On January 22, 2017, the Sunday morning after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, a pastor at a predominantly White evangelical megachurch in the Pacific Northwest looked out onto his congregation with weary eyes. Two large screens on either side of the stage displayed a close-up of his face as he began speaking. Pastor Dave started his sermon: “In the midst of this broken world, I keep envisioning one thing: our church is on the operating table.”

Pastor Dave’s words suggest a level of vulnerability that we do not often associate with White evangelicals in the United States, especially following the 2016 election of Donald Trump. The pastor’s opening statement acknowledges a broken world, but also implies that perhaps the church is part of that brokenness and needs to be repaired too. Pastor Dave elaborated on his first thoughts with, “We are living in a broken world. Sometimes the corrupt is all we see. The election cycle did not help with that!” Some people in the room of 500 or so congregants at this place I call Lakeview Church laughed, and others nodded along. “Those presidential debates were messy . . . but the world is not divided into good and evil.”

On this cold January day, the otherwise usually upbeat and smiley pastor seemed distracted and concerned. The 52-year-old White pastor continued his sermon and told his congregation that as a result of the brokenness of the world, he believes that Christians are suffering. Pastor Dave suggested to his congregation that they need to work through
this suffering, and learn not to respond to it with ugliness, anger, bitterness, or madness, but “to react in a godly way.” Pastor Dave bowed his head and exited the stage.

Pastor Amy replaced Pastor Dave on the large stage. Pastor Amy is an associate pastor at Lakeview church. This job title includes assisting Pastor Dave, as the lead pastor, in religious services and other daily operations of the church. Pastor Amy is a 35-year-old White woman and mother whose young children would often accompany her on stage. This morning, however, Pastor Amy walked slowly to the front of the stage with two heavy, large, green buckets. Pastor Amy lifted each of the two buckets up onto a stool, and the cameras zoomed in on the buckets, bringing them, along with the liquid in each of them, into focus on the screens at the back of the stage. Pastor Amy was wearing a wireless headset and microphone, barely visible under her blonde bob. Pastor Amy raised a large yellow sponge in the air and asked the congregation to identify the object in her hand. When they responded accordingly, Pastor Amy asked, “How do we find out what is inside the sponge?” Before the crowd responded again Pastor Amy excitedly yelled, “Squeeze it!”

Pastor Amy dunked the sponge in the bucket of dark-colored water and then removed it, squeezing it over the bucket for everyone to see. The camera zoomed in on her hands. Pastor Amy held the sponge as black liquid flowed from it. She said, “This is you. We don’t like it. This is what the world does when it is hurt or pressed.”

Pastor Amy then dipped the sponge in the bucket of clear water and held it up to the crowd before squeezing it again and said, “But here is our challenge. When you’re pressed this is what happens. When you’re pressed it is rivers of living water that come forth. It’s not the suffering that gets us noticed, but how we react.” Clear water dripped down Pastor Amy’s arms as she continued to hold the sponge out above her. The worship team started to quietly play a new song on the stage behind her, and Pastor Amy joined in with the lyrics. She chanted, “I’m trading my sorrows. I’m trading my shame. I’m laying them down for the joy of the Lord . . .” as she vigorously squeezed the remaining clear, or “living,” water out of the sponge for all in the room to see.

Pastor Dave returned to the stage to explain the meanings of the demonstrations to the congregation. Pastor Dave turned Pastor Amy’s elaborate and metaphorical demonstration into a clearly translated lesson for all watching: that they all need to learn to respond to their suffering without letting any ugliness show.
During the two years I spent conducting research at Lakeview Church, it became quite clear that “ugly” was a stand-in for being marked as racist, sexist, or homophobic. Since the emergence of the culture wars in the United States in the 1970s, White evangelicals have come to political power and exuded great cultural influence through battles that privilege and protect the interests of White Christians, and most often White Christian men. Indeed, the lived experiences of White Christian men and women are often synonymous with, and the default category for, what is understood to be American (Marti 2020). Now, religious affiliation is declining across the United States. Younger generations feel more abstract and unknown than ever as the social landscape shifts dramatically with the legalization of same-sex marriage, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the #MeToo movement, to name a few. The suffering the church perceives is directly tied to the status loss around White Christian manhood, and what it might mean for their long-standing cultural projects if many in the United States are unwilling to accept these identities as a default experience and, perhaps even worse for the church, unwilling to support the organizations that continue to protect these identities as a top priority.

