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Faith Community and Campus Engagement in Immigrant Integration

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Abstract

Immigration is one of the most contentious topics in contemporary American politics. This study presents the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a program of faith community dialogues on immigration developed in partnership between a public university, a faith-based group of volunteers, and Catholic congregations. Based on data from dialogue transcriptions, exit questionnaires completed by participants, observation notes, and reflections shared by students and faith community leaders, the study shows the outcomes of the program for the congregations, the volunteer group, the students, and the faculty leader. The volunteer group was able to launch a new program that helped immigrant and United States-born members of faith communities develop feelings of mutual understanding and collaboration. Students had the opportunity to learn research skills and better understand people's perspectives on immigration and race. The faculty leader produced community-based scholarship that otherwise would not have been possible. The study concludes that cumulative collaborative learning, the inclusion of a religious dimension, and support from faith leaders are key for the success of partnerships between academic and faith-based organizations.

Keywords: dialogue, religion, immigration, community-based research

Introduction

Faith-based stakeholders are key members of the communities with whom colleges and universities engage. Partnerships between institutions of higher education and faith-based groups and organizations have resulted in many teaching and service-learning programs as well as research projects (Friedrichs, 2012; Janzen, Pomazon, & Hrynkow, 2017). This article presents the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a program of faith community dialogues on immigration carried out in partnership by a public secular university, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and a faith-based group of volunteers, the Latino Racial Justice Circle (LRJC). From design to evaluation to reflection, the program involved collaboration between a researcher and community partners in the collection and analysis of data about a major social issue: immigration. As such, the work combined community-based research, engaged scholarship, and evaluation methods. While community-based research implies an equitable inclusion of community members in all stages of the research process, engaged scholarship refers to research that connects the "resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems" (Boyer, 1996, p. 19). By analyzing this experience in light of the literature, the author seeks to identify conditions that contribute to the success of research partnerships between academic and faith-based organizations.

The article is organized in five sections. In the following section, the researcher describes the context of the organizations in partnership and reflects on their positionality in the program. Next, the researcher reviews the literature of evaluations of research projects that engaged faith-based organizations. In the subsequent section, the researcher presents the design and implementation of the program in a narrative form of program evaluation for the reader to see how the program evolved through three cycles, each one taking advantage of lessons learned in the previous cycle. From summer 2018 to March 2020, the projects corresponding to the three cycles are: (1) a short dialogue at an ecumenical workshop on immigration in October 2018, (2) a set of two three-week dialogues in Catholic parishes, one in an urban and predominantly African American congregation in February-March 2019, a second in three suburban and predominantly White American congregations in May 2019, (3) a three-week dialogue in two urban Catholic faith communities, one predominantly Latinx and one predominantly White American, scheduled for 2020. In the final section, the researcher presents the results of the evaluation of the program, discussing its outcomes for dialogue participants, host faith communities, the LRJC, students, and the researcher. The article ends with a discussion for future research and a reflection on the challenges and lessons learned in the partnership between UMBC, the LRJC, and faith communities.

Context of Organizations in Partnership

After conducting research on immigration in Baltimore for a few years, the researcher realized the need to conduct research with immigrant communities rather than just about immigrant communities. In interviews with leaders of immigrant-serving organizations, the researcher heard complaints of research fatigue, which happens when community members feel overwhelmed by requests from researchers, especially when they do not see tangible results from research activities (Way, 2013). The researcher had also lost interest in scholarship whose results remained within the confines of academia. Moreover, after each research project was completed and no matter how methodologically rigorous the study was, the researcher would often ask: "But is this really how immigrants have experienced this?" Instead of designing their next research project purely on intellectual considerations, the researcher started to volunteer at immigrant-serving organizations to directly contribute through service, build relationships, and identify community aspirations to which research could make a contribution. Working from within immigrant communities would also give the researcher deep experiential knowledge that could minimize doubts about research findings.

In 2017, the researcher became a volunteer for the LRJC, which supported Latinx immigrants in Baltimore through educational and legal assistance programs. As a faith-based group of volunteers affiliated with a Catholic non-profit organization, the LRJC aims "to educate and inspire people of all faith traditions. Working together, we will recognize and then act to eliminate systemic racial injustice and everyday incidents of bias and discrimination toward the Latino community. The Circle is committed to healing the wounds of racism by seeking to understand and respect one another. The Circle also strives to change human behavior so that we might change the human heart" (LRJC, 2015). The vision of the LRJC is "to create opportunities throughout Maryland for meaningful, authentic dialogue about race relations with people of different cultures. As a result, the Circle hopes to form cross-cultural, faith based communities focused on spiritual growth and improving social relationships" (LRJC, 2015). The LRJC mission and vision are consistent with the mission of UMBC, a midsize research public university located just outside of Baltimore City. UMBC prepares students for "community service and leadership" and "is dedicated to cultural and ethnic diversity" and "social responsibility" (UMBC, 2020). In early 2020, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching honored UMBC with the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, recognizing the university's commitment to the larger academic movement toward community engagement.

