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Immigrant Catholics' Perspectives and Engagement on Climate Crisis

Tison Vadakkekudiyil Thomas
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Tison V. Thomas

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Review Committee
Dr. Jonathan Scherch, Committee Chairperson,
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, Committee Member,
Social Work Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In this generic qualitative study, how immigrant Catholics in the United States make sense of climate change and environmental justice was examined, addressing a critical gap in understanding how faith and cultural identity shape environmental engagement among marginalized communities. Guided by sensemaking theory and the Catholic principle of integral ecology, as outlined in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, the research question addressed how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice. Seventeen first-and second-generation adult immigrants participated in semistructured interviews, and data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis in NVivo software. Eight themes emerged, including faith as a motivator for ecological responsibility, intergenerational concerns, and the church's dual role as both a spiritual and civic space for advocacy. Findings reveal that religious identity inspires environmental stewardship while also creating tensions with traditional practices, fostering resilience and commitment to sustainability. Results showed that faith-informed advocacy and eco-social work frameworks can enhance community engagement, inform culturally sensitive policies, and promote equity in climate adaptation efforts. This research contributes to positive social change by amplifying the perspectives of immigrant Catholic communities, demonstrating their potential role in shaping sustainable practices, strengthening community resilience, and fostering inclusive climate action rooted in faith and cultural values.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with deep love and respect to the memory of my **dad**, who passed away in 2024 before he could see me reach this milestone. His wisdom, sacrifices, and unwavering commitment to our family shaped who I am today, and I carry his spirit with me in every achievement.

I also dedicate this work to my beloved uncles, late **Fr. Jacob Vadakkekudy**, whose persistence and devotion to faith and community inspired me to persevere, and late **V. U. Joseph**, whose constant support and belief in my abilities gave me strength through moments of doubt. Their lives and encouragement continue to guide me, even in their absence.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this work to **Pope Francis**, whose inspirational teachings on integral ecology and his tireless call for care of our common home profoundly shaped the vision and direction of this study. His voice remains a beacon of hope, compassion, and justice for all creation.

May this dissertation serve as a small testament to the enduring influence of these remarkable lives, whose love, faith, and example continue to inspire me beyond their passing.

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I want to express my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, **Dr. Jonathan Scherch**, whose exceptional guidance, direction, and unwavering support contributed tremendously to the completion of this study. His thoughtful insights, encouragement, and high expectations consistently challenged me to think critically and refine my work. His mentorship has left an enduring impact on both my scholarly and professional journey. I also wish to sincerely thank my committee member, **Dr. Thomas McLaughlin**, for his valuable comments, constructive feedback, and thoughtful suggestions, which helped strengthen this dissertation and improve the quality of the final product.

This achievement would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. To my **wife and children**, thank you for your patience, sacrifices, and encouragement throughout this long process. To my **mom**, I am forever grateful for your prayers, strength, and belief in me. I am also thankful to my extended family, friends, and coworkers who provided encouragement and understanding along the way. Finally, I thank all those who stood beside me during this journey; their faith in me has been a constant source of motivation and inspiration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The global climate crisis presents complex challenges that fall unevenly on vulnerable populations, particularly immigrant communities. Rising temperatures intensify biodiversity loss, extreme weather, and socioeconomic disparities, and immigrants are especially affected because of limited resources, political marginalization, and weaker infrastructure (see Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Naidoo, 2022). Rooted in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, which highlights "integral ecology" and the moral duty of environmental stewardship, these communities represent the intersection of faith, culture, and social justice (Francis, 2015). Systemic inequities further amplify their climate vulnerabilities, necessitating a closer examination of their involvement in climate advocacy (Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023).

Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and Pope Francis's concept of integral ecology (2015) were applied to explore how immigrant Catholics interpret climate change and connect their religious beliefs to environmental action. The findings provide practical insights for faith-based initiatives and policies aimed at equitable climate resilience and contribute to ongoing conversations on environmental justice. An overview of the dissertation's organization is provided in this chapter, along with a review of earlier research, identification of existing gaps, and an explanation of the problem, purpose, research questions, guiding frameworks, methods, and overall significance.

Background

The climate crisis is a complex phenomenon. Although natural climate cycles such as the Little Ice Age shaped past conditions, today's crisis is largely intensified by human activity. The periodic changes in ocean currents, polar ice sheets, and solar activity have historically driven global temperature shifts over millennia, leading to significant climatic events (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Liu & Xiang, 2022). For instance, the Little Ice Age demonstrated how cooler temperatures impacted agriculture, mortality rates, and migration patterns, destabilizing human societies reliant on climate-sensitive economies (Waldinger, 2022). In contemporary times, rising global temperatures, influenced by greenhouse gases, have led to extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and socioeconomic disparities (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Naidoo, 2022). These changes have amplified the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as heat waves and droughts, causing disruptions to ecosystems and biodiversity (Ali & Thakkar, 2023). If left unchecked, the mix of natural changes and human-driven impacts could destabilize ecosystems and place even more people at risk (Liu & Xiang, 2022; Naidoo, 2022). To address the scientific aspects of climate change, international cooperation is needed to cut emissions, switch to renewable energy, and put sustainable practices into place to lessen its effects on the environment.

The climate crisis, driven by anthropogenic activities, disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including immigrant communities (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). Existing literature highlights the effects of climate change on

underrepresented populations and examines the role of religion in environmental advocacy, but it ignores the unique relationship between immigrant Catholic experiences, religious traditions, and climate engagement. This gap shows the need to better understand how immigrant Catholic communities deal with environmental challenges and make sense of them, considering their faith and culture. There is a significant knowledge gap because social work scholarship has not yet addressed how the cultural and faith-based frameworks of immigrant Catholic communities affect their perceptions of climate change. Furthermore, the profession lacks sufficient empirical research on strategies to integrate faith-informed approaches into climate advocacy for marginalized populations (Gum, 2022; Mason et al., 2022).

In this study, I addressed these gaps by examining how social workers collaborate with faith-based organizations to foster culturally relevant and community-driven solutions to climate vulnerabilities. This study was designed to close a knowledge gap in social work's comprehension of the relationship between religion, culture, and environmental justice by shedding light on how immigrant Catholics integrated their faith and cultural identity into environmental advocacy. Examining these relationships, the research helps create equitable and inclusive climate policies that strengthen immigrant communities. In line with the profession's dedication to social justice and systemic change, these findings influence social work practice, faith-based interventions, and policy formation.

Problem Statement

With its effects on the environment, the economy, and society, the climate crisis is a complicated issue that disproportionately affects underprivileged groups, such as immigrant communities. These groups often encounter systemic inequities, such as limited access to adaptive resources, sociopolitical vulnerabilities, and heightened environmental risks (Avtar et al., 2023; Ek et al., 2024; Lebrón et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2023). Catholic social teaching, particularly Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes stewardship of creation, environmental justice, and integral ecology, linking ecological care with human dignity and social justice (Francis, 2015). Despite this guidance, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how immigrant communities perceive and engage with environmental justice through the lens of their faith (see Chu, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023; McCaffery & Boetto, 2024; Rami et al., 2023).

Social work research stresses the need to look closely at how issues of social justice and the environment overlap, particularly for underserved communities. Frameworks such as eco-social work, green social work, and ecoemotions highlight the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems and emphasize the need for culturally responsive and community-driven approaches to climate advocacy (Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022; McCaffery & Boetto, 2024). To address this gap, qualitative methods were employed, including semistructured interviews with church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland, to capture how their religious beliefs and cultural identity informed their perceptions of and responses to the climate crisis. These

approaches were designed to investigate the relationship between environmental justice, cultural identity, and faith.

This gap matters for social work, a profession committed to tackling systemic inequities and helping vulnerable communities build resilience (see Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022). Understanding how church-going immigrant Catholics interpret and integrate their faith with environmental advocacy can inform faith-based and community-driven solutions to climate resilience. Addressing this gap is critical to advancing culturally attuned and equity-focused climate strategies (see Francis, 2015).

It is recognized that faith-based organizations are essential venues for empowering underprivileged groups, such as Catholic immigrants. Although these groups offer opportunities to incorporate theological ideas like integral ecology and stewardship into climate advocacy, little is known about the specific practices immigrant Catholics use to align religious teachings and cultural heritage (see Nche, 2020; Szrot, 2020). In *Laudato Si',* Pope Francis advocates for environmental justice; there is little research on how immigrant Catholic communities in localized contexts align these teachings with their lived experiences of social and environmental challenges (see Chu, 2022; Hearn et al., 2024). Filling this gap can help shape faith-based social work practices, guide policy advocacy, and support climate strategies that are more culturally responsive.

While Catholic teaching promotes environmental justice at a global level, little is known about how immigrant Catholics engage with these ideas in their own local contexts. I addressed this gap by exploring how church-going immigrant Catholics in

Maryland perceived and engaged with the climate crisis through the lens of their faith and cultural identity. The findings contribute to social work's broader discourse on environmental justice, offering actionable insights for faith-based advocacy and interdisciplinary approaches that empower marginalized and vulnerable populations and advance equity-focused climate policies (see Chevance et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis through the lens of their religious beliefs and cultural identity. Through semistructured interviews and thematic analysis, this research examined how immigrant Catholics engage in faith-informed environmental advocacy, helping to fill a major gap in research on their role in climate justice. Guided by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the integral ecology framework from Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*' (2015), the research revealed narratives that reconciled faith with climate-related vulnerabilities.

The findings revealed that Catholic teachings shaped how participants viewed the climate crisis, helped them build resilience, and encouraged them to advocate for environmental justice (Francis, 2015; Weick, 1995). The findings contribute to the development of culturally relevant, faith-informed strategies that empower immigrant Catholic communities to address environmental challenges. It provides actionable insights for social workers, policymakers, and faith-based organizations, underscoring the importance of cultural and religious contexts in promoting climate resilience and social

equity (Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023). Focusing on the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and environmental action, the findings address a significant gap in existing research.

Research Question

RQ: How do church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?

The disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations, including immigrant communities, highlighted the need to critically explore their role in climate action (see Gum, 2022). This question was important because it allowed me to explore how faith, cultural identity, and environmental justice come together in a community that is often left out of climate advocacy discussions (see Gum, 2022; Mason et al., 2022; Tarusarira, 2022). Catholic teachings, particularly the concept of integral ecology from *Laudato Si*', linked ecological care to human dignity, providing a moral and spiritual framework that could inspire resilience and advocacy among these communities (Francis, 2015; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023; Szrot, 2020). Guided by the sensemaking theory, I examined how immigrant Catholics connected their faith to environmental responsibility. In doing so, it filled an important gap in the literature. It offered practical insights for policymakers, social workers, and faith leaders working toward more inclusive and sustainable climate solutions (see Chevance et al., 2023; Chu, 2022; Vanderlinden et al., 2020; Weick, 1995; Zou et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), which provided a lens to understand how individuals and communities interpreted and responded to complex phenomena, such as climate change. Weick (1995) explained how people look back on their experiences to make sense of uncertainty and navigate complex situations. Key principles of the framework include its inherently social nature, its retrospective orientation, and its context dependence, aligning closely with the experiences of immigrant Catholic communities (see Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking theory is related directly to this study's approach and research questions by emphasizing how communities integrated cultural narratives, socio-environmental contexts, and faith-based teachings to construct their understanding of climate change. In immigrant Catholic communities, shared religious and cultural interpretations shaped how people responded to climate challenges, an example of the social nature of sensemaking. For example, narratives within church communities provide a shared framework for interpreting the climate crisis, rooted in Catholic teachings such as Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*', which emphasized integral ecology and the interconnectedness of human dignity, social justice, and ecological health (Francis, 2015).

The idea of looking back, central to sensemaking theory, was especially useful for understanding how immigrant Catholics drew on their cultural traditions and past experiences when thinking about climate change (see Weick, 1995). This aligned with

my goal of uncovering how participants integrated religious teachings and cultural identity into their environmental engagement. The context-dependent nature of sensemaking highlighted the role of local church settings and socio-political environments in shaping these narratives, making this framework particularly suitable for examining how faith-based communities perceived and responded to climate challenges.

I examined how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland created meaning around environmental justice and climate advocacy, guided by the theoretical tenets of sensemaking theory. I explored how social and cultural factors interacted with Catholic social teachings to affect climate engagement. This application of sensemaking theory offered valuable insights for culturally informed and faith-driven strategies to foster climate resilience and advocacy, advancing both social work and interdisciplinary climate justice discourse.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the Catholic principle of integral ecology as articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). Together with sensemaking theory, this framework provided a way to examine how immigrant Catholics in Maryland understood and responded to the climate crisis, drawing on both their cultural identity and religious beliefs. Sensemaking theory emphasized the process by which individuals and communities constructed meaning in complex or ambiguous situations, particularly in response to social and environmental challenges (Weick, 1995). This viewpoint was especially important for comprehending how Catholic immigrants

navigated the intersection of faith, cultural heritage, and environmental justice. Presenting environmental stewardship as a moral and theological necessity and connecting preservation of creation with social justice and human dignity, integral ecology enhanced this strategy (Francis, 2015). These frameworks provided an in-depth knowledge of how immigrant Catholic communities participated in climate advocacy by highlighting the connections between ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

These frameworks share a common focus on how communities construct narratives and collaborate to create meaning. *Laudato Si'* offered moral and spiritual guidance for caring for the environment (Francis, 2015), while sensemaking theory helps explain how communities interpret and adapt those teachings within their own cultural and social settings (Weick, 1995). This conceptual framework informed the study's qualitative design by guiding the development of semistructured interview protocols to explore participants' perceptions of climate change, the role of faith in shaping their attitudes, and the influence of cultural identity on environmental engagement. The framework supported thematic analysis by examining how faith-based teachings and cultural heritage shaped participants' environmental advocacy.

A critical gap in the literature was addressed by examining the intersection between faith, cultural identity, and climate engagement, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on environmental justice and advancing social work's commitment to equity and empowerment for marginalized communities (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022). The theoretical and conceptual frameworks connected theological principles

with lived experiences, informing data collection, instrument design, and thematic analysis, and ensuring culturally relevant insights into environmental advocacy.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I employed a constructivist paradigm and used a generic qualitative design to explore how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceived and engaged with the climate crisis through the lens of their faith and cultural identity. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed for a deeper look at participants' lived experiences and the ways they made sense of environmental justice. This design aligned with the study's focus on uncovering the interplay between religious teachings, cultural heritage, and environmental engagement, as informed by sensemaking theory (see Weick, 1995).

The phenomenon under investigation was the intersection of Catholic social teachings, particularly the principle of integral ecology from *Laudato Si*' (see Francis, 2015), with the lived experiences of immigrant Catholics facing environmental challenges. Data collection involved semistructured interviews with purposively sampled participants who were active members of a Catholic parish in Maryland. This approach enabled the collection of rich, contextualized narratives that reflected participants' perceptions and actions regarding the climate crisis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software (Version 15; Lumivero, 2024), to identify patterns and themes that illuminated how participants integrated faith, culture, and environmental advocacy. Focusing on this particular cultural and religious group, the

findings highlight the challenges and opportunities that shaped how immigrant Catholics engaged in climate advocacy and stewardship.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are defined as they are used in the study:

Climate Crisis: In this study, the term refers to the escalating environmental, social, and economic challenges linked to human-induced climate change. These include global temperature increases, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Liu & Xiang, 2022). Vulnerable populations, such as marginalized and immigrant communities, disproportionately experience the adverse impacts of these changes due to systemic inequities (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023).

Community Resilience: Community resilience refers to the ability of communities, particularly marginalized ones, to adapt to and recover from environmental disruptions. Faith-based organizations often foster this resilience by integrating ecological care with social support systems (Hudson & Koenig, 2023).

Eco-Social Work: Eco-social work integrates environmental justice principles into traditional social work practices. It emphasizes sustainability, community resilience, and the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems (Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022).

Environmental Justice: The principle that all people should be treated fairly and included in decisions about environmental laws and policies, regardless of background. It focuses on addressing the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on

marginalized and vulnerable populations, including immigrant communities (see Chevance et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023).

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs): FBOs are organizations rooted in religious values that engage in community services, advocacy, and education. They play a crucial role in climate advocacy by leveraging moral authority and community networks to promote environmental stewardship (Chu, 2022; Szrot, 2020).

Immigrant Catholic Communities: Immigrant Catholic communities consist of Catholic individuals and families who have migrated to the United States. These communities are shaped by their cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and socio-economic experiences, which influence their engagement with climate action and environmental justice (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023).

Integral Ecology: Integral ecology is a Catholic concept that links environmental care with social justice and spiritual values. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all creation and advocates for holistic approaches to addressing ecological and human challenges (Francis, 2015; Szrot, 2020).

Laudato Si': *Laudato Si*' is Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical addressing environmental concerns. It emphasizes the moral imperative for ecological stewardship, linking care for creation with human dignity and social justice (Francis, 2015; Szrot, 2020).

Marginalized Populations: Marginalized populations refer to groups excluded from resources, decision-making, and opportunities due to systemic inequities. These

groups, including immigrants, often face heightened vulnerabilities to climate risks and environmental hazards (see Adger et al., 2024; Avtar et al., 2023; Estok, 2023; Hiebert, 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Ramachandra, 2023; Rami et al., 2023; Teicher & Marchman, 2024; Watson et al., 2023).

Religious Environmental Sensemaking: This concept examines how religious beliefs and practices shape communities' interpretations of and responses to environmental crises. It highlights the role of sacred narratives in influencing climate advocacy and resilience (Tarusarira, 2022; Zou et al., 2023).

Sensemaking: Sensemaking is a theoretical framework developed by Karl Weick (1995) that describes how individuals and groups create meaning in complex and ambiguous situations. This study applies sensemaking to understand how communities like immigrant Catholics interpret and respond to the climate crisis through their religious and cultural lenses (see Vanderlinden et al., 2020; Weick, 1995; Zou et al., 2023).

Social Determinants of Climate Vulnerability: These refer to structural factors such as poverty, lack of education, and inadequate infrastructure that increase susceptibility to climate risks, particularly among marginalized groups like immigrants (see Chevance et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The United Nations' SDGs are a set of global objectives aimed at addressing critical challenges like poverty, inequality, and climate change. SDG 13 focuses on climate action, promoting sustainable development to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts (Hossain et al., 2023; Zhenmin & Espinosa, 2019).

Assumptions

This study was based on several key assumptions about how immigrant Catholics in Maryland understand and respond to the climate crisis through their faith and cultural background. First, I assumed that Catholic teachings, particularly the principles of stewardship and integral ecology as articulated in *Laudato Si*' (see Francis, 2015), significantly shaped participants' environmental perceptions and actions. This theological framework provided a foundation for exploring the intersection of faith and ecological engagement among immigrant Catholic communities. The research was grounded in the assumption that sensemaking theory (see Weick, 1995) offered a robust lens for analyzing how participants constructed meaning around the climate crisis. This perspective highlighted the importance of shared values, cultural context, and reflection on past experiences relevant for immigrant Catholics facing inequities and environmental challenges.

Another key assumption was that the immigrant experience intersected with socioeconomic vulnerabilities and resilience strategies rooted in faith and cultural identity, influencing participants' engagement with environmental issues. Immigrant Catholic communities often relied on shared religious values and parish-based support systems to address these challenges, making this assumption critical to understanding their climate advocacy (Chu, 2022; Szrot, 2020). I applied qualitative methods, including semistructured interviews and thematic analysis, to capture the interplay between faith, culture, and environmental engagement. These methods provided rich, context-specific

insights into participants' lived experiences, facilitating a deeper exploration of how faith-based narratives shaped ecological advocacy (see Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2021).

An underlying assumption was that Catholic teachings significantly influenced participants' environmental perceptions, and that semistructured interviews and thematic analysis were suitable for capturing nuanced narratives. These assumptions were critical to understanding the interplay between faith, culture, and climate advocacy. Together, these assumptions provided the foundation for examining the intersection between faith, culture, and climate justice, with implications for faith-based initiatives, social work practice, and environmental policy advocacy.

Scope and Delimitations

I investigated how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceived and responded to the climate crisis by examining the intersection of faith, culture, and environmental justice. The focus was on church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland, with other demographics and religious affiliations excluded. Delimitations ensured an in-depth exploration of this specific intersection, while potential transferability was acknowledged through detailed contextual descriptions. The scope was limited to adult first- and second-generation immigrant Catholics who actively participated in a Catholic parish within Maryland. Guided by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and Catholic teachings, particularly *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), participants' integration of religious beliefs, cultural heritage, and lived experiences in constructing meaning around environmental challenges was examined. Prior studies, such as Vanderlinden et al.

(2020), highlighted the value of interpretive frameworks like sensemaking theory in understanding collective meaning-making processes, which emphasized plausibility over objective accuracy.

Focusing on the state of Maryland, the analysis offered a localized perspective on how Catholic parishes encourage environmental responsibility and engage in climate justice. This approach facilitated a richer exploration of participants' narratives, consistent with the research objective to examine faith-based perceptions and actions. The findings provide insight into how faith and cultural identity shape environmental engagement in marginalized communities, particularly through the ways church-going immigrant Catholics make sense of climate issues.

The scope and delimitations established for this research created a focused and coherent framework for exploring the research objectives. The participant pool was intentionally limited to adult church-going immigrant Catholics, excluding nonreligious populations and individuals under 18, to highlight faith-based environmental perceptions and actions. While *Laudato Si'* served as the foundational Catholic text on environmental stewardship, interfaith and other denominational perspectives were not included in the scope of this research. A qualitative design, employing semistructured interviews, was selected instead of quantitative approaches such as surveys or statistical analysis to capture new, context-specific experiences. This methodological choice ensured that the research remained grounded in interpretive processes to participants' faith and cultural contexts.

In alignment with the methodological framework, the research engaged 17 participants from an immigrant Catholic parish in Maryland. A total of 22 individuals indicated interest, 20 were selected based on eligibility, and 17 ultimately completed interviews. All participants met the inclusion criteria of being adult first- or second-generation immigrants actively involved in parish life. Semistructured interviews, conducted via the Zoom platform, allowed for flexibility and maintained the integrity of face-to-face interaction while ensuring participant comfort, privacy, and accessibility. Prior to each interview, participants provided informed consent, were assured of confidentiality, and were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Interviews ranged from 19 to 62 minutes and followed a standardized protocol informed by sensemaking theory (see Weick, 1995) and the conceptual framework of integral ecology (see Francis, 2015), enabling participants to reflect on how their faith, cultural identity, and lived experiences shaped their perceptions of and responses to the climate crisis. With participant permission, all sessions were recorded and transcribed, and transcripts were carefully reviewed for accuracy before being imported into NVivo software for systematic coding. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis guided data analysis, ensuring a rigorous, transparent, and iterative process. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness, including member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and maintaining an audit trail, were integrated throughout to enhance credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative research.

Limitations

I acknowledged several limitations of this study on church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland regarding its design and methodology. The geographic focus on Maryland restricted the generalizability of findings to other regions, as sociopolitical, cultural, and environmental contexts may have differed significantly (see Mason et al., 2022; Vanderlinden et al., 2020). I used purposive sampling of adult church-going immigrant Catholics within a single parish community in Maryland. While appropriate for an in-depth qualitative design, purposive sampling may introduce selection bias and limit the range of perspectives represented (Patton, 2015). Data saturation was reached with 17 completed interviews, which is suitable for the study's scope but necessarily constrains breadth. The relatively small sample size inherent in qualitative research further constrained the study's transferability to broader populations (Patton, 2015).

Biases may also have influenced the study's outcomes, particularly due to the reliance on semistructured interviews and thematic analysis, which involved subjective interpretation. To address these concerns, measures such as reflexivity, member checking, and detailed documentation of analytical decisions were implemented to enhance the study's dependability (see Saldana, 2021; Patton, 2015). Language or cultural barriers may have posed challenges in accurately capturing participants' experiences and narratives, particularly if these were influenced by theological or cultural interpretations (Tarusarira, 2022). To address these challenges, culturally sensitive

interview questions were employed, and NVivo software was used to ensure consistent and thorough analysis.

Even with these limitations, the findings offered detailed insights into how immigrant Catholic communities connected their faith, culture, and environmental advocacy. Focusing on this underexplored population, the research contributed to addressing critical gaps in the literature on faith-based environmental justice, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, social work practitioners, and faith-based organizations to foster culturally informed climate resilience strategies. The findings of this study, while focused on church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland, may have had potential transferability to other faith-based immigrant communities in similar socio-cultural contexts, offering insights into how cultural and religious frameworks shaped environmental engagement and advocacy.

Significance of the Study and Positive Social Change

The study's findings contribute to advancing the knowledge base in the social work discipline by addressing the intersection of environmental justice, cultural identity, and faith-based engagement within immigrant Catholic communities. Social work literature emphasized the need for holistic approaches that integrated ecological and social justice frameworks to address the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations disproportionately impacted by climate change (Gum, 2022; Mason et al., 2022). Examining how immigrant Catholics interpreted and acted on ecological teachings, particularly the principle of integral ecology from *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015), this study

aligned with the core social work principles of systemic change, equity, and justice. These insights contributed to eco-social work and green social work frameworks, which emphasized the interconnectedness of environmental and social systems and advocated for resilience and sustainability as components of justice (Breen et al., 2023; Hudson & Koenig, 2023). The findings revealed the role of culturally specific interventions in addressing systemic inequities and advancing social work's mission to empower vulnerable populations.

The practical implications of the findings extend to informing faith-based and policy initiatives designed to address environmental challenges. Uncovering how faith-based narratives and community support systems influenced environmental engagement among immigrant Catholics, the findings offer actionable recommendations for social workers, policymakers, and faith-based organizations. For example, it provided a foundation for developing educational initiatives that integrated Catholic social teachings with practical strategies for climate resilience. Additionally, this research supports the role of social workers in bridging gaps between marginalized communities and broader policy frameworks by advocating for inclusive and culturally attuned approaches to climate adaptation (see Ek et al., 2024; Lebrón et al., 2023).

The findings contribute to positive social change by highlighting the voices of immigrant Catholic communities and showing their important role in ecological advocacy and resilience. The findings promoted equity-focused strategies that empowered marginalized communities to address climate challenges collaboratively by integrating

cultural identity, faith, and environmental justice. This aligned with the broader objectives of social work to foster systemic reforms that ensured inclusivity and sustainability, positioning social workers as key advocates for culturally sensitive and environmentally just solutions (Chevance et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022). The findings ensure equitable benefit to all participants by providing a summary of findings to those who expressed interest in learning about the outcomes. Additionally, the research was designed with the purpose of informing faith-based organizations, policymakers, and social workers, thereby contributing to the broader immigrant Catholic community's ability to engage in climate advocacy. I aimed to empower communities and promote equitable environmental justice initiatives by highlighting participants' narratives.

Summary

The global climate crisis is a multifaceted issue that disproportionately impacts marginalized populations, particularly immigrant communities. Grounded in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* (2015) and its call for integral ecology, the analysis explored how immigrant Catholics in Maryland viewed and responded to environmental challenges through their faith and cultural identity. Guided by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), I focused on the intersection of Catholic theological principles, environmental justice, and cultural narratives, addressing notable gaps in the existing literature. In Chapter 1, I outlined the purpose of the research, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance. The content

also underscores the potential contributions to culturally attuned climate resilience strategies and to faith-based advocacy initiatives.

In Chapter 2, I build on the foundational concepts introduced in Chapter 1 by providing an in-depth review of the literature on climate change, environmental justice, and the role of faith-based engagement. I contextualize the study within historical and contemporary perspectives, highlighting the Catholic Church's ecological teachings, particularly as articulated in *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015), and integrating insights from sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995). This review identified critical gaps in existing research regarding how immigrant Catholic communities navigated environmental challenges through their faith and cultural identity.

Chapter 3 details the qualitative methodology, including the constructivist paradigm, generic qualitative design, theoretical and conceptual framework, participant selection, data collection procedures, and thematic analysis process used to explore the research question. In Chapter 4, I present the findings, organized around key themes that emerged from participants' narratives. These themes illustrated how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland integrated their faith, cultural identity, and lived experiences to construct meaning around the climate crisis, highlighting patterns of resilience, stewardship, and community responsibility. Building on these findings, in Chapter 5, I provide an in-depth interpretation of the results in relation to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research questions, and existing literature. This chapter discusses the practical implications for social work, faith-based advocacy, and policy

development, outlines recommendations for practice and future research, and identifies the limitations. Taken together, the chapters provide a fuller picture of how faith and cultural heritage influence climate engagement among immigrant Catholics, placing the study's findings within larger conversations about environmental justice and culturally grounded approaches to climate resilience.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Climate change is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. It affects the environment, societies, and economies, and demands solutions that draw on multiple disciplines. Rising global temperatures have intensified extreme weather events, disrupted ecosystems, and exacerbated inequalities, particularly for vulnerable populations such as immigrant communities (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023, 2022; Rami et al., 2023). I examined how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland interpret and respond to climate change through the lens of their religious beliefs and cultural identities. Applying sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the Catholic principle of integral ecology from *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), this study bridged gaps in the literature concerning the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and environmental justice. In this chapter, I provide the theoretical, historical, and empirical background of the research, emphasizing key themes, gaps in the literature, and their implications.