Three months prior to Pastor Dave’s sermon, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton engaged in three presidential candidate debates that quickly became known for their unprecedented hostility. The New York Times referred to the debates as a “90-minute spectacle of character attacks.” Clinton referenced the leaked tape recorded in 2005 in which Trump referred to his ability to grope women because of his fame. Trump repeatedly brought up accusations that President Bill Clinton was abusive toward women, and that Hillary Clinton was also responsible for attacking those same women. Trump said, on air, that Hillary Clinton had “tremendous hate in her heart” and infamously referred to her as a “nasty woman,” which became the rallying cry and self-identification for many who organized against Trump. In her book a year later, Hillary Clinton referred to the debates as experiences in which her “skin crawled.” Pastor Dave and many at Lakeview Church acknowledge the “messiness” of those debates while appearing to avoid taking a side. For a group of people who believe quite strongly in the binaries of sinner/savior, and heaven/hell, they recognize that, at the intersections of their religious beliefs, their political beliefs, and their own perceived need for change and growth, thinking in binary terms, or, in this case, “good and evil,” doesn’t really work. Instead, Pastor Dave and Lakeview Church see themselves in the messiness of those debates.
How do White evangelicals reconcile a need to grow and retain members in a rapidly changing social environment in which their beliefs, and by extension their own sense of self, might be understood or labeled as “ugly”? What does it mean to react to this perceived suffering in a way that is, according to pastors Dave and Amy, godly and good, and what needs to happen on the metaphorical operating table for this to happen? How the church wrestles with these questions and navigates its responses is at the heart of this book.

This book documents the vulnerability, anxiety, and confusion that White evangelicals profess as they work to re-create themselves as good and godly, and to avoid being marked as ugly. I show how White evangelicals negotiate their personal beliefs around questions of gender, the family, race, and sexuality alongside the larger goals of the church of which they are a part. This book uncovers the ways in which a megachurch and its congregants seek to grow their membership and, by logical extension, hold on to their cultural status. I illustrate the ways in which these goals work in tandem with continued White evangelical support for conservative politics, a long-standing relationship that continues to shape the social, cultural, and political landscape of the United States.

I entered Lakeview Church for the first time in late fall 2015, with the goal of documenting the ways in which White evangelicals were debating questions related to gender and sexuality, especially after the federal legalization of same-sex marriage in June 2015. However, in the two years I spent at Lakeview Church, the political landscape shifted around me.

On November 8, 2016, a year into my fieldwork, I found myself among those who reportedly voted Donald Trump into office. I was already documenting the daily life, rituals, and debates of Lakeview Church, many of which were related to gender, sexuality, the family, and questions about the state of the church in a nation perceived to be in a cultural moment of great upheaval and change. The goals of my initial research project that brought me to Lakeview, then, are different, and smaller, than the goals of this book. But they are connected.

White evangelicals are willing to work to change with the times in an effort to uphold their cultural relevance, especially around questions and beliefs related to gender, sexuality, and the White family. However, these changes come with increased anxiety and feelings of confusion.
and resentment. And these changes often reflect the goals of the church instead of the concerns for the livelihood of others, as church members and the organizations of which they are a part work to reconcile an ugly past while appealing to younger generations for a more sustainable future as a church.

To both illustrate and complicate this idea of change among White evangelicals, this book is oriented around a concept I call the *imagined secular*. I find that evangelicals at Lakeview talk about a range of liberal projects: topics like feminism, trans rights, reproductive justice, “deviant” sexuality, and the Black Lives Matter movement. The imagined secular encapsulates what White evangelicals imagine these liberal projects to be and shapes their responses to them. Importantly, the imagined secular holds the feelings associated with these cultural changes in the United States as the church seeks to respond to and understand their own beliefs in relation to these topics. Conversations, debates, and concerns about the imagined secular occur among members in small groups within the church and are openly discussed by the pastoral team in Sunday sermons. These conversations encapsulate the very messiness to which Pastor Dave alludes, and they also show the church’s proverbial hand, as the content of these debates identifies what the church thinks it needs to engage with to be understood as good. In order to not be understood, or marked, as sexist, the church needs to talk about feminism. To avoid the label of racist, they need to talk about Black Lives Matter. And to no longer be homophobes, the church needs to reconcile its position in response to the federal legalization of same-sex marriage.

