

The Terms of Endearment: Context, Culture, and Clergy Satisfaction

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According to Mottaz (1985; Mottaz and Potts, 1986), the majority of the literature views job satisfaction as a function of work rewards and values. In this sense, he concludes, “work satisfaction represents a person-environment ‘fit’” (366). Most research on work satisfaction, including clergy satisfaction, however, focuses on the relationship between intrinsic or extrinsic job rewards and satisfaction. This social psychological, or interactionist, model of work satisfaction tends to neglect the influence of organizational culture or community context. The present study proposes type of community as a moderator of the relationship between congregational culture and clergy satisfaction.

In his study of the effect of segmentation in the religious clergy, Gannon (1979) tested Francis’s (1950) application of the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* typology to Roman Catholic religious order communities. Gannon compared the responses of OSB (Order of St. Benedict) and SJ (Society of Jesus) priests on solidarity incentives, clerical subculture, norms and beliefs, priestly identity, and commitment. The OSB approximated the *gemeinschaft* group, “relatively small, local, highly personal, familistic, with strong communal controls.” The SJ, on the other hand, more closely represented the *gesellschaft* or contractual group, “complex, rationally-organized in terms of utility and purpose, highly specialized, stressing self-control, and substituting more impersonal, segmental, and abstract relationships for more spontaneous and personal ones” (190). Against the theory, Gannon found stronger correlations between *gemeinschaft*-like relations and commitments among SJ priests and *gesellschaft*-like characteristics among OSB priests. There was “not a simple linear development from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* forms of religious organizations” (p. 193). Instead, what Gannon found was a mixture of functions between structures so that in more *gemeinschaft*-like groups “community life becomes less all-encompassing in its claims and communal control is balanced by a new emphasis on self-control.” Conversely, in more *gesellschaft*-like groups “the importance and salience of primary relations within the religious community persist . . . although these relations are likely to be seen in the service of the community’s professional work” (192-3).

Gannon’s study of organizational structures informs our research in two ways. First, his research documents the impact of organizational structure and culture on work relations, commitments, and satisfaction among clergy. Further, his finding that there is not a simple, linear *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* continuum, is consistent with community research on the contemporary transmutation of Toennies’s traditional categories. Second, Gannon’s proposed

“accommodation model” suggests that contemporary religious orders adjust organizational objectives to the individual goals of members and that the value placed on community life is associated with different patterns of influence.

The present study focuses on work satisfaction among clergy in congregations rather than religious order communities. However, we suspect that congregations as organizations do adjust their objectives to the individual goals of members and that the value placed on community life is associated with different patterns of influence. Further, whether a distinction is made between the more expressive and local definition of community (“the well-being that comes from living the common life with the like-minded”) or more instrumental and cosmopolitan view of community (“being part of a community of Christians who are working together to share the good news of the gospel”) depends largely on the community context. Finally, the work commitment and satisfaction of clergy in congregations are related to their own accommodation to the congregational (and community) culture.

Data and Methods

Quantitative data for the present study come from the 2001 National Pastoral Leader Survey conducted by Pulpit and Pew. It consists of a random sample of 883 clergy representing nearly 100 faith traditions. The sample was drawn using a hyper-network sampling technique. That is, a random sample of congregations was identified based on the church attenders from the sample of individuals who participated in the 1998 General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). NORC also conducted phone interviews for the clergy survey. The response rate was 73% and non-response bias appears limited, although very large churches in the South and Baptists appeared to be moderately under-represented. Following standard statistical methods for hyper-network samples, the data are weighted by the inverse of organizational size.¹ Qualitative data are from fifteen focus groups conducted in 2002 by the Pulpit and Pew project with clergy leaders representing congregations in urban, suburban, and rural locations in or near Los Angeles, California; Austin, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; Indianapolis, Indiana; Birmingham, Alabama; Durham, North Carolina; and Washington, D.C.

