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The purpose of this research is to analyze partnerships of a public elementary school among faith-based organizations. Research methodology consisted of an in-depth case study of a public elementary school and its partnerships among faith-based organizations in a rural community in North Carolina. All members of the clergy of the faith-based organizations, the principal of the school, members of the School Improvement Team, members of the Missions Committee, director of the tutoring program for English Language Learners, the English as a Second Language teacher, teachers in the school, volunteers, and parents of English Language Learners were interviewed as part of this qualitative study.

Results of the study showed that the public elementary school enjoys a strong partnership with the congregations located in the school's neighborhood. The data analysis revealed that the partnerships are influenced by the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of American society and the culture of a rural community. Interpretation of the data also revealed that one of the outcomes of the building of social capital in the school's families and students is increased parent involvement in the school setting. This was true especially in the case of the English Language Learners' families. Families believe that the school is a safe, nurturing learning environment for their children and that the teachers care about their students.

Other significant findings are the need for the School Improvement Team to address and identify a strong teacher-leader to serve as a liaison between the school and local congregations. The School Improvement Team also needs to recruit parent representatives to serve from the Asian and Latino communities. There is also a need for the school and partnership leaders to examine the feasibility of implementing an after school tutoring program for students who score a Level I or II on their End-of-Grade tests. Additionally, the knowledge gained from this study will be used to help other public schools implement partnerships with faith-based organizations.

A CASE STUDY OF A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S PARTNERSHIP  
WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

“When you go to college,” the mantra stated by my father and mother while I was growing up; echoed for many years and through many professional accomplishments. To my father, Mr. Herman Faulkner, who did not complete high school, and my mother, Mrs. Ramelle Faulkner, who I honor with the writing of my dissertation. It is because of their encouragement and Christian example that I am who I am today personally and professionally. It is why I accepted the calling of educating and working with young people.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
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Events occur in our lives that lead us down specific paths. I thank God for the paths my personal and professional life has taken because I have encountered many exciting and passionate pursuits on this road. This academically and professionally challenging experience has been worth its weight in gold and many of the rewards are untold.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Spread across the United States, communities dot the landscape. Some communities are part of large, metropolitan areas and other communities are nestled in small, rural areas. No matter the size of the community, there are areas of our country where the land is barren and there is little hope of accessing the American dream for the citizens who inhabit this area. Isolated from their more affluent neighbors, these citizens dream of a better reality for their children.

Schools are the one agency that some families in a community interact with. To these families who interact with the school, the school can be a beacon of hope in a beleaguered community. Within many of these communities are also local congregations that see a need and want to help members of their community attain their dreams and become productive members of society. Whether the congregation decides to work to solve the community's problems in a global manner or work to better the community in a more intimate fashion, there is a need for partnerships to be formed among the school and faith-based organizations located in the community.

Partnerships between public schools and faith-based organizations can be one avenue to provide the "awakening of the dry bones" of hopelessness (Warren, 2001) into the building of hope and social capital in these small, rural communities. In this research study, I outline the need to study partnerships among schools and faith-based

organizations. This study will focus on a public elementary school located in a small, rural area in the southern region of the United States of America.

### **Problem Statement**

A missionary zeal such that a church congregation professes to have in setting up these partnerships is not enough. For these partnerships to be successful, the characteristics of successful partnerships must be included in the parameters (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). As the former principal of this elementary school, two of the congregations approached me to continue the partnerships that were in place before I arrived. As a new administrator, I was thrown into working with groups of people in these two partnerships whose purposes had been set prior to my coming to the school. I wondered how I effectively work as a member of these partnerships and the leader of the school. What are some of the best practices that we should be employing? I understand the needs of my students in my school, yet how we forge a partnership that benefits all involved? I knew that in one of the congregations, the volunteers were White, middle class, power brokers in the community. How would they work with our poor and minority students in the school? Not all of our families practiced the Christian religion. Would this issue cause problems in working together in the partnership? What tensions would we have to address? Would overt proselytization on the part of the volunteers be an issue? Looking to the literature, I found very little research about partnerships between schools and religious organizations.

The church I attend sits directly across the street from the school. I knew, firsthand, many of the needs of the students and families in the school community. I

attend a Protestant church filled with people who want to do something to make the community better. At the same time, many of these individuals are employed full time and see needs from a global perspective. The individual needs are invisible to them. This invisibility might be because their children do not attend this elementary school or because it is sometimes easier to not recognize a need that you feel unprepared to handle. Because my children attended this elementary school, I heard the stories they came home and told. I knew that there were families struggling to feed their children, maintain a roof over their heads, or meet basic survival needs. At the same time, our Sunday school class was very good at sponsoring a family at Christmas. But what happens after Christmas? There are 364 other days in the year that this family must survive. The family must continue to meet basic survival needs. I struggled with this issue, but did not have an answer.

The next time that I began to think seriously about school and faith-based organization partnerships was when I assumed my position of Director of Student Services in our school system. Obtaining donors to our annual School Tools campaign that is sponsored by a television station in a nearby large, metropolitan city was a challenge. The partners and major drop-off sites for the campaign were local Food Lion stores and the Honda dealership. While our community has several Food Lion stores, we have one Honda dealership that is located on the far side of town and does not encounter much general traffic. Also, our local economy had deteriorated because our community experienced massive layoffs in the areas of textile mills closing, a large aluminum manufacturer ceasing to operate, and other layoffs that became part of the economic

decline. The previous school year, our district had identified 86 families as homeless and there were many other families who would not be able to afford school supplies for their children for the upcoming school year. I approached the local churches and recruited their help in our School Tools campaign and it was successful.

