

Religion, Race, and Discrimination: A Field Experiment of How American Churches Welcome Newcomers

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This article reports the results of a nationwide audit study testing how Christian churches welcome potential newcomers to their churches as a function of newcomers' race and ethnicity. We sent email inquiries to 3,120 churches across the United States. The emails were ostensibly from someone moving to the area and looking for a new church to attend. That person's name was randomly varied to convey different racial and ethnic associations. In response to these inquiries, representatives from mainline Protestant churches—who generally embrace liberal, egalitarian attitudes toward race relations—actually demonstrated the most discriminatory behavior. They responded most frequently to emails with white-sounding names, somewhat less frequently to black- or Hispanic-sounding names, and much less to Asian-sounding names. They also sent shorter, less welcoming responses to nonwhite names. In contrast, evangelical Protestant and Catholic churches showed little variation across treatment groups in their responses. These findings underscore the role of homophily, organizational homogeneity, and the costs of racial integration in perpetuating the racial segregation of American religious life.

Keywords: *religion, race, discrimination, field experiment.*

INTRODUCTION

Racial segregation is a defining characteristic of the social organization of American Christianity at both the denominational and congregational level. An estimated 86 percent of congregations in America draw at least 80 percent of their members from a single racial group (National Congregations Study 2007). For example, 91 percent of all mainline Protestants are white as are 86 percent of evangelical Baptists. Almost 80 percent of all African-American Christians are clustered in seven major black denominations, and the remaining 20 percent are mostly in

Acknowledgments: For their research assistance, the authors thank Jordan Bloch, Vanessa Carmona, Jocelyn Claudio, Krista D'Amelio, Abigail Dunbar, Timothy Gibbons, Gregory Hall, Nicole Johnson, Jane Kelleher, Caitlin Leffingwell, Jacqueline Liu, Stephanie Miller, Ezra Morrison, Desiree Nanni, Catherine O'Leary, Siobhan O'Malley, Amanda Pickett, Michael Pollack-Twomey, Mark Selvaggi, Neal Stewart, Nolan Sweeney, and Sunny Vonchandola. For their input into this project, they thank Kathleen Garces-Foley, George Yancey, Scott Thumma, Nancy Wallach, and Douglas Bradley. The authors also thank Donald Green for his general advice about field experiments.

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predominately black congregations (Emerson and Smith 2000:16). By one estimate, only 13.7 percent of American congregations are multiracial (Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson 2013).

Racial segregation in American Christianity reinforces racial inequality throughout society. Religious congregations constitute the most extensive voluntary associations in the United States, involving over half of all Americans (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). They are the center of religious life in the United States, and they mediate members' private and public worlds (Emerson 2006). As such, race relations within churches necessarily affect race relations nationwide (Emerson and Kim 2003). Racial segregation in churches generates and sustains broader group biases and prejudices (Emerson and Smith 2000). Racial segregation alienates religious groups from each other (Dougherty and Huyser 2008), separating them into exclusive groups (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Dougherty and Huyser 2008). While larger social forces shape churches, the racial segregation in churches also shapes society as a whole (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005).

Religious racial segregation also redirects social resources. Churches serve important social functions, such as providing social networks, civic participation, and instrumental support (Blanchard 2007); in fact, clergy and congregations are a key resource that Americans turn to when they have serious needs (Cnaan et al. 2002). Racially homogenous religious groups create racially isolated social networks that contribute to differential access to resources, reinforcing socioeconomic inequality along racial lines (Emerson and Smith 2000). As churches allocate spiritual, material, and social rewards along racial lines, they constitute yet another aspect of a racialized society (Bonilla-Silva 1997).

To what extent does the racial segregation observed in many churches result from churches being less welcoming to people of different races? This article reports the results of a large-scale, nationwide field experiment that tests how Christian churches welcome potential newcomers as a function of the newcomers' race and ethnicity. It examines both if major Christian denominations discriminate and which racial and ethnic groups receive the most discrimination.

SOCIAL PRESSURES FOR AND AGAINST RACIAL INTEGRATION OF CHURCHES

Christian Theology, Justice, and Organizational Maintenance

All major Christian traditions share a central theological tenet to spread their religion to people outside the church (Garces-Foley 2008): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The admonition to "go forth" in both the physical and spiritual sense has motivated Christian missionary efforts in other parts of the world as well as close to home. Equally compelling is the precept to provide hospitality to strangers that is woven deep into Christian scripture and teaching: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). The act of receiving outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests is viewed as a sign of God's grace and beneficence. In a larger sense, attracting newcomers serves to fulfill the purpose of the church in delivering the word of God to outsiders; thus, welcoming newcomers to the church is a vehicle for leading others to salvation and is central to the mission of Christianity.

In addition to theological considerations, many Christian churches are driven to seek new members for reasons of organizational maintenance and growth. Many churches confront a challenging organizational environment that makes attracting new members difficult—an aging population or loss of population, competition from other churches in the community, economic and social forces that pull people away from the church. In an era when church attendance is declining and commitment by many members to church activities is waning, attracting new members is an organizational and economic imperative. Members are important for providing economic and human resources to help advance the church's mission. These organizational constraints would

seem to mitigate any tendency for churches to discriminate against new members on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Indeed, many Christian denominations in the United States have official positions formally welcoming people of all races. Among evangelical churches since the late 1980s, there has been a boom in racial reconciliation activities, including books, conferences, videos, speeches, study guides, formal statements, and formal apologies (Emerson and Smith 2000). For example, in 1989, the Southern Baptist Convention passed the following resolution in strong support of active racial integration (Southern Baptist Convention 1989):

Be it further RESOLVED, that we call upon individual Southern Baptists, as well as our churches, to reach across racial boundaries, establishing fraternal rather than paternal friendships; and . . .

Be it further RESOLVED, that our agencies and institutions seek diligently to bring about greater racial and ethnic representation at every level of Southern Baptist institutional life.

In recent decades, all mainline Protestant denominations have made statements in support of racial equality and inclusion (Garces-Foley 2010). For example, Foster and Brelsford (1996) studied the multicultural dynamics of three mainline Protestant congregations in Atlanta, and each congregation embraced and celebrated cultural differences. Mainline denominations vary, however, in their commitment to creating multiethnic congregations. At the forefront, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has dedicated significant resources to this goal, including staff, grants, and web resources (Garces-Foley 2010).