Review of the literature revealed little consensus on (or theoretical justification for) specific measures of job satisfaction. Following Mottaz’s (1985; 1986) definition of work satisfaction as “person-environment fit” and inspired by Gannon’s (1979) “accommodation model” of member-organization integration, we first created a multi-dimensional model of clergy satisfaction. The 2001 National Pastoral Leader Survey included a number of items measuring relevant aspects of work satisfaction. Clergy “Fit” is measured by response to an item on the importance of “feeling your gifts for ministry are right for the congregation you are serving.” Clergy Effectiveness is measured by response to the item, “at present, what is your level of satisfaction with your overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader in this particular congregation?” Clergy Contentment with Personal Life is a scale that includes the respondent’s present level of satisfaction with “Spiritual Life” and “Your family life.” Clergy Contentment with Congregational Life is also a scale that includes the respondent’s present level of satisfaction

¹ For more on weighting and hyper-network sampling methods, see Chaves, Mark, et al. “The National Congregations Study: Background, Methods, and Selected Results” (Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1999, vol. 38, no. 4), 458-476.

with “Relations with lay leaders in your congregation” and “Relations with other clergy and staff members in your church.”

The present study is focused on the relationship between satisfaction and congregational culture—particularly congregational culture that, in Gannon’s (1979) terms, reflects the “value placed on community life,” especially whether distinction is made between more *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft* characteristics. Two measures of *gemeinschaft* culture include a Familial scale that measures the extent to which respondents feel included, loved, and cared for and a Community-Based scale that measures involvement in community affairs, visiting the sick and prospective members. Two measures of *gesellschaft* culture include a Professional scale that measures expectations that the pastor be ordained and seminary trained as well as hours spent attending congregational meetings, and a Differentiated scale that measures having a private life apart from my religious role and finding personal or recreational time. In addition, measures of organizational climate are included: a Positive Climate scale that measures willingness to change and try new things, a vision for the future, high morale, and excitement and a Negative Climate scale that measures congregational demands, criticism, lack of agreement over pastoral role, and stress due to criticism and challenges. Vocational commitment, measured by confidence about the call to ministry and commitment to the ministry as a profession, was also included because of its potential importance in mediating the relationship between satisfaction and congregational culture and climate.

Finally, two “community type” measures were included: age of housing and median household income in the congregation’s census tract. We hypothesized that community type was a moderator of the relationship between clergy satisfaction and congregational culture, therefore, we did not expect to find a direct relationship between these contextual measures and clergy satisfaction. What we did expect, and what we did find in a correlational analysis is that contextual variables were significantly related to congregational culture and climate but not to clergy satisfaction.

The first step in our quantitative analysis was to conduct regression analyses with each of the four clergy satisfaction measures as dependent variables. Regressions also included control variables which are introduced to produce an analysis net of factors that are known to affect clergy satisfaction but are not included as community type, commitment, and congregational culture. They include: race, gender, married with children, denomination (a dummy variable coded as conservative protestant/non-conservative protestant), total compensation, current church tenure, and average weekly attendance. Then we conducted regression analyses for each of the satisfaction measures within subsets of two community types, tracts with predominantly newer housing and tracts with predominantly older housing.

Table 1
Effects of Community Type and Congregational Culture
on Clergy Satisfaction
(Full Sample)

	Satisfaction Measures			
	Clergy “Fit”	Clergy Effectiveness	Clergy Contentment	
			Personal Life	Congregational Life
Clergy Controls				
Race	.092*	.012	.042	-.024
Gender	.035	-.003	-.050	-.079*
Married with Children	.020	-.017	.041	.113**
Conservative Protestant	.055	-.075	.041	-.148**
Total Compensation	-.001	.053	.016	-.008
Tenure in Congregation	-.152**	-.013	.039	.071
Avg. Worship Attendance	-.046	.016	-.032	-.009
Community Type				
Age of Housing in Census Tract	.061	.075*	-.001	-.081*
Median Household Income in Census Tract	-.038	.004	.002	.061
Commitment				
Commitment to Vocation	-.038	.066	.078	.078*
Congregational Culture				
Gemeinschaft – Familial	.087*	.126**	.165**	.029
Gemeinschaft – Community Based	.042	-.012	.111**	.028
Gesellschaft – Professional	.156**	.205**	.050	-.084
Gesellschaft – Differentiated	.109*	-.069	.209**	.015
Positive Climate	.025	.289**	.101*	.164**
Negative Climate	.016	-.008	-.161**	-.175**
	R ² =.074	R ² =.188	R ² =.203	R ² =.139
	N=714	N=711	N=515	N=669