The White evangelical church is facing dual projects: it needs to continue to grow its membership, and it needs to work to grow during a time in which rapid cultural shifts are illuminating the inequalities that form the pillars on which the church is built. In an effort to accomplish both of these intertwined goals—to appear welcoming and increase membership among younger generations—the church provides a space for the messy, varied responses to the components of the imagined secular world. However, I document the ways in which the church also engages in a *bounded welcoming* of components of the imagined secular: the church entertains conversations about feminism, Black Lives Matter, and same-sex marriage, but Lakeview Church is an organization governed by hierarchies of gender, race, and sexuality; as such, the church engages with the imagined secular as an organization in a way that allows for (and, really, encourages) inequalities to endure. *How* they respond to the imagined secular sheds light on the ways in which
conservative politics endure even in the midst of engagement with these mass cultural movements and shifts.

This book documents how the church and its congregants claim feminism as part of the church’s beliefs while upholding gendered inequalities, how they reconcile and also reinforce White nationalist tendencies with the need to now reach across racial lines, and how evangelicals retain a privileged position around reinforcements of a heterosexual Christian family while jettisoning some of their former associations with homophobia. The church is finding a way to respond to the “suffering” that it perceives, and it is doing so, in line with the advice of Pastor Amy, without letting its “ugliness” show. But the individual engagement with the imagined secular reflects what I call an instrumental acceptance (chapter 4) and forced excitement (chapter 6) of these cultural shifts, paying lip service to the ideas and ideals that challenge the foundations of the church while also simultaneously retaining power central to the intersections of whiteness, Christianity, masculinity, and heterosexuality.

In Trump, White evangelicals found a politician who could help them with this project, someone who could do the ugly work for them to maintain the status quo, halt progressive change, and defend their faith while they continue to wrestle with a host of questions about their collective identity. The evangelicals at Lakeview Church did not necessarily vote for Donald Trump because of what he stands for. Rather, in many ways, Trump symbolizes his own type of wall that can hold the imagined secular at bay while the church regroups during a period of time in which it feels as though it is quickly losing cultural sway, especially among younger generations. Indeed, to Make America Great Again is to uphold a history of white supremacy and Christian nationalism, and to Keep America Great is to ensure that no one else receives access to the privileges long afforded White Christian Americans. Trump and his policies can publicly enforce what many White evangelicals would rather support in private. Trump represented one politician ready to support and manifest a White evangelical political and cultural project, but he is not the first or the last.

Lakeview Church is located in the Pacific Northwest; as such, this research moves the focus on White evangelical support for Trump out of the geographic South—out of the working-class, disillusioned communities who voted for him, as Arlie Hochschild (2016a) documents, because they feel they have lost their spot in line for the American Dream. Instead, this research centers those who embody the American Dream, and also voted for Trump. I investigate the “coastal elites”: the
middle- and upper-middle-class suburban White evangelicals who live in one of the areas of the United States with the best quality of life, and who don’t want to lose it. This work expands our understandings of the enduring relationship between White evangelism and conservative politics by asking these questions in an area of the country where such a relationship is often presumed irrelevant.

To explore the intersections of White evangelicals’ fear of cultural loss and the ways in which they reconcile that fear with a need to expand and grow as an organization, I utilize sociological theories of religion and feminist theories of religion and agency. Many of the very mechanisms that allow White evangelicals to remain an active and thriving religious group in a country with declining religiosity help explain some of their support for Trump.

RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

A variety of measures document declines in US religiosity (Schnabel and Bock 2017, 2018; Voas and Chaves 2016). White protestants have declined from 37% of all US adults to 29% between 2009 and 2019. However, of this group, White, born-again evangelicals have experienced the slowest rate of decline, such that they now make up a larger share of those who are White protestants in the United States, totaling 56% in 2019 (Pew 2019). Although Americans are increasingly likely to not identify with a religious group, White evangelical Christians remain a prominent force in this changing landscape; the most intensely religious remain firm in their beliefs (Schnabel and Bock 2018). While White evangelicals are maintaining their base more successfully than other religious groups, a decline is a decline. Pastor Dave and the members of Lakeview Church might be experiencing exaggerated feelings about this decline, but it is the existence of those feelings themselves that matters for our understandings of their current beliefs, practices, and goals.

This religious decline is especially evident among younger populations. Recent data from the General Social Survey finds that for those under the age of 30 in the United States, 37% of men and 34% of women do not identify with a religious affiliation, which represents a consistent decline for men and an over 6% increase for the rate of decline for women in two years (Smith et al. 2019). In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 40% of Millennials are religiously unaffiliated, a 13-percentage-point decline between 2009 and 2019 (Pew 2019).
The continued monitoring of these shifts and years of research on these questions reflect larger theoretical debates in the sociology of religion: that is, just how “secular” or “religious” is the United States, and why does it matter?

Sociologists understand churches, synagogues, mosques—places of religious worship—in the United States to be examples of social organizations, bounded places wherein individuals learn certain norms and values that help them to navigate the world around them, to make sense of their surroundings, to provide meaning to their day-to-day experiences, and to feel a sense of belonging. The ways in which religious organizations help socialize individuals have been the subject of decades of work, ranging in topic from the relationship between religious affiliation and mental health, to the frequency of drinking, sexual activity, educational outcomes, and numerous others. For many in the United States, and across the world, religious spaces matter in helping to understand individual and collective social life.

However, there is quite a bit more debate regarding the bounds of the reach of the church as an influencing body. What happens when individuals walk out the door of their place of worship? And what happens when religious beliefs come into conflict with the tides of social upheaval and change?

Many scholars predicted that the remnants and results of the twin processes of industrialization and modernization, such as the vast social changes in the United States from the 1950s to 1970s, would result in a decline in the significance of religion in public life. This line of work theorizes that, in the wake of modernization, religion and religious life wane. For example, Peter Berger (1967) provides a conceptual model of a religious “sacred canopy” that sustains a distinct worldview and envelops and protects its members from “anomic chaos and terror” (Smith 1998:106). However, this protection fails during times of change; Berger argues that the sacred canopy is “torn apart” by modernity, providing his readers with a vivid image of the seemingly destructive forces that the ticking of time might have on religious life.

Religion has not disappeared from the United States, even in the wake of great social change. While the United States has experienced marked shifts in collective religious life throughout the history of the nation, it seems that Berger’s work fails to encapsulate the idea that religion, religious life, and “modern” society can coexist.2

Other scholars have theorized the continued presence of religion in public life in the United States. Some suggest that religious groups, such
as evangelicals, continue to flourish by many measures in the United States because they thrive on *distinction*. Evangelicals might hold on to certain beliefs precisely because they are one of the few markers that distinguish them from nonevangelicals (see both Gallagher 2003 and Smith 1998 for overviews of this theoretical perspective). This distinction can provide meaning for the group and sustain it during times of change.

This language of distinction might be misleading, though. Craig Calhoun (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011) argues that thinking about the religious and the secular as distinct assumes a false dichotomy. Calhoun suggests we think of the process of increased secularization as a presence that affects religion, religious life, and American culture broadly (2011:335). And Lynne Gerber (2011) argues that American [secular] culture is also a locus of evangelical identity formation, and even aspiration. Secularization is not something that is left behind when religion declines, and religion is not merely reactionary to the ways of the secular world.

The ways in which both religious and secular communities mutually influence and constitute each other is especially clear when we look at empirical work on understandings of sexuality and gender. A variety of scholarship finds that White evangelical identity is often constructed in relation to perceptions of secular ideals. For example, John Bartkowski studied evangelical men involved in the Promise Keepers movement, a movement known for its efforts to reclaim and put forth a new definition and practice of masculinity for evangelical men. Bartkowski (2004) documents the ways in which men involved with the Promise Keepers work to create a “godly masculinity” that is understood in relation to a secular masculinity. Bartkowski analyzes Promise Keepers advice manuals from the 1980s and early 1990s to show that leaders within the Promise Keepers movement worked to promote an array of godly masculinities that did not advance a singular notion of manhood, but rather contained four archetypes that allowed the group to understand and define themselves in relation to changing notions of gender in the United States at the time.