Similarly, Catholics emphasize the multicultural church that fosters cultural diversity (Garces-Foley 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, the Catholic Church in America changed its emphasis from cultural pluralism to multiculturalism. Moreover, since Vatican II, Catholic leadership, both nationally and internationally, has supported cultural rights in both society and the church (Hoover 2009). In this multicultural approach, the church has encouraged cross-cultural interaction at the parish level as a way to foster unity. Some parishes have embraced this emphasis on multiculturalism, for example, with structural changes designed to empower lay leaders from different cultural groups. Other parishes, however, have resisted this change and are still divided along cultural lines (Garces-Foley 2008), or they endorse cultural assimilation (Hoover 2009). Among Christian traditions and denominations, Catholics arguably have shown the strongest support for racial justice (Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson 2013).

Thus, theological and organizational considerations of most Christian traditions would provide strong disincentives against discriminating against potential church members on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Homophily, Organizational Homogeneity, and the Potential Costs of Racial Integration

Working against this widespread endorsement of racial integration are the pressures of homophily. In general terms, the principle of homophily holds that people prefer to associate with others similar to them, and this preference is especially relevant for socially salient characteristics such as age, sex, and race (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Verbrugge 1977). Applied to voluntary organizations such as churches, homophily identifies various mechanisms that generate social homogeneity. Voluntary organizations recruit new members primarily through the social networks of existing members, and since these networks tend to be homogeneous, the people recruited often resemble existing members (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987; Popielarz and McPherson 1995). Further, people are most attracted to groups that are populated with members similar to themselves (Popielarz and McPherson 1995). Hall, Matz, and Wood conclude: “simply identifying with a religious group seemed to establish intergroup dynamics of favoring the in-group and derogating racial out-groups” (2010:134).

Once people join a group, homophily creates further pressure toward homogeneity in that atypical group members—those less similar to core members—are more likely to be marginalized, and other groups are more likely to poach these fringe members (Popielarz and McPherson 1995). The resulting attrition process leaves behind members similar to one another. As a result of homophily, voluntary organizations attract and retain members who are central to their niche, resulting in a high degree of internal homogeneity (Popielarz and McPherson 1995).

Applying the homophily principle to religious contexts, Emerson and Smith note: “individual congregations tend to be made up of people from similar geographic locations, similar socioeconomic statuses, similar ethnicities, and, perhaps first and foremost, predominantly the same race” (2000:142).

Racially homogeneous congregations can have organizational benefits (Emerson and Smith 2000). They permit members to interact with people of similar life experiences, values, and goals (Emerson and Kim 2003). As a result, congregations tend to attract members who feel socially comfortable with each other (Garces-Foley 2007b). Moreover, religious groups can be successful when they tailor their approach to the preferences of a specific group of people (Edwards 2008; Stark and Finke 2000). Homogeneity can promote religious vitality (Finke and Stark 1992) as well as membership growth, high levels of commitment, and in-group solidarity (Dougherty and Mulder 2009). Ethnically homogeneous churches provide an opportunity for ethnic fellowship, and they allow members to preserve cultural traditions (Emerson and Kim 2003). They also can provide social integration for recent immigrants (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000).

Reinforcing the benefits of racial homogeneity are the potential costs of racial heterogeneity. Strong boundaries between volunteer organizations create identity and meaning for group members and vitality of the group, and this can be diminished with inclusion of different peoples (Emerson and Smith 2000). Explicit attempts at racial integration can lead to a loss of church identity (Garces-Foley 2007b). Thus, conclude Emerson and Smith, “internally homogenous congregations more often provide what draws people to religious groups for a lower cost than do internally diverse congregations” (2000:145).

Racial integration can require the expenditure of considerable economic and emotional resources at a time when these resources are in scarce supply for many churches. Churches seeking to integrate might need to change their worship style, hire new staff, and add special ministry programs (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Edwards 2008; Garces-Foley 2007a). Routine church matters such as worship style may become fraught with racial meaning, as they represent larger issues of racial inequality, oppression, and segregation (Edwards 2008). Mixed race churches routinely experience racial conflict among many dimensions. These include the type of music, length of service, types of programs, style of preaching, and, generally, how people relate to each other (Emerson and Smith 2000). Racial and ethnic integration can be especially difficult when it encompasses multiple language groups (Emerson 2006). At the interpersonal level, the meaning given to nonverbal communication, such as touching, hugging, and eye contact, can vary by race and can evolve into race-related conflict in church interactions (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). At stake is group-centered habitus—the preference for how things should be done (Bourdieu 1984)—and as groups struggle over how things should be done, small differences in preferences can become big sources of conflict (Emerson 2006).

Our data set does not contain information about the racial composition of specific congregations, and so we posit a hypothesis for how all the churches in our study should respond. We took a random sample of American Christian congregations, and the majority of American congregations are white (Pew Research Center 2008); therefore, we expect that processes of homophily in welcoming newcomers would overall favor whites, simply because there are more white churches.

H1: American Christian churches will be less welcoming to potential newcomers who are Hispanic, black, or Asian than to whites.

ARE SOME CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS MORE WELCOMING OF RACIAL MINORITIES?

The cross-pressures of organizational maintenance and homophily are distributed unequally across different types of churches. In this study, we examine churches from three broad Christian traditions—mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic. The discussion of these traditions highlights the differences between structural- and interactional-level emphases on justice. Structural justice refers to equality in opportunities and outcomes at a structural level; it is evidenced when people are able to realize their full potential in the society in which they live (Rawls 1971). It emphasizes the role of social institutions, such as education, labor rights, employment law, and healthcare to bring about fair distribution of social resources (Rawls 1971). Interactional justice focuses on how people are treated in and by an organization. Interactional justice has two components. Interpersonal justice is evidenced when people are treated with politeness and dignity as an organization implements its policies and procedures; informational justice focuses on the explanations and information given to people by members of an organization (Colquitt et al. 2001). While it would be logical to assume that groups that emphasize structural justice in race relationships would also demonstrated the most inclusiveness in interpersonal interactions, this may not be the case.