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

Findings

Table 1 shows the regression results for the four clergy satisfaction measures in the full sample. As can be seen at the bottom of the table, the overall R^2 's are modest in magnitude, particularly the clergy fit variable. Strongest betas are produced for the Clergy Effectiveness satisfaction measure, particularly for *Gesellschaft*, Professional and Positive Congregational Climate. Clergy Contentment with Personal Life is significantly affected by a larger number of Congregational Culture variables with the strongest standardized regression coefficients for *Gesellschaft*, Differentiated, *Gemeinschaft*, Familial, and Negative Climate.

Table 2 shows the effect of conducting the same analysis within two sub-samples—as noted previously, areas with older housing and areas with newer housing. In all four cases, the variance explained within the older housing sub-sample is much greater than the full sample. And for three out of the four satisfaction measures in the newer housing sub-sample, the variance explained is also greater. This demonstrates the moderating effect of community type on the relationship between congregational culture and clergy satisfaction.

Table 2
Comparison of Model R^2 's

	<u>Satisfaction Measures</u>			
	Clergy "Fit"	Clergy Effectiveness	<i>Clergy Contentment</i> Personal Life	<i>Clergy Contentment</i> Congregational Life
Full Sample	.074	.188	.203	.139
Older Sub-Sample	.124	.221	.337	.199
Newer Sub-Sample	.094	.246	.195	.151

For purposes of time, I will focus Clergy Effectiveness and Clergy Contentment with Personal Life within the two sub-samples. In the older housing sub-sample, the strongest predictor of Clergy Effectiveness is *Gesellschaft*, Professional. The value of which increased markedly from the full sample to .405. Interestingly, the value declined to the point of insignificance in the newer housing sub-sample to .086. By contrast, the influence of positive climate remained significant for older housing and newer housing, increasing for both slightly over the full sample.

Another highly interesting finding was that the beta value for Negative Climate in the full sample was virtually zero but increased to significance for both the older housing and new housing sub-sample. However, for the older housing sub-sample, the sign was positive (.156) and for the newer housing sub-sample, the sign was negative (.184). The effect of *Gemeinschaft*, Familial was significant in the full sample, the older housing and the newer housing sub-samples but increased slightly in magnitude for pastors in areas of newer housing. Finally, Commitment to Vocation which was not significantly related to Clergy Effectiveness in the full sample predicted Clergy Effectiveness in the older housing sub-sample but not in the newer housing sub-sample.

Table 3
Effects of Community Type and Congregational Culture
on Clergy Effectiveness

	Older Houses Sub-Sample	Newer Houses Sub-Sample
<i>Clergy Controls</i>		
Race	-.021	.027
Gender	-.032	-.022
Married with Children	.006	-.100
Conservative Protestant	-.020	-.088
Total Compensation	.013	.018
Tenure in Congregation	-.085	-.034
Avg. Worship Attendance	-.023	.047
<i>Community Type</i>		
Age of Housing in Census Tract	.091	-.011
Median Household Income in Census Tract	.019	.030
<i>Commitment</i>		
Commitment to Vocation	.111*	.064
<i>Congregational Culture</i>		
Gemeinschaft – Familial	.122*	.161**
Gemeinschaft – Community Based	-.068	-.004
Gesellschaft – Professional	.405**	.086
Gesellschaft – Differentiated	.021	-.158**
Positive Climate	.305**	.321**
Negative Climate	.156*	-.184**
	$R^2=.221$	$R^2=.246$
	N=352	N=359

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

Now we will look at Clergy Contentment with Personal Life. In the older housing sub-sample, the strongest predictor of Clergy Contentment with Personal Life is *Gesellschaft, Differentiated*. The standardized regression coefficient of .337 represented a substantial increase from the full sample. For clergy in areas of newer housing, however, the beta value declined from .209 in the full sample to .132. The same effect is seen for *Gemeinschaft, Familial* which is strongly significant in the older housing sub-sample but reduced to insignificance in the newer housing sub-sample.