The researcher's identity as an immigrant from Latin America facilitated their entrance in the LRJC, which was seeking to increase its Latinx membership. The researcher's Catholic identity also facilitated participation in the group, which has strong ties to the Catholic Church and starts and finishes every meeting with a prayer. Despite these affiliations, there were differences in class position and phenotype between the researcher and members of the community served by

the LRJC which, occasionally, made the researcher feel like an outsider. With time, the volunteering evolved into the faith-based campus-community partnership presented here.

Although playing simultaneously the roles of program leader and researcher could introduce bias into the study, it allowed for the generation of what Dezerotes (2018) called "practice-based evidence." Dialogue practitioners use practice-based evidence to assess and evaluate their work relying on direct participant feedback and direct observation the dialogue process (Dezerotes, 2018, p. 42). To further minimize the risk of bias, the evaluation methods were made explicit, were applied systematically at multiple points in time, and included discussions of findings with LRJC members.

Leaders of the LRJC wanted to create a program of faith community dialogues on immigration. A volunteer with experience in classroom dialogue facilitation, the researcher offered to lead the creation of the program as a community-based research and evaluation project. The first dialogue was held in October 2018 as part of an ecumenical workshop on immigration and more dialogues were held since then.

Literature Review: Lessons from Evaluations of Research with Faith-Based Organizations

To identify program evaluations of research projects conducted in partnership with faith-based organizations, the researcher used the terms "faith" or "religio*" combined with "community research," "community-based research," "campus-community" or "university-community" on Google Scholar. The large majority of the evaluations resulting from that search assessed research on public health with qualitative evaluation methods.

Some findings of those evaluations coincide with conclusions of the broader literature on community-engaged scholarship: (1) researchers need to screen potential community partners to check if they have capacity to participate in a project (Hippolyte et al, 2013); (2) power over the project needs to be shared between researchers and community partners (Hippolyte et al, 2013; Laken et al, 2007; Oppenheim et al, 2019; Szaflarski et al, 2014); (3) researchers and community partners need to communicate regularly and transparently to build trust, assess progress, and solve problems (Easley et al, 2003; Hippolyte et al, 2013; Laken et al, 2007; Szaflarski et al, 2014); (4) researchers should include members of community organizations in the research team (Derose et al, 2010; Hippolyte et al, 2013; Xiaoming, 2007); (5) researchers and community partners should recognize each others' diverse and complementary set of skills and resources (Szaflarski et al, 2014); and (6) researchers need to invest time for building relationships in the community (Kaplan et al, 2009).

Other findings are specific to research that engages faith-based organizations. Although the literature on community-engaged scholarship has recognized the importance of building relationships with community leaders to gain access and trust in the community, evaluations of research with faith-based organizations emphasizes faith leaders as community members whose support is crucial (Hippolyte et al, 2013; Kim, 2004). Faith leaders can advocate for the project, for instance, during religious services (Kaplan et al, 2009) when a critical mass of community members are present. Researchers need to be culturally sensitive when engaging with faith leaders because some research topics or methods might raise concerns from the perspective of their religious traditions (Szaflarski et al, 2014). Researchers need to be accommodating of faith leaders' demands and try to strike a balance between rigorous scholarship and the comfort level of leaders and members of faith communities (Kloos & Moore, 2000; Szaflarski et al, 2014).

Previous evaluations of research that engages faith-based organizations have also stressed the need to include a spiritual component in the research project (Doyle et al, 2007; Kaplan et al, 2009; Kim et al, 2017; Kitzman et al, 2017; Rodriguez et al, 2009). Examples of this are opening a project meeting with a prayer, starting a community forum with a sermon by a pastor, and connecting the process, goals, and outcomes of the project to scripture. The inclusion of a spiritual component in the research project can also motivate the support of faculty, administrators, staff, and students who are inspired by their faith (Janzen et al, 2017). Researchers and faith-based community partners should, however, be cautious about the religious component of a project overpowering the scientific component (Rodriguez et al, 2009).

In sum, we expect the likelihood of success of research partnerships between academic and religious institutions to increase with: (1) transparent, participatory, and sustained interactions between scholars and faith partners, (2) the commitment of faith leaders to the partnership, and (3) the inclusion of religious rituals and values in the partnership.