Mainline Protestants

Most mainline Protestant denominations actively speak out against racial discrimination, emphasize structural justice, and support racial integration (Cooper 2003; Findlay 1993). Likewise, mainline Protestants are more likely than evangelicals to support race-based affirmative action policies (Brown 2009). However, mainline denominations tend to be predominately white. For example, the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey found that in the mainline tradition, 96 percent of Lutherans were white as were 93 percent of Methodists, 91 percent of Presbyterians, 93 percent of Congregationalists, and 83 percent of Baptists (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008).

One explanation for this regards the nature of mainline Protestant services. A key factor in racial integration is the worship style of the church. An expressive, contemporary worship service can transcend racial barriers and welcome people from different backgrounds (Dougherty 2003). Integrating musical genres in worship can be used to bring together people from multiple racial groups (Marti 2012). However, many mainline churches use a traditional, ritualized approach to worship rooted in European music. A study of worship styles found that white, liberal Protestant congregations had lower levels of verbal affirmation and spontaneous physical worship than did white Catholic or evangelical Protestant churches (Edwards 2009).

While mainline Protestants value racial equality and justice at the societal level, this may not always translate into day-to-day interactions with nonwhites in their congregations. For example, while the Episcopal Church has vigorously promoted racial equality in public, Shattuck (2000) has argued that it has not correspondingly provided sufficient resources and positions of authority for African Americans within its denomination (Shattuck 2000). While the actions of Episcopalian leaders do not necessarily reflect that of their members, Shattuck claims that this illustrates “white Episcopalians’ longstanding ambivalence about their relationship with African Americans” (2000:217). Also, to the extent that mainline Protestants emphasize the structural causes of racism, they may view interpersonal remedies as having lower levels of efficacy.¹

¹We thank an anonymous reviewer for making this point.

Another factor is the age distribution of mainline Protestant congregations, for older congregations are associated with lower levels of racial diversity (Emerson 2006). Indeed, mainline Protestants tend to be older than members of other Christian traditions, with over half of their members being over age 50 (Pew Research Center 2008), thus perhaps making them less inclined to embrace racial diversity in practice.

Evangelical Protestants²

At first blush, evangelical Protestant churches might seem less welcoming to diverse newcomers, for evangelical Protestants, such as Baptists and fundamentalists, are less likely to endorse racial integration at the societal level than mainline Protestants or Catholics (Chalfant and Peek 1983). For example, evangelicals are more likely to approve laws against interracial marriage and to vote for laws that would permit racial discrimination in home sales (Putnam and Campbell 2010). People holding theologically conservative attitudes are more likely to cling to existing stereotypes and not be open to new information; moreover, the general belief that one's religion teaches absolute truth contributes to a strong in-group preference (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). The theological orientation of white evangelical Protestant congregations is associated with network closure, which in turn creates disconnection from the broader community, hindering social ties that span racial boundaries (Blanchard 2007).

Further, evangelicals are less likely than mainline Protestants to use language celebrating racial diversity, in part because of its association with secular liberalism (Garces-Foley 2007a). Evangelicals downplay the influence of structural racism, economic inequality, and other structural forces that impact marginalized racial and ethnic groups (Brown 2009). Evangelical Protestants tend to oppose political and social changes that create socioeconomic opportunities for African Americans (Emerson and Smith 2000).

Instead, evangelicals emphasize free-will individualism whereby individuals are granted free will from God and thus they are responsible for their actions (Emerson and Smith 2000; Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999). As a consequence, racial and ethnic group distinctions are seen as having little impact on life chances (Emerson and Smith 2000; Stark and Glock 1969). This lack of emphasis on group distinctions represents an instance of "color blindness," which has been linked to white privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2003). In contrast, mainline Protestant and Catholic thought follows a prophetic strand that emphasizes the role of structural forces in shaping individual lives (Brown 2009).

Nonetheless, evangelical denominations tend to be more racially and ethnically diverse than mainline Protestant denominations, perhaps indicating a greater receptiveness to racial minorities (Pew Research Center 2008). Indeed, key aspects of evangelical theology and practice tend to foster racial diversity, especially at the interpersonal level, as studied here. A core belief of evangelicals is the need to spread their religion across group boundaries. A racially and ethnically integrated church fits with the New Testament vision for the Christian church (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). Evangelicals focus on their congregations being open to all people, regardless of social group (Emerson and Smith 2000). Integrating congregations would be an extension of the "friendship model" of evangelical outreach, and it might be an important contribution by evangelical Protestants to solving racial division in the United States (Emerson and Smith 2000).

Evangelical Protestants also embrace a relational focus in their faith that emphasizes interactional justice. From this perspective, racial discrimination is rooted in poor relationships, personal sin, and the negative influence of other people (Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999).

²For the sake of this article, we define evangelical Protestants as people who affiliate with evangelical churches or denominations, using Steensland et al.'s (2000) categorization.

Thus, racial reconciliation comes with a personal commitment to Jesus and loving interpersonal relationships. The phrase “you can’t legislate love” undergirds their approach of transforming society “one heart at a time” (Garces-Foley 2007b). For evangelicals, interracial harmony comes from the individual transformation model of racial reconciliation (Garces-Foley 2007b). As a result, evangelicals may be particularly attuned to welcoming people of different racial and ethnic groups into to their churches.

Studies have examined large evangelical churches that have made remarkable strides in becoming racially diverse (Marti 2010). These churches are marked by an explicit focus on becoming more racially inclusive, rooted in Christian teachings and principles. A pastor of a large, racially mixed church indicated an institutional commitment to racial equality by saying: “we thought [racial diversity] was something God was doing, but we should protect it, or nurture it” (Marti 2010:209). More generally, there is a tension between ethnic reinforcement and ethnic transcendence within their congregational structures. Some successful churches provide “havens” within their organizational structure in which ethnic identities are affirmed (Marti 2010). Other churches emphasize structure inclusion that downplays ethnic identities, with racial diversity coinciding with congregational members reorienting their identities to a common religious identity (Marti 2005, 2009).

Catholics

Catholic churches might be welcoming to all newcomers because in the Catholic Church both structural and interactional perspectives on racial justice are emphasized. Catholic social teaching addresses poverty and wealth, economics, social organization, and the role of the state. According to Kammer (2009), it also holds that any expression of racism is morally unacceptable, and racism is a radical evil. Further, the highly centralized structure of Roman Catholic governance allows for a unified, church-wide stance against segregation (Northwood 1958). In contrast, Protestant churches tend to be more decentralized, with less uniformity in their social justice norms. Of course, while ordinary Catholics do not always follow lockstep the teachings of the church hierarchy, these official stances of the Catholic church are likely to be reflected in the actions of church leaders at the parish level.