The current literature underscores the moral and theological imperatives for environmental stewardship articulated by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, which integrates care for creation with social justice and human dignity (Francis, 2015). However, despite the Catholic Church's global influence and advocacy for climate action, immigrant Catholics' unique contributions to climate resilience remain underexplored. Faith-based organizations (FBOs), including Catholic parishes, are essential in mobilizing marginalized communities for climate action, yet their efforts often face structural barriers and limited integration of localized contexts (Chu, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023). I

sought to address these gaps by examining the narratives and actions of immigrant Catholics in Maryland, offering insights for inclusive climate advocacy and policy.

This chapter is organized into three major sections. The first section reviews the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, emphasizing sensemaking theory and integral ecology and their relevance to the study's objectives. The second section synthesizes existing literature on climate change, environmental justice, and faith-based engagement, identifying critical gaps concerning immigrant Catholic communities. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of key findings from the literature and their implications for the study. Together, these sections establish the foundation for understanding the interplay of faith, culture, and climate advocacy, positioning the study's findings to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse and practical interventions.

Literature Search Strategy

I employed a broad, step-by-step search strategy to capture a wide range of studies and to identify areas where research remains limited. Resources were accessed through the Walden Library and multiple interdisciplinary databases, including ProQuest, JSTOR, APA PsycInfo, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar, chosen for their extensive coverage of scholarly research in religion, social sciences, climate, and environmental studies. Key search terms and combinations such as *climate crisis, environmental justice, Catholicism, Laudato Si, integral ecology, social work and climate, social work and environment, migrant, immigrant perceptions,* and *sensemaking* were applied, with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) used to refine results. For example, search phrases

like “Catholic AND environmental justice” and “immigrant Catholics AND climate change” helped focus on highly relevant studies. I gave priority to recent work from the past 5 years, while also including key older studies that provided historical and theoretical context.

The iterative search process began with broad searches to identify overarching themes, which informed more targeted refinements. Early results highlighted general insights into environmental justice and religious engagement with climate issues, prompting the use of more specific terms like “integral ecology AND immigrant communities” and “religious environmental sensemaking” to narrow the focus. Backward citation tracking from key articles was employed to uncover foundational and supplementary studies missed in database searches. Peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and conference proceedings were prioritized for their academic rigor, particularly those linking religious frameworks with ecological advocacy or addressing interdisciplinary perspectives. Challenges included the limited availability of research explicitly addressing immigrant Catholics, prompting an expanded scope to include immigrant Catholic communities across the globe. Studies of other migrant and immigrant religious groups in different regions were also reviewed to provide valid comparisons. This rigorous approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the topic, providing a robust foundation for exploring the intersection of faith, environmental justice, and climate action within immigrant Catholic communities.

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework: Sensemaking Theory

Sensemaking theory, developed by Weick (1995), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals and communities construct meaning when faced with ambiguity or complexity. The theory emphasizes the social, retrospective, and context-dependent nature of constructing meaning, making it an invaluable tool for exploring human behavior in complex situations such as the climate crisis. Sensemaking theory holds a central role in how people interpret their experiences. How individuals see themselves shapes the way they make sense of events (Weick, 1995). Retrospection allows individuals to draw upon past actions and experiences to frame current events, while enactment emphasizes the active role individuals play in shaping their environments through narratives and dialogues.

Sensemaking is also social; people build shared meanings together in groups, making community dynamics important for shaping how they respond to challenges (Weick, 1995). Some key principles of sensemaking are that people move back and forth between interpretation and action, they focus on certain cues while ignoring others, and they often prefer explanations that feel plausible and coherent over ones that are perfectly accurate. These tendencies help them cope with uncertainty (Weick, 1995). These propositions provide a robust framework for understanding how communities like church-going immigrant Catholics interpret and respond to complex phenomena such as climate change.

Sensemaking theory has been applied across diverse contexts to address complex challenges, demonstrating its adaptability and impact. Lim et al. (2023) used a structured sensemaking approach to transform bibliometric analysis from a descriptive process into a tool for deriving actionable insights, emphasizing the theory's role in uncovering knowledge gaps and trends. Similarly, Hampel and Dalpiaz (2023) employed sensemaking in organizational identity reconstruction, highlighting how identity discontinuity, rather than continuity, can be leveraged to reconcile conflicting historical narratives and shape future strategies. While both studies demonstrate the theory's potential for reframing ambiguity into meaningful outcomes, Zou et al. (2023) extended its application to workplace spirituality, showing how sensemaking enables employees to align personal values with organizational goals, fostering ethical behavior and corporate social responsibility.

In contrast to these applications focused on internal organizational or research dynamics, Vanderlinden et al. (2020) explored sensemaking in climate adaptation, demonstrating its utility in integrating local and scientific narratives to enhance community agency and resilience. Tarusarira (2022) further emphasized this external focus by examining how religious environmental sensemaking in climate-induced conflicts shapes actors' responses to resource challenges, bridging spiritual and environmental dimensions. Taken together, these studies demonstrate the flexibility of sensemaking theory. It has been used to address both organizational issues and broader community challenges, highlighting its usefulness at different levels.

The theory's emphasis on retrospective and context-dependent construction of meaning aligns with the focus on how immigrant Catholics integrate religious teachings, cultural heritage, and socio-environmental contexts into their narratives. For example, Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* (2015) provides a theological narrative emphasizing integral ecology, which participants may draw upon to frame their climate advocacy. This alignment with Weick's (1995) principle of enactment illustrates how immigrant Catholics actively construct their environmental engagement through faith-based and cultural narratives.

I applied sensemaking theory by examining its intersection with religious and cultural frameworks. In contrast, previous research has primarily examined sensemaking in organizational or environmental contexts (Tarusarira, 2022; Vanderlinden et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2023). This research investigated the unique contributions of immigrant Catholic communities to environmental justice discourse. The integration of faith, cultural identity, and local contexts highlights the theory's versatility and deepens its relevance in exploring the climate crisis through a socio-religious lens.

Sensemaking theory provides a robust framework for exploring how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland interpret and respond to the climate crisis. Integrating cultural identity, faith, and socioenvironmental contexts, the theory offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay of individual and communal narratives. This research not only contributes to the broader discourse on environmental and religious studies but also provides actionable insights for fostering culturally sensitive and faith-based climate

strategies. In doing so, it highlights the relevance of sensemaking theory in addressing complex, multidimensional challenges and advancing interdisciplinary climate justice discourse (Hampel & Dalpiaz, 2023; Lim et al., 2023; Zou et al., 2023).

Sensemaking theory offers unique advantages over other theoretical frameworks. Unlike the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) or social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasize individual decision-making and learning mechanisms, sensemaking theory focuses on interpretive processes shaped by culture and religion. Theories like environmental justice framework (Bullard, 1990) and cultural cognition theory (Kahan et al., 2011) shed light on systemic inequalities and cultural influences. Still, they do not fully explain how people actively build meaning in complex situations. Because it connects cognitive, social, and cultural aspects, sensemaking theory is especially useful for studying how immigrant Catholics deal with the many challenges of climate change.

Conceptual Framework: Integral Ecology

Integral ecology, introduced by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (2015), served as a foundational framework emphasizing the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. This holistic concept, rooted in Catholic social teaching, addresses the intertwined nature of ecological crises and social injustices (Francis, 2015; Massaro, 2023). Integral ecology emphasizes that all aspects of life are interdependent and interconnected. Pope Francis underscored that environmental degradation cannot be separated from its social dimensions, arguing that a

fragmented approach to ecological challenges is insufficient. Instead, solutions must consider the complex interrelations between ecological health, economic systems, cultural practices, and spiritual well-being (Christie et al., 2019; Francis, 2015). This interconnectedness is further reinforced by the principle of the common good, which calls for collective action to address ecological and social issues that benefit all humanity, particularly marginalized populations (Francis, 2015; Massaro, 2023). Integral ecology pushes back against models that put economic growth above environmental and social health, calling instead for solutions that rise above narrow individual or national interests (Klein & Laczniak, 2020).

Another core tenet of integral ecology is cultural sensitivity, which acknowledges the value of indigenous and local knowledge systems in addressing ecological challenges. Pope Francis stressed that ecological solutions should include diverse perspectives and respect local cultures and traditions (Christie et al., 2019; Francis, 2015). Furthermore, integral ecology emphasizes solidarity with the poor, recognizing that marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by environmental crises. Prioritizing their needs, the framework seeks to rectify systemic inequities and promote justice (Francis, 2015; Wilkins, 2020). This approach is tied to the idea of spiritual conversion, which asks for a change in values and behaviors and frames caring for the environment as both a moral duty and a spiritual practice (Francis, 2015; Massaro, 2023).

The application of integral ecology in research has demonstrated its capacity to address systemic issues of sustainability and justice. For instance, Christie et al. (2019)

explored the compatibility between integral ecology and secular sustainability frameworks and found significant overlaps in their shared emphasis on the common good and cooperative governance. Similarly, Wilkins (2020) assessed the impact of *Laudato Si'* within U.S. Catholic dioceses, revealing both opportunities and challenges in translating its principles into practical action. These studies highlight integral ecology's potential to foster transformative change in values, behaviors, and institutional practices while also illustrating the constraints imposed by local and systemic contexts (Christie et al., 2019; Wilkins, 2020).

For this study, integral ecology was appropriate because it connects directly to how immigrant Catholics engage with both climate change and environmental justice. This framework complements the sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), which served as the study's theoretical foundation. Integral ecology's emphasis on interconnectedness and its moral imperatives for ecological care provide a robust lens for examining how religious teachings influence ecological engagement (see Christie et al., 2019; Francis, 2015). Grounding the study in this framework provided for the exploration of how immigrant Catholic communities integrate their faith-based values with environmental concerns and social justice.

Integral ecology further informs the operational aspects of the study by providing a basis for analyzing parish-level initiatives and individual narratives that reflect their principles. For example, the research examined how Catholic social teachings shape community-level responses to environmental challenges (Klein & Laczniak, 2020;

Massaro, 2023). This approach facilitates a multidimensional analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, and spiritual factors influencing participants' ecological engagement. Through this lens, I also identified practical opportunities for advancing environmental advocacy within faith-based contexts.

Integral ecology offers a foundation for developing actionable recommendations that bridge theology and practice. These include integrating principles of ecological stewardship into parish educational programs to enhance awareness and advocacy efforts (Christie et al., 2019). Faith-based advocacy also serves as a crucial means of mobilizing immigrant Catholic communities to adopt sustainable practices that align with their spiritual and social values. Weaving these principles into the lived experiences of immigrant Catholics, this research contributes to theological and social discourses on environmental justice, fostering a deeper understanding of faith-driven sustainability efforts. In doing so, it may advance the understanding of how theological concepts can inform sustainable practices and equitable solutions. I addressed critical gaps in the existing literature on environmental justice and faith-based advocacy.

Significance of the Framework

Bringing together integral ecology and sensemaking theory provides a strong lens for understanding how immigrant communities engage with environmental issues through their faith. Addressing gaps in localized and community-specific research, this combined framework highlights the intersection of faith, culture, and environmental justice, offering insights into how immigrant Catholics in Maryland construct meaning

around climate change. Grounded in Catholic teachings such as *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis linked social justice with environmental health. This approach illustrates how religion and culture can guide sustainable practices and inspire climate advocacy. This framework can help advance broader conversations about environmental justice and offer practical guidance for creating culturally sensitive strategies to support immigrant Catholic communities in environmental education and engagement.

Literature Review Related to Key Themes and Concepts in Literature

The reviewed literature highlights critical themes at the intersection of faith, environmental justice, and the lived experiences of church-going immigrant Catholics, offering insights into how these factors intersect with the climate crisis. Catholic social teaching, particularly the principle of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'*, frames environmental stewardship as a moral obligation interwoven with human dignity, social justice, and care for creation (Christie et al., 2019; Francis, 2015). Although these teachings position the Church as a potential leader in climate advocacy, marginalized populations and vulnerable groups, including immigrant Catholics, often face systemic challenges such as socioeconomic hardships, limited access to resources, and political marginalization, which restrict their capacity to participate in climate action actively (Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2023). Compared with populations with greater sociopolitical capital, marginalized communities such as immigrants often experience amplified eco-emotional responses like anxiety and grief and experience significant challenges navigating systemic inequities (McCaffery & Boetto, 2024;

McMichael, 2023). Nevertheless, their faith and cultural identity offer unique strengths, as local parishes and faith-based organizations act as platforms for advocacy and community mobilization, helping immigrant Catholics connect religious teachings to environmental action (Nche, 2020).

Despite these opportunities, the literature reveals a critical gap in understanding how immigrant Catholics integrate Catholic social teaching with actionable climate advocacy. Unlike secular approaches, which often overlook spiritual and cultural motivators, faith-based engagement provides immigrant Catholics with a moral and communal framework for climate action (Boorse & Jablonski, 2024; Catto, 2024). However, divine attribution, the belief that climate change is part of God's plan, can either inspire or hinder such engagement, depending on the interplay between religious interpretations and trust in science (Djupe & Burge, 2023). Addressing this complexity requires a culturally sensitive approach that bridges the dual challenges of systemic inequities and climate adaptation faced by immigrant Catholics (Avtar et al., 2023; Ek et al., 2024; Lebrón et al., 2023). Social workers can play an important role by aligning Catholic social teaching principles with targeted interventions that empower these communities to address climate risks while promoting resilience and systemic change (Ek et al., 2023). This dual focus aligns with the broader goals of environmental justice and equity, providing a pathway for sustainable and meaningful participation in climate advocacy (Liang et al., 2023).

Historical Perspectives on Climate Change

Preindustrial Views on Environmental Phenomena

In earlier times, people often explained climate changes through religious or mystical beliefs, since these were their main ways of making sense of natural events. Catto (2024) notes that, constrained by limited scientific understanding, preindustrial societies often attributed environmental changes to slow natural processes, overlooking the possibility of rapid anthropogenic impacts. Religious narratives frequently framed environmental disruptions as divine interventions or moral judgments. Hiebert (2023) illustrates this dynamic through biblical accounts, linking climate-induced migration to enduring human responses to environmental variability. Such explanations not only helped communities understand their environment but also shaped how they adapted to it. The gradual shift towards scientific inquiry into natural climate cycles laid the groundwork for modern climate science while retaining ties to socio-religious narratives. This progression illustrates the enduring impacts of religious and cultural contexts in interpreting environmental changes.

Impacts of the Little Ice Age and Early Religious Interpretations

The Little Ice Age (about 1400 –1900) is a clear example of natural climate shifts and the profound social and economic effects they caused. This period of global cooling resulted in reduced agricultural yields, increased mortality rates, and urban economic disruptions across Europe (Gaffney, 2020; Waldinger, 2022). McMichael (2023) highlights climate-induced migration during this era, revealing the adaptive measures

societies employed to navigate such challenges. Concurrently, religious interpretations of climatic changes evolved from assigning blame to moral failings to fostering institutional responses addressing these disruptions (see Hearn et al., 2024). These changes demonstrate how evolving religious beliefs and social practices shaped the ways people tried to cope with climate challenges. Furthermore, Liu and Xiang (2022) emphasize the Earth's intrinsic climatic rhythms, shaped by ocean currents, polar ice dynamics, and atmospheric circulation. This understanding underscores the contrast between historical natural variability and human-driven climate crises. Integrating these historical and socio-religious perspectives into contemporary climate adaptation strategies offers critical insight into how societies have historically responded to climatic challenges.

Anthropogenic Climate Change: A Postindustrial Revolution Phenomenon

The Industrial Revolution marks a fundamental shift from natural climate variability to anthropogenic climate change. The heavy use of fossil fuels and industrial activity during this period led to major increases in greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4), pushing them well beyond natural levels (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Zickfeld et al., 2021). This shift initiated a period in which human activities became the dominant drivers of global warming. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), average global surface temperatures have risen by approximately 1.1–1.3°C above preindustrial levels (1850–1900 baseline), reflecting the influence of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions rather than natural variability

alone. These ecological transformations reflect the profound consequences of industrialization.

The environmental changes stemming from the Industrial Revolution were not solely scientific or ecological; they also raised ethical and social questions. Boorse and Jablonski (2024) argue that the acceleration of greenhouse gas emissions and resultant warming have sparked debates on the moral imperatives of climate action. Encyclicals such as *Laudato Si'* have mobilized faith communities, advocating for sustainable practices and ecological justice, aligning with scholarly critiques of industrial excess and its ecological repercussions (see Agusalim & Karim, 2024). The increasing spatial disparities in climate vulnerability, particularly for Arctic ecosystems and marginalized populations, further necessitate coordinated global responses (Avtar et al., 2023; Desmet & Rossi-Hansberg, 2024). The transition to an era dominated by anthropogenic influences highlights the urgent need for mitigation strategies to reduce emissions, safeguard ecosystems, and address the cascading effects of a warming planet.

Multifaceted Risks of Climate Change

Climate change represents a complex and multifaceted crisis with significant environmental, economic, psychological, and health implications. Rising global temperatures exacerbate habitat loss, biodiversity decline, and ocean acidification, destabilizing ecosystems worldwide (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Naidoo, 2022). These environmental shifts also generate serious economic problems. Disasters like hurricanes and floods tend to hit developing economies and marginalized groups the hardest (Avtar

et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). Similarly, extreme weather events amplify health risks, including heat-related illnesses, respiratory issues from pollution, and the proliferation of vector-borne diseases (Chevance et al., 2023). These interconnected risks require an integrated and systemic approach to mitigate and adapt to their far-reaching consequences.

Intersectionality of Climate Risks and Systemic Inequities

The risks associated with climate change are not distributed evenly; they are magnified for marginalized populations, particularly low-income and immigrant communities. Immigrant populations, for example, often reside in climate-vulnerable areas with limited infrastructure and resources, which increases their susceptibility to adverse outcomes (see Avtar et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023). This overlap of risks illustrates how systemic inequalities make certain groups more vulnerable, because social, economic, and geographic disadvantages often stack on top of each other. FBOs and frameworks such as integral ecology offer significant potential to address these disparities by linking environmental care with social justice and human dignity (see Francis, 2015). However, existing policy frameworks often fail to consider the compounded vulnerabilities of these groups, resulting in fragmented and inequitable solutions (see Rami et al., 2023).

To close these gaps, researchers have called for approaches that focus on justice, making policies more inclusive and ensuring resources are shared fairly. Such strategies not only address immediate risks but also foster long-term sustainability by tackling the

root causes of vulnerability and inequality (see Chevance et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023). A critical component of these approaches involves empowering marginalized groups through participatory frameworks that integrate cultural, social, and environmental perspectives. This alignment with equity and sustainability principles ensures more effective and inclusive climate adaptation efforts.

Environmental Justice and Marginalized Populations

Environmental justice provides a crucial lens for understanding the systemic vulnerabilities faced by marginalized populations, especially low-income and immigrant communities. Factors like poor infrastructure, lack of resources, and political marginalization make these communities even more vulnerable to environmental risks (Avtar et al., 2023; Gum, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023). Deivanayagam et al. (2023) and Rami et al. (2023) highlight how structural racism and environmental inequities further intensify vulnerabilities, emphasizing the need for policies that prioritize resilience among these groups. Similarly, Ek et al. (2024) demonstrate that faith-based organizations can play an essential role in addressing these disparities by serving as bridges for resource access and advocacy, particularly for immigrant communities. These findings align with the work of Lebrón et al. (2023), who illustrate how barriers such as language limitations, political underrepresentation, and fragmented social networks hinder immigrant populations' ability to adapt effectively to climate challenges.

Despite these insights, researchers such as Chevance et al. (2023) argue that current policies often lack intersectional approaches, limiting their effectiveness in

addressing complex vulnerabilities like climate-induced migration and access to essential resources. This gap emphasize the importance of adopting comprehensive frameworks that account for the unique socio-cultural dimensions of affected populations.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Environmental Justice Frameworks

Environmental justice frameworks stress the importance of inclusive policymaking that takes cultural, social, and environmental factors into account. These principles align with equity and sustainability goals, as demonstrated by Chevance et al. (2023) and Gum (2022). Nche (2020) highlights the role of FBOs in fostering social engagement and preserving cultural identity, which enables marginalized populations to participate more actively in climate adaptation and advocacy (see Avtar et al., 2023). However, systemic barriers such as entrenched inequities and political resistance often impede the equitable implementation of these frameworks (see Lebrón et al., 2023). Vanderlinden et al. (2020) further emphasize the necessity of tailoring policies to reflect the lived realities of immigrant populations, advocating for more culturally attuned and intersectional strategies.

Even though these frameworks can be powerful tools for addressing inequality, they are not fully used when it comes to dealing with the cultural and systemic vulnerabilities faced by immigrant groups. Addressing this gap requires not only policy reform but also community-driven solutions that incorporate the voices and experiences of those most affected. Linking environmental advocacy to social justice principles, these

frameworks can promote the way for more equitable and sustainable responses to climate challenges.

Global Efforts in Addressing Climate Change

Global responses to the climate crisis reveal a dynamic interplay between international agreements, scientific innovation, and socio-environmental justice principles. Major initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement all stress the need for collective action to build climate resilience (Hossain et al., 2023; Zhenmin & Espinosa, 2019). While SDG 13 provides a roadmap for global climate action, challenges persist, including uneven progress and financial constraints that undermine its effectiveness (Fonseca et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2023). Similarly, the Paris Agreement's shift from legally binding emissions targets under the Kyoto Protocol to voluntary commitments reflects an inclusive but less enforceable approach to global collaboration, exacerbating disparities in ambition and accountability among nations (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Hartin et al., 2023). These initiatives demonstrate the importance of systemic responses while revealing critical gaps in equity, particularly for vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by climate change (see Watson et al., 2023; Woodworth, 2024).

Integrating Scientific Insights and Cultural Dimensions

Combining scientific knowledge with cultural perspectives is essential for creating effective climate solutions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) provides vital scientific analyses, guiding global policies and adaptation

strategies (Hossain et al., 2023; Naidoo, 2022; Zhenmin & Espinosa, 2019). However, translating these insights into actionable policies is often hindered by political, economic, and cultural diversity among nations (see Hartin et al., 2023). Platforms such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) facilitate international collaboration but face criticism for slow progress and limited inclusivity, particularly of marginalized voices (see Avtar et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2024). The establishment of measures like the Loss and Damage Fund in recent COP negotiations underscores a growing recognition of equity and accountability for climate-affected nations, yet critiques persist regarding the exclusion of climate migrants and the failure to address diverse regional vulnerabilities (see Desmet & Rossi-Hansberg, 2024; Smeeth & Haines, 2023). These challenges illustrate the need for adaptive approaches that are inclusive and grounded in local realities.

The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Climate Governance

FBOs play an important but often overlooked role in global climate governance. Scholars such as Boorse and Jablonski (2024) and Salter and Wilkinson (2024) emphasize the transformative potential of partnerships between religious and scientific communities in framing climate change as a moral imperative. FBOs offer unique strengths in addressing cultural and contextual dimensions of climate adaptation, especially in marginalized communities overlooked by global frameworks like the SDGs and the Paris Agreement (Ali & Thakkar, 2023; Avtar et al., 2023; Hearn et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2023). Faith-based advocacy is strongly connected to social equity and helps ensure that the voices of vulnerable groups are included in climate action.

Leveraging these diverse perspectives alongside technological advancements and inclusive policies is essential for addressing systemic barriers and fostering equitable solutions to the climate crisis.

Social Work's Role in Environmental Justice and Climate Advocacy

Social workers are uniquely positioned to address the many challenges of climate change, especially those that disproportionately affect marginalized groups. The Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative prioritizes climate action, focusing on mitigating environmental injustices that disproportionately impact low-income and immigrant populations (Grand Challenges for Social Work, n.d.). Structural inequities, including inadequate infrastructure and socio-political marginalization, exacerbate these vulnerabilities, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions (Avtar et al., 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Gum, 2022). Social workers bridge the gap between scientific expertise and community needs by employing holistic approaches such as local organizing, policy advocacy, and the development of sustainable programs (see Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023). These efforts are rooted in core social work values: equity, systemic change, and strong community involvement.

Frameworks for Social Work Engagement

Eco-social work and green social work exemplify the profession's evolving role in addressing environmental and social justice issues. Eco-social work emphasizes the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems, advocating for sustainability and resilience as integral to social justice (Breen et al., 2023). Green social work focuses on

addressing the root causes of environmental degradation while promoting equitable resource access (Hudson & Koenig, 2023). Social workers use these frameworks to empower immigrant communities by addressing barriers such as language limitations, political underrepresentation, and inadequate social networks (see Mason et al., 2022). Faith-based organizations working with social workers can further enhance these efforts by bridging gaps in resource access and advocacy, facilitating community engagement and cultural identity preservation (see Ek et al., 2024).

Education and Capacity Building in Social Work

Training and education are key to preparing social workers to address climate-related challenges. Scholars such as Arkert and Jacobs (2023) advocate for embedding environmental justice topics into social work curricula, including disaster preparedness, sustainable development, and culturally responsive practices. Hudson and Koenig (2023) emphasize ecological justice as a cornerstone of social work education, encouraging practitioners to integrate their understanding of environmental systems into their practice. Frameworks proposed by McCaffery and Boetto (2024) and Walker (2023) emphasize the importance of critical media literacy and systemic vulnerability analysis in equipping social workers to counter misinformation and advocate for marginalized groups.

Faith-based organizations also enrich this educational framework. Fostering cultural identity and social engagement enables social workers to develop interventions that align with immigrant communities' lived experiences and needs (see Nche, 2020). This approach supports policymaking that includes community voices and drives

systemic reforms, helping make climate advocacy more equitable and inclusive (see Avtar et al., 2023; Ek et al., 2024; Tarusarira, 2022).

The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Environmental Justice and Climate Advocacy

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are central to environmental justice work because they bring together social advocacy and care for the environment. Leveraging their moral authority, theological principles, and expansive community networks, FBOs mobilize action on pressing environmental challenges, particularly among marginalized and vulnerable populations. Research underscores how climate change disproportionately impacts low-income and immigrant communities, necessitating integrated approaches that address both social and ecological inequities (see Gum, 2022). Within this context, FBOs are uniquely positioned to offer holistic solutions by addressing systemic inequities while advocating for environmental sustainability. In Catholicism, the idea of integral ecology, linking care for creation with human dignity and social justice, offers a powerful framework for faith-based leadership in climate advocacy (Francis, 2015).

Diverse Approaches to Environmental Justice by Faith Traditions

Faith communities respond to environmental justice in ways shaped by their unique theological commitments and cultural contexts. For example, the United Methodist Church often emphasizes grassroots initiatives, such as community gardens or energy-efficiency programs, that link environmental care with social justice concerns (Nche, 2020). Non-Christian traditions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, focus on

principles of harmony, stewardship, and sustainable living, forming the foundation of ecological engagement in these traditions (Maharana & Behura, 2024; Zhang & Shi, 2024). Catholicism, through Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, provides a holistic vision that unites spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. This framework drives initiatives such as renewable energy promotion, community-based ecological education, and advocacy for policy reforms (see Francis, 2015). Together, these varied strategies illustrate the capacity of FBOs to complement secular efforts, inspiring collective action and shaping societal values.

Contributions and Challenges of the Catholic Church in Climate Advocacy

The Catholic Church's global reach and theological depth make it a notable leader in climate advocacy. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis critiques ecological harm and systemic inequities, framing environmental stewardship as a moral and spiritual imperative. This encyclical has galvanized Catholic communities worldwide, fostering ecological consciousness and collective efforts to address climate risks (Szrot, 2020). In immigrant Catholic communities, these teachings deeply resonate, influencing perceptions of ecological responsibility and motivating community-based initiatives such as sustainability workshops, recycling programs, and community gardens (see Chu, 2022). However, practical implementation often encounters systemic barriers, including limited resources, internal resistance from conservative factions, and socio-economic vulnerabilities, especially within immigrant contexts (see Chu, 2022; Tarusarira, 2022).

Addressing Barriers in Immigrant Catholic Communities

For immigrant Catholic communities, systemic barriers such as political marginalization, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural complexities hinder full engagement with environmental advocacy. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) provides a valuable lens for exploring how these communities construct narratives that align their religious beliefs with their lived experiences of climate challenges. This theoretical approach emphasizes the importance of communal identity and cultural narratives in shaping responses to complex phenomena, such as climate change (see Vanderlinden et al., 2020). For immigrant Catholics, aligning theological imperatives with localized socio-economic realities requires culturally sensitive interventions tailored to their unique barriers and opportunities.

