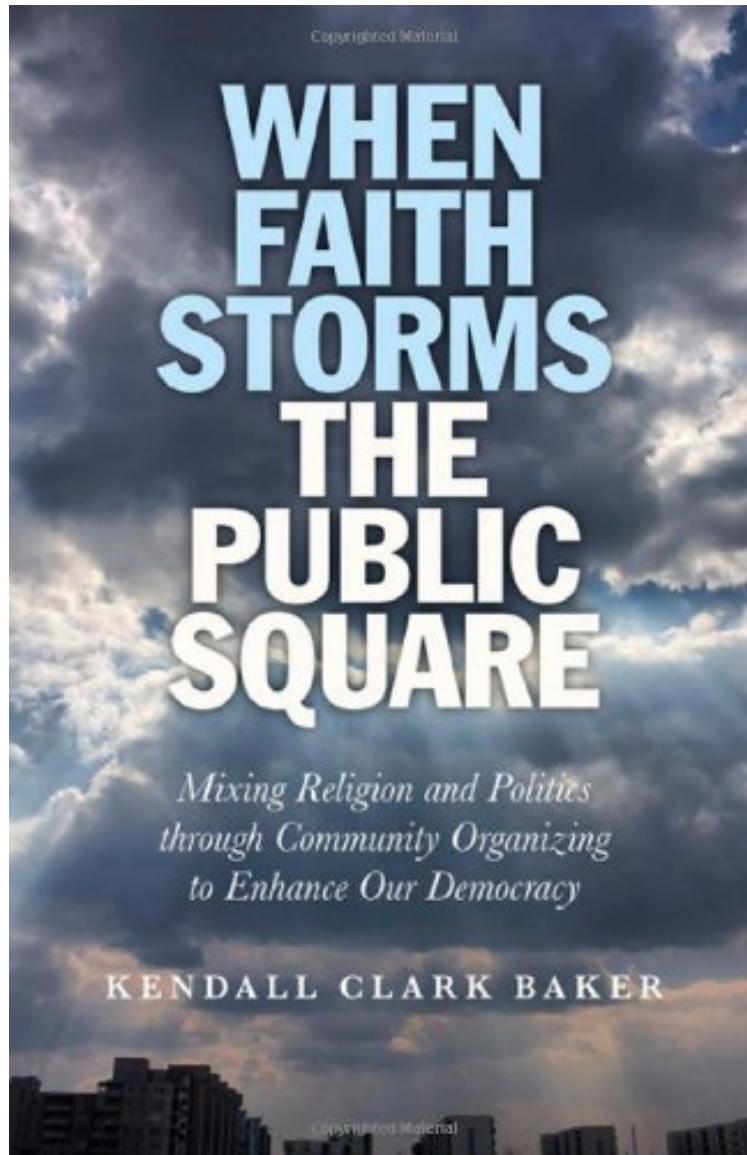


(Library ebook) When Faith Storms the Public Square: Mixing Religion and Politics through Community Organizing to Enhance our Democracy

# When Faith Storms the Public Square: Mixing Religion and Politics through Community Organizing to Enhance our Democracy