Catholic congregations are three times more likely than Protestant congregations to be racially and ethnically mixed (15 percent vs. 5 percent) (Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson 2013). In particular, American Catholicism has received a steady influx of Hispanics in recent decades due to immigration (Putnam and Campbell 2010). A particular feature of Catholic organization reinforces segregation: the norm of people attending a parish on the basis of geographical location. Thus, to the extent that parishes’ boundaries encompass people of different racial and ethnic groups, this norm will create diversity within a parish. This geographically-based assignment of Catholics to churches could instill norms of welcoming everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, since they are from the area. While we do not want to overstate the tendency of Catholics to worship exclusively in their own parish, it is nonetheless true that potential members of Protestant churches are more likely to “shop around” for the best church and Protestant church officials are very aware of this shopping behavior in their interactions with newcomers (Emerson and Smith 2000). Altogether, the structural and social influences have resulted in Catholic congregations being more likely than Protestant congregations to be multiracial (Emerson 2006).

These observations lead to the following hypothesis about which churches will be more receptive to newcomers who are nonwhite:

H2: Mainline Protestant churches will be relatively less welcoming than evangelical Protestant or Catholic churches to potential newcomers who are Hispanic, black, or Asian.

DATA, METHODS, AND DESIGN

The present study is part of a larger project in which we investigate how church responses to potential newcomers vary by race and class of the person making the inquiry. We employ an emerging method known as the Internet-based field experiment (Wallace et al. 2012) to contact churches by email inquiring about possible membership. Our study takes the form of an audit study (Pager and Shepherd 2008) that tests discrimination by churches against potential newcomers.

The current study revolves around a very simple research question: Do churches treat potential newcomers differently on the basis of perceived race? We sent emails to churches nationwide. In each email, we posed as someone contemplating a move to the community where the church is located and wanting to find a new church home. The email asked for information about the church. Our contact with the churches was initiated with the following email (adapted for Catholics with the italicized parentheticals):

Subject line: Moving to your area

Dear Pastor (*Father*),

My family and I are planning to move to your area in the next several months. We're looking for a new church (*parish*) to attend, and we're hoping to get some information about your church (*parish*). We'd like to find a church (*parish*) similar to the one that we regularly attend now. So would you please let me know how big your congregation (*parish*) is, your service times, and any other additional information that may be helpful?

Thank you very much,

(Signature)

This type of initial screening is not uncommon in American Christianity, and it fits with the common practice of church shopping (Emerson and Smith 2000). For example, Emerson and Smith (2000:140) tell of a couple who had recently moved to a new metro area, and to find the right church for them, they created a short list of 25 promising churches that fit their criteria. They then conducted short telephone interviews with representatives of each of these churches and narrowed the search to five churches, which they visited in person. Anecdotally, we have heard of similar stories from both mainline Protestant and Catholic churches of potential members asking for information about the congregation.

A key manipulation in this project is the perceived race and ethnicity of the email authors, whom we labeled "characters." We designated the race of each character on the signature line by utilizing given names and surnames that signaled likely racial or ethnic identities of the characters as follows: "white" (Scott Taylor, Greg Murphy); "black" (Jamal Washington, Tyrone Jefferson); "Hispanic" (Carlos Garcia, José Hernandez); or "Asian" (Wen-Lang Li, Jong Soo Kim). We created two names for each racial/ethnic identity to offset idiosyncratic responses to specific names.

We created separate name-identified email accounts for each of the characters. With the assistance of several undergraduate assistants, we used these accounts to send the emails described above to a nationally representative sample of churches between May and July 2010. These email accounts were then used to collect the responses of church officials. We received many responses from the churches on the same day we sent the emails; in other cases, responses came several weeks later, often with an apology for the slow response.

The Internet-based nature of our field experiment means that there were no geographical barriers to the study. Thus, in order to assure a nationally representative sample, we employed a sampling frame representative of different geographic regions in the United States as well as

a range of major Christian denominations. To achieve geographical representation, we obtained a list of 436 congressional districts (including the District of Columbia) and arrayed them in inverse order according to the population density of the districts. Congressional districts have the advantage of containing approximately equal numbers of people, and give churches a roughly similar chance of being selected for the study. We then used interval sampling to select 65 districts (approximately 1 in 7) for inclusion in the sample. This procedure not only ensured that the districts were geographically dispersed, but also that they encompassed a range of settings including rural, urban central city, suburban, and small town locations.

We then identified 12 major, organized Christian denominations in the United States that represented mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic traditions. Among mainline Protestant denominations, we selected the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A. Among evangelical Protestant denominations and groups, we selected churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Church of Christ, congregations affiliating with the Willow Creek Association, and churches that self-identify as Pentecostal (regardless of specific denomination).

For most denominations, we were able to locate a website on the Internet that provided a comprehensive national list of churches. For denominations with no readily accessible websites, we used the Google search engine to identify churches. By either method, we ultimately sought to identify churches by name along with their locations, contact information, and (in many cases) church websites. One key requirement for inclusion in the sample was that the church must have a working email address by which our characters could contact it; these email addresses might be directed to the church pastor or priest, a church secretary, or an anonymous church address. Using this information, we attempted to locate churches for each of the 12 denominations within each congressional district. We attempted to identify these churches within a reasonable radius of a geographically central location (such as a key city or town) within each district. With these parameters, we sometimes had to extend the radius some distance from the central location and in some cases our search spilled over into adjacent congressional districts.³ This led to a few duplicate churches being included in the original sample (the same church was chosen from two different districts); these duplicates were weeded out and replaced with nonduplicates when possible. In addition, some of our initial emails bounced back to us or were answered by someone no longer affiliated with the target church. In these cases, we either attempted to contact a second email affiliated with the same church or chose a different church altogether.