Complementary Contributions of Faith Traditions

While Catholicism's integral ecology has effectively operationalized principles of environmental justice through global and grassroots initiatives, Protestant traditions excel in localized, community-driven approaches emphasizing sustainability and social equity (Nche, 2020). Non-Christian traditions, such as Buddhism's focus on harmony with nature and Hinduism's emphasis on sacred stewardship, further enrich the global climate advocacy landscape (Koehrsen, 2021; Zhang & Shi, 2024). These complementary approaches highlight the potential for interfaith collaboration while exposing structural and political challenges that hinder cohesive action. Addressing these challenges requires targeted strategies that integrate theological principles with practical, localized solutions.

Critiques of Faith-Based Environmental Advocacy

Critics often point to the variability in implementation and the cultural and institutional barriers faced by faith-based environmental initiatives. For instance, while *Laudato Si'* has inspired a global movement, adoption among immigrant Catholics is uneven due to resource limitations, divergent interpretations of its teachings, and lack of awareness (see Szrot, 2020). Internal divisions within the Church, as well as broader socio-political resistance, further slow the progress of eco-justice initiatives. Addressing these challenges necessitates a combination of theological leadership and practical support from social work and policy frameworks that prioritize equity, resilience, and inclusivity.

Advancing Faith-Based Advocacy for Systemic Change

The transformative potential of FBOs lies in their ability to integrate spiritual values with actionable climate advocacy. Catholicism, through its emphasis on integral ecology, demonstrates how theological principles can inspire individual and collective action, fostering a moral urgency to address climate issues. Engaging immigrant Catholic communities in Maryland with culturally attuned interventions amplifies the Church's ecological teachings, empowering these populations to contribute meaningfully to climate advocacy. These efforts align with broader social work and environmental policy initiatives aimed at integrating diverse perspectives into climate strategies, ensuring that marginalized voices are represented in decision-making processes (see Gum, 2022). Exploring these intersections, the contributions of FBOs can be strengthened to foster

sustainable, inclusive responses to the climate crisis. The integration of theological imperatives with practical advocacy not only enhances community resilience but also advances global efforts to address systemic inequities and promote environmental justice.

Faith-Based Leadership in Climate Advocacy

FBOs are central to climate advocacy, leveraging their moral authority, theological principles, and community networks to address environmental challenges. Catholicism's integral ecology, articulated in *Laudato Si'*, provides a comprehensive framework for global engagement, emphasizing spiritual values alongside practical actions such as renewable energy promotion, ecological education, and grassroots initiatives (see Chu, 2022; Francis, 2015). Protestant traditions and non-Christian faiths also contribute uniquely, integrating stewardship, sustainability, and social equity into their approaches (Koehrsen, 2021; Maharana & Behura, 2024; Nche, 2020).

While FBOs face barriers such as political resistance and resource constraints, their collaborative potential remains significant. Catholicism's global reach, combined with Protestant grassroots mobilization and non-Christian ecological traditions, underscores the power of interfaith collaboration in addressing systemic inequities and fostering sustainable climate solutions (see Mason et al., 2022; Gum, 2022). Strengthening these efforts requires a focus on inclusive policies, strategic partnerships, and culturally responsive interventions that align faith-based advocacy with broader climate action goals.

Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts

Global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide essential platforms for addressing climate change at an international level (Boorse & Jablonski, 2024). These agreements aim to standardize mitigation efforts, promote collaboration, and emphasize the importance of equity in climate action (Ali & Thakkar, 2023). To bridge these gaps, localized efforts led by FBOs and eco-social work models have proven instrumental. FBOs use their moral authority and expansive community networks to advocate for environmental justice, while eco-social work integrates social and environmental justice principles to address systemic inequities (see Breen et al., 2023; Chu, 2022). These localized approaches complement international frameworks, ensuring climate initiatives remain equitable, inclusive, and responsive to community needs.

Social Work's Contributions to Climate Advocacy

Social Workers are uniquely positioned to address systemic inequities and advocate for climate policies that prioritize marginalized populations. They play a critical role in promoting equitable access to renewable energy, supporting green job initiatives, and developing community-led climate adaptation strategies (see Smith et al., 2023). Connecting grassroots movements with institutional frameworks, social workers bridge gaps between policy and practice, ensuring that vulnerable communities are included in climate action plans. For example, Avtar et al. (2023) and Gum (2022) highlight the importance of addressing systemic barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized

groups, while Szrot (2020) underscores the exclusion of faith-based organizations' voices from policymaking processes. Chu (2022) advocates for community-based solutions that integrate environmental sustainability with cultural preservation, exemplifying the multifaceted role of social workers in advancing environmental justice.

Faith-Based Organizations and Climate Advocacy

FBOs play a distinctive role in climate advocacy by aligning religious values with sustainable practices. The Catholic Church, for example, has emphasized environmental stewardship and community-based climate action, resonating strongly with immigrant populations (see Chu, 2022). Despite facing challenges such as resource limitations, theological ambiguities, and cultural barriers, FBOs bridge spiritual values with actionable climate advocacy, fostering ecological awareness and inspiring collective action (Hearn et al., 2024). The interplay between theology and science enhances their capacity to mobilize communities, integrating moral responsibility with scientific imperatives (Djupe & Burge, 2023). Addressing structural and cultural challenges is critical for ensuring that FBO-led initiatives are equitable and sustainable, particularly for immigrant and marginalized groups.

Religious Beliefs and Climate Perceptions

Religious beliefs play an essential role in shaping environmental attitudes and behaviors, though their impact remains contested among scholars. Djupe and Burge (2022) argue that religious dominionism, the belief in humanity's mastery over nature, significantly shapes environmental attitudes but note that secular beliefs are more

effective in driving pro-environmental behaviors. Chong and Nair (2023) assert that religious conscience can inspire ecological stewardship, positioning faith as a catalyst for environmental responsibility. While both studies underscore the interplay between religious beliefs and environmental attitudes, their emphasis diverges, with Djupe and Burge (2022) focusing on secular drivers and Chong and Nair (2023) on faith-based motivations. Expanding on these perspectives, Kiral Ucar et al. (2023) explore the role of social identities, such as global and environmental identities, in fostering collective climate action but omit religious identity from their analysis. Addressing this gap, Ramachandra (2023) frames ecological care as a theological imperative, highlighting the potential of religious identity to shape environmental engagement. Collectively, these studies indicate the need to examine how immigrant Catholics integrate their faith into climate activism. Despite offering valuable insights, Djupe and Burge (2022) lack specificity regarding immigrant communities, particularly Catholics, while Chong and Nair (2023) focus on global faith movements, overlooking localized contexts. Similarly, the theoretical contributions of Kiral Ucar et al. (2023) and Ramachandra (2023) fail to incorporate empirical evidence on the engagement of faith-based groups, such as immigrant Catholics, with climate issues. These gaps underscore the importance of exploring how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, informed by their religious beliefs and environmental justice concerns.

Social Identities and Proenvironmental Behavior

Social identities play a crucial role in shaping environmental behaviors, influencing engagement and barriers to action. Kiral Ucar et al. (2023) argue that global and environmental identities enhance participatory efficacy in climate action, while national identities may impede such efforts. Salter and Wilkinson (2023) highlight the dualistic nature of religious identity, which can act as either a barrier or a catalyst for climate action, depending on theological interpretations. Expanding on these perspectives, Lebrón et al. (2023) emphasize that community support fosters resilience among immigrant groups, suggesting that faith-based identities significantly influence environmental engagement. While these studies offer valuable insights into the role of identity in pro-environmental behavior, significant gaps remain. Kiral Ucar et al. (2023) provide a comprehensive framework for understanding identity dynamics, but omit religious identities, limiting their relevance to immigrant Catholic communities. Similarly, Salter and Wilkinson's (2023) limited empirical focus restricts the understanding of religious identity dynamics within immigrant populations. Lebrón et al. (2023) emphasize the role of resilience but fail to address how specific religious teachings contribute to pro-environmental behaviors.

Environmental Justice and Migration

The intersection of environmental justice and migration reveals systemic inequities that disproportionately impact marginalized communities. Deivanayagam et al. (2023) and Watson et al. (2023) identify these communities as bearing the brunt of

climate change, with Watson et al. (2023) further emphasizing how migration, conflict, and structural barriers compound their vulnerability. Woodworth (2024) discusses the exclusion of climate migrants from legal protections, exposing a significant gap in addressing the rights and needs of these populations. The macro-level approaches of Deivanayagam et al. (2023) and Watson et al. (2023) overlook cultural and religious dimensions that may influence immigrant Catholics' responses to climate issues, whereas Woodworth's (2024) legal analysis fails to incorporate faith-based perspectives. However, none of these studies explicitly examined immigrant Catholic communities as both vulnerable groups and potential advocates for environmental justice, leaving a significant gap in the literature.

Immigrant Communities and Climate Change

Faith-based advocacy provides a mechanism for addressing structural inequalities and promoting environmental justice. Chong and Nair (2023) and Ramachandra (2023) emphasize the mobilizing role of faith communities in advocating for environmental justice, demonstrating how religious groups can influence collective action. Rami et al. (2023) expand on this by highlighting the potential of faith-driven initiatives to mitigate health and social disparities, while Hiebert (2023) examines biblical migration narratives as a framework for understanding environmental displacement. However, the approaches of these studies diverge in focus and applicability. Hiebert's (2023) historical analysis offers valuable theological insights but lacks practical application in contemporary contexts. Despite these contributions, none of the studies sufficiently addresses

immigrant Catholic communities' specific experiences and perspectives. The absence of localized theological narratives in Chong and Nair (2023) and the lack of community-specific strategies in Hiebert (2023) reveal critical gaps in the literature. These limitations indicate the need for research that integrates theological principles with immigrant Catholics' lived experiences to develop actionable environmental justice strategies, particularly within Maryland's church-going communities.

Barriers and Opportunities for Immigrant Engagement in Climate Policy

Demographic factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural identity significantly influence public opinion on climate change among immigrant groups. Low-income immigrant communities often experience disproportionate environmental burdens, including exposure to pollution and vulnerability to extreme weather events (see Gum, 2022). These lived experiences heighten their awareness of environmental justice issues but also present barriers to action, such as limited resources and political representation. FBOs play a critical role in addressing these challenges by providing culturally sensitive education, resources, and advocacy tailored to the needs of immigrant populations. Catholic Church initiatives, for instance, integrate theological principles of stewardship and social justice, resonating deeply with immigrant congregations (see Szrot, 2020). These initiatives not only raise awareness but also empower immigrant communities to engage in climate advocacy by fostering a sense of agency and shared purpose.

Immigrant communities face intricate challenges as they strive to balance cultural preservation and adaptation in the context of climate change. Deivanayagam et al. (2023) emphasize that migrant populations are disproportionately affected by environmental stressors, impacting their health and livelihoods. These findings are echoed by Adger et al. (2024), who discuss the intersection of migration and sustainability, highlighting the adaptive capacities that immigrants develop to cope with climate challenges. However, while Deivanayagam et al. (2023) primarily focus on the immediate health and economic impacts, Adger et al. (2024) provide a broader perspective by incorporating sustainability and long-term adaptation strategies.

In these approaches, Estok (2023) argues that narratives around immigrant community dynamics often oversimplify the intersection of migration and environmental challenges. Estok advocates for more analyses that capture the complexities of these interactions. While Deivanayagam et al. (2023) and Adger et al. (2024) contribute valuable insights into the lived experiences of immigrants, Estok (2023) urges scholars to delve deeper into the structural and systemic factors that exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

Faith-based organizations serve to mobilize immigrant communities for climate action. Daw et al. (2023) illustrate how Catholic narratives inspire pro-environmental behaviors among immigrant populations, framing ecological stewardship as a moral obligation. Similarly, Hearn et al. (2024) highlight successful models of engagement within European Catholic communities, where faith institutions provide resources and foster resilience. Djupe and Burge (2023) expand on this by exploring how theological

narratives shape collective responses to environmental crises, suggesting that faith-based organizations can act as bridges between cultural traditions and contemporary climate challenges. While Daw et al. (2023) and Hearn et al. (2024) focus on specific Catholic practices, Djupe and Burge (2023) provide a broader examination of theological influences across different contexts, enriching the discourse on faith-based community engagement.

The diverse responses of religious traditions to climate change reveal commonalities and distinctions in their approaches to environmental stewardship. Ramachandra (2023) critiques the role of theological diversity in shaping climate action, emphasizing that Catholic, Protestant, and secular perspectives often adopt distinct strategies. For example, Catholic narratives frequently highlight the moral imperative of care for creation, while Protestant traditions may focus on individual responsibility and grassroots initiatives. Boorse and Jablonski (2024) extend this discussion by demonstrating the unique contributions of various faith traditions to advancing environmental justice, underscoring the potential for interfaith collaborations to address global environmental challenges.

Mayer (2023) highlights ecumenical collaborations as a promising avenue for achieving shared climate goals, noting that partnerships between Catholic and Protestant organizations have led to innovative solutions. This aligns with the findings of Daw et al. (2023), who underscore the role of collective action in fostering pro-environmental behaviors. However, Ramachandra (2023) cautions against overreliance on interfaith

efforts, arguing that theological differences can sometimes hinder unified action. This is supported by Estok (2023), who contends that interfaith narratives often downplay the complexities of religious doctrines, potentially obscuring critical points of divergence.

The intersection of immigration, faith-based community engagement, and religious responses to climate change underscores the importance of collaborative approaches. While immigrant communities and faith-based organizations exhibit remarkable resilience and adaptability, scholars like Estok (2023) and Ramachandra (2023) discuss the need for critical analyses that account for the complexities and tensions within these dynamics. This further demonstrates the potential of interfaith collaborations to advance environmental justice, provided that such efforts are grounded in an appreciation of theological diversity and cultural specificity.

The Role of Education and Public Awareness

Education and public awareness are vital in bridging the divide between scientific knowledge and public understanding, particularly in the context of climate action. Due to their unique cultural and theological contexts, immigrant religious communities offer a fertile ground for educational initiatives that integrate moral and spiritual dimensions. Programs rooted in Catholic educational settings, for instance, emphasize moral responsibility and localized impacts of climate change, creating opportunities for meaningful, community-driven action (see Chu, 2022). Framing climate change as a pressing social justice issue, these initiatives simultaneously address its moral and

practical dimensions, effectively inspiring behavioral change on both individual and collective levels.

FBOs play a critical role in shaping public opinion and promoting climate action within immigrant communities. As intermediaries, FBOs translate complex climate science into culturally resonant narratives and practical steps for action. Specifically, educating Catholic communities about climate change offers a unique opportunity to harmonize theological and scientific narratives, making religious institutions ideal platforms for promoting climate literacy (Chong & Nair, 2023; Daw et al., 2023). These studies emphasize the need for communication strategies that align closely with religious teachings, enhancing both engagement and action among immigrant communities.

Despite these successes, the literature reveals significant challenges in integrating ecological awareness within faith-based education initiatives. Boorse and Jablonski (2024) critique the limited interdisciplinary approaches in these programs, calling for a more robust synthesis of scientific rigor and theological depth. Their findings highlight the untapped potential of religious education to advance ecological stewardship while also pointing to areas for improvement. Similarly, Catto (2024) identifies polarization within religious communities as a significant barrier to inclusive climate dialogue. This polarization not only hinders a broad consensus but also limits the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at fostering climate resilience.

Policy Implications for Immigrant Inclusion in Climate Action

Including immigrant voices in public policy is important for developing inclusive and effective climate strategies that address these communities' unique challenges and contributions. Immigrants, particularly those engaged with FBOs, bring a rich blend of cultural heritage, lived experiences, and theological principles to climate advocacy. FBOs act as platforms for bridging representation gaps and fostering equitable climate responses by empowering marginalized communities (Nche, 2020). For example, Catholic parishes, including those that cater to immigrant communities, often implement grassroots initiatives such as recycling programs and community gardens, translating theological principles into tangible environmental justice efforts (see Chu, 2022; Szrot, 2020). This integration of faith-based initiatives highlights the critical role of FBOs in addressing systemic inequities and fostering sustainable practices.

The literature underscores the importance of FBOs in amplifying marginalized voices and providing practical applications within immigrant communities. Nche (2020) emphasizes their role in elevating the perspectives of underrepresented groups, while Chu (2022) and Szrot (2020) provide examples of parish-organized sustainability projects that align with theological teachings. These efforts demonstrate how immigrant communities, guided by faith-based initiatives, can actively contribute to climate advocacy. Policymakers can leverage these insights to create equitable and sustainable climate solutions that align with broader goals of social justice and environmental sustainability.

Effective climate advocacy in social work also requires addressing systemic inequities that disproportionately impact marginalized populations. Watson et al. (2023) highlight the need for interdisciplinary collaboration to dismantle systemic barriers and advocate for equity-focused policy frameworks. Similarly, Li et al. (2023) propose interdisciplinary approaches that enhance the inclusivity of climate policies, ensuring diverse populations are better served. In addition to these perspectives, faith-based social work practices provide a distinct lens for addressing the spiritual dimensions of systemic inequities exacerbated by climate change (see Boorse & Jablonski, 2024). These practices integrate moral and ethical considerations into policy advocacy, broadening the scope of interdisciplinary approaches to climate action.

The approaches outlined in the literature share a commitment to equity while offering complementary strategies. Watson et al. (2023) and Li et al. (2023) emphasize the practical benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, while Boorse and Jablonski (2024) and Körtner (2022) focus on the ethical imperatives brought forth by faith-based practices. Combining these approaches could create a more comprehensive framework for climate advocacy, merging pragmatic methods with moral and spiritual imperatives to address systemic barriers effectively.

Integrating environmental justice into social work practices, education, and policy advocacy reflects an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness between social and environmental systems. Existing approaches, while insightful, highlight the need for greater synthesis. For example, integrating the psychological focus of McCaffery and

Boetto (2024) with the structural critiques of Ek et al. (2024), the media literacy emphasis of Walker (2023), and the ethical dimensions of Boorse and Jablonski (2024) and Körtner (2022) could provide a more cohesive and effective framework for climate advocacy. Future research and practice should aim for such integration to ensure that social workers are equipped to address the multifaceted challenges of the climate crisis comprehensively.

Methodological Flaws in Prior Research

Existing studies often rely on broad quantitative surveys that aggregate data across diverse populations, potentially obscuring the experiences of specific communities (see Jenkins et al., 2018; Mason et al., 2022). While such approaches provide generalizable findings, they fail to capture the lived realities of immigrant Catholics, including the interplay between socio-economic vulnerabilities and religious beliefs in shaping environmental attitudes. Qualitative studies, such as those by Vanderlinden et al. (2020), offer more profound insights into community-specific sensemaking processes but primarily focus on secular or nonimmigrant contexts, leaving immigrant religious groups underrepresented. Nonetheless, while thematic analysis provides depth, the potential for subjective interpretation highlights a methodological limitation. Future reviews could benefit from integrating quantitative meta-analyses to corroborate qualitative findings.

Summary of Literature Review and Gaps in the Literature

The Catholic Church's doctrine of environmental stewardship, articulated through the concept of integral ecology, emphasizes the interconnectedness of human dignity,

social justice, and ecological care (Francis, 2015; Szrot, 2020). This theological framework positions the Catholic Church as a critical actor in global environmental advocacy, yet the localized implementation of these principles, particularly within immigrant Catholic communities, remains underexplored. Sensemaking theory provides a valuable lens for examining how immigrant Catholic communities construct meaning around environmental challenges by integrating cultural and religious narratives to shape their responses (see Tarusarira, 2022). FBOs, such as Catholic parishes, play an instrumental role in fostering resilience and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, yet the strategies employed at the grassroots level within immigrant Catholic contexts are insufficiently documented (see Chu, 2022; Gum, 2022). Immigrant communities face heightened vulnerabilities to climate change due to systemic inequities, including inadequate infrastructure, resource limitations, and political underrepresentation (see Mason et al., 2022; Gum, 2022). These challenges are further compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers, underscoring the need to explore how immigrant Catholic populations engage with climate advocacy within their unique socio-cultural and theological contexts.

In the social work profession, considerable research has examined the role of FBOs and eco-social work frameworks in addressing environmental justice. Significant gaps remain in understanding the intersection of immigrant Catholic communities, faith-informed advocacy, and systemic inequities. While institutional frameworks such as integral ecology have been widely studied in encyclicals like *Laudato Si*' (see Francis,

2015) and scholarly work (see Chu, 2022), their practical resonance and implementation at the parish level, particularly in immigrant contexts, are underrepresented in the literature. Existing studies often focus on global or institutional perspectives (see Szrot, 2020; Chu, 2022) but fail to capture the lived experiences of immigrant Catholics navigating climate challenges through the dual lenses of faith and cultural heritage. Furthermore, while FBOs are acknowledged as vital contributors to climate advocacy, the literature largely emphasizes macro-level dynamics, neglecting immigrant Catholic parishes' grassroots strategies and narratives (see Nche, 2020; Vanderlinden et al., 2020).

Sensemaking theory has been effectively applied in religious contexts to explore collective meaning-making and cultural narratives in environmental challenges (see Tarusarira, 2022; Zou et al., 2023). However, its application to immigrant Catholic communities is limited. Although immigrant Catholics rely on cultural and theological traditions to navigate climate risks, few studies address how systemic inequities, cultural preservation, and religious teachings shape their responses. Social work research has identified barriers such as resource scarcity and political disenfranchisement among immigrant communities (see Gum, 2022; Nche, 2020). However, integrating these challenges with Catholic environmental teachings and grassroots engagement remains insufficiently explored. This gap restricts understanding of how immigrant Catholic communities navigate the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and socio-economic realities in their climate advocacy.

In this study I addressed these gaps by examining the perceptions and engagements of church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland regarding the climate crisis. It bridges the divide between global Catholic doctrines and localized grassroots advocacy by employing sensemaking theory to explore how religious teachings, cultural heritage, and systemic inequities influence immigrant Catholic responses to environmental challenges. By doing so, this study's findings advance theoretical discourse on the intersection of faith, culture, and environmental justice and contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and faith-informed strategies for climate advocacy.

The findings from this research contribute to extending knowledge in the social work discipline by integrating faith-informed approaches with eco-social work frameworks to address climate justice. Specifically, the findings inform social work practices that empower immigrant Catholic communities to engage in climate action while navigating systemic inequities and preserving cultural identity. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodological approach to investigate how church-going immigrant Catholics construct narratives that integrate their faith and cultural identities with environmental justice concerns. Using sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), I applied a comprehensive framework to explore the interplay between religious teachings and grassroots environmental engagement and identified actionable insights for inclusive climate advocacy within immigrant Catholic communities.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, I outline the qualitative research methodology used to examine how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis through the lens of their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice. The study also addressed the theological, cultural, and social dimensions that influence these communities' ecological engagement. Integrating sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the Catholic principle of integral ecology from *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), I sought to uncover how immigrant Catholics constructed meaning around environmental challenges, reconciled faith traditions with lived experiences, and fostered climate advocacy through their unique cultural and religious lenses.

This chapter is organized into several key sections. The Research Design and Rationale section describes the qualitative approach and constructivist paradigm that guided the study, emphasizing their alignment with the research questions and theoretical frameworks. The Role of the Researcher section discusses my positionality and strategies to mitigate bias, ensuring methodological rigor. The Methodology section described participant selection, data collection methods, including semistructured interviews, and thematic analysis supported by NVivo software. The Issues of Trustworthiness section outlined strategies for enhancing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a Summary that transitioned to the subsequent presentation of results. Through this methodology, the research addressed critical gaps in the literature, providing insights into how immigrant

Catholic communities navigated the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and climate advocacy. These findings aimed to inform faith-based initiatives, social work practices, and policy strategies that empowered marginalized populations and advanced environmental justice.

Research Design and Rationale

I examined how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceived and engaged with the climate crisis, focusing on the interplay between their religious beliefs, cultural identity, and concerns for environmental justice. The phenomenon under investigation involved the intersection of Catholic social teachings, particularly the principle of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), and the lived experiences of immigrant Catholics navigating systemic inequities and environmental vulnerabilities. Integral ecology emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, framing environmental stewardship as a moral and theological imperative (Francis, 2015). Complementing this framework, sensemaking theory provided a lens to understand how individuals and communities constructed meaning when faced with complex or ambiguous challenges. The theory's focus on retrospective interpretation, social construction, and context dependence aligned with the study's objectives, offering insights into how immigrant Catholics interpreted and acted on climate issues (see Weick, 1995). Together, these frameworks allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how theological narratives and cultural identities shaped ecological engagement and informed faith-based responses to climate challenges.

The research question that guided this study was “How do church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?” This question addressed critical gaps in the literature by focusing on an underexplored population whose unique experiences and perspectives had significant implications for climate advocacy and environmental justice (see Adger et al., 2024; Avtar et al., 2023; Estok, 2023; Hiebert, 2023; Lebrón et al., 2023; Ramachandra, 2023; Rami et al., 2023; Teicher & Marchman, 2024; Watson et al., 2023). I sought to reveal how theological narratives and cultural identities influenced participants’ perceptions and actions, contributing to the broader discourse on integrating faith and cultural heritage into ecological advocacy.

The concept and theory underpinning this research were integral ecology and sensemaking. Integral ecology, a foundational theme of *Laudato Si’*, underscored the interconnectedness of human dignity, ecological health, and social justice, advocating for holistic approaches to addressing ecological crises (Francis, 2015). This concept was particularly relevant to immigrant Catholic communities, aligning with Tarusarira's (2022) observation that religious beliefs and cultural heritage played an important role in shaping their worldview and responses to environmental challenges. Sensemaking theory, developed by Weick (1995), complements this framework by emphasizing the dynamic processes through which individuals and communities construct meaning. Integrating sensemaking theory into this methodological framework stresses the importance of

narrative construction and social interaction in shaping participants' engagement with the climate crisis.

I employed a qualitative research tradition rooted in a constructivist paradigm, which prioritized exploring participants' lived experiences and the meanings they constructed. A generic qualitative design was used to provide the flexibility needed to capture the complexity of participants' experiences. The rationale for a qualitative approach lies in its capacity to prioritize depth, context, and the coconstruction of meaning between researcher and participant (Patton, 2015). This research is situated within the constructivist paradigm, which holds that knowledge is coconstructed through researcher-participant interaction and shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This paradigm aligns with the study's focus on how immigrant Catholics construct meaning around climate change and environmental justice through faith and cultural identity. Semistructured interviews were key to this approach, offering participants a platform to articulate their unique perspectives while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes (see Saldana, 2021). This aligned with the Catholic emphasis on human dignity and the value of individual experiences, as articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). Using thematic analysis ensured that the research captured patterns and themes across participants' narratives, providing insights into the complex interplay of faith, cultural identity, and ecological engagement (see Saldana, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

I was appropriately qualified to conduct this study, possessing advanced academic training in social work. All data collection procedures were supervised and guided by institutional review board (IRB) standards to ensure adherence to ethical and professional practices. The study was reviewed and approved by Walden University's IRB on March 27, 2025. The IRB approval number for this study was 03-27-25-1060559, and it expires on March 26, 2026. As a member of this Catholic Church in Maryland, my role as a researcher involved balancing insider knowledge with the objective execution of the study. This dual position allowed for building trust and rapport with participants while requiring rigorous reflexivity to minimize potential biases. Although I share membership in the parish, no professional or supervisory relationships with participants were maintained. To avoid conflicts of interest, family members were not included as participants in this study. Twenty participants were selected from the broader parish community, and data saturation was achieved at participant number 17.

Personal and Professional Relationships with Participants

While my membership in the church created an insider perspective, no formal or hierarchical power was held over potential participants. To address any perceptions of undue influence, recruitment materials were distributed equitably through bulletin postings. Participants were reminded that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that their decision to participate or not would bear no consequences in the shared community interactions.

Researcher Bias and Reflexivity

Given my insider status, reflexivity was key in mitigating potential biases. I used reflexive journaling throughout the research process to document my thoughts, assumptions, and reactions, ensuring that these did not unduly influence data collection or interpretation (see Saldana, 2021). Member checking and peer debriefing enhanced the credibility of the findings, allowing participants and colleagues to validate interpretations and ensure alignment with the data collected (see Patton, 2015). Engaging in these strategies, I remained cognizant of my positionality and its impact on the research.

Ethical Considerations and Incentives

The ethical challenges of conducting research within my own community included maintaining participant confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation, and managing dual roles as both a researcher and a community member. Data were anonymized during transcription and securely stored to protect participant privacy. To encourage participation and acknowledge the time and insights of participants, a $25 incentive was provided to each individual upon completion of the interview. This incentive aligned with ethical research practices by compensating participants for their contributions without exerting undue influence or coercion (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Addressing Conflicts of Interest

To ensure ethical integrity, I followed IRB protocols, emphasizing respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Recruitment was conducted equitably to prevent selection bias and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants had

the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. These measures, as recommended by qualitative research scholars, were crucial for upholding the trust and ethical standards necessary in community-based research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Regular reflection on researcher bias and implementation of member checking further enhanced the study's credibility and ethical rigor (see Saldana, 2021). I managed potential conflicts of interest by maintaining professional boundaries and ensuring transparency in all communications.

