

Public Abstract

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The combination of a critique of organized faith, along with an interest in pursuing faith expressions by living a particular sense of justice, leads some religious practitioners to discover new contexts to live out their faith experiences. These new contexts may exist outside of traditional religious institutions, but in this process, not all boundary work is put aside. In this dissertation, I explore how a group of social justice activists seeks to unite issues of worker justice and faith by redefining work and the worker as belonging to the realm of the sacred. In so doing, they challenge the boundaries that delineate the sacred and the profane, the public and the private. Based on particular family and faith histories, they have cultivated an understanding that all religions believe in justice, requiring that practitioners move from acts of charity to acts of justice in order to experience a deeper, more authentic faith. In journeying with them, I discovered that organizational form and structure are important even in the new setting. Rigid hierarchies and agendas insensitive to local contexts can stand in the way of justice work based on a framework of relationship-building and consensus decision-making. Organizational form can transgress and become something that no longer reflects the ways practitioners want to live out their faiths.