Program Design and Implementation

In summer 2018, an LRJC leader proposed to the group the organization of an ecumenical workshop to educate members of local faith communities about immigration. As a volunteer of the LRJC, the researcher joined the planning committee of the workshop and became responsible for a dialogue that would happen as part of the event. From the beginning, the researcher wanted to combine a programming opportunity with research on intergroup community dialogues and on the intersections of faith and relations between immigrants and people in the United States. In the designing stages of the program, research consisted of: (1) a review of the literature on intergroup community dialogues, (2) a review of the literature on religion and immigration attitudes, (3) a pre-dialogue facilitator training session and focus group with LRJC members to discuss the dialogue guide. This initial research sought to make the dialogue evidence-based and culturally sensitive.

The researcher designed the dialogue following the principles of intergroup community dialogues: the dialogue would happen in small groups of participants, have trained facilitators, ground rules, and open-ended questions for participants to think critically about commonalities and differences between immigrants and people born in the United States (Herzig, 2011; Hope in the Cities, 1995; McCoy, Flavin, & Reaven, 1997; Study Circles Resource Center, 1998; U.S. Department of Justice, 1998; Nagda et al, 2012).

The researcher also took into account theories about the intersection of religion and immigration attitudes (Bloom et al, 2015; Brenneman, 2005; Brown & Brown, 2017; Kang, 2017; Knoll, 2009; McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2011; Paterson, 2017; Wallsten & Nteta, 2016). For instance, Bloom et al (2015) found that religious social identity increases opposition to immigrants who are dissimilar to in-group members in religion or ethnicity, while religious belief engenders welcoming attitudes toward immigrants of the same religion and ethnicity but only among the less conservative devout. To mitigate the social identity effect, in the introduction of the dialogue, the facilitator asked participants "Please say your name and which country you or your ancestors came from" to make participants acknowledge their immigrant background. To heighten the religious belief effect, the researcher included the question "What does your faith tradition say about immigrants?" which makes participants ponder what would be an immigration attitude consistent with their religious beliefs.

One week before the event, the researcher trained LRJC members to work as dialogue facilitators. Each facilitator received a guide for the dialogue, which presented the ground rules, organization, dialogue questions, evaluation procedures, and recommendations for effective facilitation (see Table 1 below for a sample). The training also included a simulation of the dialogue. Participants made a few suggestions for the dialogue, such as changes in the language of some questions to make them culturally appropriate from the perspective of immigrants.

Table 1. Examples of ground rules, facilitation guidelines, and dialogue questions

Ground rules	We agree to dialogue in good faith. We will listen to others carefully, speak honestly, and be open to thinking together.	We will raise our hands to the facilitator every time we want to speak. We will talk one person at a time and keep our comments brief.	We will face and work through disagreements respectfully. Disagreements will be about ideas and not personalized.
Facilitation guidelines	Your main task is to keep the discussion focused, stay neutral, and enforce the ground rules. Do not act as a teacher or expert. You should not become the "go to" person to answer questions.	Value people and their ideas, promoting critical thinking on those ideas without being judgmental. Ask questions about the pros and cons of ideas or facts and about assumptions and concerns underlying ideas.	Prevent outspoken participants from monopolizing the conversation.
Dialogue questions	How do you decide who your "own people" are?	Have you seen or experienced in your community tensions between immigrants and those born in the United States around cultural issues such as language, religion or ways of life?	If we had excellent relations between immigrants and people born in the United States, what kinds of things would we see, hear, or feel in the communities?

The LRJC decided the dialogue would be the last activity of the workshop and last for 40 minutes. Participants could share personal stories, feelings, and thoughts about immigration, explore commonalities and differences between immigrants and people born in the United States, discuss visions of how participants' communities should deal with immigration, and propose actions they should take to achieve that vision. To recruit workshop participants, the LRJC distributed flyers about the workshop to local public libraries, colleges, neighborhood groups and associations, but mostly to religious groups and organizations. Twenty-eight people participated

in the workshop. For the dialogue activity, participants were randomly split into small groups, each with a facilitator. The workshop took place at a private Catholic school in an area of Baltimore largely populated by Latin American immigrants.

Redesigning the Program

The evaluation of the ecumenical workshop dialogue informed the LRJC decision to scale up and redesign the dialogue. The researcher drafted an extended version of the dialogue guide according to which the program would now take place over three sessions of one hour and thirty minutes over three consecutive weeks with one session per week. The extended version of the dialogue would also encourage participants to talk in terms of personal stories (to reproduce in the dialogue the appeal of personal testimonials by immigrants, which workshop participants had highly appreciated).