Methodology

The population for this study comprised adult, church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland who were actively engaged at a Catholic Parish in Maryland. This demographic provided a unique perspective due to its intersectional experiences of cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and environmental vulnerability, making it particularly relevant to the focus on climate crisis engagement. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants possessed specific characteristics directly aligned with the research questions. This approach was appropriate for intentionally identifying individuals who demonstrated an active interest or engagement in climate crisis issues and were well-positioned to provide meaningful insights into the study's focus (see Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected based on three primary criteria: they had to be adult immigrants (first or second generation) who self-identified as Catholics, resided in Maryland, and were actively involved in the parish. Recruitment began with a flyer

posted on the parish notice board. This flyer generated interest from 22 individuals, who contacted me directly to express their interest in participating. Eligibility was confirmed through a preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix A) that validated demographic alignment with the inclusion criteria. Of the 22 individuals who expressed interest, 20 met the eligibility requirements and were selected to participate in the study.

The initial target sample size was 15–20 participants, consistent with qualitative research principles emphasizing depth over breadth. Recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the data (see Saldana, 2021). Saturation occurred at participant number 17. This provided sufficient thematic coverage to address the research questions comprehensively while ensuring the richness and depth of the findings. Recruitment procedures were designed to meet ethical standards, ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent.

Achieving data saturation was critical to the research objectives, as it ensured completeness in the thematic analysis (Saldana, 2021). Saturation was monitored throughout the collection process, and the final number of interviews reflected the point at which thematic redundancy occurred rather than adherence to a predetermined quota. This process served as both an indicator of data completeness and a hallmark of methodological rigor in qualitative inquiry (see Saldana, 2021). Given the targeted population's shared experiences and relative homogeneity, the final sample size was sufficient to enable an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and actions. This

methodological approach aligned with the study's qualitative framework, ensuring that participant selection, data collection, and analysis adequately addressed the research questions and theoretical focus.

Instrumentation

Data Collection Instruments

I employed multiple data collection instruments, including semistructured interview protocols (see Appendix B) and observation sheets to gather rich data. Semistructured interviews were selected for their capacity to enable in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, allowing flexibility to probe deeper into specific themes relevant to the study's research questions (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Observation sheets were used to document nonverbal behaviors, interactions, and environmental contexts, providing valuable contextual information that complemented interview data (see Saldana, 2021). The semistructured interview protocol used in this study was developed specifically for this research. No preexisting tools requiring legal permission were used.

Sources of Instruments

The interview protocol was developed by me and directly informed by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study: sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the principle of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). Drawing from the literature review and best practices in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldana, 2021), questions were designed to capture the interplay between

participants' faith, cultural identity, and environmental engagement. Sensemaking guided the development of prompts that encouraged participants to reflect on how they interpreted and assigned meaning to climate change within their cultural and religious contexts. Integral ecology shaped questions that explored connections among environmental, social, and spiritual dimensions of participants' lives, particularly their moral and theological commitments to caring for creation.

During analysis, both frameworks continued to guide the process: sensemaking concepts informed codes related to interpretation, narrative construction, and meaning making, while integral ecology guided codes that captured interconnections among ecological responsibility, cultural traditions, and social justice. This dual framework ensured that both data collection and analysis were coherent and consistently aligned with the study's conceptual foundation.

Historical and Legal Documents

While historical and legal documents were not primary data collection instruments in this study, papal encyclical texts, such as *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), were analyzed to provide theological and conceptual grounding. These documents were recognized as authoritative sources within the Catholic Church and were important in understanding the theological underpinnings of participants' perspectives on environmental justice. The inclusion of these texts was justified as they directly informed the conceptual framework and participants' faith-based narratives (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Justification of Instruments

The selected instruments were sufficient and appropriate to address the research questions, aligning with the constructivist paradigm that underpinned the research design. Semistructured interviews provided flexibility and depth, enabling the collection of rich, detailed narratives that reflected the complexity of participants' experiences (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Observation sheets added depth by documenting environmental and interpersonal dynamics observed during interviews (see Saldana, 2021).

The triangulation of these instruments enhanced the study's validity and reliability. Through integrating interviews and observational data, the research captured both the subjective and contextual dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach ensured a holistic understanding of how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceived and responded to the climate crisis through the lens of their religious beliefs and cultural identity (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Such methodological rigor supported the research's contribution to the discourse on environmental justice and faith-based engagement.

Instrument Development

The instrument developed for this study was grounded in a comprehensive review of literature and theoretical frameworks, including empirical studies on climate engagement, environmental justice, and Catholic social teachings, with specific emphasis on the principle of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) further guided the design of semistructured interview

questions to capture participants' narrative constructions around faith, cultural identity, and climate advocacy. Following best practices for qualitative research, the instrument's development involved iterative refinement through a pilot study with a small, representative sample of three to four individuals from the target population. This approach ensured cultural and contextual relevance while addressing linguistic and theological aspects of immigrant Catholic communities (see Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Content validity was established by aligning the instrument with key theoretical constructs and cross referencing it with existing literature. Feedback from the pilot study enhanced the instrument's clarity, thematic resonance, and ability to elicit meaningful data (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The semistructured interviews were designed to facilitate detailed responses, and yielded data sufficient to address the study's research question. Adhering to theoretical constructs from Weick (1995) and *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), the interviews enabled exploration of participants' lived experiences. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, allowed for the systematic identification of patterns and themes, adhering to coding practices as outlined by Saldana (2021). This design ensured that the data collection process and instruments were well-suited to address the study's aims and yielded rich, valid insights into the research question.

Procedures for Pilot Study

The pilot study served as an essential preparatory phase for the main study and was used to evaluate the data collection instruments' reliability, validity, and cultural

relevance. This section outlines the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection in the pilot study, as well as how the pilot study informed the main study. The goal of the pilot study was to refine the semistructured interview questions and procedures to ensure alignment with the study's theoretical framework and research objectives. Data collected during the pilot study were not included in the main study's analysis to avoid potential conflicts of interest or bias, in accordance with ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Recruitment Procedures for the Pilot Study

Participants for the pilot study were recruited from the same demographic population as the main study, church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify three individuals who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to provide feedback on the interview protocol. These participants were known to me but did not participate in the main study. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the pilot study.

Participation Procedures

A total of three pilot interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private and comfortable setting to ensure confidentiality and participant comfort. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. Participants answered the draft interview questions, provided feedback on the clarity and cultural relevance of the questions, and offered suggestions for improving the flow of the interview. The pilot interviews also helped identify opportunities for follow-up questions that would elicit deeper and more detailed

responses. Based on this feedback, adjustments were made to the wording, sequencing, and depth of certain interview questions to improve clarity, thematic coverage, and cultural resonance.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection for the pilot study took place in person in a secure and private location. Detailed field notes were taken to capture participant feedback, nonverbal cues, and contextual observations that might not be evident in the question responses alone. After each interview, I reviewed the observation notes to evaluate the effectiveness of the questions in eliciting detailed and meaningful responses.

Participant feedback played a critical role in refining the interview protocol. Feedback regarding the clarity of the questions, their cultural relevance, and their alignment with the research objectives was systematically documented and analyzed for recurring patterns (Saldana, 2021). Insights from this iterative feedback process informed specific adjustments to the interview protocol so that the instrument used in the main study was both reliable and sensitive to participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

Relationship of the Pilot Study to the Main Study

The pilot study served as a methodological trial for the main study and was used to evaluate the rigor and relevance of the data collection instruments. It enabled me to identify and address potential issues related to question phrasing, cultural sensitivity, and thematic scope. Insights gained during the pilot phase informed refinements that strengthened the validity and reliability of the instruments, ensuring they effectively

captured the experiences and perceptions of the target population. The pilot study thus provided a solid foundation for conducting the main study in alignment with the theoretical framework, Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), and the conceptual framework, integral ecology (Francis, 2015).

Ethical Considerations for the Pilot Study

Participants were informed that their involvement in the pilot study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Data collected during the pilot study were excluded from the main study's analysis to maintain ethical integrity. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and no identifying information was shared or used in future phases of the research. This pilot study approach adhered to best practices in qualitative research, ensuring that the instruments were well-prepared for the main study while maintaining ethical and methodological rigor (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection were designed to ensure replicability and adherence to ethical research practices, with detailed plans for both the pilot and main study phases. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from a Catholic parish in Maryland, targeting church-going immigrant Catholics who actively participated in parish activities. I served as the interviewer and was responsible for all data collection.

Before recruitment began, I obtained permission from the parish pastor to post and distribute flyers on church premises. Following IRB approval, the flyer was posted on the church notice board for one month. Twenty-two individuals contacted me directly to express interest in the study, and the flyer was removed once these responses were received. Eligibility screening was conducted using the inclusion criteria, and 20 participants were selected for the main study. Exclusion criteria were limited to individuals under the age of 18 and non-Catholics, as the focus of the study was on adult, church-going immigrant Catholics. All exclusions were handled respectfully, with clear communication that the decision was based solely on the study's research objectives.

Recruitment was conducted in a noncoercive manner to ensure that participants felt no undue pressure to participate. All participation was voluntary, and individuals were assured that their decision to participate or decline would not affect their standing within the parish community or personal relationship with me. I disclosed any prior relationships with participants and maintained professional boundaries to minimize perceptions of coercion throughout recruitment and data collection. The inclusion of church-going immigrant Catholics as participants was justified by the study's focus on understanding the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and environmental justice.

Pilot Study

As described in the pilot study section, three participants, family members, and friends who met the inclusion criteria, participated in face-to-face semistructured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes. The pilot interviews provided valuable

feedback on the clarity, cultural relevance, and thematic coverage of the interview questions. They also generated ideas for follow-up questions that could elicit richer responses. Based on this feedback, adjustments were made to the interview guide before the main study began. Data from the pilot study was not included in the primary analysis.

Main Study

For the main study, each participant took part in a single semistructured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times and locations to ensure accessibility and participant comfort, with both in-person and virtual options available. All participants selected the virtual option, and interviews were conducted via Zoom. Field notes were taken during the interviews to capture nonverbal cues, contextual details, and immediate reflections to support later analysis. All data were securely stored on password-protected devices, and identifying information was removed during transcription to maintain confidentiality.

At the conclusion of their interviews, participants took part in a brief debriefing session. I summarized the study's goals, acknowledged the significance of participants' contributions, and provided an opportunity for questions or additional comments. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. While no follow-up interviews were planned, participants could be contacted for clarification to enhance the credibility and accuracy of the findings. These procedures ensured that recruitment, participation, and data collection were conducted in a rigorous,

ethical, and participant-centered manner, consistent with the study's qualitative research design and methodological framework.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for this qualitative study was designed to align with the research question, theoretical framework, and methodological rigor. This research examined how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis through their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice. NVivo software was used for coding and thematic analysis, which ensured a systematic exploration of the data and a strong connection to the study's objectives.

Data saturation was achieved after 17 interviews, as recurring themes and patterns consistently emerged, and no new insights were identified in the final transcripts. Saturation was monitored throughout the coding process using NVivo, where iterative comparison of codes demonstrated redundancy across participants' narratives. During the last two interviews, the data confirmed existing categories without adding new concepts, signaling that the breadth and depth of the phenomenon had been adequately captured. This indication of saturation strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings and confirmed that the sample size was sufficient for the study's qualitative design.

The data collected through semistructured interviews directly addressed the research question. The interview protocol emphasized participants' lived experiences, the influence of Catholic teachings, and their perceptions of environmental justice. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes emerging from the data, ensuring

that the findings remained grounded in the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldana, 2021).

Participants' names and contact information were collected only for logistical purposes, such as scheduling interviews and disseminating findings. These details were stored separately from research data to maintain confidentiality. A unique participant code was assigned to link demographic information with interview data without revealing identities. All data were de-identified before analysis, and quotations used in publications were carefully reviewed to prevent unintentional disclosure. Only pseudonyms or generic descriptors were used in the final write-up.

Coding Procedures

The data were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo for analysis. A two-cycle coding process was employed to organize and interpret the data comprehensively (Saldana, 2021). In the first cycle, initial coding was conducted by assigning descriptive and in vivo codes to capture participants' direct statements and surface-level meanings. These codes highlighted key elements such as religious narratives, cultural influences, and environmental engagement. In the second cycle, pattern coding was used to group the initial codes into broader themes and subthemes that reflected participants' sensemaking processes and their integration of Catholic teachings with environmental advocacy. This structured approach ensured that the coding process remained rigorous and closely aligned with the study's objectives. No other third parties were involved in this study, and

as such, no additional confidentiality agreements were required for the protection of participant data.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted iteratively, guided by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the principle of integral ecology as articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). This approach involved reviewing the coded data to identify overarching themes related to cultural identity, religious narratives, and environmental engagement. The themes were compared and refined to ensure consistency with the theoretical frameworks, thereby providing a deeper understanding of how participants constructed meaning around the climate crisis. The analysis illuminated the complex interplay between faith, culture, and environmental advocacy by linking these themes to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

Use of NVivo Software

NVivo played a critical role in the organization, analysis, and visualization of the data. The software facilitated efficient coding through its ability to create and manage hierarchical nodes, which helped organize themes and subthemes. NVivo's data visualization tools, such as word clouds, thematic maps, and matrix coding queries, enabled the identification of relationships and patterns within the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The software's functionality supported transparency in the research process by allowing for systematic exploration of the data and careful tracking of analytical

decisions. NVivo also enhanced the integration of theoretical constructs with participant narratives, providing a robust framework for thematic interpretation.

Follow-up and Member Checking

To ensure the credibility of the findings, participants were contacted for follow-up clarification through member checking. This process involved sharing their interview transcripts with participants, who were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their contributions. Member checking fostered trustworthiness by validating the accuracy of the analysis and ensuring that participants' voices were authentically represented (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These systematic and rigorous methods provided meaningful insights into how church-going immigrant Catholics perceived and responded to the climate crisis, contributing to the broader discourse on faith, culture, and environmental advocacy.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative study, I addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was established through systematic recruitment, transparent data collection, and participant validation of transcripts via member checking. Participants reviewed their transcripts to confirm accuracy, which ensured their perspectives were authentically represented (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Reflexivity was maintained through journaling, which enabled me to critically assess personal assumptions and bracket preconceptions that could have influenced data collection or analysis (Habibullah et al.,

2023). These strategies collectively enhanced credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for qualitative rigor.

Transferability was established through thick description of the research setting, participant recruitment, and study context. Rich details about the parish environment, participant demographics, and cultural homogeneity provided sufficient contextual information to allow readers to assess applicability to similar communities (Shenton, 2004). While the findings were context-specific, these strategies ensured depth and breadth to support broader relevance within immigrant Catholic populations.

Dependability and confirmability were ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting research decisions, coding frameworks, and theme development. NVivo software supported systematic coding and thematic organization, ensuring consistency across the analytic process. Confirmability was reinforced by linking interpretations directly to participant quotations and by maintaining reflexive journals that recorded analytic decisions and researcher reflections. Together, these measures helped maintain the study's rigor and supported findings grounded in participants' authentic voices rather than researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical integrity of this study was maintained through rigorous adherence to established ethical guidelines and practices, in alignment with Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. The study was reviewed and approved by

the IRB on March 27, 2025 (Approval No. 03-27-25-1060559), and approval remained valid until March 26, 2026. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from an immigrant Catholic parish in Maryland, focusing on church-going immigrant Catholics. A formal letter of cooperation was not required, as recruitment materials were distributed publicly within the parish. If additional permissions were required, a letter of cooperation or data use agreement would have been obtained to ensure full compliance with institutional policies and ethical standards. All participants received an informed consent document outlining the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. This process followed established ethical guidelines to ensure participants understood their role and could make an informed decision about participation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Semistructured interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom at times chosen by participants to ensure convenience, comfort, and privacy. With participant consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. Transcriptions were anonymized, with all identifying details removed to protect confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and no personal identifiers appeared in transcripts, reports, or publications (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Ethical concerns related to potential coercion or power dynamics were addressed by emphasizing voluntary participation and by maintaining a clear distinction between the researcher's role and any authority within the parish community.

Confidentiality was safeguarded through secure data management practices. Audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored on encrypted, password-protected devices accessible only to me as the researcher. Backup copies were stored in a secure, password-protected cloud drive. Physical documents were stored in locked storage. In accordance with Walden University requirements, all data will be retained for five years and then permanently deleted. Given the cultural and religious sensitivities of the participant group, I employed a culturally responsive approach to minimize potential risks and respect participants' values. A $25 gift card was provided to each participant to acknowledge their time and contributions, reducing the risk of undue influence. Transparency and open communication were maintained throughout recruitment and data collection.

Potential risks to participants were acknowledged, including psychological discomfort when discussing sensitive topics related to climate challenges or faith. To mitigate these risks, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Each participant also received a list of mental health resources (see Appendix C), including local counseling services and hotlines, in case of distress. If a participant had exhibited acute psychological distress during an interview, the session would have been paused, and immediate referrals provided. These measures ensured that participants' autonomy and well-being were prioritized throughout the research process.

I incorporated safeguards into the study design to minimize risks such as loss of privacy, emotional distress, or inconvenience. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymization and secure data storage, while flexibility in scheduling reduced burdens on participants' daily lives. These strategies reflected a commitment to ethical rigor and cultural sensitivity within the research design. The risks associated with this study were minimal and reasonable considering its potential to contribute significantly to understanding the intersection of faith, culture, and climate advocacy. The findings provided insights relevant to social work, faith-based organizations, and policymakers, with implications for developing equitable and sustainable climate solutions.

Dissemination of the Results

The results of this study were shared with participants and community stakeholders in a manner that respected their contributions and confidentiality. Each participant received a summary of the findings via email, according to their stated preference. Findings were also shared with faith-based organizations and policymakers through presentations and written reports, with an emphasis on actionable insights for environmental advocacy. Dissemination procedures ensured participant anonymity, and no identifiable information was included in reports or publications.

Although this study did not specifically target vulnerable adults, I acknowledged that such individuals could have been incidentally included due to the broad recruitment criteria. Their participation was justified by the potential to contribute to the knowledge base and to benefit their broader community. During data collection, I remained attentive

to signs of distress and provided appropriate referrals when necessary. If research procedures had revealed criminal activity or required mandatory reporting (e.g., child or elder abuse), I was prepared to follow applicable local laws while safeguarding participant confidentiality to the extent permitted. Participants were informed of this obligation during the consent process.

Summary

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the framework for data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. Using a qualitative design grounded in the constructivist paradigm, this study drew upon sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the Catholic principle of integral ecology (Francis, 2015) to explore how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceived and engaged with the climate crisis. The chapter described participant recruitment through purposive sampling, the use of semistructured interviews for data collection, and NVivo software for systematic thematic analysis. Ethical considerations were central, with protocols implemented to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality, in alignment with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

Strategies to ensure trustworthiness were also addressed, focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through member checking, thick description, audit trails, and reflexivity. Collectively, these approaches established a rigorous and ethical methodology designed to yield meaningful insights into the intersection of faith, cultural identity, and environmental justice.

Building upon this foundation, the next chapter, Chapter 4, presents the results of the study. It highlights the narratives and themes that emerged from participant interviews, organized into eight overarching themes: (a) Climate Change Understanding and Framing, (b) Awareness and Education, (c) Faith and Environmental Perceptions, (d) Cultural and Immigrant Identity, (e) Intergenerational and Youth Engagement, (f) Barriers and Challenges to Engagement, (g) Personal and Community Action, and (h) Climate Engagement within Church Settings. Together, these themes reflect participants' unique perspectives on environmental advocacy through the lens of their cultural and religious identities.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the findings of the qualitative research, which examined how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis through the intersecting lenses of faith, culture, and community. Guided by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the conceptual framework of integral ecology (Francis, 2015), I aimed to understand how participants constructed meaning around climate issues, and how their religious and cultural identities shape their attitudes and behaviors toward environmental stewardship.

The research question was "How do church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?" The participants for this study answered this question, reflecting both shared and divergent experiences. 17 participants from an immigrant Catholic Parish in Maryland were interviewed using semistructured interview protocols. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, with the support of NVivo software. A total of 85 initial codes were generated and grouped into eight overarching themes. In this chapter, these themes are detailed, supported by thick descriptions and verbatim participant quotes. Discrepant cases are embedded within each theme to provide a nuanced, trustworthy representation of the findings.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with two participants who met the study's inclusion criteria to test the clarity, flow, and cultural sensitivity of the semistructured interview protocol. Recruitment, consent, and virtual interview procedures mirrored those of the main study, ensuring that ethical safeguards and logistics were tested. The pilot interviewees confirmed that the questions were understandable and appropriate, but they also highlighted opportunities to improve depth by adding prompts that encouraged richer storytelling around faith practices and environmental engagement. As a result, the final interview guide was slightly reorganized for smoother flow, and time allocations for specific questions were adjusted to allow for deeper exploration. These refinements enhanced the quality and depth of data collection in the main study without making any changes to the study design.

Setting

The study was conducted within an immigrant Catholic parish in Maryland, which served as both a spiritual and social hub for a close-knit community. This parish was composed primarily of first- and second-generation immigrants from India, creating a culturally homogeneous setting characterized by a shared religious identity, strong community bonds, and active participation in parish life. Members of the parish were engaged in various aspects of community life, including worship services, catechism instruction, volunteer work, and leadership roles.

The church's dual role as a place of worship and a center for community interaction made it an ideal site for examining how cultural values, immigrant experiences, and Catholic teachings influence perceptions of the climate crisis and approaches to environmental engagement. The shared cultural and religious background of the participants provided a rich context for exploring common patterns while still acknowledging individual diversity. Situating the research in this unique environment enabled an investigation of the intersection of cultural identity, religious belief, and environmental engagement that was deeply embedded in the lived experiences of this immigrant community.

All interviews were conducted via the Zoom meeting platform to provide flexibility for participants and to accommodate varying schedules and locations. Prior to each interview, participants were emailed a written consent form, which they reviewed, signed, and returned via email. At the start of each session, I reviewed the purpose of the study, confirmed confidentiality measures, reiterated the voluntary nature of participation, and reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Permission to record the interview was also obtained before proceeding. Interviews lasted between 19 and 62 minutes and followed a semistructured protocol, allowing for follow-up questions to clarify or deepen responses. This virtual format maintained the integrity of face-to-face interaction while ensuring participant comfort, privacy, and accessibility.

Participant Demographics

While detailed demographic data were not formally collected, both to preserve participant anonymity and due to the homogeneity of the sample, all 17 participants met the established inclusion criteria: age 18 or older, first- or second-generation immigrant status, Catholic religious affiliation, residency in Maryland, and active involvement in parish life. The group included both men and women, all of whom were adults aged 18 and above. All participants identified as first- or second-generation immigrants from India and were affiliated with an immigrant Catholic Church in Maryland. Participants had lived in the United States for periods ranging from 5 to over 30 years and spoke English fluently. They were actively involved in the parish community in various roles, including church membership, catechism instruction, volunteer service, and parish leadership.

Given the shared cultural, religious, and geographic context of the sample, additional demographic details such as exact ages or educational levels were not deemed necessary for addressing the research question. The decision to omit detailed demographic variables was consistent with IRB approval and with the study's methodological emphasis on cultural homogeneity. This homogeneous sample enabled a focused exploration of shared experiences related to faith-based perceptions of climate change. As such, transferability is supported through a thick description of the research setting, parish context, and participants' collective characteristics, rather than through individualized demographic profiles.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this qualitative study was grounded in the use of semistructured interviews, which were purposefully designed to elicit rich, in-depth narratives from participants about their perceptions of climate change and the role of Catholic faith, cultural identity, and intergenerational influences in shaping their environmental awareness and engagement. The interviews were guided by the conceptual framework of integral ecology and the theoretical lens of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995). Together, these frameworks guided the construction of open-ended, exploratory questions that allowed participants to share their experiences and beliefs in their own words, with particular attention to how their religious and cultural contexts influence their environmental views and behaviors.

Eligible participants were recruited from an immigrant church in Maryland and included first- and second-generation immigrant Catholics who were actively involved in parish life. All participants provided informed consent before the interviews and were assured that their participation would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were used throughout the research process to protect participants' identities, and no identifiable personal information was included in transcripts or subsequent reporting.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, and this approach allowed for greater flexibility and inclusivity, accommodating participants' schedules and ensuring that all those willing to participate could do so comfortably. Each interview lasted between approximately 19 and 62 minutes, although in a few cases, the duration varied slightly

based on the depth of the conversation and the participant's level of engagement. A standardized interview protocol was followed in all sessions to maintain consistency across participants. This protocol (Appendix B) included open-ended questions that encouraged participants to reflect on how Catholic teachings influenced their understanding of environmental issues, how they interpreted their sense of responsibility and action considering their faith, and how cultural and intergenerational dynamics shaped their ecological engagement.

With participant consent, all interviews were recorded using the Zoom platform to ensure an accurate record of each conversation. Initial transcriptions were generated through Zoom's automated transcription service. To preserve the authenticity and precision of participants' responses, each transcript was subsequently reviewed and manually edited by me while listening to the original audio recordings. This process ensured that every word was accurately captured and any errors or omissions in the automated transcription were corrected. Transcripts were reviewed thoroughly for accuracy and completeness before being imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated systematic organization and coding.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which provided a structure for ensuring a rigorous and transparent process for identifying, reviewing, and refining themes, while preserving the authenticity of participants' voices. NVivo software supported the organization, coding, and retrieval

of data throughout the analysis. The following subsections outline each phase of the process.

Phase 1: Familiarization With the Data

The analysis began with an in-depth familiarization process in which I read and re-read each interview transcript multiple times. This immersion allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the content, tone, and context of participants' narratives. During this stage, preliminary notes and observations were recorded in analytic memos, capturing initial impressions, recurring ideas, and points of interest. This phase established the foundation for subsequent coding by ensuring a nuanced grasp of the data's depth and breadth.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Following familiarization, I engaged in systematic coding using NVivo. Descriptive and interpretive codes were created manually to capture key concepts, patterns, and significant statements across the dataset. Codes reflected both semantic content and latent content within participant narratives. This initial coding process produced 85 codes, which were documented in a codebook (see Appendix D) along with definitions to ensure consistency.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Once initial codes were established, I examined them for conceptual similarities and patterns of meaning. Related codes were grouped to form candidate themes that reflected broader patterns in the data. This stage was iterative, involving both visual

mapping and narrative reflection to explore how different codes connected. Potential themes were compared against the study's research questions to assess their relevance.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Candidate themes were then systematically reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the coded data and the dataset. This involved two levels of review: first, examining the coherence of data within each theme, and second, ensuring that each theme was distinct from others and meaningfully contributed to answering the research questions. Themes were revised, merged, or discarded based on this evaluation, resulting in a refined thematic structure supported by substantial evidence.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

In this phase, I refined the specifics of each theme, clearly articulating its scope, focus, and meaning. Theme names were carefully selected to capture the essence of each finding while remaining accessible and precise. Definitions were written for each theme, ensuring that they could be consistently interpreted. Verbatim participant quotes were identified and linked to each theme to provide illustrations and enhance the richness of the findings.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The final phase involved synthesizing the themes into coherent and compelling narratives that directly addressed the study's research questions. These narratives integrated thematic descriptions, illustrative quotes, and interpretive analysis to highlight the interconnectedness of themes and their relevance to the study's conceptual and

theoretical frameworks. The results are presented in Chapter 4, with a summary of themes, codes, and representative quotes provided.

Treatment of Discrepant Cases

The data that deviated from the dominant patterns or themes were carefully examined and documented. These cases were analyzed to identify alternative perspectives and refine emerging themes, which contributed to the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Addressing discrepant cases ensured a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and minimized researcher bias, reinforcing the rigor of the analysis.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Across all six phases, multiple strategies were employed to ensure rigor and trustworthiness, including member checking, an audit trail, and reflexivity. Member checking allowed participants to review their transcripts for accuracy, while the audit trail documented recruitment decisions, coding procedures, and theme development. Reflexivity was maintained through journaling to examine assumptions and biases, and together these measures supported credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria.

Credibility

Credibility was established through a systematic and transparent recruitment and data collection process. This particular church was selected because it is primarily an immigrant parish and provides access to a population relevant to the study's focus. After

receiving IRB approval, I met with the parish pastor to explain the purpose of the study. The pastor granted permission to post a recruitment flyer on the church bulletin board.

