clergy – they are whole people who require self-care and time with family and friends. These gestures also recognize the sacrifices clergy families take on for ministry. When clergy families discuss these examples of congregational support, they focus less on the financial or time benefits and more on the shared commitment to mutual care. To be sure, the added benefits are very real in a practical sense, but these gifts, from the perspective of clergy, are significant because of the alignment with ideas around what the church ought to be as an employer.

Conflicts between Ideology and Lived Experience

Just as the ideology of community offers a tool kit for pastors to make sense of positive workplace practices, it also serves as a lens through which they articulate frustration or conflict within congregations. While clergy recognize that churches are, indeed, employers and they are paid employees, they have higher expectations for the church:

> So if there's some measure where you either feel like you're being played or the person is not being straight forward, that's something that's really hard for me, and I think in the church of all places (Gwen, mainline pastor and spouse).

Gwen's comment speaks to the tension that arises when church simultaneously represents a religious organization, a spiritual home, a social network, a community of like-minded people, and a place of work. Saying "in the church of all places" sheds light on her perspective that certain behaviors do not fit within this particular institution because of the ideas and values on which the institution is based. And yet, the various roles and values foundational to a church are defined and understood in vastly different ways by the people involved – pastors, spouses, children, and congregants. In other words, while clergy families have a particular idea of how the church should function – the ideology of community – the views of laypeople and the actual practices of a church do not necessarily align.

Some pastors see a conflict in the way churches following conventional business practices and describe these scenarios as antithetical to the ideology of community. While discussing

situations where pastors were abruptly asked to leave churches, Ken, an evangelical pastor, utilizes ideas and values as a critical tool:

> Another change, I'm seeing more and more churches that I think may be more of a business type expectation where it seems like pastors will come into a church and there's problems and the church is very quick to pull a trigger let's put it that way, [a former colleague's] situation being one of them. I'm more aware of it now, but it seems like before if there were problems, a church would be more willing to work it out.

In asking Ken to expound more on why he thinks congregations have shifted in this regard, he explains:

> I think a lot of it is business expectations. It has changed in society. It used to be if you go work for AT&T or General Motors or Ford you would go there as a young man or woman and expect to have your whole career there. Nowadays when you graduate from business college they will say well you might work somewhere five years but you'll probably change jobs three or four times and that's society at large. I think that's worked in the ministry field as well. If we don't like the pastor we have, we'll change.

Congregations share similar characteristics with other workplaces, being divided into "good" and "bad" based on factors like size and budget as well as employment benefits like salary, autonomy, security, and support (Mueller and McDuff). But ideas and values are another important measure clergy use to evaluate churches as employers. And clergy in this study describe a range of experiences, some falling in line with the ideology of community and others operating in opposition to this ideal.

Along these lines, clergy challenge workplace practices through the ideology of community in discussing a perceived lack of support for their families or an expectation that personal life should not impose on ministry. Clergy may recognize how compartmentalization or balance is impossible, and yet the congregation does not always share their perspective. Evan, an evangelical pastor, draws from his ideological tool kit in countering his congregation's assumption that he, his wife, and young daughter constitute a self-sufficient, nuclear family. He compares the minimal support his family receives from their church to another congregation in the same community:

> [A nearby church] runs a preschool where we send our child. That pastor . . . he pushed for a 75% discount on tuition for the children of any credentialed pastor from any tradition. Now that's community. That's kingdom. That's phenomenal, and that's why it works for us.

And while Jeff, also an evangelical pastor, appreciates how much his congregation supported him and Annette upon the birth of their son, he was disappointed by the inflexibility of his church after a few months as a new parent:

> [F]or a while I stayed home in the mornings to care for Isaac and that obviously had an effect on when I was doing work and things like that. And I found out

there were people at the church that didn't like that, were concerned about it and for eight months never brought it up.

Given how supportive the congregation seemed when Isaac was born, he thought it would be fine to adjust his schedule so he and Annette could more easily manage childcare alongside their dual-ministry careers in separate congregations. His disappointment is partially directed at the structural circumstances (an inflexible schedule), but is more broadly connected to Jeff's idea of the church as a community that should not only support a family with a new baby, but also be open and honest in discussing concerns.

Overall, clergy were rather surprised when churches operated contrary to the ideology of community, assuming the norm is a flexible, accommodating, and caring congregation. In other words, pastors expect the church to operate as an alternative institution and when it does not, they also draw from the ideology of community to make sense of the situation. The element of religion is important here, as it provides backing for this perspective on church as an organization rooted in particular beliefs and values. There are clear expectations in the eyes of pastors as to how a church should treat its employees, but interestingly these concerns have less to do with an individual's personal needs. Instead, the way the church treats its pastor reflects a church's ideas and values as an institution, and given the deep commitment pastors have in shaping a spiritual community, seeing it operate in ways antithetical to their vision draws forth questions about the strength of that community. Ryan, an evangelical pastor, shares his own story of conflict between ideas and actual practice when his father died just as he was starting a new ministry position:

> I was driving across country. My dad was sick and had lung cancer. So I was driving across country and got word that he had died, which was expected but so I arrived here, we unpacked the house. And I had just driven across country. We unpacked the house virtually by ourselves. Had a little bit of help from the church but virtually by ourselves. And then unpacked the office, start to get the office organized. That was part of it that week, that first week. And then in grief, hop on a plane, go out to [the state where my parents lived] for the memorial service, come back and find out that Tim, the chairman of the trustees, has made a recommendation that I be docked two week's pay for the time that I was moving in and was back for my dad's funeral.