The researcher shared the draft of the dialogue guide in a focus group with LRJC members for discussion. The group provided suggestions, mostly about language, which the researcher followed in the revision of the draft.

Since the evaluation of the ecumenical workshop dialogue indicated that the LRJC should expand its recruiting efforts to get a more diverse pool of dialogue participants, the LRJC decided to partner with faith communities of specific demographics and locations for subsequent dialogues. One dialogue would happen at a predominantly African American urban congregation and another would happen at a predominantly White American suburban congregation. The selection of those two settings was done to allow for comparisons and because of the biracial demographics of the Baltimore area, a predominantly African American urban core surrounded by predominantly white American suburbs. The different locations and compositions of dialogue groups could also reveal different power dynamics between participants.

Scaling up the program

Scaling up the program and engaging specific faith communities as partners was costly. The researcher applied for funding from Maryland Humanities, a statewide educational nonprofit organization. Members of the LRJC were listed in the grant application as members of the project team. The LRJC contacted two Catholic congregations that matched the criteria stated above. The application was successful.

In early 2019, the researcher met with members of the LRJC and the pastoral team of the urban predominantly African American congregation to plan the first dialogue, which happened in late February and early March 2019 in the church dining room. To recruit participants, the pastoral team suggested the researcher, being Catholic, attended a Sunday mass at the congregation to

speak about the program. Parishioners interested in the program wrote their contact information on a sign-up sheet. Between 12 and 14 people participated in the dialogue, depending on the day, including members of the congregation and members of the LRJC who were brought in to increase the number of Latinx participants. Some participants missed one of the three dialogue sessions.

After the LRJC concluded the dialogue at the urban congregation, the group contacted the pastor of the suburban predominantly White American parish that had initially accepted to host a dialogue. Although this parish was historically White American, an inflow of Latinx immigrants to the area had led to the establishment of a Hispanic ministry, including masses in Spanish. The LRJC thought the program would be a great way of building relationships between the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking parishioners. However, the pastor decided to withdraw the parish from the program fearing that open conversations about a divisive issue such as immigration at this time of the nation's history would jeopardize the incipient interethnic relations among members of the parish.

The LRJC then reached out to other suburban predominantly White American parishes and, after several weeks, received a positive response from the pastor of three parishes. The LRJC met with the pastoral team to present the program, answer questions, and decide on dates and recruitment of participants. The pastoral team decided to be in charge of the recruitment. The LRJC asked only that they invited a diverse group of people in terms of their home parish, ethnic background and political ideology, if known. The dialogue happened in May 2019. Between 11 and 14 people participated in the dialogue, depending on the day, including members of the three parishes, several of whom were immigrants, and a member of the LRJC. The pastor, a White American man, was so enthusiastic about the program that he proposed the LRJC organize a broader event on immigration open to more members of their congregations. In one of the dialogues, the pastor talked about their previous experience of service to Latin American immigrants in New York.

The researcher acted as the facilitator of both dialogues, which were held in English with as needed translation to and from Spanish. The researcher was assisted by four undergraduate students, who helped with set up and cleaning the space, distribution and collection of informed consent documents, and exit questionnaires. All dialogues were audio recorded.

In spring 2020, a leader of the LRJC told the researcher that her own congregation, an urban predominantly White American Catholic community, was interested in hosting a dialogue on immigration. The researcher proposed the LRJC organize a dialogue between members of that congregation and members of an urban predominantly Latinx Catholic congregation. The LRJC met with the pastor of the Latinx congregation, a White American man who was very receptive to the program and even offered to connect the LRJC to pastors of other Catholic parishes.

Currently, the LRJC is creating a committee of members from both congregations and the LRJC to implement the program. As the LRJC learned from the previous dialogues, members of host faith communities, not just faith leaders, need to be actively involved in the implementation of the dialogue. In this upcoming dialogue, the researcher-facilitator will use the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration* that was created based on the dialogues held at the Catholic congregations in spring 2019, as discussed in the next section.