A total of 22 individuals expressed interest. Each potential participant was screened using the following criteria: age 18 or older, residency in Maryland, Catholic religious affiliation, first- or second-generation immigrant status, and active involvement at the parish. Seventeen eligible participants ultimately completed interviews, which lasted between 19 and 62 minutes. Data saturation was reached by the 17th interview, at which point no new themes, codes, or insights were emerging from the data. As interviews progressed, participant responses began to demonstrate substantial overlap in content, reflecting redundancy in key ideas, patterns, and perspectives across the dataset. Recurring concepts, such as the influence of Catholic teachings, generational differences in climate awareness, cultural values of frugality, and barriers to engagement, surfaced consistently, regardless of participant background or role within the parish. The final few interviews confirmed existing codes without contributing new dimensions to the analysis, indicating that additional data collection would likely yield diminishing returns. This redundancy signaled that the dataset had reached sufficient depth and breadth to address the research question comprehensively, aligning with qualitative standards for saturation in thematic analysis.

All interviews were recorded via Zoom with consent, transcribed using Zoom's auto-transcription, and then corrected while listening to the audio. Paralinguistic features such as "hmms" and "amms" were retained. Member checking followed: participants

reviewed their transcripts and confirmed accuracy. No major changes were requested. NVivo software was used for data management and thematic coding. A total of 85 codes were developed, and themes were reviewed and validated through peer debriefing with the dissertation chair. Discrepant cases were retained to enhance credibility and analytic transparency.

Transferability

Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research setting, participant recruitment, and data collection process. Although demographic data were not formally collected, the sample was culturally homogeneous, consisting of first- and second-generation immigrant Catholics active in the same parish. Immigrants from this parish contributed to the cultural and religious context, creating a unique environment for examining the intersection of climate engagement and faith. Rich, thick descriptions and direct participant quotations enhance readers' ability to assess transferability to similar populations.

Dependability

Dependability was established through consistency and rigor in the research process. After IRB approval, all recruitment materials, consent processes, interview protocols, and transcripts were documented and stored securely. Each interview was anonymized and coded using NVivo. Thematic development followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. An audit trail included flyer, eligibility screening forms, signed consents, transcriptions, codebook, NVivo memos, and theme development

notes. Reflexive journaling strengthened dependability by identifying and addressing potential inconsistencies and assumptions.

Confirmability

Confirmability was achieved through strategies to ensure that findings were grounded in participant perspectives. Reflexive journaling was employed after every interview and during analysis. A codebook in NVivo was used to maintain analytic consistency. Direct quotes supported all interpretations, and member checking allowed participants to confirm or correct their contributions.

Reflexivity

As a researcher with cultural and religious commonalities with the participant population, my reflexivity was essential. While this insider status facilitated rapport and trust, it also risked influencing interpretation. To mitigate this, I used a reflexive journal to document thoughts, emotions, and assumptions throughout data collection and analysis. This reflexive practice helped bracket biases and ensured that the participants' voices remained central to interpretation. It also allowed me to examine how personal beliefs might shape engagement with the data and to maintain transparency in the analytic process.

Thematic Overview

Eight key themes emerged from the in-depth thematic analysis of participant interviews. The themes are arranged in a purposeful sequence that reflects the interpretive arc of the study and supports a coherent response to the research question: "How do

church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?" The thematic structure was designed to illustrate the layered and evolving ways participants made sense of climate change, from initial awareness to personal and institutional engagement. Each theme is introduced with a brief contextual overview, followed by an in-depth discussion that includes participant narratives, interpretive analysis, discrepant views, and explicit links to the study's conceptual and theoretical framework.

The first theme, Climate Change Understanding and Framing, addresses how participants conceptualize climate change as a scientific reality, a moral issue, or a natural phenomenon. This theme directly informs the research question by illustrating the initial ways participants make sense of environmental change, grounded in personal experience, cultural interpretation, and, for some, spiritual belief.

The second theme, Awareness and Education, explores the sources from which participants gain knowledge about climate issues. This theme provides insight into the informational and educational contexts that shape their environmental understanding, which in turn influences how they engage with the topic as Catholic immigrants navigating complex social and cultural systems.

The third theme, Faith and Environmental Perceptions, examines how Catholic teachings, spiritual values, and Church messages inform participants' views on environmental responsibility. This theme speaks directly to the research question by

exploring the religious dimension of climate perception and how faith acts as a lens through which environmental issues are interpreted.

The fourth theme, Cultural and Immigrant Identity, highlights how participants' experiences as immigrants and the cultural values they carry shape their environmental attitudes and behaviors. This theme underscores the cultural lens of the research question, revealing how ethnic identity, migration history, and community belonging influence environmental engagement.

The fifth theme, Intergenerational and Youth Engagement, explores how participants perceive generational differences within their families and communities regarding climate awareness and action. This theme connects to the research question by showing how cultural transmission, parental responsibility, and youth leadership influence engagement across age groups within the immigrant Catholic context.

The sixth theme, Barriers and Challenges to Engagement, identifies the structural, theological, and practical obstacles that prevent deeper involvement in climate action. These challenges are critical to understanding the limitations and tensions participants face as they navigate faith, culture, and climate responsibility by adding complexity to the sensemaking process at the heart of the research question.

The seventh theme, Personal and Community Action, shifts toward participants' expressions of agency and responsibility. This theme highlights the specific ways individuals and small groups attempt to live out their environmental values, connecting their beliefs and identities to concrete forms of climate engagement.

Finally, the eighth theme, Climate Engagement within Church Settings, examines how participants perceive the role of the Church in addressing climate change. This theme answers the research question by revealing how faith communities provide support, guidance, or barriers to climate-related discourse and action.

Together, these eight themes offer a multidimensional and contextually rich response to the research question. They reveal how participants construct meaning around climate change through the integrated influences of faith, culture, identity, and community. The thematic sequence not only reflects the depth of participants' perspectives but also traces their engagement, from conceptual understanding to live action, within the framework of their religious and immigrant experiences.

Table 1 presents how each of the eight emergent themes aligns with the study's guiding theoretical and conceptual frameworks: Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and integral ecology. For each theme, the table identifies how participants constructed meaning around climate change (sensemaking) and how their responses reflect the environmental, moral, and spiritual principles emphasized in integral ecology. This alignment illustrates the interpretive coherence of the study and provides a foundation for the analysis in Chapter 5.

Table 1

Themes Aligned to Sensemaking and Integral Ecology Frameworks

Theme	Integration with theoretical and conceptual frameworks
1. Climate change understanding and framing	Sensemaking theory: participants actively constructed meaning from personal experiences, media, and cultural memory. Integral ecology: emerging concern for nature reflected an implicit awareness of human-environment interconnection.
2. Awareness and education	Sensemaking theory: awareness was shaped by a mosaic of sources, including school, media, and personal encounters. Integral ecology: education as a moral imperative was emphasized, especially in family and parish settings.
3. Faith and environmental perceptions	Sensemaking theory: faith acted as a sensemaking tool, guiding moral interpretations of environmental responsibility. Integral ecology: catholic teachings reflected care for creation as a spiritual obligation.

Theme	Integration with theoretical and conceptual frameworks
4. Cultural and immigrant identity	Sensemaking theory: participants drew on transnational experiences and cultural norms to make sense of U.S.-based environmentalism. Integral ecology: traditional values of simplicity and community reflect essential principles of sustainability.
5. Intergenerational and youth engagement	Sensemaking theory: intergenerational dialogue became a medium for meaning construction across generations. Integral ecology: emphasis on legacy and future generations aligns with the principle of ecological continuity.
6. Barriers and challenges to engagement	Sensemaking theory: participants negotiated internal conflicts (e.g., economic stress vs. Ecological concern) through narrative reflection. Integral ecology: barriers highlighted the social, economic, and cultural systems that affect environmental justice.

Theme	Integration with theoretical and conceptual frameworks
7. Personal and community action	Sensemaking theory: small actions were framed as meaningful responses that helped reconcile belief with behavior. Integral ecology: participants expressed values of care, sustainability, and justice in everyday practices.
8. Climate engagement within church settings	Sensemaking theory: institutional silence or action shaped how participants made sense of the church's moral stance. Integral ecology: faith communities were seen as potential catalysts for integrated environmental and spiritual care.

Results

Theme 1: Climate Change Understanding and Framing

Interview narratives reflected varied understandings of climate change, some grounded in science, others informed by spirituality, and many shaped by cultural and personal histories. Analysis of their responses revealed that environmental awareness is shaped not only by facts and education but also by spiritual orientation, generational position, and social context. This multifaceted framing reflects the dynamics of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), suggesting that individuals constructed meaning through the interplay of identity, social cues, and contextual understanding. At the same time, integral ecology, with its call to view ecological issues through the interconnectedness of human, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, provides a lens to appreciate the moral and theological dimensions in participants' environmental awareness.

Many participants framed climate change as a scientifically grounded and observable phenomenon. Their interpretations reflected a trust in empirical data, often influenced by exposure to education or current events. For instance, P10 emphasized the authority of scientific knowledge, stating, "Climate change is not a political, political hoax, or I mean a political ideology, but it is based on pure science, and I respect that science." Participant P04 echoed this by pointing to human causality, "Climate change ahh, actually is a real thing, and it's basically caused by humans. That is the first thing which comes to my mind." These responses represent an effort to make sense of a

complex global issue through facts and evidence, consistent with the sensemaking process, where understanding emerges from ongoing interaction between knowledge, context, and social validation. Others used experiential and anecdotal cues, such as changes in weather patterns or personal memories, to interpret climate change. Their narratives align with the idea in sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) that people rely on lived experiences and environmental feedback to construct meaning. Participants described shifts in seasons, extreme weather events, and changes observed both in Maryland and in their countries of origin. P16 stated:

> I believe, I can, I experience in two ways like you know the way I came to Maryland in 2006, and the weather! How it used to be in Maryland in 2006, and now in 2025, it's two different things… I see the impact of, the impact of, hurricanes. Those storms are getting bigger, much devastating. Now it's much bigger and much devastating. Same thing with, you know, decent snow in the state of Maryland, but now we don't see any snow hardly.

P15 responded, "In 2018, where my ancestral house is, it got affected by the unusual floods that was there, historically for centuries has never got flooding to that levels." P14 said, "The wildfire that happened in Canada in the summer of 2023 was so bad that our air quality here in Maryland was affected for several weeks."

These narratives reflect how personal observation and memory shape understanding. Importantly, they also signal a kind of ecological awareness rooted in integral ecology, where environmental change is not abstract but relational and

experienced across generations and geographies. Some participants viewed climate change through a moral and theological lens, aligning with integral ecology's principle that care for the environment is an ethical and spiritual mandate. These framing ties climate responsibility to human accountability before God as P10 indicated, "We are not just stewards of creation; we are also accountable to God for how we live. Climate change is part of that responsibility." P9 said, "To some extent, I may, now, I kind of a little more spiritually grown. I mean, I just not look at global warming as our human issue. We are offend the God also. I started thinking."

These responses illustrate how religious beliefs shape moral sensemaking, highlighting how faith provides a framework for interpreting the climate crisis as both a spiritual offense and a call to stewardship, a core tenet of integral ecology and the Catholic ecological tradition rooted in *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015). Other participants emphasized the collective, global nature of the climate challenge, connecting it to humanity's shared responsibility, beyond individual belief systems: P11 stated, "Climate change is a fact that science, that is happening. Unless we as a whole world work on it, it's not going to go away."

Such statements reflect a social dimension of sensemaking, where meaning emerges not only from personal insight but through recognizing collective responsibility and interdependence. A few participants offered limited or vague understandings of climate change, suggesting that for some, the concept remained abstract or underexplored. Their framing often reflected passive or indirect exposure through

education or media. P06 stated, “Climate change was one of the topics in my bachelor’s, yeah, when we were learning about depression there, it was mentioned in certain states, there was more depressive patients, because of the too much rain there.” P08 answered, “I would say, not too much. I know that it is an issue, an ongoing issue, I have not, it hasn’t changed too much from the beginning of what I have learned.” P17 said, “Because, of the season, you know, each season, the summer or winter, the climate also changing, you know. That is what I think.”

These responses suggest that knowledge about climate change is shaped by access to information, cultural priorities, and educational background. A clear generational divide was evident in how participants framed climate change. Some recognized that younger members of the community had greater awareness and exposure to environmental education, an insight consistent with both frameworks, as youth serve as critical agents of intergenerational ecological transformation. P03 stated, “I think the younger generation probably have better awareness. Probably because they hear about it in school, and they are perhaps more active in social media, I don’t think the older generation is very proactive.” P08 responded, “I was in elementary school in 5th grade or 6th grade, some of the teachers were discussing to us about climate change, and how CO2 emissions and pollution causes climate change. That was my first introduction.” P10 demonstrated an integrated sense of faith, science, and moral responsibility, which captures the core message of integral ecology, the call to protect creation as an expression of love and justice. “My motto is, live for a sustainable world. Keep it sustainable, Christ

said, if you want to see God, what do you have to do? Look at your neighbor, your own family."

Discrepant Views

Discrepant views also emerged; for example, P07 acknowledged the seriousness of climate change but downplayed their own role and expressed uncertainty about its moral implications or alignment with their lifestyle, including the severity or urgency of the issue. "The climate change, I, it's, it's always a big concern for me, because I always deal with climate change issues, but I am not against luxury or anything…I think it's exaggerated. Climate always changed. Why make a big deal now?" P02 stated, "I don't feel it affects me directly. So, I haven't really thought about it much." P16 responded, "I have heard of it, climate change, but I don't know, like, what exactly it is or what we are supposed to do." These variations reflect the fact that awareness of climate change is not linear or consistent; individuals construct meaning through sometimes contradictory narratives that merge personal values, cultural norms, and external cues.

Insights from participant interviews provide an understanding of how immigrant Catholics make sense of climate change. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) is particularly relevant, as individuals drew on diverse sources, lived experience, cultural memory, religious teachings, and media to interpret environmental phenomena. Their narratives reveal the subjective nature of knowledge construction, shaped by the convergence of personal history, communal context, and belief systems. Integral ecology is evident in the moral framing of climate change, with many participants expressing

concern not only for the Earth but also for future generations and spiritual integrity. These perceptions reflect a dynamic, ongoing process of negotiation between scientific information, cultural narratives, and spiritual values.

Although participants conveyed a wide range of understandings, from natural skepticism to deep spiritual concern, their sources of information played a critical role in shaping those views. Interview responses also highlighted the importance of both formal and informal education in influencing participants' climate awareness and engagement levels. The following section examines how varying levels of awareness and education impacted their perceptions and actions.

Theme 2: Awareness and Education

The analysis showed that both formal and informal education significantly informed participants' perceptions of climate change and motivated their responses to the issue. It reflects the role of knowledge, whether obtained through personal experience, formal instruction, or faith-based communities, in shaping how immigrant Catholics make sense of the climate crisis. As articulated in sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), individuals interpret complex issues by drawing on cues from their environment, identity, and social contexts. Likewise, integral ecology, as developed in *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015), emphasizes the need for ecological education that integrates moral, social, and spiritual awareness. Together, these frameworks illuminate how participants' awareness of climate change emerges through a dynamic, lived process of encountering, interpreting, and sometimes struggling to understand environmental realities.

Participants identified multiple sources of climate awareness, especially through lived experiences. Their narratives demonstrated the role of personal observation in shaping ecological understanding of environmental cues. Participant P10 stated,

> The climate change means the, if you reverse the word change of climate, and, eh., based on my living on this earth, my time on this earth. I have seen and experienced climate change. How the environment changed from my childhood through my adulthood.

Participant P13 echoed this experiential insight, illustrating how direct exposure to shifting weather patterns becomes a way of knowing:

> Yeah, when I compare past few years, summer is not same all the time. So, I, it varies, and we can feel it. It's like living at the same place. I can see that it's more hot compared to previous years, and it's increasing.

These examples reflect how participants construct meaning about climate change through direct observation and are grounded in memory, place, and experience. In addition to experiential learning, several participants cited formal education, media, and reading as sources of environmental knowledge. This demonstrates how institutional and informational contexts shape sensemaking processes, particularly when individuals encounter scientific explanations or global discourses about climate change. Participant P10 shared, "I have learned about climate change means, I mean through basically, mostly from the scientific journals." Participant P12 described their school-based learning:

> That's even during my school days, ehh, it was more through through the the studies that we do in the school, uhh, You come to know that. Yeah, there is greenhouse effect due to which the temperature is rising. There is more, uhh, the ozone layer is depleting.

For participant P13, awareness came from unexpected or everyday sources, showing the variety of channels through which environmental messages are received and interpreted, “I came to know, ahh, from newspapers then some of the magazines, when I heard about the go green initiatives, and some of them from the T-shirts also, people were wearing.”

These responses highlight how the awareness of immigrant Catholics, often in layered and overlapping ways. Education is not merely the transfer of information but a moral and spiritual invitation to perceive the interconnectedness between people, creation, and God. Some participants discussed how awareness translates into personal action and family modeling, illustrating the social dimension of environmental learning. As Weick (1995) suggests through sensemaking theory, people enact meaning through behavior that influences others. Participant P10 explained how awareness becomes contagious through a lived example:

> Awareness is the key. And, for example, I mean, I do things in my family. Okay? And they know that I do all kinds of stuff. But then, are they aware? Um, Are they doing it? They help in doing composting, they help in doing recycling, they do it, they see it so by seeing it. They understand that I took once. Once (participant’s

> daughter) came to school for seeing it, and then she came and helped out. So I mean teaching and preaching is not to help out. I mean, we had to model it and to see it. And they are. That's why I said, awareness is and rules and regulations won't help so awareness.

This statement underscores how climate awareness is shaped and transmitted within households and communities, reinforcing the integral ecology principle that care for the environment must begin with small-scale relationships and daily practices (Francis, 2015). Participants also articulated the potential role of the Church in promoting climate education, especially among younger generations. This connects directly to the research question, as it reveals how religious institutions could be vehicles for ecological awareness in immigrant Catholic communities. Participant P11 expressed this opportunity clearly:

> Umm, I think the probably the awareness, awareness, educate, educate the scientific fact of it. I think educating the people, umm, getting them understand that it's, it's a fact, it's a fact, and we should be kind of a little bit worried about that. And also, the church, I mean, since since this is a vibrant community, right? Church could organize, um, this kind of awareness to the next generation as well. I think we could have a planting the tree events or or cleaning, the cleaning, the roadways. Those kinds of the activities can be encouraged within the church.

Participant P16 emphasized the importance of early awareness within the Church setting.

> Ahh. Within the church community. Ahh. That's a little like I believe I am not much involved, ahh, in the church community of talking about the, but I think so. It's important that we talk to our kids in our church. And it's very important again, climate is ehh. It's like gaining, you know, knowledge gives you wisdom and same thing about people needs to understand and educate about climate change. It's very important.

These perspectives suggest a vision of the church not only as a space of worship but also as a platform for ecological education and moral formation.

Discrepant Views

Despite the overall emphasis on education and awareness, some participants revealed either skepticism or uncertainty about climate change, reflecting a disconnect between exposure to information and internalization of the issue. Some participants revealed gaps in awareness or skepticism about how deeply climate education reaches people's consciousness, indicating that awareness alone may not always lead to understanding or concern. Participant P10 noted the lack of urgency or connection among people:

> So, people don't understand. So, water resources? But so, people, when everything I have. I don't like it. I mean, I mean, when I have it. I have everything right? So, people are not aware. Okay, people aren't aware. Awareness is the key.

Participant P14 reflected on the limitations of their own learning:

> I don't think so. I think, uhh, maybe I have learned a little bit more about it. But, um, in fact, after elementary school, I haven't learned much about it other than just hearing it a little bit in the news. So, I haven't learned much since elementary school.

Participant P02 expressed similarly limited or general understandings, "Yeah, just from the, from the news and the articles." These responses illustrate the challenges of climate awareness and education, particularly when formal education is limited, or environmental discourse is not reinforced by religious or community institutions. They also suggest a missed opportunity for deeper integration of ecological concerns within spiritual and cultural contexts.

Participants' awareness of climate change emerged through a complex mix of personal experiences, educational encounters, cultural messages, and family or church-based interactions. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) helps illuminate how individuals build understanding from the cues around them, while integral ecology provides a moral and spiritual lens through which awareness can deepen into responsibility (Francis, 2015). Together, these frameworks affirm that awareness is not just informational; it is relational, embodied, and transformative, and it holds the potential to activate individual and communal engagement in the care of the planet.

Theme 3: Faith and Environmental Perceptions

Participants shared that their Catholic faith significantly shaped how they perceive the natural world and their moral responsibility toward it. Their interpretations of

environmental care were often grounded in theological teachings and spiritual consciousness, where individuals form meaning by drawing from personal identity, social context, and religious frameworks. The responses also reflect ecological responsibility as inseparable from moral, social, and spiritual commitments. Participant P10 care for creation was a direct moral duty entrusted by God. They viewed environmental protection as rooted in divine intent and human stewardship, "It is our moral value and duty to protect our home for others. God created this world, and we are living in it. So, it is our duty to protect the nature."

Here, moral responsibility is framed not merely as environmental ethics, but as a sacred obligation, consistent with integral ecology's call to recognize creation as a divine gift entrusted to human beings (Francis, 2015). Scriptural references also guided participants' understanding of ecological responsibility, particularly the Book of Genesis in the Bible, which many cited as foundational to their faith-based perceptions. P05 offered a personal reflection:

> I believe in the Genesis, 1:1, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' That itself is saying. He created it for a purpose, when you read down the Genesis, he created man, he gave them the power, but instead of looking at it, we try to destroy it.

P06 responded, "From Genesis it mentions we are the steward, if there is no nature, we can't live here peacefully, so, it is our absolute necessity to take care of the nature." These reflections show how participants made sense of climate responsibility

through Scripture, viewing environmental degradation not just as an ecological crisis but as a spiritual and moral failure, an interpretation strongly aligned with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and integral ecology, both of which stress the role of values and belief systems in shaping perceptions of environmental issues. Participant P10 also mentioned Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato Si*' as powerful affirmations of the Church's role in ecological care. These references highlight how official Church teaching can shape and validate personal sensemaking, reinforcing faith-based ecological ethics:

> I mean, I mean, ehh, it's not me I mean pope Francis I mean he is the one who actually, I mean, who spearheaded the first time I am telling you I mean, maybe I am ignorant. But first time I heard from a Pope saying that I mean if you do not take care of the the universe. I mean the the nature, I mean, then we are not taking over the care of the humanity. Okay? And it is the inherent value of Catholicism, because I mean to protect the nature and to protect human beings. Okay? So, I mean, and then so as a Catholic, I mean. we have a while. I mean, ehh, we have a we have a value, and I believe that I mean the motto is, live and let live. Okay. So you should live yourself and allow others to live. But not only for others. You have to keep this for the next generation.

Participant P07 stated, "I think, Pope Francis' study is very much, is 100% correct. According to me, each environment is connected, and in olden days, people were more environmental-friendly. We should think about it seriously." Their references to papal leadership and the idea that "each environment is connected" resonate deeply with

integral ecology, which views ecological, social, and spiritual well-being as inseparably linked. Beyond official teachings, participants often drew from Catholic saints and traditions to frame their understanding of environmental values. St. Francis of Assisi emerged as a symbol of harmony with creation. Participant P14 said, “I think of St. Francis of Assisi, he definitely emphasized loving, the animals, loving the environment around us, the sun, the moon, everything.” Participant P05 echoed, “We used to do programs in our Catholic Church, we got to plant trees, we got to clean the streets, that was promoted by our church, I hope that plays that much.”

These experiences reveal how environmental values are passed down and enacted in practical ways within the Church community, even if not explicitly framed as climate action. They reflect the process of connecting tradition, action, and belief, and align with community-based ecological witnesses. However, several participants noted that environmental topics were not commonly addressed in their parish life or that faith-based environmental awareness was not clearly emphasized. These observations suggest gaps between Church teaching and local parish engagement. Participant P02 responded, “Honestly, I don’t remember any priest or church activity talking about climate change. Maybe it’s there in the church teaching, but I haven’t heard it much.” Participant P08 shared that while their sustainable habits were rooted in family or culture, they later came to see them as aligned with their faith: “We grew up composting, it wasn’t because the church told us to, but now I see that it connects with faith too.”

Such insights suggest that ecological sensemaking is often formed outside religious institutions but later reconciled with faith identity, revealing a potential opportunity for deeper integration of ecological spirituality in parish settings. Many participants articulated that neglect of the environment violates Christian values, especially when it harms others. This moral framing reflects integral ecology's insistence that caring for the environment is also about justice, love of neighbor, and intergenerational responsibility. Participant P11 said, "If you are exploiting the nature just for your selfish interest and not caring about your neighbor, then, that definitely is not Christian. It's not Catholic." Participant P14 described, "We believe that God wants us to love our neighbors, and caring for our neighbors also involves caring for the environment." Their reflections express a relational view of faith and creation, aligning with both *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015) and identity, spirituality, and social relationships are important in how people process complex global issues like climate change.

Discrepant Views

Some participants expressed a more dualistic view, separating faith and climate as distinct concerns. Participant P01 reflected, "Faith is different from, climate change, that, that is a scientific truth, and the faith is totally different." Participant P15 shared, "Faith should not be mixed, faith cannot be made purely science. Science cannot be made purely based on faith." These perspectives underscore the diverse sensemaking pathways among participants. While many integrated faith and environmental concern, others

compartmentalized them, highlighting the need for sensitive, culturally rooted environmental theology that respects different interpretive frameworks.

Taken together, these responses illustrate that Catholic faith plays a complex and varied role in shaping immigrant perceptions of climate responsibility. For many, faith is a source of meaning, duty, and ecological consciousness, deeply aligned with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the moral-spiritual framework of integral ecology. However, the variation in responses also points to the importance of explicit teaching, modeling, and dialogue in bridging the gap between belief and ecological engagement. While faith provided a strong moral foundation for many participants, their cultural backgrounds and experiences as immigrants added an additional layer of meaning to how they engaged with environmental issues. Insights from participant narratives reveal the influence of cultural background and immigrant identity in shaping how individuals understand and respond to climate change.

Theme 4: Cultural and Immigrant Identity

Participants' reflections revealed how their cultural backgrounds and immigrant experiences shaped their relationship with the environment and informed their engagement with climate issues. These personal narratives highlighted the role of cultural memory, social context, and lived experience in shaping how environmental responsibility is understood and practiced. This aligns with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), which emphasizes how people draw from identity and past experiences to make sense of unfamiliar or complex issues. In parallel, integral ecology emphasizes the

interconnectedness of culture, community, and environment, showing how ecological engagement is embedded in broader patterns of social life.

Many participants described how practices rooted in their cultural upbringing, especially in India, reflected sustainable habits that were not necessarily framed as environmentalism, but as part of daily life. For these individuals, resourcefulness and conservation were modeled behaviors rather than explicit teachings. Participant P09 stated: “Back in Kerala, we didn’t waste anything. We reused everything, not because we were taught to be environmentalists, but because it was our way of life.”

This comment illustrates how environmental behaviors can be deeply woven into cultural norms, even in the absence of formal environmental discourse, reflecting the sensemaking process in which participants reinterpret past cultural practices through the lens of their current environmental awareness. Participant P10 recalled specific environmentally conscious activities from their youth, such as participating in nature clubs or observing local changes in pollution and ecological degradation:

> Uhh, What I say is, I mean, uhh, I don't know how it changed or not, because I mean, even before I came here also, I was very active. the field of environment back in my country. We have a forestry club, we plant trees all over the campuses, so that is, that’s my part there.

Participant P12 offered a personal reflection:

> I used to be in India, and I have moved to the US, when I was little, I didn't find so much of pollution around me, but when I was like 25, 30, I could see, the air

was polluted, the rivers were polluted, but when I moved here, it was very different. The environment was pretty clean.

These experiences highlight how immigrants carry a dual lens, aware of both environmental decline and opportunity. This duality reflects a transcultural dimension where people make meaning by comparing two socio-environmental systems and evaluating their own role within them. As they adapted to life in the U.S., participants often confronted a contrasting culture of convenience and consumerism. Participant P12 expressed a desire to hold onto traditional values of frugality and stewardship, while adapting to a new system that promotes recycling and sustainable practices through policy and infrastructure: “In America, it’s easy to throw things away and buy new. But I still try to live like how my parents taught me, use what we have, don’t waste.” P09 said, “Actually, the laws in this country, encourage us to put recyclable, this country gives a lot of help, I learned from here, not from India. But when I go back, I try to teach them.”

These statements reflect how immigrants negotiate between inherited cultural habits and new social systems, constructing hybrid practices that draw from both. Participants also spoke about communal and relational values embedded in their cultural identity, such as caring for neighbors, family, and the larger community, which they saw as naturally extending to care for creation. These views reveal an interpersonal orientation toward environmentalism, consistent with the relational ethics of integral ecology. For example, P05 said, “In our culture, we think about others, our neighbors, our family. That also includes nature. It’s all connected.” For many, the immigrant journey

itself offered a powerful contrast between different societal priorities and practices. This comparative lens informed how participants understood the role of education, policy, and civic responsibility in shaping environmental awareness. Participant P13 said,

> When I came to U.S. I noticed, there are so many different things like a more awareness. To, you know, ehh, protect the climate. There are so many pledges we take, then, they organize many initiatives. So, from the culture. I noticed I didn't hear much.