In her research on Christian sexuality websites, Kelsy Burke (2016) documents the ways in which evangelicals construct a new sexual logic around “godly sex.” Burke illustrates the ways in which evangelical Christians debate and support one another in their questions, concerns, and commitments to various sexual practices, and how they do so while both maintaining their evangelical faith and demonstrating their knowledge of, and interactions with, contemporary secular values about sex.
In my previous work on evangelical men who pledge sexual abstinence until marriage, I show how young men construct a sacred sexuality against what they understand to be a beastly sexuality of the secular world (Diefendorf 2015). And in her research on evangelical Christians and their beliefs about gay marriage, Dawne Moon finds that the “church was not separate from secular life, but a place where people went, in part, to learn how to be better persons in the secular world” (2004:4). When studying evangelicals, we must account for this interplay between religious and secular beliefs, the malleability, and the moments of tension and compromise. Religious groups may thrive, not because of their distance from, or even accommodations to, processes of secularization, but rather because of a direct engagement with the world outside of the church.

In foundational work on contemporary evangelical life, Christian Smith (1998) suggests that a religious movement that unites both clear cultural distinction and intense social engagement will be capable of thriving in the modern world. Smith argues that religious groups have always found ways to reformulate their orthodoxies to best engage with the changing social landscape they face. As such, groups that are better at constructing these distinct identities, and doing so in times of change, will grow in size and strength, whereas those who have difficulty will grow relatively weaker.

One of the ways that social groups, and indeed religious groups, provide their members with these distinct identities and meaning is by supplying them with a “moral orientation” to understand their own lives and the world in which they live (Smith 1998:90). Oftentimes, the construction of this moral orientation is done against a selected referent out-group. Another way of saying this is that social groups know who they are in large measure by knowing who they are not (Smith 1998).

Religious groups can continue to grow and fortify their strength through the tensions and conflicts between them and other groups (Smith 1998). These groups, whether real or imagined, can be understood as external threats that help build internal solidarity. Through engagement with these groups, these perceived threats, and identity-building in relation to them, evangelicals can thrive (Smith 1998).

White evangelicals might thrive because they are quite good at creating these in- and out-group boundaries and because, as a collective, they have the ability to “sustain the articulation of the tradition’s essential orthodoxy in a reformulated way appropriate for their given context” (Smith 1998:101). However, as our contemporary theoretical and empirical work on religion shows, we must critically interrogate the
presumed divides between religious and secular life in the United States today. That is, how “external” is this threat off of which evangelicals understand and maintain their own group identity? If there is considerable overlap, or at least engagement, with the secular world “outside” of evangelical communities, what is established as an external threat, and how do evangelicals debate values and ideals that require engagement on the part of the church? If we pay attention to both what gets defined as an external other and what elements of secular life require intense engagement and debate, we can better uncover and complicate the larger meanings associated with what Smith calls this identity work.

Smith suggests that it is precisely this engagement with external threats—indeed, what he calls an “embattlement” with these external threats—that results in continued solidarity for the religious group. As Smith states, “There is nothing quite like an outside threat or enemy to bring people together, make them set aside their internal differences, and increase their dedication and loyalty to the group” (1998:114). I suggest, however, that there are many steps between an identification of an external threat and group cohesion. If evangelical and secular worlds are not separate, but rather mutually influence each other while remaining somewhat distinct, we can picture them in a somewhat constant dance around questions of culture and society crucial to our contemporary moment. And we can imagine that this constant dance, of engaging with the world to remain relevant and grow, requires quite a bit of work. This work is not necessarily linear or uniform, and as Pastor Dave alluded to in his Sunday sermon following the presidential inauguration of 2017, this work can cause quite a bit of anxiety and tension and feelings of vulnerability. If we are able to capture both what is defined as an external threat and how these threats are engaged with on a day-to-day basis, we can uncover a much more nuanced picture of how White evangelicals understand their place in the social world, and how this understanding has larger implications for their continued support for conservative politics.