The board did not go along with the suggestion to cut Ryan's pay but the idea presented a conflict with the ideology of community and conventional employment practices. In many lines of work (such as any non-salaried position) a person is never paid for time off and is expected to cleanly separate personal issues from work but Ryan, as a pastor, believes his workplace – the church – should operate under a higher standard rooted in particular religious ideas and values. Seeing the way his new church treated him in the midst of grief is about more than an inflexible family leave policy. For Ryan and others who experience similar frustrations, such actions represent a breakdown of ideas and values grounded in mutual, communal support.

Clergy react against micro-management in a similar fashion. When congregations are skeptical over how a pastor is spending his or her time, clergy point to this as another sign the church is veering away from the ideal notion of community rooted in care, openness, and

mutual trust. Pastors share stories of coming in late the morning after an evening meeting (a common practice to compensate for frequent nighttime commitments) and the reactions from laypeople:

> Well when the receptionist is on vacation, she'll arrange to have various lay members staffing the desk. And they usually do half a day at a time, so one of them will be there in the morning and one of them will be there in the afternoon. There is a particular layperson who's not embarrassed about having . . . when I walk in at 11:00, looking at the clock and saying, "Hmm, nice to see you" (Sasha, mainline pastor).

As the pastor, Sasha avoids confronting people defensively, but she clearly believes members, as part of the church, should have more trust in their pastor and show sympathy for the unconventional, demanding schedule she maintains.

When clergy name specific issues, they are connected to broader concerns over the way the church functions as a community. Pastors who sense a lack of care or an unwelcoming aura frame such church practices as antithetical to the ideology of community because they lack mutuality and assume compartmentalization of work from other aspects of life. For instance, clergy families assume a certain level of social engagement with laypeople and are surprised and disappointed with more closed-off congregations:

> I expected and Elsa expected and we were told to expect "Oh, you're going to get invited to dinner every weekend. You're going to gain twenty pounds because you're going to be eating so much food." And there wasn't a lot of that and I don't know if that was because I was the pastor. I don't think it was only that because I later learned it just wasn't part of the culture of the church to go to each other's houses either. I think they again, maybe a generational thing or a cultural thing, generally traditionally had looked to the pastor to set the direction. "You tell us what to do and we'll do it. We're the workers. You're the CEO. The general manager." And that was not how I was taught to be a leader in seminary. So they were definitely looking to me to be the one to provide the answers, not necessarily the one to ask the questions (Alex, mainline pastor).

Alex highlights the conflict between clergy ideas and the assumptions, expectations, and culture of the congregation. Inviting an employee to dinner is not an expectation in most workplaces, yet it matters for clergy families because religious ideas and values – particularly an understanding of the church as a mutually supportive community – shape clergy experiences as employees. Drawing from their ideological tool kit, conflicts and tensions are about much more than dinner invitations and scheduling conflicts. These are conflicts of culture and a mismatch of ideas and values.

Navigating Ideas, Values, and Lived Experience

The aforementioned examples highlight how clergy interpret the church as a workplace through a perspective or frame of reference I call the "ideology of community." In some instances, clergy families discover alignment between their ideas and those of the congregation, yet they also experience conflict when expectations do not align. However, it is too simplistic

to suggest clergy wholeheartedly embrace the ideology of community in all contexts. Just as work, family, and personal life cannot be easily compartmentalized or balanced, neither can ideas and actual practice. Indeed, clergy families are continually navigating these intersecting realms of everyday life, reflecting a model of work-life integration. While they promote the ideology of community as the way the church "should be" and rely on this perspective in analyzing their experiences, they acknowledge instances where their own practices go against their ideals. Because the church is both a spiritual community and workplace for pastors, there are some instances where clergy compartmentalize work, family, and personal life as a response to competing demands

Relationships with laypeople – for pastors, spouses, and children – represent a key area blurring the lines between church as community and church as workplace. A demanding congregation is directly related to a pastor's level of stress and negatively impacts well-being, while supportive relationships with congregations foster more positive attitudes among clergy and create greater work and general life satisfaction. In other words, although clergy caution against forming friendships, there are some benefits to developing positive relationships with people in the church (Lee and Iverson-Gilbert). However, friendships between laypeople and clergy families look different than other friendships in a congregation due to the way work, family, and personal life so deeply intersect.

This is especially true for clergy spouses who occupy a liminal space between church as a spiritual community and church as a workplace. Spouses are not church employees nor are they regular members and laypeople. Most clergy spouses in this study grew up in religious families who instilled a perspective on church as a community of like-minded people providing mutual care and support for members. Now, being married to pastors, spouses adjust their thinking around friendships at church, altering their overall perspective on the role of a religious community. Bruce shared his approach:

> [E]very friend at church has to be a qualified friend. Sort of like, you don't go into business with somebody . . . You don't go into a partnership with somebody you're not willing to sue. You don't become a real tight friend when the person you're friends with may be sitting on the . . .What are the . . . The personnel committee and doing your wife's review. Ain't going to happen.