This overall design yielded a nationally representative sample of 3,120 Christian churches (65 congressional districts \times 12 denominations per district \times 4 race manipulations per denomination).⁴ In each district, the four race manipulations were assigned randomly to four churches selected within each denomination. In addition, the specific names of each character within each race manipulation (e.g., José Hernandez or Carlos Garcia) were assigned by matching to exactly half of the cases within each denomination. By randomizing each aspect of the design, we effectively control for most plausible alternative explanations of differential response by churches. Seven of the churches we selected had to be dropped and were not replaced, leaving us with a final sample size of 3,113 churches.⁵

³We were not concerned that some churches fell outside of the sampled congressional district, particularly because gerrymandering often creates districts of irregular dimensions. The districts were used simply as starting points to locate churches for the sample.

⁴As part of a larger project, we also had two class-based interventions that are not used in this article.

⁵We dropped these seven churches because after completing the study, we realized that either they were not really churches (e.g., seminaries or mission outposts) or that we had sent the email to a nonworking address.

Table 1: Percent receiving at least one email by treatment within each religious tradition

	Mainline Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Catholic	All Churches
White	67.1	59.3	70.8	63.5
Black	59.9	57.8	60.9	58.9
Hispanic	57.5	59.1	66.2	59.1
Asian	48.9	56.0	64.6	53.8
Total	58.4	58.1	65.6	58.8
<i>N</i>	1,299	1,555	259	3,113
<i>p</i>	.000***	.782	.736	.002**

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001; †*p* < .10.

Importantly, we have no measure of the racial composition of these specific 3,113 churches. Since they were randomly selected, as described above, we assume the racial composition of most of them mirrors that of congregations nationwide, which is predominately white. An estimated 95 percent of Protestant congregations and 85 percent of Catholic congregations are racially homogenous (Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson 2013), with the majority being predominately white congregations. The racial composition of denominations varies within Protestantism. The online Appendix lists the racial composition of the denominations included in this study, and they range from 57 percent white (Pentecostal churches) to 97 percent white (ELCA).

We developed two primary types of data to measure the pattern of response. First, we developed several “quantitative” measures such as whether the characters received a response at all from the pastor, church secretary, or some other representative of the church. We also recorded whether any church contacted our characters more than once, as this might indicate more sincere interest. Second, we created several “qualitative” indicators that assessed the quality of the response as judged by its length, its warmth, its religious tone, the quality of information provided about the church and community, the length of time it took to reply, and several other dimensions. The specific measures we used in this study are described below.

ANALYSIS

One advantage of our experimental design is that it implicitly controls for many possible factors that might be relevant to explaining the pattern of responses in our data. This means that we can assess the influence of the race manipulation with a relatively simple analytic method. In each of our analyses we utilize a three-way analysis in which the presumed race/ethnicity of the character sending the inquiry is the key independent variable and region of the country (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) and a four-category measure of population density of the congressional district, which served as the primary sampling unit for choosing churches. Population density serves as a proxy for how urban or rural the area is where the church is located.

In Table 1, we show the percentage of churches that replied at least once to the emails sent to them broken down by treatment and religious tradition. This rate was a bit higher among Catholics (65.6 percent) and slightly lower for mainline Protestants (58.4 percent) and evangelical Protestants (58.1 percent). Among all churches, there was significant variation in the rate of response by race/ethnicity: 63.5 percent of emails with white-sounding names received a response, compared to 58.9 percent for black-sounding names, 59.1 percent for Hispanic-sounding names, and 53.8 percent for Asian-sounding names. In each of our analyses, we report the raw experimental treatment effects because these are easier to interpret. However, when we test for

Table 2: Percent receiving at least one email by treatment within each Protestant denomination

Panel A. Mainline denominations (%)						
	American Baptist	Episcopal	ELCA	United Methodist	PCUSA	
White	64.6	81.5	75.4	66.2	47.7	
Black	72.3	70.8	52.3	46.2	57.8	
Hispanic	56.9	64.6	56.9	56.9	52.3	
Asian	49.2	63.1	41.5	50.8	40.0	
Total	60.4	70.0	56.5	55.0	49.4	
<i>N</i>	260	260	260	260	259	
<i>p</i>	.045*	.071 [†]	.001***	.126	.201	

Panel B. Evangelical denominations (%)						
	Assembly of God	Church of Christ	LCMS	Pentecostal	Southern Baptist	Willow Creek
White	54.7	51.6	69.2	52.3	58.5	69.2
Black	67.7	48.4	61.5	49.2	49.2	70.8
Hispanic	50.8	60.0	69.2	56.3	44.6	73.8
Asian	66.2	54.7	58.5	40.0	43.1	73.8
Total	59.8	53.7	64.6	49.4	48.8	71.9
<i>N</i>	259	257	260	259	260	260
<i>p</i>	.136	.606	.492	.297	.285	.920

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; [†] $p < .10$.

statistical significance, we use a three-way ANOVA that controls for region and population density. Using this approach for Table 1, the differences in response rates across the four treatments are statistically significant at $p < .002$.

We also conducted separate analyses for three religious traditions: mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and Catholics. In response to inquiries sent to mainline Protestant churches, 67.1 percent of whites received at least one response, compared to 59.9 percent of blacks, 57.5 percent of Hispanics, and only 48.9 percent of Asians. Put differently, blacks were 11 percent less likely, Hispanics were 14 percent less likely, and Asians were 27 percent less likely than whites to receive a response from mainline Protestant churches. This difference in treatment of potential newcomers by their assumed race/ethnicity is statistically significant at $p < .000$. By comparison, evangelical Protestant and Catholic churches did not significantly vary their responses across experimental treatments.⁶

In Table 2, we explore these patterns in more depth by conducting separate analyses for mainline Protestant and evangelical Protestant denominations. In Panel A, we find that statistically significant differences existed for American Baptist, Episcopal ($p < .10$), and ELCA churches, and near-significant ($p = .126$) differences existed for United Methodists. Only Presbyterians displayed no evidence of differences by race/ethnicity. Four of the five mainline denominations had the lowest response rates for Asian emails, and the fifth—United Methodists—gave Asians the next-to-lowest response rate. On the other hand, three of the five denominations responded most favorably to whites, but American Baptists and Presbyterians responded most

⁶Only 260 Catholic churches were included in our sample, thus the statistical power for detecting treatment effects for Catholics is equal to that of a single Protestant denomination. However, the magnitude of difference among the treatment groups is far less than mainline Protestants, but slightly larger than evangelical Protestants.