Gemeinschaft, Community-Based was significantly related to Clergy Contentment in Personal Life in the full sample. The effect of this variable increased strongly in the newer housing sub-sample but was reduced to insignificance in the older housing sub-sample. The same basic pattern is observed for *Positive Climate*. It was the strongest predictor of Clergy Contentment in Personal Life in the newer housing sub-sample (.210), a significant predictor in the full sample but with a much smaller value (.101), and was reduced to insignificance in the older housing sub-sample.

Table 4
Effects of Community Type and Congregational Culture
on Clergy Contentment with Personal Life

	Older Houses Sub-Sample	Newer Houses Sub-Sample
<i>Clergy Controls</i>		
Race	.060	.033
Gender	-.111	.031
Married with Children	.042	.036
Conservative Protestant	.093	.034
Total Compensation	.091	-.036
Tenure in Congregation	-.074	.126*
Avg. Worship Attendance	-.056	-.010
<i>Community Type</i>		
Age of Housing in Census Tract	-.119	-.055
Median Household Income in Census Tract	.033	-.062
<i>Commitment</i>		
Commitment to Vocation	.127*	.045
<i>Congregational Culture</i>		
<i>Gemeinschaft – Familial</i>	.226**	.109
<i>Gemeinschaft – Community Based</i>	.062	.163**
<i>Gesellschaft – Professional</i>	.062	.095
<i>Gesellschaft – Differentiated</i>	.337**	.132*
<i>Positive Climate</i>	-.015	.210**
<i>Negative Climate</i>	-.135	-.140*
	R ² =.337 N=231	R ² =.195 N=284

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01

The effect of Negative Climate on Clergy Contentment in Personal Life was significant in the full sample but was reduced in magnitude for both the older and newer housing sub-samples. It remains significantly related to Clergy Contentment in Personal Life among clergy in newer housing areas. Commitment to Vocation in the older housing sub-sample was significantly related to Clergy Contentment in Personal Life but did not predict this form of contentment in either the full sample or the newer housing sub-sample. Looking at the control variables, it can be seen that longer tenure in the congregation is associated with greater clergy contentment in the newer housing sub-sample. This effect was not observed for Clergy Contentment in Personal Life in the full sample or the older housing sub-sample. In fact, for older housing, the sign reverses but is insignificant.

As predicted, the relationship between clergy satisfaction and congregational culture is moderated by community type. Further, much as Gannon (1979) found, satisfaction among clergy in areas of older housing (expected *gemeinschaft*-like contexts) was more highly related to *gesellschaft*-like organizational characteristics. Conversely, satisfaction among clergy in areas of newer housing (expected *gesellschaft*-like contexts) was more strongly related to *gemeinschaft*-like organizational characteristics. In older housing areas, for example, satisfaction with Clergy Effectiveness is explained by an organizational culture that expects clergy to be credentialed and busy in its energetic and forward-looking organizational life. Clergy working in long-established communities, however, know that moving congregations forward is not an easy task and they expect conflict. Buffers for the inevitable stress created by clergy effectiveness in more *gemeinschaft*-oriented contexts are the tendency to include and care for members of the family and the clergy-person's own strength of vocational commitment.

In newer housing areas, satisfaction with clergy effectiveness is explained by organizational cultures that are, first, characterized by a positive climate, and that are NOT associated with conflict, criticism, or stress related to work challenges. Second, however, clergy effectiveness in more *gesellschaft*-oriented contexts is strongly related to *gemeinschaft*-like familial inclusion and care. Not surprisingly, such intense involvement leaves little time for a life apart from the job.