*Kendall Clark Baker*

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**Kendall Clark Baker : When Faith Storms the Public Square: Mixing Religion and Politics through Community Organizing to Enhance our Democracy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When Faith Storms the Public Square: Mixing Religion and Politics through Community Organizing to Enhance our Democracy:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An essential primer for faith-based community organizing By Robert Cornwall You have heard it said that religion and politics don't mix, and therefore religion should stay clear of the public square. You've also heard it said that America is a Christian nation and that its laws and customs are based on the Bible, and thus the two are mixed. Still others are convinced that modern culture is so corrupt there's nothing we can do to change things, so we should remain separate from this society. Still others, and I count myself among them, believe that it is incumbent upon us as members of faith communities to engage the public square in a way that influences political decisions without become co-opted by the system. The process of congregation-based community organizing is rooted in this belief, and Kendall Clark Baker has provided us with what can be called a primer on faith-based community organizing. In this book, Kendall Baker, a retired United Church of Christ pastor who got involved in community organizing while serving a pastorate in San Bernardino, California, provides an introduction to the foundations of faith-based community organizing, explains its principles and terminology, and provides illustrations from his involvement as to how this works. According to the author the focus of faith-based organizing is not issues, but rather it's focused on values. It's from values that are inherent to faith that communities come together to work on issues of common concern. The point of this process is to build powerful communities of faith that are able to engage the political world in effective ways. The use of the word "storming" in the title of the book is a reminder that the starting point of action is a sense of anger or grief. Simply being concerned won't generate power. You have to be angry enough to get working on a solution. When looking at the public square, participants in this form of community organizing don't view government as the enemy, but instead they view government as a potential though not permanent ally. Indeed, community organizers work from the principle that there are no permanent allies or permanent enemies; thus empowered communities work to build relationships that will benefit the people of our communities, and not just those in our own faith communities. The focus is on the common good. Baker divides his book into two parts. Part One focuses on defining the foundational issues - primarily the role of religion and democracy in forming our values. Both are needed if community organizing is to succeed. In this first section Baker looks at religious and political history and theory. He brings into play the Puritan and Calvinistic understanding of human nature - we're sinful and need government to regulate our behavior if we're to survive as a people. He explores the way in which religion and politics have mixed, both positively and negatively, and points us in an appropriate direction. Appropriately enough, Baker looks at the "paternity" of this form of community organizing. Though noting the influence of Saul Alinsky, who provided much of the process of organizing, faith-based organizing has other roots as well, including the Social Gospel movement, Catholic Social Teaching, Jewish social understandings, and liberationist theologies. The forms of engagement are rooted in Alinsky's work, but they are redefined through theological/spiritual reflection. This needs to be understood, so that congregation-based organizing doesn't simply become a secular action without connection to faith. In Part Two, Baker focuses more clearly on the principles of community organizing, especially as he learned them through the PICO National Network (this is the same network my own organization is affiliating with). There are, according to the author, four primary principles that define this work: self-interest, power, relationships, and values. Baker develops each of these four principles, and in the course of doing this he responds to concerns about such things as appealing to self-interest or building power - two areas that may make some in the faith community uncomfortable. But, as he notes self-interest and power must intertwine with relationships and values. With regard to relationships, it's important to note the centrality of the "one-to-one" in building relationships of power. A "one-to-one" is an intentional and focused listening event that is designed to discern a person's self-interest and then engage them in working with others to find a solution to that concern. The values, of course, are rooted in the faith communities and they give guidance to the process. All four of these principles are essential to effective organizing. In the fourteenth chapter Baker offers a reflection on Jesus' organizing principles, a reflection was offered a clergy caucus meeting in San Bernardino, and then finally, in the fifteenth chapter, Baker develops his understanding of what it means to be an "organizing pastor." He doesn't mean being a pastor who organizes, but rather an "organizing pastor." That is, everything that he engages in as pastor is to be understood in terms of community organizing - whether preaching, pastoral care, or worship leadership. For me, this chapter is essential reading because it provides a new way of understanding my own ministry. I believe that it will provide a foundation for leading the congregation serve toward fulfilling its own sense of calling to be missional. The tools that community organizing provides translate very well to congregational life. They're tried and true and they're not a gimmick for quick church growth. They're designed to create powerful communities, and isn't that what ministers/pastors are called to do? If you're a pastor then this is essential reading, but don't just read - act on it. This book was not published by a major publisher and so it likely won't get the attention it deserves. This is a shame because there really isn't that much available that explores and develops faith-based community organizing. I was fortunate to stumble upon it while doing a search for books on community organizing at .com, and this was the most recent book available. So I took a chance and I am glad I did. The book is a good read. It flows nicely and goes fast. The chapters are brief and they hold your interest. It's the kind of book that you want to keep on reading rather than put down. The only real criticism I have of the book is the lack of a table of contents, which makes navigating the book difficult. My hope is that a second edition could be made available that would rectify the situation. In a same vein, I'll

note that since I was using a Kindle edition of the book I found the lack of live endnotes frustrating. Again, perhaps this can be rectified by a new edition. Besides these more technical issues, which should be easily taken care of, I can say that this is a really good book that needs a wide-readership.

To some, the notion of mixing religious groups and community organizing may seem a pleasing prospect, an idea long overdue. To others, it may be anathema. Like it or not, however, this blending is a reality that has been forged in streets and meeting halls day by day, from the very beginnings of our country to the present-day touchstones of President Barack Obama.

Kendall Baker's terrific book shows how faith-based community organizing transformed his life and ministry, and how it can revivify the spiritual and civic lives of ministers and congregations alike. When Faith Storms the Public Square is for all those who care about faith communities, the spiritual health of ministers, or the role of religion in our democratic life. (Professor Richard Wood, University of New Mexico, author of Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America) About the Author Kendall Clark Baker has extensive experience as an organizing pastor serving an organizing congregation, collaborating with clergy and laity of many faiths to improve the city through faith-based community organizing.