Participant P08 emphasized that their immigrant identity encouraged them to take personal initiative in environmental advocacy. They described a sense of shared responsibility for the global ecological crisis, rooted in both their cultural background and their marginal perspective:

> We may be coming from an immigrant background; we probably do look at [the environment] in a different way. We may look at it from a way of seeing it, it's more of us problem rather than a them problem. We may try to take more initiative.

This kind of thinking reflects integral ecology's insistence on shared responsibility and interconnectedness, especially as it applies to vulnerable populations and those often left out of mainstream environmental discourse (Francis, 2015).

Discrepant Views

Not all participants viewed culture or immigrant experience important to their ecological consciousness. Participant P17 offered discrepant perspectives, minimizing the

influence of cultural background and emphasizing a more universal human obligation: “As an immigrant, there is no peculiarity, for as an immigrant, you know, for keeping the safe environment. As a human being, that is my obligation.” Participant P07 explained, “According to me, cultural background doesn’t make much difference, I think that culture needs to be developed.” These alternative viewpoints suggest that while cultural identity is significant for many, it is not uniformly recognized or experienced as a driver of environmental engagement.

Participants’ cultural and immigrant identities played a significant role in how they perceived environmental responsibility, often grounding their practices in frugal, relational, and community-oriented values inherited from their home country. Participants’ cultural practices and immigrant experiences often intersected with generational shifts within families, particularly in how environmental values were transmitted. These individuals drew from past experiences and new environments to reinterpret their ecological roles. And through the lens of integral ecology, we understand that cultural memory, immigrant experience, and faith are not separate, but interwoven elements of a holistic response to the climate crisis. Participant interviews reveal that younger generations are playing a key role in advancing climate awareness, with intergenerational dynamics shaping the extent of ecological involvement within families and communities.

Theme 5: Intergenerational and Youth Engagement

Across the interviews, participants reflected on how generational dynamics, especially youth involvement, shaped awareness and engagement with environmental issues in their immigrant Catholic community. These reflections are aligned strongly with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), which emphasizes how individuals construct meaning within social contexts, especially in response to new or complex realities. They also echoed the insights of integral ecology, which calls for an appreciation of how family systems, generational knowledge, and community education are deeply interconnected in fostering ecological responsibility (Francis, 2015). Many participants observed that younger generations displayed greater environmental awareness, often attributing this to their education and early exposure to ecological values in the American school system. Participant P13 expressed admiration for how climate consciousness is instilled in children at an early age:

> Yeah, one thing I was so surprised to see the young generation here. They are very, you know, cautious about the, the ehh, nature, and I think the the school system over here. They are teaching children at the very young age like they are making them, I mean the awareness they provide the in the school system. I am very proud about it. And the kids are like trying. I mean, they are trying to follow the same. During my childhood that was in the case. I never heard about the word, the recycle. And how does it work? But kids over here they know what is recycle

> means that they I mean, at this younger age, which is good for the nature and for everyone.

Participant P04 contrasted the attitudes of immigrant parents with their American-born children, suggesting that environmental sensemaking differs based on generational experience and cultural adaptation:

> Sure, in our community, is the first-generation community, right? Many people are coming from in, from, from the land of India or Indian subcontinent as the first generation. I can clearly distinctly see the difference between the approach of the first-generation parents and their children. Their children are more receptive about this idea of climate change or environmental issues, than their parents. Why? Because these parents are coming from an environment where there is no environmental protection out there. There is no climate change awareness out there, and they just think that the existing system here is good enough. But, on the, on the other hand, the second generation, the kids who are born and brought up here they have a different perspective, because their training in their school and their colleagues training the, you know, the existing American community. Their interaction with the existing American community basically shaped their view about the environment and the world.

Younger participants were seen as more adaptive, informed, and engaged, suggesting that early formation within a socially and ecologically aware context leads to deeper ecological consciousness. Participant P04 also noted how youth often influenced

their parents' attitudes and behaviors. Intergenerational learning was not one-directional; children were seen as agents of change within families: "And also teaching, the training the children. And that's I believe the children will be more receptive. And the children, through children, too, you can impact. You can, you know, influence your parents." Participant P09 explained, "Yeah, it should start from the house. If, if people are, the children are putting the stuff in the recycle, they will do in the public also. I believe so."

These comments reveal how ecological modeling within the family system can reinforce environmental behaviors and create long-term cultural shifts. Participant P01 described youth as well-positioned to lead parish-based environmental initiatives. Their enthusiasm and receptivity were seen as valuable assets for fostering broader community awareness:

> I think the young people will be more, ahmm, more, umm, willing to work on this climate change front. I definitely think it will be, I mean to, to use that youth venues or youth, I mean forums, or whatever to, to work on the climate change. That will be definitely better, and the older folks who specifically immigrant from, from the, from Kerala, they, they may not give as much, I mean, you may not be able to, you can influence the youth better, definitely.

The church itself was also cited as an important space for fostering youth engagement through faith formation and leadership opportunities. Participant P08 discussed their experience with church-based education as a catalyst for awareness and action:

> You can’t do that right. And so, taking on more responsibility and teaching those younger and educating those younger is a big thing. That's something I have learned through, ahh, through the church community. Actually, one great example is through the Sunday School, CCD, faith formation classes that I was a part of. And, now I help teach, so, those students really look up to all of us, whether we are aware of it or not as role models. And so, the fact is, we have to, ahh, we have to help the younger generation understand these things. So, yeah.

Such responses reflect how faith communities serve as influential social ecosystems, where intergenerational modeling and spiritual instruction can reinforce care for creation, fusing theological commitment with ecological concern. Participant P11 also emphasized the importance of stewardship and legacy, viewing environmental responsibility as a sacred trust passed from one generation to the next:

> Yeah, that’s a that’s a very good question, I think. Umm, I think what we, what we maintain, how we, how we maintain our circumstances and how, and handing it over the way that our God, the Creator, intended to hand over to the next generation.

Participant P16 has the future-oriented concern for children and grandchildren added moral weight to their ecological reflections:

> Oh, what comes to my mind? So, it’s a big, it’s a big question. I believe you cannot answer in few words, ahh, climate change. I personally think about the future. Right? So, when climate change is, it’s all how things are going to impact,

> ahh, not our life, my kids, life and their kid's life. So, I believe climate change. I look we will be fine, but our futures will be in trouble. So, it's a it's the future. It's my kid's life and my grandkids life.

Discrepant Views

Participant P08 expressed uncertainty or skepticism about generational engagement, especially among elders: "And then our older generation more of the adults and umm, senior citizens, they may not be aware of what's going on, or they may not have the knowledge to teach the younger generation about these kinds of issues." Participant P01 questioned whether older community members had sufficient awareness or capacity to engage with climate issues: "Gauge the younger generation's perception or thought process. I can't gauge that. And with the older community, I think it is less." Participant P02 downplayed generational difference altogether, suggesting that the focus should remain on shared stewardship, regardless of age: "Ahh, I don't remember, basically that whatever the, ahh, the environment we got right, we need to pass through, ahh, through, that to the next generation."

These divergent views illustrate that generational dynamics are not always experienced uniformly, and that climate engagement is fluid, shaped by context, exposure, and personal reflection. Participants described how intergenerational relationships serve as both a conduit and a catalyst for climate awareness and action. Youth play an important role in shaping family attitudes through education, modeling, and influence, while older generations often frame their responsibilities in terms of

legacy. This dynamic supports sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) by showing how meaning is constructed through relational and social contexts. Integral ecology is also reflected in the emphasis on continuity, responsibility, and care for future generations. Despite increased awareness among youth and growing interest among parents, participants also encountered significant barriers that limited their ability to act on environmental concerns. The following analysis explores the challenges participants described, including misinformation, competing priorities, and institutional gaps.

Theme 6: Barriers and Challenges to Engagement

Interview responses revealed a range of obstacles that limit climate-related engagement among immigrant Catholics. Participants described how everyday pressures, cultural norms, structural limitations, and knowledge gaps intersect with how individuals interpret and respond to climate change. These reflections reflect key elements of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), which emphasizes how available cues, contextual constraints, and competing priorities shape meaning. They also resonate with Integral ecology, which highlights how the environment is interrelated with social, economic, and institutional realities, influencing awareness.

One prominent challenge involved skepticism and misinformation. Participants shared that climate change was sometimes dismissed as a myth or misunderstood within their community. This skepticism, rooted in mixed messaging, scientific illiteracy, or cultural distance from environmental discourse, complicated individuals' ability to make an informed sense of the issue. Participant P11 explained,

> I think the knowledge belief, I mean belief in the sense. As I said, there are people who think this is not happening right. There are, people think it is. . . Even even in our community, there may be a large number of people, or or at least a 50% of the people may be thinking that this is not a science. This is not happening. It is some some bogus conspiracy theory. So, there are people who thinks both ways.

Participant P13 said, “Some people think it’s just a natural cycle, not something we can control. They don’t believe it’s caused by humans.” These perspectives suggest a fragmented environment, where individuals are exposed to conflicting narratives and lack trusted sources to guide interpretation. This confusion hinders the connection between environmental degradation and personal or collective responsibility. In addition to disbelief, participants pointed to a lack of urgency, describing how day-to-day concerns, such as work, immigration, and family, often take precedence over climate action. These competing priorities narrow the cognitive bandwidth available for engaging with long-term or abstract concerns like climate change. Participant P03 described, “People are more worried about jobs, kids, their visa status. Climate change feels like a luxury topic, not a survival one.” Participant P06 shared, “We don’t have time to sit and talk about the environment. After work and family, there is no energy left.”

Such reflections align closely with the assertion that ecological action cannot be separated from broader issues of social justice and economic vulnerability. Without addressing basic needs, environmental awareness remains out of reach for many. Economic limitations were also seen as a major barrier. Participant P01 shared those

financial constraints restricted their ability to make environmentally conscious decisions, even when they were aware of ecological issues: “Probably I don’t think the immigrant community, because, because they, they, they, they do give a lot of importance to the money. I don’t think any immigrant community will invest, invest heavily or spend money on, on doing that, environmentally right thing.”

Here, the intersection of immigrant identity and limited financial resources creates a practical constraint, one that affects the perceived feasibility of eco-friendly behaviors, and systemic inequalities and access to resources shape individual ecological action. Cultural norms and past experiences were another influential factor. Participant P09 compared their behaviors and habits in India with those adopted in the U.S., describing how local laws, social expectations, and environmental infrastructure shaped their practices:

> It's it’s all law, I think. Here we we are not supposed to put trash. so, we don’t back in India. We don’t care. We put on the trash; I mean on the road as soon as we land in Cochin Airport. You don’t mind putting. I have seen people throwing diaper everything there, but here they are, so here they won’t. So, I think some fear, some rules. We need to establish.

Such comparisons illustrate how social systems influence ecological behaviors, reinforcing sensemaking theory’s (Weick, 1995) premise that behavior is shaped through interaction with rules, roles, and norms. Beyond personal and cultural barriers, several participants pointed to the lack of institutional leadership, particularly within parish

settings. Without visible environmental programs or guidance, climate-related action is often stalled. Participant P11 said, “We don’t have anyone in the church organizing these things. If no one leads, then people don’t act.”

This reflects an absence of communal spaces where people can come together to interpret, discuss, and respond to climate challenges as a faith community. Such communal platforms are essential for fostering environmental commitment and mobilizing collective action. Language barriers and informational overload were also cited as sources of disengagement. Participant P14 noted confusion around where to find trustworthy information or how to act on it: “There is too much information and sometimes it’s confusing. People don’t know what is real and what they can do.” This speaks to information overload, where too many or conflicting inputs disrupt the process of forming clear conclusions. It also highlights a need for curated, culturally relevant environmental education within immigrant communities.

Participant P08 emphasized that lack of environmental education was a root issue. They believed that raising awareness through targeted, accessible learning opportunities would reduce other barriers and empower their community to act:

> I think it’s a lack of knowledge. I think people are not aware that these are things exist and I think that if we were to make the first step and create something, I think people would get very involved after that. But I think, once we ahh, educate the people, the community members, I think we can easily address a lot of these concerns and get more active involved in this thing.

Discrepant Views

Although these barriers were widely acknowledged, discrepant perspectives also emerged. Participant P07 suggested that the challenges were not unique to immigrants or their cultural context, but part of a broader societal issue: “According to me, it is not a, not a one community’s challenge. It is the challenge for the entire nation and in their globe, entire world. It’s, it’s not, only community, but community is part of everything.” Participant P05 emphasized that cultural differences were not the primary barrier, instead pointing to the need for awareness and resources: Umm. Mainly the awareness and resources are the main key point. I don’t see any reason for cultural awareness, because we all are, we are all good into adapting situations, so if we get aware, then we are, we are good to go.

These divergent views underscore the complexity and heterogeneity within immigrant Catholic communities. While many participants experienced social, cultural, and economic obstacles, others framed the issue as a universal challenge requiring education, infrastructure, and leadership across all contexts. Taken together, participants painted a picture of the barriers that shape climate engagement in their communities. Highlighting how immigrant Catholics navigate climate concerns amid competing priorities, misinformation, limited resources, and institutional gaps, these reflections illuminate the layered realities of ecological engagement. Even amid barriers, many participants found ways to live out their environmental values through small, meaningful actions rooted in both cultural practice and religious conviction. The following analysis

presents examples of personal and community-driven climate engagement expressed through these lived experiences.

Theme 7: Personal and Community Action

Participant narratives revealed a range of climate-related actions at both personal and communal levels, rooted in daily decisions, faith-driven motivation, and a sense of intergenerational responsibility. These accounts illustrate how ecological awareness, once internalized, is expressed through intentional behaviors that reflect both moral obligation and cultural adaptation. Participant P02 described small-scale lifestyle changes they have adopted as expressions of environmental stewardship. These changes, though modest, were seen as meaningful responses rooted in everyday awareness and practical ethics: "We try to use less electricity, we recycle, and we walk when we can. It's small, but it's something we can do." Participant P03 spoke about reducing waste, particularly food waste, as a tangible way to live out their Catholic values: Ahh, in my house, food is wasted only if it goes bad. Ahh, my wife and I make every effort to say to me that food is not wasted. So personally, that bothers me a lot. So as Catholics, we have a responsibility to keep that in mind.

These individual actions are not random or incidental. They represent decisions made within specific moral, cultural, and religious frames, practices that help participants align their ecological behavior with their faith and identity. This alignment further reinforces that environmental choices are inseparable from spiritual and communal life.

Participant P09 linked their behavior directly to religious belief and gratitude toward creation:

> Ummm, again. Umm, everything, I mean. How do I say that? I mean we are, we should be thankful to God, we should love our nature, love the animals, love the next generation. I will try to put even small things in the recycle.

These expressions affirm the moral and theological grounding of environmental action. In addition to making personal changes, participants highlighted the importance of modeling behavior as a strategy for community engagement. Participant P13 expressed that environmental learning within families and peer groups often begins by example: "One thing is awareness sessions. Then being a role model, do what you say instead of just preaching. If you bring that into your daily life, the next generation will notice you, and they will follow." Participant P04 said, "One of the things, we teach my children, you have to separate, trash cans, and recycle, we practice that. And we reduced our use of disposable paper, these small actions have a lot of impact."

These insights reflect how people construct meaning not only through internal reflection but also through observing others and participating in shared practices. Participants also envisioned opportunities for community-level action, particularly through parish involvement. Participant P12 described the need for structured environmental initiatives that could build collective momentum: "If the parish supports it, we can do something like a tree planting or a recycling drive. People just need a little push and structure." Participant P02 said, "Yeah, something like, it will be good to

arrange more activities, do planting, plant trees or something, and involve more kids, so that they are active in protecting our environment."

These responses emphasize how shared values and group initiatives reinforce individual awareness and engagement. Parish-based programs, when framed as both faith expression and ecological duty, can help bridge the gap between belief and action, an essential insight from integral ecology. Direct involvement in community efforts was also described. Participant P05 recounted participating in a coastal cleanup, which exemplified the kind of hands-on engagement many hoped to see more of: "We went to the oceanfront and cleaned the bay, taking all day cleaning. So, if you ask me, the question was about how much effect, right?"

Participant P12 suggested expanding the impact through education and advocacy, proposing larger-scale initiatives that go beyond personal actions: "I think we should have some seminars, bring real environmentalists, help our community understand the effects, we should be able to help in small ways, maybe influence the government." Faith emerged repeatedly as a motivating force behind both personal and communal environmental efforts. Participant P17 drew inspiration from Pope Francis and Catholic teachings on creation care: "Yeah. Because, when we talk about, Pope Francis, he's always talk about, the environment, as a Christian, we say, we are the part of the environment."

Discrepant Views

Despite strong motivation, few participants acknowledged that community-wide engagement remained limited, often due to the absence of leadership or established structures within their parish. Participant P06 said, “Maybe, they can. We don’t see that much environmental care in our community. Maybe they are just starting to care, maybe with Pope Francis.” Participant P02 admitted they were not currently engaged in specific actions: “Honestly, I don’t do anything specific now. Maybe I recycle. That’s all. I want to do more.” Participant P07 added: “I want to do something, but I don’t know where to start. Maybe if the church takes the lead, I can join.”

Participant P12 reflected that, although they recognized the value of action, the current level of engagement, both personally and within their community, was insufficient: “I think we could do more right now it’s just a few people who are active, and the rest of us are busy.” Participant P14 said, “In our church, I don’t see a lot happening for the environment maybe just occasional events, but nothing regular.” This reflects a gap, where individual conviction is not yet matched by organizational coordination or communal reinforcement. Without clear narratives, role models, or institutional pathways, even deeply held values may not translate into visible, sustained action.

Taken together, participants’ reflections illustrate how personal responsibility and community context intersect in shaping environmental engagement. Their actions, ranging from recycling and waste reduction to calls for parish-based initiatives, represent

meaningful expressions of ecological stewardship informed by faith, cultural memory, and a desire to model values for future generations. When viewed through sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), these efforts emerge from individuals navigating uncertainty, drawing on identity and lived experience to guide behavior. Framed by integral ecology, they reflect a moral ecology rooted in connection: to God, to others, and to the Earth (Francis, 2015). While individual and familial efforts were evident, participants viewed the Church as a powerful potential driver of broader climate engagement. The final section of the analysis investigates participants' perceptions of the Church's role, highlighting both its current limitations and its potential to foster environmental responsibility within the faith community.

Theme 8: Climate Engagement within Church Settings

Participants' reflections revealed a disconnect between personal ecological convictions and the limited role climate issues currently play within their church communities. While many valued environmental stewardships, they expressed concern that parish settings rarely emphasized or institutionalized climate action. Several participants observed that environmental issues were noticeably absent from church programming and preaching. Despite strong ecological messages in Catholic social teaching, such as *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015), many parishioners reported minimal engagement with these themes during liturgy, education, or events. Participant P01 stated: "Church doesn't give that much importance to climate change. It may be

discussed in some other places, but not really from the pulpit or through any programs we see." Participant P10 shared the following:

> I mean uhh, honestly telling. I mean, I have not heard that a lot in my church, uhh, but I mean definitely, I mean, I am not blaming anyone, because I mean, we are a short community of people, but still, uhh, we can have.

Participant P12 added, "Ohh, within the church community there has not been, or at least I have not been, involved. But I don't think there was. At least I have not been involved, if there are any." These responses suggest a lack of institutional cues and reinforcement, which limits the process of collective sensemaking around climate change. Without visible discourse or leadership from church authorities, many individuals do not perceive climate action as a faith-based priority. This absence weakens one of the core mechanisms by which religious communities form shared meaning and mobilize collective action. At the same time, participants emphasized that parish leadership, especially priests, have the potential to influence environmental awareness if they choose to prioritize it. Participant P04 said, "I think if the priest talks about it more like from the Bible, people will listen. But now it's mostly absent." Participant P01 shared, "Priests, whatever he says carries some weight, definitely can influence the people. But I mean, they don't give that much importance to the climate change things."

Although most participants described minimal institutional involvement, participant P06, P08, and P06 recalled isolated efforts or symbolic gestures that promoted environmental awareness. P06 stated,

> Yeah, I once I have attended a party where we were planting trees in a church, every year I go to a church, they give a plant on every Mother's Day. So now, when I look at my yard, I see most of the flowers come from the church.

Participant P08 shared, "I think I have only participated in one of those events that was done at the DC Church, adopt a highway, we basically picked up all the litter, one spring Saturday morning, it was a great experience." Participant P06 added, "We once had a clean-up day after church, but it was more of a one-time thing. There is no regular effort to talk about or act on climate issues." These examples illustrate the potential for localized environmental action, but they also underscore its inconsistency and informality. Without sustained programs, education, or liturgical integration, even well-intentioned events lack the power to shape long-term ecological commitment, something that must be deeply embedded in church life.

Participants P01 and P12 proposed practical strategies for enhancing climate engagement in their parishes. Their suggestions included integrating creation care into feast days, forming new ministries, and expanding awareness through visuals and educational campaign. Participant P01 stated,

> Dedicated day for that, like we celebrate all the Saints' feast, but we never had a feast day for improving the climate change, priests talk about it, awareness, education, how the amount of resource you are using is negatively impacting the climate.

Additionally, participant P12 indicated,

> I think, we should be able to create another ministry, focused on this work, constant outreach, more awareness, show pictures, videos, this ministry could bring like-minded people and help.

These ideas reflect participants' desire for collective processes within their church communities, efforts that would link theology, ecology, and community practice. This reflects a call to move beyond symbolic action toward sustained pastoral and structural commitment to climate justice. Collaboration with external organizations was also suggested as a means of expanding environmental engagement. P07 expressed, "I think, church also work with the local government, there are some programs, like redistribution, awareness, seminars, church also has to have lot of role like educating their parishioners." Such partnerships represent integrated networks of care and civic responsibility, with church communities serving as bridges between faith-based action and public advocacy.

Discrepant Views

Participants offered discrepant views, suggesting that the absence of environmental programming in church life might reflect broader social dynamics, not just institutional neglect. P14 stated, "Hmm! Honestly, I think, many of our church communities, environmental issues often take up, they are not at the forefront which it is understandable, but maybe in the future." Participant P07 was unsure whether environmental topics belonged in church at all: "I'm not sure if climate change should be a church topic. We come to pray, not to get lectures." Participant P15 stated: "Faith is spiritual. Climate is science. Maybe we should keep them separate."

These comments acknowledge that immigrant Catholic communities may face competing priorities, such as cultural integration, language barriers, or economic stability, that overshadow environmental concerns in the short term. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) helps contextualize this ambivalence, as individuals interpret what matters most based on their immediate contexts, social roles, and perceived relevance of issues. Overall, participants conveyed a strong interest in integrating ecological values into parish life but recognized that such transformation requires intentional leadership, community-wide participation, and theological grounding. While the current level of climate engagement within church settings appears limited, the narratives suggest both a readiness for growth and a theological foundation for deeper action.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a detailed thematic analysis of interviews with 17 church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland, offering insight into how religious belief, cultural identity, and community context shape their perceptions and engagement with the climate crisis. The findings addressed the research question: *How do church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?* Drawing from lived experience, Catholic teachings, cultural traditions, and intergenerational relationships, participants described a complex, interwoven narrative of ecological awareness, moral concern, cultural memory, and institutional constraints.

Eight overarching themes emerged, reflecting multifaceted and evolving ways participants constructed meaning around climate change. Participants frequently interpreted environmental issues through a moral lens grounded in Catholic values, viewing creation care as a spiritual responsibility. Cultural values such as simplicity, frugality, and community interdependence further influenced daily environmental practices, many of which originated from traditional ways of life in Kerala, India. Overall, the findings illustrated how participants actively constructed meaning around the climate crisis through a process of sensemaking shaped by their spiritual, cultural, and social identities.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, multiple qualitative validation strategies were employed, including member checking, NVivo-assisted coding and audit trails, and reflexive journaling throughout data collection and analysis. The application of these methods contributed to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. The use of thick description, verbatim quotations, and deliberate attention to discrepant cases further strengthened the analytical transparency and ethical rigor of the study.

Chapter 5 interprets these findings through sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and integral ecology (Francis, 2015) and examines how these insights contribute to broader understandings of moral reasoning, community responsibility, and environmental justice within religious and cultural contexts. The chapter also discusses implications for social work practice, policy advocacy, and community-based interventions. It concludes

with recommendations for future research aimed at advancing culturally and spiritually responsive approaches to environmental justice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I interpret and synthesize the study's findings, situating them within the existing literature and connecting them back to the original problem, purpose, and guiding research question. I also consider study limitations, offer recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, and discusses implications for positive social change before concluding with a summary. The problem was that marginalized populations, including immigrant communities, disproportionately experience the harms of climate change, yet their localized, faith-informed engagement remains underexamined in empirical research. In response, I explored how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis through the lens of their religious beliefs and cultural identity. The research question guiding this study was: *How do church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice?*

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings contribute eight interrelated themes: (a) climate change understanding and framing, (b) awareness and education, (c) faith and environmental perceptions, (d) cultural and immigrant identity, (e) intergenerational and youth engagement, (f) barriers and challenges to engagement, (g) personal and community action, and (h) climate engagement within church settings. Together, these themes show

that participants integrate empirical observation, cultural memory, and Catholic social teaching to construct environmental meaning and action.

These themes align with the study's theoretical framework, sensemaking theory, and its conceptual framework, integral ecology, and are further developed through the rich narrative evidence shared by participants. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) helps explain how participants drew on cues from lived experience, parish life, and cultural identity to construct their understanding of climate change. Integral ecology (Francis, 2015) illuminates how their moral and spiritual commitments to care for creation connected ecological stewardship with justice and human dignity. Collectively, the themes trace progression from perception and awareness to action and institutional engagement. The detailed interpretation of these findings is presented in the following sections.

Theme 1: Climate Change Understanding and Framing

Participants framed climate change as a scientific reality, a theological–moral concern, or a natural cyclicality. Sensemaking clarifies how empirical cues and religious identity combined into possible narratives; integral ecology illuminates why stewardship and accountability to God emerged as motivators. These findings are consistent with Chapter 2 studies documenting faith-informed environmental concern among immigrant communities. Participants' perspectives on climate change revealed how faith, cultural identity, and environmental justice concerns intersect to shape both perception and engagement, core elements of this study's research aim. Their understandings ranged

from framing climate change as a scientific reality to interpreting it as a theological and moral concern or as a natural occurrence. These interpretive frames influenced not only how participants assessed the significance of the issue but also the forms of action they considered meaningful. This variation reflects the foundational stage of meaning making, where cultural memory, lived experience, and religious worldview merge to create the interpretive lens through which participants respond to climate challenges (see Francis, 2015; Weick, 1995). Revealing the underlying beliefs, values, and knowledge sources that inform these perspectives, the findings illuminate how immigrant Catholics construct climate change narratives in ways that align with or diverge from broader discourses on environmental justice (Chu, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023).

Several participants articulated a clear acceptance of the scientific consensus on climate change, grounding their perspectives in empirically verifiable evidence. For example, participant P10 asserted, “Climate change is not a political, political hoax [sic], but it is based on pure science, and I respect that science.” while participant P04 similarly noted, “Climate change ahh, actually is a real thing, and it’s basically caused by humans.”

These statements demonstrate how participants draw upon scientific authority to frame the issue as a human-caused crisis, reflecting the intersection between empirical knowledge and personal conviction (IPCC, 2023). Other participants relied on lived and place-based experiences to substantiate their views. Participant P15 explained, “In 2018, my ancestral house, got affected by the unusual floods, for centuries has never got flooding to that levels”, using a rare and severe environmental event to highlight the

tangible impacts of climate disruption. Still others incorporated theological framing into their understanding. Participant P09 remarked, “To some extent, I just not look at global warming as our human issue. We are offend the God also”, while participant P10 added, “We are not just stewards of creation, we are also accountable to God for how we live.” These statements show how moral and spiritual responsibility is integrated with scientific awareness in shaping climate engagement, aligning with *Laudato Si*’s call for ecological stewardship (Francis, 2015). Finally, a collective-action perspective emerged in some accounts, such as participant P11’s observation, “Unless we as a whole world work on it, it’s not going to go away”, reflecting a belief in shared global responsibility.

This spectrum of perspectives aligns with sensemaking theory (see Weick, 1995), which posits that individuals interpret complex phenomena through retrospective, socially constructed, and context-bound processes. Participants drew meaning from environmental cues, cultural heritage, and communal religious narratives to frame climate change. For instance, participant P16 compared Maryland’s weather in 2006 to that of 2025, noting, “It’s two different things”, exemplifying how personal observation shapes climate interpretation. Such reflections support Vanderlinden et al.’s (2020) finding that local narratives often merge with scientific accounts to create a holistic climate understanding. Within parish communities, these interpretations were reinforced through shared discourse, illustrating sensemaking as a collective process. In this context, the moral narrative of stewardship presented in *Laudato Si*’ served as a guiding framework,

enabling participants to reconcile scientific evidence with theological imperatives (Francis, 2015).