In sum, the LRJC, leaders of host faith communities, and the researcher designed and implemented the dialogue program in collaboration. Since participant feedback on the ecumenical workshop emphasized the importance of personal testimonials to educate the public on immigration, the researcher invited another UMBC professor, Tania Lizarazo, to partner with the LRJC to work with dialogue participants in the production of digital stories. Lizarazo is an expert in digital storytelling and had already collaborated in teaching and research with members of the local Latinx community. She attended the dialogues held at the Catholic congregations and invited participants that seemed engaged in the conversations to produce digital stories about their experiences with immigration and how they understand the role of dialogue in improving relations between immigrants and those born in the United States. Lizarazo and an undergraduate research assistant taught six participants the concept of digital stories and guided them through the production process. Participants chose the images and text, used their own voice, and had control over the final content of the stories.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a major field of opportunity for partnerships between academic institutions and faith-based organizations. Unlike government agencies, business corporations, and professionally staffed non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations (especially individual congregations and volunteer groups) often lack the capacity to conduct evaluations independently. Evaluations do not only provide faith-based organizations with the knowledge necessary to develop programs but also provide demonstrated program needs and outcomes that can justify requests for resources in grant applications and fundraising efforts.

Two undergraduate students participated in the evaluation of the partnership between the LRJC and UMBC that materialized in the dialogues. They collected, transcribed, and analyzed data from the program. The researcher considered the effects of the program on faith communities, the LRJC, students, and themself as a scholar-teacher. While the LRJC was interested in the evaluation primarily as a means to develop a program, the researcher was also interested in using the data to investigate the efficacy of intergroup community dialogues in improving relations between immigrants and people born in the United States, and to explore the role of faith in those relations. The evaluation of the 2018 dialogue draws extensively from Filomeno (2019a), a

publication that resulted from the partnership. The research protocols used in the evaluation of the dialogue program were approved by the UMBC Institutional Review Board.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach. In terms of quantitative methods, the evaluation used data collected through an exit questionnaire completed by dialogue participants. Near the end of the 2018 ecumenical workshop on immigration, an undergraduate student provided a questionnaire to the 28 participants in which they provided basic demographic information and evaluated the workshop. The questionnaire contained five questions that asked participants to self-report attitudinal changes resulting from the workshop, namely feelings of mutual understanding and inclination for collaboration between immigrants and those born in the United States (see Appendix). Participants answered according to a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A compound index consisting of the average score for those five questions was generated to assess the results. The questionnaire also asked workshop participants for suggestions for improvement and other comments. At the end of the last session of each dialogue held in Catholic congregations in spring 2019, an undergraduate student provided a questionnaire for participants to evaluate the program. Like the questionnaire used in the October 2018 ecumenical workshop, this questionnaire asked participants to self-report attitudinal changes in a Likert scale that allowed for the calculation of a compound index (see Appendix).

In terms of qualitative methods, a week after the 2018 ecumenical workshop, the researcher conducted a focus group with LRJC members to discuss the event and the findings from the questionnaire data. The focus group had 13 participants, including four members who had worked as facilitators in the workshop and five members who were participants in the workshop. The focus group was audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. The evaluation of the dialogues held in Catholic congregations in spring 2019 included a thematic analysis of observation notes, dialogue transcripts, post-participation reflections by students and faith leaders, and answers to open-ended questions of the exit questionnaire completed by participants.

Since the dialogue transcripts were extensive, the researcher used the software NVivo to thematically analyze that data. The researcher coded the first dialogue and then the second dialogue. The coding followed an open coding approach, starting with a set of codes based on theories of dialogue and on a review of observation notes. Codes related to the process and outcomes of the dialogue were, for instance, “critical thinking” and “empathy.” After the first round of coding, the researcher analyzed the data again to make sure that codes created during the analysis were applied consistently across the data.

Evaluation Results

Outcomes for Faith Communities

Considering all participants of the 2018 ecumenical workshop on immigration, the compound index of attitudinal change calculated from the exit questionnaire was 4.45, near the midpoint between "agree" and "strongly agree", indicating stronger feelings of mutual understanding and inclination for collaboration between immigrants and those born in the United States as a result of participation. The questionnaire did not allow the evaluation to distinguish between effects of the dialogue portion of the workshop from the effects of mini-talks about immigration and testimonials by immigrants. The question about suggestions and comments prompted a wide variety of responses but one theme emerged from five responses: to increase the duration and/or frequency of the workshop. Participants also expressed strong appreciation for the testimonials by immigrants. Like workshop participants, the follow-up focus group with facilitators agreed on the strong appeal of testimonials by immigrants and on the need to increase the duration of the workshop. LRJC members who worked as facilitators said there was not enough time for the dialogue portion.

For the dialogue in the predominantly African American Catholic congregation, the compound index was 4.57, or 11 respondents. For the dialogue in the predominantly White American Catholic congregations, the compound index was 4.1, or 10 respondents. The high values suggest participation improved feelings of mutual understanding and inclination to collaborate across differences. The small number of participants in each dialogue makes it difficult to verify statistically the reason for the slightly weaker attitudinal change among the predominantly White American congregations, but this might be due to the higher proportion of conservative participants in those congregations.