Similarly, contentment with personal life among clergy in older housing areas is most strongly related to the ability to differentiate their personal from work life. This, however, is more often a characteristic associated with more *gesellschaft* than *gemeinschaft* contexts. The inclusion and caring support of such congregations at their best may provide support for clergy in clarifying and maintaining these boundaries. Certainly, as with clergy effectiveness in long-established communities, a strong sense of vocational commitment is required.

As with clergy in areas of newer housing in relation to clergy effectiveness, such clergy are more likely to experience contentment with personal life if the organizational climate is positive, energetic, and forward-looking and NOT conflictual and stressful. Different from clergy in older, more established communities, however, contentment with personal life is related, first, to involvement in the local community ALONG WITH time apart for a personal life, relaxation, and recreation. As before, more *gemeinschaft*-like characteristics are associated with satisfaction in *gesellschaft* contexts. Not surprisingly, clergy in suburban areas who are concerned to create *gemeinschaft* in *gesellschaft* (a goal our suburban pastors in focus groups explicitly embraced) must also maintain time apart for a personal life, relaxation, and recreation. Perhaps, that is why longer tenure in a congregation is associated with contentment with personal life among clergy in areas of newer housing.

Appendix
Effects of Community Type and Congregational Culture on Clergy Satisfaction
(Older Houses Sub-Sample)

	Satisfaction Measures			
	Clergy "Fit"	Clergy Effectiveness	<i>Clergy Contentment</i>	
			Personal Life	Congregational Life
<i>Clergy Controls</i>				
Race	.120*	-.021	.060	-.014
Gender	.054	-.032	-.111	-.101
Married with Children	.021	.006	.042	.125*
Conservative Protestant	.115	-.020	.093	-.133
Total Compensation	-.080	.013	.091	-.085
Tenure in Congregation	-.129*	-.085	-.074	.071
Avg. Worship Attendance	-.060	-.023	-.056	-.045
<i>Community Type</i>				
Age of Housing in Census Tract	.143**	.091	-.119	.100
Median Household Income in Census Tract	-.002	.019	.033	.107
<i>Commitment</i>				
Commitment to Vocation	-.035	.111*	.127*	.083
<i>Congregational Culture</i>				
Gemeinschaft – Familial	.134*	.122*	.226**	-.013
Gemeinschaft – Community Based	.096	-.068	.062	.093
Gesellschaft – Professional	.254**	.405**	.062	-.072
Gesellschaft – Differentiated	.076	.021	.337**	.061
Positive Climate	-.069	.305**	-.015	.227**
Negative Climate	-.038	.156*	-.135	-.156*
	R ² =.124 N=334	R ² =.221 N=352	R ² =.337 N=231	R ² =.199 N=334

Effects of Community Type and Congregational Culture on Clergy Satisfaction
(Newer Houses Sub-Sample)

	Satisfaction Measures			
	Clergy "Fit"	Clergy Effectiveness	<i>Clergy Contentment</i>	
			Personal Life	Congregational Life
<i>Clergy Controls</i>				
Race	.082	.027	.033	-.017
Gender	.005	-.022	.031	-.092
Married with Children	.002	-.100	.036	.100
Conservative Protestant	.009	-.088	.034	-.226**
Total Compensation	.019	.018	-.036	.027
Tenure in Congregation	-.180**	-.034	.126*	.057
Avg. Worship Attendance	-.041	.047	-.010	.030
<i>Community Type</i>				
Age of Housing in Census Tract	-.063	-.011	-.055	-.094
Median Household Income in Census Tract	-.013	.030	-.062	.028
<i>Commitment</i>				
Commitment to Vocation	-.051	.064	.045	.052
<i>Congregational Culture</i>				
Gemeinschaft – Familial	.025	.161**	.109	.087
Gemeinschaft – Community Based	.045	-.004	.163**	-.008
Gesellschaft – Professional	.081	.086	.095	-.042
Gesellschaft – Differentiated	.146*	-.158**	.132*	-.083
Positive Climate	.152**	.321**	.210**	.113*
Negative Climate	.059	-.184**	-.140*	-.253**
	R ² =.094 N=359	R ² =.246 N=359	R ² =.195 N=284	R ² =.151 N=335

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01