The concept of the imagined secular world helps to capture the ways in which the evangelicals at Lakeview internalize these external threats. It captures the messy process through which they discuss these threats and the debates, rearticulations, and decisions around what requires engagement and what does not. I approach this work with the theoretical assumption that White evangelical Christians have held their place in the modern social landscape of the United States by interacting with, and reformulating their orthodoxies in (at least partial) accordance with, the secular landscape of which they are a part, but I argue that this process
of reformulation includes many steps before reaching the goal of group solidarity. And this work of internalizing external threats might maintain not only group solidarity and perseverance but inequality as well.

The imagined secular, this bundle of external threats, represents the fights and ideas that challenge the lives and privileges of white, middle- and upper-middle-class straight evangelicals. This work shows how this group of individuals endeavors to construct and maintain their status as not ugly—as good and, in many ways, even as unseen, as normal. The changing terrain of life in the United States threatens to mark this group as intolerant at best, and the organization to which they belong as racist, sexist, and homophobic at worst. And many in the United States have long thought of White evangelicals in this way. White evangelicals are not neutral or passive subjects in this equation, beholden without power to the labels they increasingly receive. But I write about their own feelings and perceptions of their cultural position as increasingly under threat, as these beliefs are fundamental to their continued alignment with conservative politics.

White evangelicals want to retain the authority and privileges that have always come hand in hand with being members of a dominant racialized, classed, and religious organization in the United States, and this work centers both the everyday practices and beliefs of members of Lakeview Church, and the organization (and organization’s goals) of which they are a part.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN EVANGELICAL

The term “evangelical” is a contested one. Its meaning has adapted throughout its history in the United States, and the people who identify with the term change, too. Evangelical does not represent one denomination or a single tradition. There is no pope who reinforces a single definition or set of beliefs. There is not a website full of resources or a unified governing body that articulates an overarching mission statement. Rather, it is a movement that has found its home in a variety of denominations across the United States and globally, with a central focus on the renewal of Christianity. There is, however, a commonality and shared sense of understanding in the use of the term that leaves many invigorated by it and others wanting to disassociate from the term altogether, especially following the 2016 presidential election.

In October 2017, the Princeton Evangelical Fellowship, a student organization that had, at that point, existed for over eighty years, offi-
cially changed its name to the Princeton Christian Fellowship. The group director cited concerns about “baggage” about what evangelical means. In an interview for Christianity Today, Kara Powell, the executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute, commented that she did not see this title change as a negative move, and, instead, would “be more concerned if organizations who were moving away from the term evangelical were moving away from what it means to be evangelical” (Shellnut 2017, emphasis mine).

What it means in practice to be an evangelical varies, but I use the definition relied on by many other scholars to give clarity to the group in focus in this book. Following Bebbington’s (1989), Noll’s (2001), and Wellman’s (2008) articulations, I use evangelical in this text as the umbrella term for conservative Christians in the United States. I focus on evangelical Protestants in this book, those who represent a fairly homogenous political bloc (Wellman 2008). This broad group shares four core tenets of faith: (1) a belief in the importance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as atonement for human sin; (2) a belief that the Bible is the literal word of God; (3) the importance of individual decision-making to convert to follow Jesus Christ; and (4) missionary activity centered on the importance of such conversion, in other words, getting other people to follow Jesus Christ, too (Bebbington 1989; Noll 2001; Wellman 2008). In more succinct terms, Thomas Kidd (2019) defines evangelicals as “born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”

Writer Jonathan Merritt (2015) quipped of the meaning of evangelical, “To the pollster, it is a sociological term. To the pastor, it is a denominational or doctrinal term. And to the politician, it is a synonym for a White Christian Republican.” For our purposes, it is indeed a combination of all three: a term that means something specific to members of Lakeview Church in their beliefs and practices, a term that carries with it sociological significance as many White evangelicals occupy organizations and institutions that carry and enforce cultural sway in the larger social landscape, and a term that symbolizes, reflects, and continues to uphold a very specific political history in the United States.

LAKEVIEW CHURCH
I documented this anxiety, the negotiations about what it currently means to be an evangelical (and, really, a White evangelical), and what
Pastor Dave perhaps nicely encapsulated as the “messiness” of this current moment, during two years of fieldwork at a place I call Lakeview Church.