Consistent with the findings from the questionnaire applied at the congregations, the thematic analysis indicated that the dialogue promoted mutual understanding and collaboration between immigrants and citizens born in the United States. For illustration, see the following exchange between an African American and a Latinx participant in the first dialogue (which was edited for shortness):

African American participant: What is it that makes you feel uncomfortable [among non-Hispanic Americans]? Is it something that people do directly or is it just generalizations?
Latinx participant: Sometimes people give you "the look." You have an accent.
African American participant: I do those looks too. But they're not all negative. They're more inquisitiveness than negativeness [sic]. I would just say that, you know, talk to the people. You would be surprised. People aren't all negative.

In the above exchange, the African American participant challenged an assumption of the Latinx participant, making her understand that "the look" might just be a benign sign of noticing difference. The African American participant, in turn, learned that immigrants might interpret "the look" in negative ways. In the following exchange from the first dialogue, also edited for shortness, an African American and a Latinx participant connected their experiences with discrimination:

Latinx participant: I worked at a school and I got promoted while I was working there. And the young lady that had my position before I got promoted had a starting salary that was $5,000 higher than mine. We had the same educational level, same experience. [Was that] because I'm a woman, a Latinx woman?

African American participant: I worked in a doctor's office and there was another woman that worked with the doctor and we both did the same job and we both made the same salary when we came in. But then the doctor gave me a raise, and so he gave her a raise, and every time he gave me a raise, he would give her a thousand dollars more than I had [been paid] because he could not stand for somebody black to make more money than a white person.

In both dialogues, participants often engaged in critical thinking about immigration interactively by scrutinizing, elaborating or corroborating each others' statements. The result of those critical thinking moments was not necessarily a consensus among participants, but each group was able to move from stereotypical statements about immigration to more nuanced understandings in a friendly manner.

Several passages of the dialogues also show participants' inclination to collaborate across differences, especially in response to the dialogue question about actions that participants could take to improve relations between immigrants and citizens born in the United States in their communities. Actually, as a result of the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, the LRJC and the congregation cross-marketed community events and a member of the LRJC was invited to give an "immigration 101" talk to the congregation. Participants of the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations decided to organize a multicultural, multi-parish potluck, which happened a few weeks after their last dialogue session and had 30 participants from four different parishes and several different countries, a rare occurrence in a city as racially segregated as Baltimore.

After the conclusion of the dialogues at Catholic congregations, the researcher asked the faith community leaders that collaborated with the program to write letters of testimonial. The LRJC received two such letters. A faith community leader said the she "would highly recommend that other parishes be afforded opportunities to meet and have honest conversations with members of various ethnic, racial and cultural groups to help eradicate racism and unfounded biases that separate us as members of God's family." She also suggested that "In order to more fully appreciate the diversity of the groups, the location of the [dialogue] meetings should be rotated

between the two groups [host congregation and LRJC]." This rotation format, in fact, was already adopted in the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations. According to the letter from another faith community leader, the dialogue "allowed for a safe and non-judgmental environment where individuals could share their life stories and experiences they encountered and continue to encounter as immigrants in this country … Moreover, the [dialogue] helped to develop deeper and long lasting relationships with those who participated where, otherwise, we might not have had the opportunity do so."

Outcomes for the LRJC

The UMBC and LRJC partnership launched the dialogue program that had been envisioned by the group's leadership. The LRJC brought its community connections and its mission provided a strong social justice framework lacked by traditional academic research. UMBC brought expertise in grant writing, evaluation methods, and production of digital stories. In addition, UMBC made available a classroom where several LRJC meetings related to the project were held as well as the university's graphic design services for the production of publications from the program. UMBC also provided students to assist in the execution of the program, who, in turn, gained skills and knowledge. To guarantee the sustainability of the program, the researcher wrote, in consultation with LRJC members, the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration*, which is available to the public for free (Filomeno 2019b). The guide teaches step-by-step how to implement a three-week dialogue on immigration in faith communities of any denomination. The digital stories produced with dialogue participants are published on the LRJC YouTube page will also contribute to the sustainability of the program. The presence of UMBC service interns in the LRJC, discussed below, is another positive outcome of the partnership for the group.

Outcomes for Students

Five undergraduate students participated as assistants in the project. Not all students were involved equally in all tasks and all students missed at least one dialogue session, which makes difficult a standard assessment of their learning outcomes. To evaluate what they gained from this experience, the researcher relied on notes from conversations with students during the project and on reflections they shared with the researcher via email.