Table 3: Mean days to first response by treatment within each religious tradition

	Mainline Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Catholic	All Churches
White	4.01	10.45	17.83	8.31
Black	7.82	10.85	12.21	9.67
Hispanic	5.98	11.92	12.60	9.60
Asian	7.19	10.86	10.78	9.46
Total	6.13	11.02	13.50	9.23
<i>N</i>	742	887	167	1,796
<i>p</i>	.003***	.717	.001***	.278

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001; †*p* < .10.

Table 4: Word count of received emails by treatment within each religious tradition

	Mainline Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Catholic	All Churches
White	178	177	123	172
Black	171	167	89	162
Hispanic	150	158	112	150
Asian	160	141	90	143
Total	166	161	104	158
<i>N</i>	747	898	167	1,812
<i>p</i>	.098†	.024*	.059†	.001***

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001; †*p* < .10.

favorably to blacks. In Panel B, among evangelical denominations, there were no significant treatment effects, although the Assemblies of God churches were nearly significant (*p* = .136).

In addition to whether they responded at all, churches could vary in how long they took to respond to the emails. Longer response times might indicate indifference, or perhaps ambivalence, in responding. We measured this time to respond in terms of days from the sending of our initial email to when we received a response. Many of the responses were in the first day or so after the original email was received, but as shown in Table 3 the average number of days to respond (for the churches that responded) was 9.23 days owing to some longer response times. On average, mainline Protestants tended to respond more promptly (6.13 days) and Catholics tended to take longest to respond (13.50 days). We found no significant variation in response time among all churches and evangelical churches. However, mainline Protestant churches showed a strong and statistically significant difference by race/ethnicity (*p* = .003). Mainline Protestant churches responded most quickly to white emails (4.01 days) and most slowly to black (7.82 days) and Asian (7.19 days) emails. As such, blacks and Asians had to wait about 95 percent and 79 percent longer, respectively, than whites to hear from those churches that contacted them. Catholics also showed significantly different treatment by race/ethnicity (*p* < .001), but they responded most promptly to Asians (10.78 days) and most slowly to whites (17.83 days). We note, however, that the results for Catholics must be viewed cautiously because of the smaller sample size and a few inordinately long response times toward whites.

Our analyses so far have focused on quantitative indicators of church responses. Next, we test whether churches vary in the quality of their responses. In Table 4, we analyze length of responses as measured by their word counts. For all churches combined, the average word count

Table 5: Terse emails by treatment within each religious tradition (%)

	Mainline Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Catholic	All Churches
White	2.3	3.5	13.0	3.9
Black	2.6	5.3	23.1	5.7
Hispanic	9.6	8.3	7.0	8.7
Asian	5.1	9.2	21.4	8.9
Total	4.8	6.5	15.9	6.7
<i>N</i>	757	903	170	1,830
<i>p</i>	.002**	.054 [†]	.152	.004**

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001; [†]*p* < .10.

of the emailed responses was 158 words; emails from Catholic churches (104) were markedly shorter, while those from mainline Protestant (166) and evangelical Protestant churches (161) were slightly longer. Among all churches, differences by treatment were statistically significant ($p < .001$) with whites receiving emails of 172 words on average compared to blacks (162), Hispanics (150), and Asians (143). In other words, responses to blacks were 5.8 percent shorter, those to Hispanics were 12.8 percent shorter, and those to Asians were 16.9 percent shorter than emails sent to whites.

Interestingly, there were also significant differences by treatment among churches in all three religious traditions. All three traditions sent the longest responses to whites. Mainline Protestants sent Hispanics 15.7 percent shorter emails than whites; evangelical Protestants sent the shortest emails to Asians, who received 20.3 percent shorter emails than whites; and Catholics sent shorter emails to both blacks and Asians, who received 27.6 percent and 26.8 percent shorter emails than whites, respectively.

In reading the emails received from the churches, we noted that some of them were very terse, often providing only minimal interaction or referring the sender to the website for more information. We operationalized “terse” emails as having only one or two short sentences and not answering the questions asked in the initial email received by the church. As shown in Table 5, only 6.7 percent of all emails received—about 1 in 15—fit this description, although terse emails were much more likely from Catholics (15.9 percent) than mainline Protestants (4.8 percent) or evangelical Protestants (6.5 percent). Across all churches in the sample, the differences by treatment in terse emails were statistically significant ($p < .004$). Whites (3.9 percent) were least likely to receive terse emails and Hispanics (8.7 percent) and Asians (8.9 percent) were more than twice as likely as whites to receive terse emails.

Although mainline Protestants sent the fewest terse emails, the differences by treatment were statistically significant ($p < .002$). Whites (2.3 percent) received the fewest terse emails from mainline Protestants, but Asians (5.1 percent) received over twice as many and Hispanics (9.6 percent) received over four times as many as whites. Evangelical Protestants also showed marginally significant differences ($p < .054$) with whites (3.5 percent) receiving the fewest terse emails, and Hispanics (8.3 percent) and Asians (9.2 percent) receiving over twice as many as whites. For Catholics, the differences by treatment do not reach conventional levels of significance ($p < .152$), but this is based on a substantially smaller sample size of 170 emails received. With this in mind, we note that Hispanics (7.0 percent) received the fewest terse emails from Catholic churches, but blacks (23.1 percent) and Asians (21.4 percent) received more than three times as many.

Next, we coded each response received along five different dimensions: using a religious closing, providing a description of how we worship in this church, the warmth of the message,

selling the church, and quality of information provided. Graduate student coders were responsible for coding these data. We held several training sessions to familiarize them with the coding and had frequent meetings to assure consistent procedures were followed and that the data were reliably coded. *Religious closing* is a dichotomous measure indicating simply whether the church representative used a religious closing in the email. A religious closing might reflect a church official reaching out or otherwise being more disclosing to a potential newcomer—viewing them as an in-group member with a shared spiritual affinity. *How we worship* is a dichotomous measure of whether the church representative voluntarily provides information about worship style in the church. The next three measures were coded using a Likert-type scale. *Warmth of the message* is the coder's rating of how much warmth was exhibited in the email. *Selling the church* is the coder's rating of how much the church representative attempted to “sell” the advantages of the church. *Quality of information* is the coder's rating of the quality of the information provided by the church representative. For these latter three measures, we converted the coders' ratings to coder-specific z-scores to control for any lingering interrater differences in scaling and facilitate direct comparability of different coders' ratings.