Bruce has been a mainline clergy spouse for many years and confidently draws boundaries, but for others – especially those new to vocational ministry – a shift in thinking around church as community can be challenging. This puts pastors in a tenuous spot, as Jen, an evangelical pastor, stated:

> We have gone out to dinner just recently with a couple couples from the church. I'm really conflicted at that because they've been initiated by Scott which has been great and he wants to connect with people in the church which I want him to do and it's so wonderful. And so he's made dinner plans with a couple different couples in the church just recently and we go, but for me that's work.

Whereas Scott is hoping to develop friends at their new church (just as they had friends at their previous congregation), Jen finds a need to compartmentalize and stress that, at times, ministry is work and nothing else.

The limits of the ideology of community extends to pastors' children, too. Although community, care, and shared support are central messages that shape the culture of Eva's congregation, she hesitates in encouraging her own children to view relationships with laypeople through this ideological lens:

> I get anxious because I think that everybody shouldn't know that level of detail about us. And I want a measure of separateness from that and privacy from that that doesn't come and so in some ways I've kind of pushed them a bit to be more protective of themselves which doesn't I think feel natural to them. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's like a really tricky thing to say, "Go and be this happy, one big, happy community family, but don't tell them too much." So they get a little double message there about that. That's kind of hard to figure out, what is the real message there. Is church really family or is it not family? And there's a double standard for the clergy that is hard.

Pastors' kids are a part of the church community and witness the social and communal interactions that take place within the congregation. Clergy point out the conflicts they experience parenting within the intersecting realms of work, family, and religious life. On the one hand, they wish to impart ideas and values on their children that church is a caring, open, and supportive community. Yet they also desire a level of privacy for their family, given how immersed and noticed they are in the congregation. Indeed, even clergy children are brought into the continual need among clergy families to navigate their ideas over what the church should be and the actual realities of life in vocational ministry.

Conclusion

Research on work and family life clearly illustrates the way institutions intersect in numerous ways (Blair-Loy; Christensen; Folbre; Garey; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Jacobs and Gerson; Nippert-Eng; Townsend; Williams). But this study of clergy families shows that religion – as an institution but also a system of cultural beliefs and values – also plays a significant role in the ways people navigate and reconcile competing demands. Furthermore, this study shows the importance in bringing ideas and values into discussions on work-life conflict. For people involved in vocational ministry, religion – as an ideological tool kit – bridges the complex boundaries between intersecting institutions including work, family, and church. Looking beyond the structural conflicts and examining the ideological tensions adds another important layer to discourses on the competing demands contemporary families face. What ideas and values do we attach to our places of work? And moreover, how do these ideas and values draw together or serve as a dividing force among elements of personal and professional life?

The clergy families in this particular study are continually navigating the competing demands between work and personal life, but they do so through the lens of religious ideas and values, specifically an ideology of community. The ideas clergy families link to the church as a community are frequently in conflict with the actual practices of a congregation as an

employer. Looking at the various ways churches operate and treat employees, some churches in this study function as communities of mutual care, extending support for clergy families above and beyond a normative workplace – practices clergy positively connect to the culture and values of the congregation. And when churches mimic typical secular workplaces – monitoring schedules or failing to extend dinner invitations – clergy emphasize the tensions between their ideas about church and the reality of the workplace. Examining the effect of women's ordination on gendered family life, Susan Cody-Rydzewski argues that churches are not very accommodating to demands of home and personal life. My findings, however, suggest more varied and complex dynamics in the ways congregations function as employers with some accommodating the ideology of community and others remaining rigid and inflexible in the eyes of clergy. While this project focuses on a subset of clergy families – mostly evangelical but centrist – what is most interesting in comparing these varying congregational models is the way pastors operate and make sense of their employment experiences within an idealized vision. Through embracing work-life integration, pastors and spouses not only appreciate the flexibility and support congregations provide, but assume this is how a church should function given its foundations in specific religious beliefs.

This study builds upon the notion that work-life balance is a problematic construct given how an individual's life and work are deeply intertwined. No one is immune from the conflicts between work and personal life. The perspective of what the church ought to be – rooted in the ideology of community – is the lens through which these pastors and spouses experience tensions that arise when one is both a religious individual and a religious worker. Bringing ideas and values into discourses on work-life conflict highlight the problems in compartmentalization and illustrate how the various elements of our life are woven together in nuanced ways. Indeed, we are complex people with complex lives and attempts to understand the relationship between work, family, and personal life must recognize how people navigate the fluid movements between these areas. Conflicts are about more than structural problems like scheduling and family leave – they extend from the ways people think about institutions and relationships. Continued examination into the ways a particular ideological perspective – in this study, a set of ideas rooted in notions of both religion and community – provides a lens through which contemporary adults understand and experience the intersections of work, family, and personal life can move us in a positive direction toward alleviating competing demands.

Acknowledgements

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