In an interview for a story of *The Baltimore Sun* on experiential learning that featured the program, one of the students said, "the project helped me to understand what assumptions people have regarding race and the immigration process and how these assumptions shape their outlook on people who are different from themselves" (Scarff, 2019). In a conversation right after one dialogue session, three students said they were surprised by the stories of activism shared by elderly dialogue participants. One student said her generation thinks of themselves as the most

conscious about racial justice and environmental problems but the elderly participants of the dialogue session were already mobilizing around those issues decades ago.

Three students also expressed appreciation for dialogue across differences as a mode of communication and developed active listening skills by observing dialogue sessions. One student said "if I did not agree with [a participant's] viewpoint. Instead of feeling defensive or upset, I became curious and tried to understand their point of view" (personal communication, Feb 13, 2020). Another student said "The biggest change that is suggested from the study is listening to others. This does not mean just listening to hear words. It means really enveloping yourself in someone else's perspective" (personal communication, Feb 15, 2020).

One student specifically connected the religious component of the dialogue to their experience with religion: "as someone who has had a rocky relationship with religion throughout my life, I was able to see the positive impact that the church had on some individuals. It helped me to look past my own experience and to appreciate the experience of another. I also saw how the common thread of religion created the ability to have the conversation" (personal communication, Feb 15, 2020).

Since the partnership between UMBC and the LRJC in the dialogue program has worked out, the researcher asked the LRJC if they would like to host UMBC students in service-learning. Their response was positive and, in February 2020, two undergraduate students became service-interns for the LRJC.

Outcomes for the Researcher

The partnership between the LRJC and UMBC has given the researcher opportunities to develop their scholarship and teaching. In terms of scholarly outcomes, the researcher has published an article about the ecumenical workshop on immigration (Filomeno, 2019a), obtained a grant to fund the dialogues in Catholic congregations as a community-based research project, and has started a book project on cosmopolitan dialogues in faith communities. The researcher has also given scholarly talks about the project at UMBC and at a local public library. In terms of teaching outcomes, in spring 2020 the researcher started to teach a service-learning course on global citizenship and had two students placed in the LRJC for service-learning. More broadly, the partnership allowed the researcher to transition from research about communities to research with communities. As scholar who is also a person of faith, the researcher feels the partnership has been personally enriching, allowing them to combine rigorous academic work with service to faith communities.

Implications for Practice to Challenge Anti-Immigrant or Racist Beliefs

At last, the dialogues at Catholic congregations also generated insights about the intersection of religion and immigration that can inform the work of faith leaders and communities interested in pro-immigrant advocacy and, more broadly, partnerships between colleges and faith communities for social justice. Participants of both dialogues connected specific religious beliefs and metaphors to immigration, such as "All are welcome," "We are all God's children," "Jesus was a refugee," "all people are the body of Christ," "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and "you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." Interestingly, politically conservative White American participants who had made anti-immigrant statements were quick to bring up pro-immigrant religious beliefs. This finding is consistent with the claim by Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche (2015) that religious beliefs can generate pro-immigrant attitudes, but only among the less conservative devout. The more conservative devout might understand those religious beliefs but still display anti-immigrant attitudes.

In the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, after one participant brought up that religion had also been used to the detriment of immigrants and other minorities, such as when religious beliefs were used to justify slavery or when immigrants of religious minorities were discriminated, other participants agreed that religion can work for both the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants. Indeed, Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche (2015) found that, across religious denominations, religion as social identity – as opposed to religion as a set of beliefs – has a parochialist effect, increasing opposition to immigrants who are dissimilar to in-group members in religion or ethnicity. By contrast, participants of the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations saw the Catholic Church only as an institution that contributes to immigrant integration. They mentioned, for instance, the welcoming and vibrancy of Hispanic parishes in the United States and the church as a source of information and charity for immigrants. As social theory would expect, members of dominant social groups can be oblivious of the exclusionary aspects of social institutions. It is, therefore, important that partnerships between universities and faith-based organizations for social justice bring together people of dominant and oppressed social groups. Dialogue across difference in the context of those partnerships can help surface blind spots that some people of faith might have about religion and society.

Furthermore, at times, White American dialogue participants articulated American national identity in a Christian nationalist fashion. For instance, a White American participant mentioned the phrase "in God we trust" as a principle that Americans have used as guidance. In response to the dialogue question about what it means to be an American, two other White American participants connected the founding of the United States to Christianity, saying the founding fathers were believers and that they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Articulations of Christian nationalism were not present in the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, whose participants expressed more positive immigration attitudes and reported

more positive attitudinal change in comparison to participants of the predominantly White American congregations. This finding is consistent with the claim by McDaniel, Nooruddin and Shortle (2011) that Christian nationalism is associated with negative immigration attitudes. Leaders of partnerships between universities and faith communities that are geared for social justice in urban settings should be aware that religion is not necessarily a progressive force for social justice. Critical self-reflection informed by evaluation research can help partnership leaders navigate the complicated relationship between religion and social justice.