In Table 6, we analyze variation in these five dimensions by treatment within each religious tradition. Mainline Protestants showed significant variation across treatments for three dimensions—how we worship ($p < .062$), selling the church ($p < .084$), and quality of information ($p < .029$)—and approached statistical significance for a fourth—warmth of the message ($p < .183$). In general, mainline Protestant churches provide the most welcoming responses to whites and the least welcoming responses to blacks.

The content of emails from evangelical Protestant churches significantly varied only in terms of explaining how they worship ($p < .020$). Whites (40.0 percent) and blacks (37.1 percent) most frequently received descriptions of worship style, Hispanics (29.7 percent) and Asians (27.9 percent) received them least frequently. In other words, Hispanics were about 25.8 percent less likely and Asians were 30.3 percent less likely than whites to receive such a hospitable response.

For Catholic churches, there is significant variation in only one of the five dimensions—selling the church ($p < .068$)—but the differences approach statistical significance in two others—warmth of the message ($p < .174$) and quality of information ($p < .118$). Considering the much smaller sample sizes for responses from Catholic churches, these differences are noteworthy. On the other hand, there is no consistent pattern of response across these three dimensions for Catholic churches except that Asians tend to receive less favorable responses than other groups.

To test the robustness of our findings, we conducted one additional set of analyses among the full sample for each dependent variable in which religious tradition (mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic) was added as a covariate along with race/ethnicity, region, and population density in a four-way ANOVA. These analyses showed that for all nine variables except one—the mean number of days for a response—race/ethnicity remained statistically significant. However, for this dependent variable there was a significant two-way interaction between race/ethnicity and religious tradition—the only such interaction among the nine dependent variables. Also, religious tradition was a statistically significant determinant of all nine dependent variables. In fact, religious tradition was a stronger predictor than race/ethnicity in eight of the nine models—the only exception being whether a response was received. Thus, the overarching message from these analyses is that there are strong differences in the pattern of responses among different religious traditions, but nested within those differences are also tendencies for differential treatment of potential newcomers by their assumed race/ethnicity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article reports findings of a nationwide audit study testing how Christian churches' respond to potential newcomers as a function of perceived race and ethnicity. We sent emails to

Table 6: Characteristics of church responses by treatment within each religious tradition

Panel A. Mainline Protestants					
	Religious Closing (%)	How We Worship (%)	Warmth of Message	Selling the Church	Quality of Information
White	51.6	51.2	.125	.130	.167
Black	49.2	42.4	.088	.200	.164
Hispanic	48.4	38.5	-.029	-.067	-.107
Asian	46.8	40.4	-.067	.087	.086
Total	49.2	43.6	.038	.091	.083
<i>N</i>	747	747	746	746	746
<i>p</i>	.804	.062 [†]	.183	.084 [†]	.029*
Panel B. Evangelical Protestants					
	Religious Closing (%)	How We Worship (%)	Warmth of Message	Selling the Church	Quality of Information
White	57.2	40.0	.062	.080	.088
Black	50.5	37.1	.003	.044	.059
Hispanic	50.7	29.7	.081	.014	.022
Asian	47.9	27.9	-.061	-.049	-.058
Total	51.6	33.7	.022	.023	.029
<i>N</i>	898	898	896	896	896
<i>p</i>	.207	.020*	.426	.608	.467
Panel C. Catholics					
	Religious Closing (%)	How We Worship (%)	Warmth of Message	Selling the Church	Quality of Information
White	38.0	8.7	-.158	-.179	-.238
Black	42.1	10.5	.045	-.649	-.642
Hispanic	26.2	11.9	-.157	-.432	-.499
Asian	22.0	7.3	-.535	-.607	-.696
Total	32.0	9.6	-.204	-.455	-.508
<i>N</i>	167	167	167	167	167
<i>p</i>	.208	.901	.174	.068 [†]	.118

p-values show the significance of race after controlling for region of the country and population density (effects not shown) in a three-way ANOVA.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001; [†]*p* < .10.

3,113 churches, randomly assigning to each email a name associated with whites, African Americans, Hispanics, or Asians. We measured if and when churches replied as well as characteristics of their responses. In testing H1, Christian churches, as a whole, responded more frequently and more fully to inquiries with white-sounding names. In testing H2, we found that it was primarily mainline Protestant churches that showed significant variation by race in both the quantity and quality of their responses. They responded most frequently and most welcomingly to emails with white-sounding names, followed by black and Hispanic names, followed by Asian names. There was variation, however, across the five mainline denominations that we analyzed. Evangelical Protestant and Catholic churches showed little to no variation in their response rates and moderate variation in the quality of their responses.

Mainline churches have more traditional, European-based worship services (Edwards 2009), and they have relatively few racial minorities (Emerson 2006). We speculate, then, that representatives of mainline Protestant churches may anticipate that minorities will fit less well in their

churches, and so for the sake of both the church and the racial minority person, the representatives might be less welcoming to them—creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of racial homogeneity. It is ironic that the mainline Protestant tradition, which has lost most of its share in the American religious marketplace in recent history, is also the most discriminating in welcoming newcomers. This finding is plausible because processes of discrimination need not always serve the “rational” interests of the discriminator.

Evangelical theology highlights the importance of individual relationships with God and others (Emerson and Smith 2000). While this approach by evangelicals has been criticized for overlooking structural injustice, it may have the benefit of prompting outreach across group boundaries in interpersonal interactions. As such, the individual-level focus of evangelical theology might prompt behavior consistent with a concept of interactional justice.

Catholic churches also did not significantly vary their responses by our experimental treatments, and this may be rooted in the geographic nature of Catholic churches. Namely, Catholic parishes have historically had geographic boundaries, and Catholics would attend the parish in which they live (Putnam and Campbell 2010). To the extent that a given area has social diversity, this practice would create diversity within Catholic congregations. It might also foster within parishes a norm of welcoming anyone who visits their church, regardless of the visitors’ personal characteristics. We note, however, that the relatively low number of Catholic churches in our study makes it difficult to compare Catholics to evangelical and mainline Protestant traditions.