The conceptual framework of integral ecology (Francis, 2015) further illuminates participants' interpretations by emphasizing the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural, and spiritual realities. Many participants viewed climate change as both an environmental crisis and a matter of divine accountability, aligning with integral ecology's call for ecological conversion and recognition of creation as a sacred trust (Massaro, 2023). This moral-spiritual framing suggests that for these immigrant Catholics, climate change transcends political or technical concerns, becoming a deeply personal and ethical issue. Such findings are consistent with prior research showing that immigrant communities' climate perceptions are shaped by lived experiences, cultural identity, and faith-based values (Chu, 2022; Rami et al., 2023).

Although most participants acknowledged climate change as a reality, they varied in the degree to which they personalized the threat or saw themselves as agents of change (see Lebrón et al., 2023). The presence of skepticism or disengagement among a subset of participants challenges assumptions in the environmental justice and eco-social work literature that moral and theological teachings naturally lead to ecological action (see Szrot, 2020). For instance, participant P07 stated, "I think it's exaggerated. Climate always changed. Why make a big deal now?", reflecting a competing narrative that may limit engagement. Such views highlight the importance of addressing divergent interpretations within faith-informed communities to strengthen climate advocacy efforts.

The immigrant Catholics' framing of climate change is an evolving synthesis of empirical evidence, theological reflection, and cultural heritage. Scientific recognition can coexist with theological convictions; lived immigrant experiences bridge global and local environmental realities, deepening relational concern for creation; and parish communities act as interpretive spaces where moral, cultural, and empirical perspectives converge into shared meaning (Francis, 2015; Weick, 1995).

Theme 2: Awareness and Education

Awareness accumulated through school, media, family modeling, and parish conversations. Sensemaking emphasizes enactment and social verification; integral ecology underscores the formation that links facts to moral action. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 identifies parishes as potential hubs for ecological literacy—an opportunity participants also described. For many participants, awareness of climate change was not the result of a single source of information but rather the cumulative effect of varied experiences over time.

Personal observation, early school lessons, media exposure, and occasional parish activities all contributed to their understanding. This process often unfolded informally, with moments of recognition sparked by seasonal changes, community conversations, or news coverage, and later reinforced by religious and cultural contexts (see Francis, 2015; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). Because awareness shaped how participants interpreted the climate crisis and considered appropriate responses, it played a direct role in answering the research question about the ways faith, cultural identity, and

environmental justice concerns intersect to influence perception and engagement. Some spoke of noticing changes in their surroundings, such as hotter summers or unpredictable weather patterns, while others drew on foundational lessons about greenhouse gases and ozone depletion learned during their school years. In these narratives, awareness functioned less as a static body of knowledge and more as an evolving filter through which participants assessed climate-related issues and envisioned possible actions.

From the perspective of sensemaking theory, awareness reflects the iterative process of constructing meaning from environmental cues, social context, and identity (Weick, 1995). Participants often began with direct personal observations, which were then reinforced, or challenged, by formal education, media narratives, and faith-based discourse. For some, awareness was tied to modeling behaviors and lived example, as expressed by participant P10: "Awareness is the key, we had to model it and to see it, awareness, rules and regulations won't help." This reflects Weick's principle of enactment, in which lived practice within social groups serves as a form of meaning-making and informal teaching (see Vanderlinden et al., 2020).

Integral ecology (Francis, 2015) adds further depth by framing awareness as more than scientific literacy; it is an ecological conversion that integrates environmental, social, and spiritual understanding. Many participants linked awareness to moral obligation and community action, often within family and parish settings. Participant P11 suggested that churches should "educate the scientific fact of it, organize, planting the tree events or, cleaning the roadways", aligning with *Laudato Si*'s call for ecological

education that fosters both understanding and concrete action. This emphasis mirrors Wilkins's (2020) finding that Catholic parishes can be critical facilitators of intergenerational ecological literacy, reinforcing shared responsibility for creation.

The findings are consistent with previous research showing that immigrant communities often develop climate knowledge through a combination of formal schooling, informal community exchange, and transnational experiences (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). Yet, as Gum (2022) noted, marginalized populations frequently face information gaps that hinder sustained engagement, a reality reflected in participants who reported minimal exposure beyond childhood education. For instance, participant P14 shared, "After elementary school, I haven't learned much, just hearing it a little bit in the news." Such accounts suggest that high levels of church involvement do not necessarily translate into consistent access to environmental education, revealing a missed opportunity for parish communities to act as hubs of ecological learning (see Francis, 2015). The parish setting, while currently inconsistent in delivering ecological education, holds significant potential as a sustained platform for fostering moral, cultural, and practical dimensions of climate awareness (see Francis, 2015; Weick, 1995).

Participants also described the range of sources contributing to their awareness. Some relied on academic and scientific literature, as participant P10 explained: "I have learned about climate change, mostly from the scientific journals." Others mentioned media and popular culture, such as newspapers, magazines, or even clothing slogans, "From newspapers, magazines, T-shirts also, people were wearing" (P13). Faith-based

conversations also played a role, as participant P16 observed: “It’s important that we talk to our kids in our church, knowledge gives you wisdom, people need to understand and educate about climate change.” These overlapping channels, personal, academic, media-driven, and faith-based, collectively informed participants’ interpretive frameworks, reinforcing that awareness is not merely the acquisition of facts but an evolving, socially embedded process.

An unexpected finding was the persistence of awareness gaps despite generally high educational attainment and active parish involvement. Several participants noted that climate change is rarely addressed in church settings, contradicting *Laudato Si*’s vision of the Church as an active promoter of environmental awareness (Francis, 2015). This gap underscores that while parishes can be powerful amplifiers of ecological literacy, they remain underused in this role. These findings suggest that awareness must be both learned and lived to translate into meaningful engagement. Cultural and religious contexts can function as amplifiers or filters for environmental information, influencing whether climate knowledge prompts personal or collective action.

Theme 3: Faith and Environmental Perceptions

Integral ecology describes how love of God and neighbor with care for creation, aligning with prior literature on eco-theology and social justice (Francis, 2015). Variation in theological engagement suggests a need for intentional parish formation. For many participants, the lens through which they understood climate change was inseparable from their Catholic faith. Rather than treating environmental issues as purely scientific or

political matters, they interpreted them in theological and moral terms, seeing climate stewardship as both a divine mandate and an act of justice toward others. This faith-centered framing connects directly to the study's purpose of exploring how religious belief, cultural identity, and environmental justice concerns intersect to shape perceptions and responses. In these accounts, scripture, Catholic social teaching, and parish life became touchstones for interpreting environmental challenges. Participant P10 explained, "It is our moral value and duty to protect our home for others. God created this world, and we are living in it. So, it is our duty to protect the nature", echoing the stewardship ethic in *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015). Similarly, participant P05 drew from Genesis 1:1, noting, "He created it for a purpose, but instead of looking at it, we try to destroy it", positioning care for creation as an obligation entrusted to humanity from the very beginning.

From the perspective of sensemaking theory, faith served as an interpretive anchor that organized climate-related information into familiar moral and spiritual categories (Weick, 1995). Participants used theological concepts such as stewardship, sin, and accountability before God to frame climate change as a moral and even eternal concern. Participant P09's observation, "I just not look at global warming as our human issue. We are offend the God also", illustrates how identity and context, central to Weick's framework, shaped meaning making (see Weick, 1995). In this way, religious belief did not merely supplement scientific or experiential knowledge; it reframed the entire problem in terms of spiritual responsibility.

Integral ecology (Francis, 2015) offers additional insight by linking participants' theological interpretations to a broader moral vision that connects care for creation with love of neighbor. Some participants explicitly articulated this link, as when Participant P10 stated, "If you want to see God, look at your neighbor, your own family." This reflects *Laudato Si*'s call for ecological conversion, in which environmental action is understood as part of discipleship. Wilkins (2020) similarly found that this integration of theology and environmental responsibility can motivate believers toward a sustained ethic of ecological care.

The findings align with prior research showing that religious belief can act as a powerful motivator for environmental concern, particularly in immigrant and marginalized communities (see Chu, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). The consistent use of scriptural references and moral language mirrors the eco-theological framing described in *Laudato Si*' (Francis, 2015) and supports Christie et al.'s (2019) observation that faith traditions often provide moral authority for environmental justice advocacy. At the same time, the data complicates this picture. While many participants described a faith-driven obligation to protect creation, others expressed uncertainty about the Church's role in environmental matters or did not connect their beliefs to ecological action, reflecting Gum's (2022) caution that moral imperatives alone may not overcome cultural, practical, or informational barriers.

These varied interpretations reveal that within a single parish community, theological engagement with environmental issues is far from uniform. For some, faith

functioned as an important motivator for climate action; for others, it was a background value without clear practical expression. This variation underscores the need for intentional parish-based ecological formation to translate moral convictions into sustained action. Viewed together, Weick through the sensemaking theory explains the process by which participants drew on religious narratives to interpret environmental concerns, while Integral ecology explains the substance of those interpretations, linking climate stewardship to justice, community, and the sacredness of creation. In the immigrant Catholic context, climate perceptions are therefore not only informed by external education or lived experience; they are deeply embedded within theological meaning systems that shape moral orientation and influence the likelihood of action.

Theme 4: Cultural and Immigrant Identity

Sensemaking integrates migration history into present judgments, and integral ecology values cultural wisdom as an environmental asset. Participants' views on climate change were deeply rooted in the cultural traditions, migration histories, and transnational experiences they carried with them to Maryland. Their environmental perceptions did not emerge in isolation; instead, they reflected a blending of values and practices from their countries of origin with Catholic teaching in their U.S. parish life. This blending directly relates to the research's aim by showing how cultural heritage and immigrant experience work alongside faith to shape both how climate change is understood and how action is considered. Several participants spoke vividly about environmental changes in their homelands, drawing direct comparisons with the United States. Participant P15 recalled,

“In 2018, my ancestral house, got affected by the unusual floods, for centuries has never got flooding to that levels.” These transnational comparisons expanded their climate awareness beyond the immediate local context, adding both spatial and historical depth to their interpretations. For many, cultural norms such as simplicity, resource conservation, and community solidarity had instilled a sense of environmental responsibility long before they encountered formal climate discourse in the U.S.

These narratives align closely with sensemaking theory, which holds that meaning is shaped through retrospective interpretation of past events (Weick, 1995). Immigrant participants often looked back to their formative experiences in their country of origin, whether rural agricultural work, community-based resource sharing, or enduring climate-related disruptions, and used these memories as reference points for understanding current environmental challenges in Maryland. This was not simply an individual process. Cultural stories, values, and observations were shared and reinforced within families and parish communities, becoming part of a collective memory that guided environmental attitudes and decisions. Participant P16 illustrated this continuity by remarking, “When I came to Maryland in 2006, the weather, and now in 2025, it’s two different things”, linking personal migration history to evolving perceptions of climate change.

Integral ecology (Francis, 2015) offers further insight into these accounts by highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental, cultural, and social realities. Many participants’ cultural traditions such as frugality, communal resource care, and respect for

the land resonated with *Laudato Si*'s call for ecological conversion and solidarity with those most vulnerable to environmental harm. These traditions often emerged from subsistence practices or rural living in their home countries, fostering an ethic of interdependence with nature. As Christie et al. (2019) note, such cultural wisdom is not only compatible with Catholic ecological teaching but can enrich it, creating a hybrid environmental ethic that bridges continents.

The data are consistent with prior studies showing that immigrant communities often retain sustainable practices rooted in their cultural heritage, which can positively influence climate engagement in their host countries (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). This was evident in participants' emphasis on shared responsibility and collective well-being, which mirrors eco-social work literature's call for culturally grounded approaches to environmental action (Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022). Yet the findings also reveal structural and social constraints similar to those noted by Mason et al. (2022), including limited political influence and systemic inequities that can make it difficult for immigrant communities to fully express their ecological values through public advocacy.

One unexpected pattern within this theme was the generational divide in climate awareness. First-generation participants often relied on memories and cultural practices from abroad, while younger, U.S.-born or U.S.-educated family members tended to draw more heavily on formal education and digital media for their understanding of climate issues. Participant P03 reflected, "I think the younger generation, probably because they hear about it in school, older generation is not very proactive." This divergence suggests

that cultural identity is dynamic, interacting with educational and social contexts to produce both opportunities for cross-generational learning and potential tensions in family and parish discussions about climate action.

Taken together, the interplay of cultural heritage and immigrant experience in this theme demonstrates that these identities are not passive background factors but active interpretive lenses. Through the combined insights of sensemaking theory and Integral ecology, it becomes clear that immigrant Catholics' environmental views are enriched by transnational perspectives, reinforced by cultural values of simplicity and communal care, and shaped in ways that can either bridge or widen generational differences. In this way, cultural and immigrant identity becomes a vital element in how climate change is perceived, morally evaluated, and translated into action.

Theme 5: Intergenerational and Youth Engagement

Sensemaking theory and integral ecology both emphasize care for future generations, supporting intergenerational programming in parish life. Within immigrant Catholic families, climate awareness and action often emerged at the intersection of generational experience and dialogue. Younger members, shaped by school-based climate education and digital media exposure, tended to express a stronger sense of urgency than their older relatives, whose environmental views were more frequently influenced by cultural tradition and life experience in their country of origin. This contrast speaks directly to the study's research aim by illustrating how faith, cultural heritage, and contemporary environmental discourse converge, and sometimes clash,

across generations. Participant P03 observed, “I think the younger generation probably have better awareness, they hear about it in school, I don’t think the older generation is very proactive”, while participant P08 reflected on an early classroom encounter: “I was in elementary school, teachers, discussing, how CO2 emissions and pollution causes climate change, that was my first introduction.” These accounts suggest that for many youth, climate consciousness is cultivated earlier and more consistently than it was for their parents.

Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) helps to explain how these generational differences play out in everyday interactions. Conversations between parents and children, or between younger and older parish members, became sites where climate meaning was negotiated. Youth often brought scientific knowledge and policy-oriented perspectives into these discussions, while elders contributed moral reasoning and cultural narratives rooted in faith and tradition. In some families, these exchanges led to greater mutual understanding and reinforced a shared sense of responsibility; in others, the gap persisted, with older members less inclined to embrace the urgency felt by younger ones. Such dynamics reflect Vanderlinden et al.’s (2020) finding that climate narratives frequently blend scientific and local knowledge but require active negotiation when worldviews diverge.

The moral significance of these generational interactions is underscored by integral ecology (Francis, 2015), which frames ecological responsibility as an act of solidarity with those who will inherit the planet. Concern for the well-being of younger

generations, along with their formation in both scientific and moral dimensions of environmental care, resonated strongly among participants. Participant P11 proposed that parishes could "educate the, next generation as well, have planting, or cleaning, activities, encouraged within the church," aligning with *Laudato Si*'s call for ecological education that is participatory and action-oriented (Francis, 2015). Such initiatives could bridge generational divides by offering shared experiences that unite cultural heritage, faith practice, and environmental stewardship.

These findings parallel previous research showing that immigrant youth often serve as cultural and informational bridges, mediating between their parents' traditional frameworks and contemporary climate discourse (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2023). In eco-social work scholarship, this bridging role is recognized as vital for mobilizing collective action in marginalized communities (see Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022). Yet, as Mason et al. (2022) caution, generational differences can also create obstacles when priorities diverge, a challenge reflected here in participants' acknowledgment of awareness gaps among older community members.

One unanticipated finding was the belief among some participants that environmental education was the responsibility of schools rather than families or the church. This perspective may limit the integration of ecological teachings into everyday family life and parish programming. Others, however, modeled environmentally responsible behaviors, such as composting or recycling for their children, demonstrating

that intergenerational learning can happen informally through example as well as through formal instruction.

Together, sensemaking theory and integral ecology reveal that generational interaction in these communities is both a potential source of enrichment and a site of tension. When youth act as catalysts, integrating scientific understanding with faith-based moral imperatives, they can help shape a shared environmental ethic that bridges age-related differences. Conversely, without intentional spaces for intergenerational dialogue, whether in families or in parish life, these differences may persist, limiting collective engagement. For immigrant Catholic communities, fostering intergenerational ecological learning is not simply an educational goal; it is a moral and cultural imperative that can strengthen both environmental stewardship and community cohesion.

Theme 6: Barriers and Challenges to Engagement

Time constraints, economic pressures, ambiguity about effective actions, and inconsistent parish emphasis limited follow-through. Sensemaking highlights competing identities and incomplete cues; integral ecology points to system-level constraints that require multi-level responses. Barriers and challenges to climate engagement among church-going immigrant Catholics emerged from a mix of structural, cultural, and theological factors that often limited participants' ability to act. While earlier findings showed strong moral convictions and growing awareness, these results reveal the realities that can constrain follow-through. Economic pressures, competing priorities, and limited time due to demanding work schedules frequently took precedence over environmental

action. Some participants also struggled to reconcile ecological responsibility with personal values, such as comfort and material aspirations. Participant P07 admitted, “The climate change, it’s always a big concern for me, but I’m not against luxury or anything.” Others viewed climate change as distant or irrelevant to their immediate lives, as participant P02 explained, “I don’t feel it affects me directly. So, I haven’t really thought about it much.” These perspectives underscore how barriers, whether rooted in perception, lifestyle, or circumstance, can dilute motivation even when awareness exists.

From the perspective of sensemaking theory, these barriers arise when the meaning-making process is incomplete or shaped by conflicting cues (Weick, 1995). In the absence of reinforcing signals, such as visible local climate impacts or strong parish-based ecological teaching, awareness may not translate into urgency or action. Some participants appeared to resolve tensions between ecological values and competing desires by minimizing the seriousness of climate change, echoing Vanderlinden et al.’s (2020) observation that individuals often negotiate between priorities and identities when interpreting environmental issues. Skepticism persisted among a small subset, even within faith communities aligned with *Laudato Si*’, suggesting that theological agreement does not always lead to personal conviction or behavior change.

Integral ecology offers a moral and systemic lens for understanding these barriers. Francis (2015) acknowledges that ecological conversion is hindered by entrenched economic inequalities, cultural habits, and institutional silence, patterns reflected in participants’ experiences. The absence of formal parish initiatives was noted by some,

such as participant P01, who observed, “We do talk about [it], within the church community friends”, but without structured programming or consistent emphasis, climate discussions remained peripheral to parish life. This echoes Wilkins’s (2020) critique of missed opportunities for Catholic institutions to integrate environmental teaching into community practice. In line with prior research on marginalized and immigrant populations (see Chu, 2022; Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023), these findings show that economic realities, social inequities, and limited institutional support can stall ecological engagement. Addressing these barriers will require approaches that link climate action to culturally resonant practices, faith-based values, and accessible opportunities for participation.

Theme 7: Personal and Community Action

Household practices and episodic parish initiatives enacted ecological identity. Consistent with Chapter 2, small actions embedded in routines can scaffold sustained engagement when institutions provide support. Personal and community action emerged as a concrete expression of how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland translate ecological awareness and moral conviction into lived practice. These actions ranged from household recycling and composting to participation in parish-based clean-up days and tree-planting initiatives. While often modest in scale, they reflect intentional efforts to align daily life with the moral imperatives of stewardship and care for creation. Participant P10 described family engagement in sustainable habits, noting, “They help in doing composting, they help in doing recycling, by seeing it, they understand.” Such

practices not only reduce environmental impact but also serve as informal educational tools, especially for children. On the communal side, some participants expressed interest in expanding these efforts through church-led initiatives, such as participant P11's suggestion to "organize, planting the tree events, or cleaning the roadways."

From the perspective of sensemaking theory, these localized efforts demonstrate how meaning is reinforced through enactment (Weick, 1995). Participants did not view their behaviors as isolated gestures but as tangible enactments of their beliefs. The act of recycling or composting becomes a way of making environmental concern visible in everyday life, thereby reinforcing both personal identity and shared family values. This dynamic aligns with Vanderlinden et al.'s (2020) observation that community-level climate engagement often grows from everyday actions that integrate lived experience with accessible opportunities for participation. In these cases, the household and parish act as micro-environments where environmental meaning is constructed and sustained.

Integral ecology provides an additional interpretive layer, framing these actions within a holistic moral vision that unites care for the environment with care for others (Francis, 2015). For many participants, ecological responsibility was inseparable from Christian discipleship. Participant P10 expressed this integration succinctly: "Live for a sustainable world, if you want to see God, look at your neighbor." Such statements echo *Laudato Si*'s call for ecological conversion, where environmental stewardship is understood not merely as environmental policy but as a lived expression of love,

solidarity, and justice. The moral imperative thus elevates even small-scale efforts into meaningful acts of faith.

The findings are consistent with research showing that immigrant and marginalized communities often begin ecological engagement at the household or neighborhood level due to limited access to broader advocacy platforms (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022). Similar to prior studies, participants here combined Catholic teaching on creation care with cultural values of frugality, resourcefulness, and mutual responsibility (Chu, 2022; Rami et al., 2023). Modeling sustainable practices for younger generations emerged as a recurring theme, echoing eco-social work literature that emphasizes intergenerational learning and relational influence as catalysts for long-term behavioral change (Breen et al., 2023; Gum, 2022).

One unexpected finding was that several participants framed their personal and local efforts as sufficient contributions in themselves, without necessarily seeking to link them to systemic advocacy or policy change. While this perspective underscores a sense of agency and empowerment, it also highlights a gap between individual action and collective structural transformation. This suggests that faith-based organizations, particularly parishes, could play a greater role in connecting local practices to broader initiatives that address the root causes of environmental degradation. Bridging this gap, institutions could amplify the impact of personal and community engagement.

Taken together, these findings show that personal and community action among immigrant Catholics is both a reflection of and a reinforcement for ecological identity.

Sensemaking theory explains how everyday practices enact meaning, while integral ecology situates those practices within a moral framework that values solidarity, justice, and sustainability. Small-scale actions, when culturally resonant and faith-driven, can serve as powerful entry points into broader environmental engagement. Yet the potential for parishes to expand these efforts into coordinated, collective initiatives remains largely untapped. This underscores the importance of viewing local ecological behaviors not as endpoints, but as building blocks for communal and systemic transformation.

Theme 8: Climate Engagement within Church Settings

Parish cues shaped interpretations of the Church's ecological priorities. Integral ecology advocates parishes as centers for environmental education; variability reported by participants reflects implementation gaps noted in the literature. Climate engagement within church settings emerged as a significant factor influencing how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland understood and acted on environmental issues. While many participants expressed strong personal commitment to ecological responsibility, they also described parish-level engagement as limited, informal, or inconsistent. This perceived gap between Catholic ecological teaching and parish practice shaped how parishioners interpreted the Church's priorities on climate change and, in some cases, influenced their willingness to participate in collective initiatives. Participant P16 expressed a clear expectation for institutional involvement, stating, "It's important that we talk to our kids in our church, people need to understand and educate about climate change." In contrast, participant P01 observed that climate discussions occurred primarily

in casual settings among friends within the parish, suggesting the absence of structured programming or coordinated action.

From the perspective of sensemaking theory, parish life functions as a meaning-making environment where the Church's priorities are interpreted through institutional cues and communal interactions (Weick, 1995). When leadership integrates creation care into homilies, ministry activities, or parish events, it sends a strong signal that environmental stewardship is integral to Catholic identity. Conversely, when such engagement is minimal or absent, parishioners may interpret climate issues as peripheral to the Church's mission, even if Catholic teaching affirms their moral urgency. The variability in participants' perceptions reflects the interpretive ambiguity that can arise when parish-based ecological messaging is inconsistent.

The parish setting is also a social and spiritual hub where climate-related meaning is co-constructed. Liturgy, small groups, social justice ministries, and even informal fellowship serve as opportunities to reinforce ecological values. However, without intentional leadership, these opportunities may pass by unused. For some participants, personal convictions about environmental care were formed independently of parish influence, while others relied heavily on church programming as a source of moral guidance. This divergence underscores how institutional action, or inaction, can directly shape the sensemaking process within faith communities.

Integral ecology provides the theological and moral rationale for greater parish involvement, emphasizing that care for creation is inseparable from the Church's broader

mission of human dignity and justice (Francis, 2015). Pope Francis has called for parishes to serve as "centers for ecological education" and catalysts for cultural transformation, blending spiritual formation with practical ecological action. Suggestions from participants, such as organizing tree planting, hosting clean-up drives, or integrating environmental topics into catechetical programs mirror this vision. Participant P11's recommendation to "organize, planting the tree events, or cleaning the roadways" reflects an openness to faith-based ecological initiatives that unite communal participation with environmental impact.

The literature reinforces this pattern of unused potential within Catholic parishes. Wilkins (2020) notes that while *Laudato Si*' provides a comprehensive framework for ecological engagement, its translation into parish practice is inconsistent, often depending on pastoral leadership, resource availability, and competing institutional demands. This aligns with findings by Chu (2022) and Mason et al. (2022), who observe that faith-based climate advocacy can be constrained by organizational priorities unrelated to environmental issues. While some parishes have successfully integrated creation care into their mission, others address it only sporadically, leaving parishioners to form their ecological commitments independently.

One unexpected finding in this study was the degree of intuitive alignment between parishioners' expectations for church engagement and the core principles of integral ecology, even among those unfamiliar with *Laudato Si*'. This suggests that Catholic ecological teaching resonates with deeply held values related to community,

justice, and moral responsibility, regardless of formal catechesis. For parish leaders, this represents a significant opportunity: by building on these shared values, they could create programs that both honor tradition and address urgent ecological challenges in culturally relevant ways.

Ultimately, the relationship between parish engagement and climate responsibility illustrates the interplay between individual belief and institutional action. Sensemaking theory helps explain how parishioners interpret the Church's stance through observed behaviors, while integral ecology articulates why creation care must be central to Catholic life. Together, they highlight that parish engagement is not merely a supportive backdrop to personal ecological action but a formative force that can either amplify or diminish faith-based environmental responsibility. Intentional integration of climate education, advocacy, and action into parish life would not only reinforce doctrinal commitments but also provide a powerful model for how immigrant Catholic communities can embody environmental stewardship in both word and deed.

Synthesis of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive and engage with the climate crisis, considering their religious beliefs and concerns for environmental justice. Interpreted through the lenses of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the Catholic principle of integral ecology (Francis, 2015), the findings provide a rich and multifaceted understanding of this question.

Integrating the Themes to Address the Research Question

Across the eight themes, participants demonstrated that their perceptions and engagement with the climate crisis emerge from a dynamic interplay of scientific understanding, cultural heritage, theological conviction, generational experience, and institutional influence. The first two themes, Climate Change Understanding and Framing and Awareness and Education, revealed that a blend of empirical observation, formal education, and religious worldview shaped participants' initial perceptions of climate change. Some participants grounded their understanding in scientific evidence, while others framed climate change as a moral and theological issue rooted in their Catholic faith. This dual framing underscores the role of both secular and faith-based knowledge systems in shaping environmental sensemaking.

Themes 3 (Faith and Environmental Perceptions) and 4 (Cultural and Immigrant Identity) highlighted that Catholic social teaching and immigrant cultural values often reinforced one another. Participants drew on scriptural references, such as the Book of Genesis, and on *Laudato Si*'s call to care for creation as a divine mandate. At the same time, cultural traditions from their countries of origin, such as simplicity, frugality, and community interdependence, provided practical and moral grounding for environmental stewardship. This synergy between theology and cultural heritage illustrates how immigrant Catholics integrate multiple identity layers into their environmental engagement.

Themes 5 (Intergenerational and Youth Engagement) and 6 (Barriers and Challenges to Engagement) revealed that intergenerational relationships are both a source of opportunity and tension. Younger generations, more frequently exposed to climate education in schools and through social media, often acted as information conduits to older family members. Older generations contributed moral and cultural context, but some also expressed skepticism or competing priorities that limited their engagement. Structural and practical barriers, including economic pressures, limited parish programming, and perceived lack of direct impact, further constrained ecological action, even among those with strong moral convictions.

Themes 7 (Personal and Community Action) and 8 (Climate Engagement within Church Settings) illustrated that participants are engaging in small-scale personal behaviors, such as recycling and composting, and are open to collective parish initiatives. However, parish involvement in ecological action was perceived as inconsistent or minimal, leaving many participants to rely on informal networks or family modeling to sustain engagement. When the parish did not provide clear or visible leadership on environmental issues, participants' climate-related sensemaking often remained localized to household or friendship circles rather than expanding into organized, collective action.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Integration

Weick (1995), through the lens of sensemaking theory, explains how participants construct meaning about climate change by integrating diverse cues from personal experience, cultural memory, religious teachings, and community discourse. Across

themes, the process of sensemaking was socially and contextually shaped by the parish environment, family interactions, and broader cultural narratives. For example, participants who observed environmental changes both in Maryland and in their ancestral homelands integrated these transnational experiences into their climate understanding, reinforcing the retrospective and identity-driven nature of sensemaking. The theory also helps explain why some participants, in the absence of strong parish cues, deprioritized climate engagement despite personal awareness. Without institutional reinforcement, the process of sensemaking sometimes stalled at the level of awareness rather than moving toward collective action.