Discussion for Future Research

The partnership between the LRJC and UMBC materialized in the dialogue program evaluated generated benefits for the LJRC, faith communities, faculty and students from UMBC. The LRJC was able to launch a new program. Community engagement through local volunteerism led a faculty member to develop relationships and understandings that then became the natural platform for community-based scholarship. Students had the opportunity to learn dialogical skills and better understand people's perspectives on immigration and race. Immigrant and United States-born members of faith communities developed feelings of mutual understanding and collaboration across differences. The continuity of the program since mid-2018 and the recent placement of UMBC students as service-interns in the LRJC attest to the mutual benefits of the partnership. As the program engages other faith communities, those outcomes are likely to develop.

The LRJC-UMBC partnership included collaborative learning in the co-creation of the dialogue program. There were several built-in opportunities for program evaluation from its inception. Evaluation procedures, such as the focus group with facilitators of the ecumenical workshop on immigration or the questionnaire for dialogue participants, can be seen as formal procedures for active listening to program stakeholders. Punctuating the timeline of the program intentionally with evaluation moments allows one stage of the program to inform the next. In the case of the LRJC-UMBC partnership, the evaluation of the ecumenical workshop informed the design of the dialogues at Catholic congregations, whose evaluation informed the creation of the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration*, which will be used in upcoming dialogues.

Faith and scholarship are often understood as alternative approaches to knowing the world. The LRJC-UMBC partnership, however, indicates there is potential for mutually beneficial and synergistic relations between faith-based organizations and secular universities. In the case of immigrant integration, there is an interesting synergy between scholars and faith-based pro-immigrant actors. While the first think critically about immigration using logic and evidence from research, the latter think critically about immigration from the cultural perspective of cosmopolitan religious values such as "welcome the stranger."

Previous evaluations of research based in faith-communities underscored the inclusion of a spiritual component in such projects. In the LRJC-UMBC dialogue program, meetings with faith leaders would usually start with a prayer, all dialogue sessions started with a prayer, and the dialogue script specifically encouraged participants to think about what their faith traditions say about immigration. However, leaders of partnerships between universities and faith communities should be aware that religion is not necessarily a progressive force for social justice.

As previous evaluations of research based in faith communities suggested, when exploring partnerships with faith communities, academic representatives should see faith leaders as crucial stakeholders. In the LRJC-UMBC experience, the embrace by pastors of the dialogue program as a type of intercultural ministry that can integrate diverse yet segregated parishes were indispensable. Working with faith leaders requires flexibility. Many of them are overworked and their pastoral committees work on a volunteer basis. Faith leaders also tend to be protective of their faith communities and will need to be convinced that the collaboration will not hurt their communities. In the dialogues in Catholic congregations, for instance, the researcher negotiated the participant recruiting method with pastors. While, as a scholar, the researcher would have preferred a random selection of participants, pastors wanted control over who would participate.

The LRJC-UMBC experience also suggests that not only the leaders but also members of faith communities should be involved in the planning and implementation of the collaborative project. Members of faith communities can provide valuable input to project design, increase the trust of the community in the project, and help with participant recruitment and in the actual implementation of project activities. In the case of dialogue programs, the LRJC-UMBC program still faces the challenge of sustaining collaborative action between immigrants and United States-born people after dialogue ends. To go beyond one-time events, such as a multicultural potluck, the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration* now ends the dialogue with a deliberation on a single issue that participants will collaborate on over an extended period of time. The LRJC also faces the challenge of scaling the program out to other denominations and up beyond the congregation level. Again, the support from faith leaders will be essential to encourage other communities to welcome the program and to recommend it to higher clergy.

Conclusion

Immigrant integration is a key area for partnerships between urban institutions of higher education and faith-based organizations. Immigrants tend to settle in urban areas and faith-based organizations have historically played an important role in immigrant integration. Universities and faith-based organizations are, therefore, bound to encounter each other when working with immigrant communities. Overall, the LRJC-UMBC dialogue program suggests that partnerships between secular public universities and faith-based organizations are not only possible but likely

fruitful for communities, faculty, and students. Like previous evaluations of research based in faith communities, this study affirms the importance of power sharing between universities and faith-based organizations and the value of regular communication between academic and faith-based stakeholders for program assessment and cumulative learning.

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