The pattern of discrimination that we observed fit with processes of homophily as expressed through statistical discrimination. The denominations most likely to discriminate were those for whom diversity might be most costly. Our findings are generally supportive of models of religion and race that focus on the potential fit of groups in a church rather than aversive discrimination. A church leader or representative might evaluate the potential fit of newcomers to his or her church. While potentially done with good intentions—for both the church and the visitor—this mechanism produces racial homogeneity and its attendant costs.

This pattern of findings also fits with varying ideals of justice—whether structural or interactional in nature. Mainline Protestants have long emphasized structural racial justice, but this appears to correspond to less focus on interactional justice. Evangelicals show the reverse pattern. This finding counters the well-established narrative that highlights racism among evangelicals and fundamentalists (e.g., Calfano and Paolino 2010; Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010).

The findings of this study highlight the complementary nature of surveys and field experiments in the study of racial discrimination. A classic finding in the literature is that self-reported attitudes about other racial and ethnic groups are sometimes at odds with actual behavior (Pager and Quillian 2005). In this instance, we find that mainline Christians, who on surveys espouse liberal, egalitarian attitudes toward race relations, actually demonstrate the most discriminatory behavior. In this case, the egalitarian values of mainline Protestants appear to be more directed at broader, societal issues than everyday interpersonal encounters.

These findings also broaden the concept of racial microaggressions. Microaggressions are defined as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership” (Wing 2010). Most studies of microaggressions focus on face-to-face interactions, whether verbal or nonverbal behavior. In our study, we show that written messages can also serve the same derogatory purpose. While it is beyond the scope of this article, it would be interesting to explore how microaggressions vary when given face-to-face versus written messages.

We also found an association between the quantity and quality of email responses to minorities. In particular, the churches that sent the fewest emails to racial minorities also sent the ones with the least welcoming language. This points to multiple mechanisms by which discrimination can be conveyed in these interactions. An organization can simply not respond to an inquiry or it can respond in an unwelcoming manner. In this case, mainline Protestant churches did both. It would be difficult for a minority to divine discrimination simply from whether or not he or

she received a response, for a lack of response could be explained in multiple ways, such as inefficient administration. But discrimination via differential response rates is clearly seen at the aggregate level. However, receiving an unfriendly response provides a stronger, personal experience of discrimination. For example, we found that the Hispanic treatment groups were three times more likely than whites to receive terse responses from mainline churches—responses that might clearly convey that someone is not welcome at the church.

This has methodological implications for the conduct of field experiments. Whereas audit studies typically focus on measuring just response rates, our study suggests that an analysis of the content of responses can provide an even richer analysis of discrimination. This points to the need of future audit studies to incorporate measures of both the quantity and quality of responses.

Future research in this area should examine two key issues. One is the impact of congregational characteristics. In this study, we examined Christian traditions as a whole; however, the composition of a congregation—especially its racial and ethnic makeup—undoubtedly affects its orientation to visitors. Racially diverse churches should have a lower marginal cost in terms of time, money, energy, and potential disruption of adding “different” members than would homogenous churches. Further, existing multiracial membership might reflect an underlying willingness, and less aversion, to welcoming people from other groups. More generally, homogenous groupings can foster prejudice and discrimination in favor of one’s own group (Billig and Tajfel 1973).

Mainline Protestant churches are, as a whole, more racially homogenous than evangelical or Catholic churches. By one estimate, only 9 percent of mainline Protestants attend a racially diverse church—defined as one having at least 25 percent of members of a different race than the respondent. In contrast, 16 percent of evangelicals and 21 percent of Catholics attend racially diverse churches (Putnam and Campbell 2010:292). Other studies have also found that Catholics, in particular, and evangelical churches are the most likely to be multiracial (Chaves 2011; DeYoung et al. 2003; Dougherty and Huyser 2008).

Of particular importance is the degree to which a church or denomination is predominately white. Theories of white racism hold that racism is rooted in ideas of white privilege and supremacy (Wellman 1993). A key process in white privilege is white normativity, which reinforces the normality of white ideologies, cultural practices, and location within the racial hierarchy—that is, “just how things are.” In contrast, understandings and practices that diverge from the norm of whiteness are viewed as deviant (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Edwards 2008). Consequently, we might expect that predominately white churches and denominations embrace white normativity and privilege more than diverse churches (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005), and so they would be more welcoming to whites and less welcoming to nonwhites who might challenge the status quo.

A limitation of this study is that we do not measure the racial composition of individual churches. As shown online in the Appendix, the denominations in our study vary in their racial composition. Future research should examine how the composition of individual churches affects how they welcome newcomers of different races and ethnicities. Several competing possibilities would guide this analysis. It could be, according to principles of homophily, that individual churches show preference for newcomers that resemble their existing congregation, so white churches most welcome whites, black churches welcome blacks, and so forth, with only multiracial churches welcoming everyone to the same degree. It could also be, according to the theories of white racism, that white churches exclusively, or at least predominately, are less welcoming to newcomers who are different.

Another issue for future research is how patterns of discrimination unfold after initial contact. In this study we examined the initial contact with churches; however, deeper integration into a church might involve other race-related processes. This issue arises in other audit studies, such as those of employment discrimination, which frequently gauge discrimination only in the first stage of the hiring process. Discrimination might be most likely to occur in the first contact of

the hiring process because employers have relatively little information about job applicants and thus may be unduly influenced by general status characteristics, such as race and gender (Pager 2007). The same principle might hold true for interactions with other types of organizations, such as churches. Also, we studied email exchanges, and in-person interactions might follow different scripts. This study points to various avenues for future research on race and religion using field experiments. Some involve characteristics of churches that might relate to how they respond to opportunities for increased heterogeneity, characteristics such as the racial composition of the congregation, its geographic location, and who responds to newcomers. Other avenues involve a closer look at the content of church responses. For example, what are other ways that churches signal eagerness or hesitancy in welcoming newcomers?

The findings of this study have broader significance than just the study of race and religion, for they point to processes by which voluntary organizations in general become and remain racially and ethnically segregated. Just as some Christian denominations are more welcoming of whites than people of other races and ethnicities, so too might be the case with other voluntary organizations across interest areas. To the extent that the organizations distribute important social and material resources to their members, the processes described here, and the segregation that they produce, might work to promote continuing social advantage for whites.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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Appendix: Compositions of Denominations and Religious Groups.