Integral ecology (Francis, 2015) provides the moral and theological framework for interpreting participants' narratives. Many participants framed ecological care as a sacred responsibility, viewing stewardship of creation as inseparable from love of neighbor and protection of human dignity. This alignment with *Laudato Si*' was evident even among those who did not explicitly reference the document, suggesting that Catholic ecological teaching resonates intuitively with parishioners' values. Integral ecology also sheds light on participants' desire to see parishes act as hubs for ecological education, advocacy, and community action. Where such engagement was absent, participants identified it as a missed opportunity to embody Catholic social teaching in practice.

Applying both frameworks, the findings reveal that participants' environmental engagement is not a singular or uniform process but an evolving synthesis of moral

reasoning, cultural heritage, lived experience, and institutional context. Sensemaking theory helps explain how participants arrive at their understandings through the integration of multiple, sometimes conflicting, narratives. Integral ecology helps explain why these understandings matter morally and theologically, framing climate action as an essential expression of Catholic discipleship and social justice.

Patterns, Tensions, and Unexpected Findings

Several cross-cutting patterns emerged. First, while participants generally acknowledged the reality of climate change, the framing of its causes and urgency varied widely. Second, cultural traditions and theological beliefs often reinforced one another, producing a coherent moral framework for action. Third, intergenerational dynamics provided pathways for knowledge exchange but also revealed gaps in urgency and engagement.

Unexpectedly, skepticism persisted among some participants despite strong Catholic ecological teaching and parish involvement in other forms of social justice. In addition, while small-scale actions were common, there was little evidence of sustained engagement with broader advocacy or policy change, reflecting both structural barriers and limited institutional leadership. Finally, many participants expressed expectations for parish engagement that closely mirrored the principles of integral ecology, even when they were not familiar with the formal language of *Laudato Si*'.

Comprehensive Answer to the Research Question

In answer to the research question, this study found that church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland perceive the climate crisis through a blended lens of scientific awareness, cultural heritage, and Catholic moral teaching. Their engagement is primarily expressed through personal and family-level actions, often informed by intergenerational dialogue and grounded in a sense of moral responsibility to God and neighbor. However, engagement is constrained by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, including limited parish-based ecological initiatives.

Through the lens of sensemaking theory, these perceptions and actions emerged from an interpretive process that integrates multiple sources of meaning, personal experience, faith-based teaching, cultural memory, and social context. Through the lens of integral ecology, these understandings reflect a theological imperative to care for creation as part of Catholic identity and a commitment to social justice. Together, these frameworks reveal that meaningful and sustained climate engagement in this community depends on reinforcing moral convictions with accessible education, culturally resonant practices, and visible institutional leadership.

The findings suggest that immigrant Catholic parishes have significant untapped potential to become centers of ecological education and action. Drawing on the cultural wisdom, theological resources, and generational diversity within their congregations, these parishes can bridge the gap between awareness and collective action, advancing both environmental stewardship and social justice in alignment with Catholic teaching.

Limitations of the Study

This research employed a generic qualitative design with semistructured interviews to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland regarding climate change engagement. Although this design was well-suited to capturing in-depth, context-specific narratives, it is inherently limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by memory recall, selective disclosure, or social desirability bias. The interview format allowed participants to articulate experiences in their own words, but it also depended on their comfort level and willingness to discuss potentially sensitive topics, such as their political views, religious beliefs, or migration histories. The research did not employ longitudinal methods; as such, it captured a snapshot in time rather than documenting changes in climate engagement over a longer period.

Sampling Limitations

The participant pool was composed of immigrant Catholics attending church within a specific geographic area in Maryland. While purposive sampling ensured that all participants met the inclusion criteria, the homogeneity of the group in terms of religious affiliation, geographic region, and immigrant status limited the diversity of perspectives represented. The sample size, though adequate for qualitative depth, means that important variations in age, socioeconomic background, length of residency in the United States, and levels of parish involvement may not be fully captured. Moreover, participants were

drawn from those willing to volunteer for the study, which may mean that individuals less engaged with environmental issues were underrepresented.

Transferability and Generalizability

The findings of this qualitative study are not intended to be statistically generalizable. Instead, they offer context-specific insights into the ways immigrant Catholic communities in one region of the United States make sense of and act on climate change. Because participants were drawn from a relatively homogeneous population of church-going immigrant Catholics, the findings reflect this shared context. However, as no demographic data were collected, transferability is limited because the absence of demographic profiling constrains readers' ability to situate the results within broader populations. While readers and practitioners in similar contexts may find resonance with the themes, transferability to other faith traditions, immigrant groups, or geographic regions must be approached with caution. A thick description of the research context and participants' experiences has been provided to allow readers to make informed judgments about applicability in other settings.

Researcher Bias and Positionality

As the researcher, my own positionality inevitably influenced the study. My faith background within the Catholic tradition and my prior involvement in environmental advocacy informed both the framing of the research questions and my interpretation of participant narratives. While these experiences provided valuable cultural and theological insight, they also carried the risk of shaping the coding and thematic analysis in ways that

reflected my own commitments. Recognizing this, I employed deliberate reflexive practices, including journaling after interviews, revisited transcripts multiple times to identify and mitigate bias.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Explicit acknowledgment of my dual identity as both a scholar-practitioner and a member of the faith community under study was critical to maintaining transparency. My Catholic faith background enabled rapport-building with participants, particularly when discussing concepts drawn from *Laudato Si*' and integral ecology. However, it also required vigilance to ensure that participants' voices, rather than my own theological interpretations, shaped the findings. Reflexive memos were used throughout the analytic process to track how my values and experiences might be influencing data interpretation. These memos were reviewed alongside coded transcripts to identify areas where my assumptions might be unintentionally privileging certain perspectives over others.

Steps Taken to Ensure Trustworthiness and Rigor

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of this study by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, whereby participants reviewed their transcripts to confirm accuracy of transcribed interview notes. Transferability was supported by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research setting, interview contexts, and enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other cultural, social, or faith-based contexts.

Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting methodological decisions, revisions to the interview protocol, and coding procedures, ensuring transparency and allowing replication by future researchers. Confirmability was achieved through systematic linking of raw data, coding steps, and theme development within the audit trail, triangulation across transcripts, verbatim quotations, and analytic memos, and ongoing reflexive journaling to document positionality, decisions, and evolving insights, thereby minimizing bias and ensuring that the findings authentically represented participants' lived experiences.

Additional Considerations

The culturally homogeneous, single-parish sample constrains transferability; purposive sampling recruitment may introduce self-selection bias; videoconference interviews reduce access to nonverbal cues; limited demographic detail restricts subgroup analysis; and my shared cultural/faith background necessitated ongoing reflexive bracketing.

Recommendations

Grounded in the findings, I offer recommendations for practice, policy, leadership, and future research that align with Walden University's mission to advance positive social change through scholarship, service, and systemic transformation. Interpreted through the lenses of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and integral ecology (Francis, 2015), the results highlight opportunities for social workers, parish leaders,

policymakers, and researchers to engage immigrant Catholic communities in ecological care at multiple levels.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Advancing the Grand Challenges and Eco-Social Work

The findings connect directly to the Grand Challenges of Social Work, particularly advancing social justice, ensuring healthy environments, and strengthening the social response to climate change. Integrating insights from eco-social work and green social work, practitioners can better address the intersection of environmental change, migration, and faith-based identity. The findings from the research indicate that immigrant Catholics construct environmental meaning through faith, culture, and intergenerational concerns, which underscores the need for culturally and spiritually grounded approaches.

Direct and Family-Level Practice

At the individual and family level, participants described ecological actions such as recycling, conserving resources, and teaching children about care for creation. Social workers in direct practice can strengthen these behaviors by framing them within Catholic values of stewardship and the common good, reinforcing ecological responsibility as both a spiritual duty and a pathway to resilience.

Community Practice

At the community level, parish engagement with environmental issues was often limited or inconsistent, even though participants viewed parishes as trusted spaces. Social

workers can play a facilitative role in developing parish-centered programs such as intergenerational climate dialogues, community gardens, *Laudato Si'* study groups, and youth-led creation care activities. These initiatives integrate cultural heritage with Catholic teaching, strengthen community bonds, and promote positive social change through collective action.

Advocacy and Justice

Participants' experiences also reflected broader structural barriers, including limited institutional engagement. Social workers can respond through environmental justice advocacy by amplifying the voices of immigrant parishioners in policy discussions, building coalitions between faith-based and secular organizations, and promoting equitable access to environmental resources. In doing so, practitioners embody Walden's vision of equity and social change while advancing Grand Challenges related to environmental change and social justice in climate decision-making.

Faith-Based and Culturally Sensitive Practice

The analyses further revealed that participants drew simultaneously on Catholic teaching and immigrant cultural traditions in their understanding of climate change. Social workers can incorporate these insights into practice by co-creating interventions with clergy and cultural leaders that are both spiritually resonant and culturally grounded. Such efforts reflect eco-social work's emphasis on context-specific practice and build pathways for ecological engagement that honor heritage and faith.

Recommendations for Policy

The findings also point to important implications for policy. Expanding language-accessible resilience resources, supporting parish-based sustainability projects, and developing diocesan guidelines that scaffold ecological initiatives would create a more robust infrastructure for environmental engagement. Policymakers at the local and state levels could also strengthen inclusion by inviting parish representatives to participate in climate resilience planning committees, ensuring immigrant Catholic voices are represented. Environmental policy bodies, in turn, could collaborate with dioceses to co-create outreach programs and resilience workshops integrating scientific knowledge with Catholic moral teaching, increasing accessibility and building trust. Such collaborations ensure that immigrant communities are not passive recipients of climate initiatives but active contributors to shaping environmental solutions.

Recommendations for Church and Diocesan Leadership

Parish and diocesan leadership also have an important role in fostering ecological engagement. Participants consistently reported looking to clergy for guidance, yet many noted that parish efforts were inconsistent or absent. Leadership could respond by designating a *Laudato Si*' coordinator in each parish to oversee ecological programs, embedding ecological themes in homilies and catechesis, and organizing parish-wide initiatives that merge immigrant cultural traditions with Catholic social teaching. Establishing support groups where immigrant families can share experiences of environmental change, exchange strategies, and strengthen resilience would further

embed ecological stewardship into parish life. Such actions would transform parishes into centers of environmental education and community resilience, consistent with Catholic social teaching.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study highlight several important directions for future research. First, further investigations should examine how immigrant Catholics in other regions of the United States, or across different Catholic rites and denominations, construct ecological meaning. Comparative studies could reveal both shared themes and context-specific variations, providing a broader understanding of faith-informed environmental engagement. Second, longitudinal and participatory research designs are needed to explore how ecological identity develops over time within immigrant Catholic families and communities. Studies that track the influence of parish cues on household behaviors, or that involve parishioners as co-researchers in shaping ecological initiatives, would provide deeper insights into causal relationships and sustainable change.

Third, future work should investigate the social and cultural dynamics that influence ecological engagement. Mixed-methods research could systematically map the barriers and facilitators to climate action within immigrant Catholic communities, ensuring that strategies remain responsive to both cultural heritage and theological commitments. Scholars might also explore how transnational experiences of weather and climate shape adaptive practices in immigrant contexts, as well as how clergy leadership styles influence parish-level engagement. Finally, generational differences in ecological

sensemaking warrant further study. Research that compares youth, middle-aged, and elder parishioners could inform targeted engagement strategies designed to bridge gaps in perception and action across age groups. Such inquiries would deepen the evidence base for faith-informed eco-social work and expand knowledge on how cultural, spiritual, and ecological identities intersect.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Walden University (n.d.) defines positive social change as "a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies." This study's findings align directly with this mission by demonstrating that church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland possess untapped potential to lead in climate engagement through faith-informed, culturally grounded, and community-centered action. Through the interpretive lens of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the moral framework of integral ecology (Francis, 2015), the findings illustrate how climate engagement in this community can advance social justice, ecological sustainability, and cultural empowerment simultaneously.

The findings reveal that immigrant Catholic communities, often marginalized in both policy and public discourse, already engage in ecological care at the household and interpersonal levels yet face structural and institutional barriers to broader participation (see Lebrón et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2022; Rami et al., 2023). Recognizing and amplifying these existing capacities, social workers, faith leaders, and policymakers can

reframe these communities as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of environmental programs. Parish-based ecological ministries, intergenerational climate dialogues, and culturally resonant public campaigns can position immigrant Catholics as visible leaders in local environmental justice initiatives. Such empowerment aligns with Walden's vision of promoting dignity, agency, and participation for marginalized groups.

Conclusion

Through its focus on immigrant Catholic communities in environmental discourse and action, the findings contribute to Walden's mission of developing scholar-practitioners who create sustainable solutions to social problems. The empowerment of marginalized communities, the integration of ecological responsibility with faith, and the insistence on equity and inclusion in climate responses represent actionable pathways to create systemic, lasting positive change. In doing so, these findings demonstrate how local, culturally grounded initiatives can advance global sustainability goals, bridge divides between secular and faith-based environmental actors and contribute to a more just and resilient future.

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how church-going immigrant Catholics in Maryland understand and engage with climate change, and how their faith traditions, cultural heritage, and parish contexts influence these interpretations and actions. Anchored in sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and the moral framework of integral ecology (Francis, 2015), I sought to examine not only what participants believe about climate change but also how they interpret these beliefs through the lens of

Catholic teaching, immigrant experience, and parish life. Through semistructured interviews, I aimed to capture the lived experiences of a community often absent from mainstream environmental discourse yet potentially positioned as a powerful force for ecological justice.

The findings reveal that participants' environmental engagement is strongly shaped by moral and theological convictions. Many understood climate stewardship as a core tenet of Catholic faith, grounded in the belief that caring for creation is inseparable from caring for the poor and protecting human dignity. Engagement was often expressed in modest but consistent personal and family actions, such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and teaching environmental values to children, underscoring the role of households as primary sites of ecological practice. Participants also described moments when parish activities, cultural traditions, or homilies reinforced these commitments, illustrating how faith communities can act as catalysts for environmental responsibility. Yet the study also found that structural barriers, limited parish programming, and inconsistent leadership diminished opportunities for collective action.

These insights contribute to social work scholarship by expanding the application of eco-social work, environmental justice, and green social work frameworks to faith-based immigrant contexts. The findings demonstrate that environmental engagement cannot be understood solely in terms of individual attitudes or access to resources; it must also account for cultural meaning-making, theological framing, and institutional signals. Through this study, I explored how parish life and Catholic social teaching can deepen

environmental engagement, offer social work a culturally attuned model for integrating environmental justice into practice, advocacy, and community development.

The findings of this research matter because it amplifies voices that are rarely centered in climate discourse and social work research yet are deeply invested in the moral and social dimensions of environmental care. Situating immigrant Catholics as active agents rather than peripheral stakeholders, the findings challenge prevailing narratives about who leads and who participates in climate action. Its potential impact is far-reaching: in practice, it calls for culturally and theologically grounded interventions that resonate with community values; in policy, it advocates for partnerships between faith institutions and civic bodies to co-create inclusive climate strategies; and in future scholarship, it opens new pathways for exploring the intersection of faith, migration, culture, and ecological responsibility.

In a time when climate change is both a global crisis and a profoundly local reality, these findings affirm that solutions must be as diverse and interconnected as the communities they serve. Aligning environmental action with deeply held faith traditions and cultural heritage, communities can cultivate sustainable change that is morally compelling, socially equitable, and ecologically sound. In doing so, the path moves closer to a vision where environmental justice is not an abstract goal, but a living reality rooted in the dignity of every person and the flourishing of the planet. The findings contribute a culturally and theologically grounded pathway for social workers, parish leaders, and policymakers to advance environmental justice with immigrant Catholic communities.

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Appendix A: Prerecruitment Questionnaire

Prerecruitment Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in our study on how faith and culture influence environmental engagement. Please answer the following questions to determine your eligibility.

Your responses will remain confidential, and participation is voluntary.

Name (required):*(First and last name):*

_____

Phone Number (required): *(For scheduling purposes only):*

_____

Email Address (required): *(For contacting and sharing information only):*

_____

Date (required): (Date of completing this form):

_____

Age: Are you 18 years or older?

Yes

No

Residency: Do you currently reside in Maryland?

Yes

No

Religious Affiliation: Do you identify as a Catholic?

Yes

No

Immigrant Status:

a. Are you a first- or second-generation immigrant?

Yes

No

Parish Involvement: Are you actively involved at St. Alphonsa Syro-Malabar Catholic Parish, Halethorpe, MD?

Yes

No

Note*:* Your personal information, such as name and contact details, will be used only for scheduling purposes and will not be linked to your responses in any research reports.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction to Participants

"Hello, my name is Tison Thomas, and I am a Ph.D. student at Walden University. I am conducting a study exploring the impact of climate change on immigrant Christians in the United States and investigating effective mitigation strategies to raise awareness within this population. I deeply value your willingness to participate in this research. Your insights are crucial to understanding the unique experiences of this community and will contribute to shaping future public policies."

Confidentiality and Anonymity Measures

"Confidentiality and anonymity are key priorities in this study. Your responses will be treated with the utmost care. To protect your identity, all data will be securely stored and coded, ensuring it cannot be linked back to you. Any quotes or ideas included in the study will be anonymized to maintain your privacy."

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

"Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time during the interview or afterward without any consequences or explanations required. This will not affect your relationship with Walden University or the researcher in any way. Your autonomy and comfort are central to this research process."

Do you have any questions so far, or can I clarify anything I discussed so far?

Transition to the Interview

“I understand your time is valuable, so if you don’t have any further questions, we can proceed with the first question.”

1. How does your faith influence the way you understand and think about the world around you?
2. Can you describe how participating in church activities has shaped your thoughts about caring for the environment?
3. Are there any teachings or experiences within your faith that have encouraged you to think about nature and the environment?
4. What comes to mind when you hear the term "climate change"?
5. Have you noticed any changes in the environment, such as weather patterns or pollution, that affect you or your community? If so, can you share your thoughts on this?
6. In what ways, if any, do your beliefs as a Catholic relate to the idea of caring for the environment?
7. How are environmental issues, like changes in the climate, discussed within your church community?
8. Can you share an example of how your church or community has responded to environmental concerns?
9. Have you participated in any church events or programs related to the environment? If so, what were your thoughts on them?

10. Pope Francis talks about the idea that everything in nature is connected. How do you see this idea reflected in your own life, faith, and culture?
11. How has your experience as an immigrant shaped your views about caring for the environment?
12. What challenges, if any, does your church or community face in addressing environmental issues?
13. In your opinion, how might cultural differences or being part of an immigrant community influence the way environmental issues are understood or approached?
14. In what ways, if any, does your faith inspire or guide you to take care of the environment or help others do the same?
15. What role do you think your church could play in supporting the community's efforts to care for the environment?
16. What types of programs or activities do you think could help people in your community learn more about taking care of the environment?
17. How could these programs be designed to better connect with the values and experiences of immigrant Catholic communities?
18. What changes, if any, would you like to see in your church or community to encourage more people to get involved in environmental efforts?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or thoughts on faith, culture, and the environment?

20. What suggestions would you offer to your church or other organizations to help people in your community care for the environment?

Appendix C: Resources for Participants Experiencing Psychological Distress

If a participant exhibits acute psychological distress during the study, the researcher will pause the session and provide immediate referrals to the following support services:

Maryland Crisis Hotline

- **Contact Information**: Dial 988 or 1-800-422-0009
- **Description**: Available 24/7, this hotline provides immediate assistance for individuals experiencing mental health crises, emotional distress, or suicidal thoughts.

Behavioral Health Services at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center

Contact Information: 410-550-0104

Description: Offers comprehensive mental health and counseling services, including crisis intervention and ongoing therapy, to individuals in Maryland.

Catholic Charities of Baltimore – Mental Health Services

- **Contact Information**: 667-600-2000
- **Description**: Provides culturally sensitive mental health counseling and support services, including therapy for stress, anxiety, and trauma.

Local Emergency Room or Urgent Care Centers

- **Description**: Participants experiencing severe distress will be encouraged to visit their nearest emergency room or urgent care facility for immediate care.

2. **Follow-Up Procedures**

    - The researcher will follow up with participants within 48 hours of the session to ensure their well-being and confirm they have accessed appropriate care if needed. Participants will also be reminded of the availability of these resources for ongoing support.

Appendix D: Codebook Extracted from NVivo

Name	Description
Acknowledgment of Integral Ecology but Skepticism	Agrees with the holistic view but doubts the actual action.
Affecting the Underprivileged	Recognition that climate change disproportionately impacts low-income or marginalized populations.
Appreciative of Nature	Expressing gratitude or admiration for the beauty and value of the natural world.
Authentic Transformation	Authentic environmental care must be rooted in sincere internal conviction.
Awareness of Climate Change	Knowledge of the impact of the climate crisis
Awareness-Practice Discrepancy	Awareness is high, but action is lacking in both countries.
Biblical Reference to Nature	Quoting or referencing scripture that speaks about nature or God's creation.
Caring for the Environment	Care for the environment by practicing environmentally friendly activities
Challenges in Addressing the Climate Crisis	The things that prohibit people from participating

Name	Description
Challenges in the home country	Difficulties encountered in one's country of origin related to environmental conditions or response.
Church Leadership	The role, stance, or actions of clergy and institutional leaders regarding environmental matters.
Church's role in Environmental Stewardship	The church's perceived responsibility and participation in promoting environmental care.
Clergy as Influencers with Limited Environmental Focus	Priests are respected but not vocal on environmental issues.
Climate change and the Common Good	Climate change as a shared responsibility aimed at promoting collective well-being and justice
Climate Change and Science	Understanding of climate change based on scientific research or evidence.
Climate Change as Global Warming	Associating climate change primarily with global temperature rise.
Climate Change as Natural Disasters	Identifies hurricanes and flooding as signs of climate change.
Climate Change as Social Topic	Discussing climate issues when prompted by media or events.
Community Action	Community involvement in addressing the climate crisis

Name	Description
Concern for Future Generations	Worry or consideration about how environmental degradation will affect children or grandchildren.
Concerns about the Next Generation	Whatever we do or don't do will affect the next generation
Continued Environmental Concern	Belief that humanity remains on a harmful environmental trajectory.
Cultural and Faith Integration in Immigrant Communities	How faith and cultural identity influence each other in shaping environmental perspectives within immigrant groups.
Cultural Shifts in Environmental Values	Changes in environmental attitudes or behaviors due to migration or exposure to new cultural norms.
Daily Environmental Practices	Describes everyday eco-friendly behaviors like recycling or cleanliness.
Disconnect Between Faith and Environment	Perceived gap between religious teachings and environmental responsibility.
Disparity in climate impact	Uneven distribution of climate change effects across regions or populations.
Early education on environmental issues	Introducing environmental awareness during childhood through schooling or community programs.

Name	Description
Environmental advocacy	Promoting policy, awareness, or action in support of environmental protection.
Environmental Change in the Home Country	Climate changes and its impact in the home country where the participant came from.
Environmental Effects of Pandemic	Observations or reflections on how COVID-19 impacted the environment (positively or negatively).
environmental justice	Concern for equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, especially for vulnerable communities.
Faith aligns with social issues	Faith aligns with social issues
Faith and Environment connection	Seeing faith as a motivator or lens for understanding and caring for the environment.
faith and environmental ethics	Connects religious values or scriptures to environmental responsibility.
Faith and Science as Separate Realms	Views climate change as scientific and separate from religious belief.
Faith and Stewardship	Framing environmental responsibility as a spiritual duty to care for God's creation.
Faith-Connected Climate	Direct link between one's religious beliefs and climate change awareness or action.
Faith-Guided Ethical Living	Living according to ethical principles inspired by one's religious values, including environmental responsibility.
Faith-Informed Stewardship	Environmental care rooted in religious teachings or doctrine.
Faith-Driven Compassion	Helping others is a core faith value.
Faith's Role in Social, Not Environmental Issues	Faith is seen as proactive in social justice but not ecology.
Financial Constraints on Eco-Action	Cost sensitivity limits climate-conscious behavior.

Name	Description
Gaps in What the Church Does	These are the things that are missing in the church's response to the climate crisis.
General Environmental Awareness	Demonstrates broad concern or observation about the climate or sustainability.
Generational and Situational Engagement	Disasters prompt engagement; the older community is more vocal.
Gradual Changes to the Climate	Observations of slow or subtle environmental shifts over time.
Health Impacts of Climate	Recognition of how climate change affects physical or mental health.
Household Practice of Environmental Stewardship	Demonstrates consistent personal and family practice of avoiding waste.
Human Impact of Climate Change	The belief or observation that human activity contributes to environmental damage.
Impact of law on Environmental Issues	Discussion of how regulations, or lack thereof, affect climate and environmental practices.
Individual Practices to Address Environmental Issues	Actions taken by individuals to mitigate environmental harm (e.g., conserving energy, avoiding plastic).
Industrial Pollution	Pollution from factories, construction, or other industrial sources contributes to environmental degradation.
Integral Ecology Awareness	Understanding the concept that environmental, social, and spiritual issues are interconnected.
Lack of Awareness	Limited knowledge or understanding of climate change or environmental issues.
Lack of Environmental Involvement	No direct participation in eco-related church activities.
Lifestyle Shift Post-Migration	Abandoning prior eco-habits due to convenience.
Limited Church Engagement	Acknowledges minimal emphasis on climate in church discussions.
Limited Knowledge of Integral Ecology	Unfamiliarity with the concept of integral ecology as defined in faith-based environmental teachings.
Love Your Neighbor Equates to Caring for the Environment	Viewing environmental responsibility as an extension of love and duty toward others.
Media as a Source of Climate Awareness	Learning about climate change through newspapers and media outlets.
Moral and Ethical Duty	Belief that it is morally right to care for the earth and act against environmental harm.

Name	Description
Need for Environmental Education	There is a desire or call for increased learning opportunities about climate change and sustainability.
No Connection Between Faith and Nature	View that religious practice and environmental issues are unrelated or separate concerns.
Observed Climate Change Over Time	Personal experience of environmental changes such as temperature, rainfall, or seasons.
Passionate About the Environment	Strong emotional commitment to environmental protection.
Perceived Temperature Changes	Observation of rising temperatures both in the U.S. and in India.
Personal Impact of Climate Change	How environmental changes have affected the participant's life or community directly.
Politics and Environment	Linking climate issues with political discussions or polarization.
Pollution due to a Change in the Environment	Noticing increased pollution as a result of climate or ecological shifts.
Religion as Moral Foundation	Connecting religion with general well-being but not directly with climate change.
Role of the Church in Climate Change	Expectations or critique of how the church addresses or fails to address environmental issues.
Role of Youth	Highlighting young people's engagement, leadership, or concern for the environment.
Shift in Environmental Behavior as an Immigrant	Changes in one's eco-friendly habits after migrating to a new country.
Stewardship and Respect for Nature	Treating the environment with care as a form of respect and responsibility.
Strategies to Address the Climate Crisis	What the church could do more to address the climate crisis
Sustainable Practices from Homeland	Describes an environmentally friendly lifestyle in India.
Taking Care of our Surroundings	Emphasis on cleanliness, maintenance, and general care for one's local environment.
Theological Basis for Environmental Care	Religious or doctrinal foundations for environmental concern.
Transnational Climate Awareness	Climate consciousness that spans both the country of origin and the U.S.
U.S. Vs Homeland Environmental Awareness	Comparing environmental attitudes or practices between the U.S. and one's home country.
Use of Nature for Health Reasons	Belief in or practice of using nature (plants, walking, fresh air) for physical or mental health.

Name	Description
Value of Recycling	Sees recycling as positive and increasingly common.
Views as an Immigrant	The kind of behaviors that shape the participant as an immigrant
Visual Imagery of Environmental Destruction	Climate change is visualized through damage to coastal regions and property.

Appendix E: AI Engagement Statement

In alignment with Walden University's OASIS recommendations for transparency regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital writing tools in scholarly work, I provide the following disclosure:

Tools Used: ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly

Purpose of Use: These tools were used exclusively for language editing, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence-level phrasing to improve readability and clarity.

Scope of Use: The tools were not used to generate research content, analyze data, develop arguments, or write substantive portions of this dissertation.

Author Responsibility: All conceptualization, analysis, interpretation, and final composition are my own. Any suggestions provided by ChatGPT or Grammarly were critically reviewed, revised, and approved by me before inclusion in the final document.

This statement is provided to ensure complete transparency regarding the use of AI and digital tools in the preparation of this dissertation.