Inside Lakeview, the two main foyers of the church bustle before Sunday services. In one area, congregants gather in front of tables where small groups advertise their meetings and mission trips display photographs as part of their fundraising efforts. Others skip these tables entirely and head straight for the donut wall, where about 100 wooden pegs protrude from a wall and hold three to four donuts each. Individuals grab donuts just as fast as the high school volunteers can replace them on the pegs, and then many often head into the second foyer and stand in line for a latte at International Java. Volunteers work behind the counters at the registers and as baristas, moving quickly below large banners that hang from the ceiling with photos that depict smiling children of color outside of the United States. All proceeds from International Java go directly to Lakeview’s international mission trips. For those who just want coffee, there are multiple stands set up at all entrances to Lakeview, where individuals can fill Styrofoam cups before entering the sanctuary.

The sanctuary at Lakeview seats 1000 individuals. There are seven separate entrances to the sanctuary, and an individual greeter is stationed at each set of doors to pass out Lakeview’s weekly bulletin to all of its members. The weekly bulletin advertises many facets of Lakeview’s community life, including upcoming church events, small groups that are accepting new members, community service opportunities, youth groups, volunteer opportunities in the church, ways to contribute financially to the church, mission trips, Lakeview’s social media presence, and information about children’s summer camps. On the back page of the weekly bulletin, Lakeview provides space to take notes on the Sunday sermons. Sometimes, this space includes an outline of the sermon to come. The weekly bulletin and church’s social media presence reflect the highly curated and hip brand of the church, with identical fonts, consistent color schemes, and graphic icons that depict and distinguish small groups by types.

Lakeview was founded in the 1970s and still exists in the same building today. Lakeview Church is a member of the Foursquare denomination. Harvard Chaplain Janelle Ibaven describes Foursquare evangelicals, jokingly, as “Pentecostals with a seat-belt on” (Harvard University 2018). In the spectrum of evangelical denominations, we might understand those who belong to Foursquare as among the more conservative, but not quite as socially and politically conservative as most Pentecos-
Lakeview is one of 1600 Foursquare churches in the United States and one of 66,000 Foursquare churches worldwide. Lakeview’s membership in this denominational network makes it a bit more representative of a more “typical” megachurch than other stand-alone nondenominational churches across the country.

The church’s campus is sprawling, with massive parking lots, and a multistoried structure that is the compilation of many additions over the building’s 50-year history. In the spring, cherry trees bloom and cover the building’s boundaries in blankets of pink. Children often play tag outside in the mornings, running through the trees as their parents encourage them to come indoors. Teenagers congregate by the northern entrance to the building, and a group of young men usually toss around a football in the parking lot to the dismay of incoming drivers. Police officers are present on Sundays to ensure the easy flow of exit traffic at the end of each service, of which there are three every Sunday. Small buses crowd the roundabout at the entrance for ease in dropping off local senior citizens for the services.

A particular rhythm guides Sunday services: for the first twenty minutes, the worship team, a band of individual musicians that varies in size each week, leads the congregation in song and prayer. The pastoral team usually stands with their families in the front rows to worship during this part of the service. The lyrics to each song are projected onto a large screen behind the stage. A series of church announcements follows the worship songs before the lead pastor comes up onto the stage and the Sunday sermon begins. The lead pastor wears a wireless headset and microphone and uses a tablet to refer to notes for their sermon. A group of people operates a sound board at the back of the room, and another group of people operates cameras that project the lead pastor onto large screens behind the stage. Often, the images on the screen toggle between live views of the pastor, slides that include bullet points, Bible verses, phrases from the Sunday sermon, and graphic designs that in some way relate to the theme of the sermon for the day. For example, during a sermon series titled “Jonah” an image appeared on the screen of a man on a wooden boat, floating on bright teal water above the outline of a massive whale just below.

Lakeview Church is located in a suburban city in the Pacific Northwest. Lakeview is home to a majority White, economically and generationally diverse congregation of about 1500 members, qualifying it as a megachurch. About 15% of the congregants at Lakeview Church do not identify as White, which makes Lakeview Church about as diverse