One of the goals of this study is to understand what the characteristics of an effective partnership between a school and faith-based organization are and how can we use what we learn to strengthen other partnerships in this arena. I knew as a principal that there were many benefits our school and students could gain from this partnership, but how should we proceed? In the review of the literature, we will see the value of partnerships. It is interesting that there is vast research about partnerships with schools and parent and community and civic organizations (Baker & al, 1999; Bazzoli & al, 1997) but a void in the area of partnerships with faith-based organizations. I contend that the conclusions reached through my study will better enable schools and faith-based organizations to create effective partnerships. This information can be shared with new principals who are beginning their tenure as school administrators and are examining the idea of creating or maintaining partnerships with community organizations and faith-based organizations specifically.

### **Magnitude of the Task Ahead**

Why do schools seek to form partnerships or collaborations with outside agencies including faith-based organizations? Forming, growing, and maintaining these partnerships expends valuable time, energy, and skills on the part of school

administration, staff, parents, community leaders, and other educational stakeholders.

Melaville (1998) states that

The sheer magnitude of what we ask of these institutions [schools] ‘to promote learning, prepare a workforce and create a citizenry’ puts them at the heart of our communities and endows them with special status...An active, engaged community – has an enormous role to play in supporting the schools’ mission.  
(p. 6)

School leaders have found that “promoting learning, prepar[ing] a workforce and creat[ing] a citizenry” (Melaville, 1998, p.6) are daunting tasks that cannot be accomplished alone. Stakeholders in the community must join together and empower those people who live in the community who feel powerless to attain their dreams. Members of the community are comprised not only of the families who attend the local elementary school but senior adults, young families whose children are too young to attend school, local businesses and financial institutions, retired adults, and local congregations. These empowered community members must assume responsibility for themselves and their livelihoods and build the resources within our students so that they become successful citizens in a global economy (Melaville, 1998).

While much research has been done in the area of school and community partnerships, there is a gap in the literature that explores the collaborations between public schools and faith-based organizations. This review of the literature will explore the kinds of partnerships found between schools and the community with a focus on faith-based organizations; the legal, political, and ethical issues that these partnerships must navigate; the characteristics of an effective partnership; the frameworks of social capital

and how cultural and class diversity affect the school community; and the outcomes of these partnerships.

### **Definition of Partnership**

In Chapter 2, Review of the Literature, I will define the word “partnership” and the linkages that are available to schools and faith-based organizations. One of the main reasons that schools and other organizations partner together is to build social capital in the community. While building social capital is not a “magic bullet” that will solve all of the challenges that a community faces, it does empower members of the community to take ownership of problems and solutions in their community. These empowered citizens become advocates for their families and themselves and change agents in society (Alfred, 2009; Lockhart, 2005; Warren, 2001).

The legal aspect of school and faith-based partnerships is also important. While the courts have weighed in on the legality of using public monies to support sectarian schools (Mitchell v. Helms, 2000), it is also important to examine the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 that is also known as “charitable choice” and how this legislation could impact school and faith-based organization partnerships.

One of the ways to measure whether or not a partnership is effective is to examine the outcomes of the partnership. In the literature review, I will present research-based outcomes from faith-based organization and community partnerships that are deemed

successful.

This review of the literature leads to the questions I investigate in my study:

- How do the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships among faith-based organizations and schools affect the educational programs in a rural, public elementary school?
- How does the frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership with a faith-based organization?
- What cultural factors in the rural setting influence partnerships among public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations?

### **Context of the Study**

#### **Chapter I**

Chapter I sets the stage for my study. I am interested in this topic because of my current position as Director of Student Services and the aspects of my job that deal with schools and forming partnerships. At one of our elementary schools, I have helped the school and local congregations connect to form a partnership that will begin next year. As principal several years ago of the elementary school I am studying, I worked with two of the three faith-based organizations involved in the partnership. Because I was “in the fire” at the time, I never stopped to think about how effective the partnerships were and how could we make them more effective. Currently, I am involved at the ground level in forming a partnership with one of our middle schools and a local mental health agency to set up a day treatment program at the school. Researching effective partnerships between community organizations and schools will enable me to better understand what the

literature says helps to make a partnership effective and the cycles through which these partnerships evolve.

### **Chapters II and III**

Chapters II and III comprise the literature review of my topic of study. Forming a partnership between a rural, public, elementary school and faith-based organization is the basis of my study. The literature is very extensive regarding the topic of partnerships and partnerships between the school, family, and community. However, this study would not be complete without examining the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of this topic and how they impact the educational programs in a public elementary school. At the same time, I must consider that a school is a place where learning and the value of all children are recognized and nurtured. Diversity of class and culture is a part of the public school setting in today's society. The next segment of the literature review examines the issue of how the framework of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect the school community and the need for partnerships to be formed. Last, I cannot ignore the fact that the school is set in a rural community. There are many cultural factors in the rural setting that influence the school and the forming of partnerships with the community. This segment of the literature review examines this issue. The argument to support forming partnerships among public schools and faith-based organizations is brought together when possible outcomes of the partnership are discussed. Concluding the section is a graphic organizer of how the factors mentioned above impact the notion of partnerships among public schools and faith-based organizations.

## **Chapter IV**

Chapter IV is the methodology section of study. Beginning with the primary and secondary research questions, I then define the key concepts of the study. A description of the research setting is provided. Data collection methods are outlined and the interview protocol is included. A table shows the relationship between the interview protocol questions and the research questions so that the reader can easily ascertain the relationship to the concepts in my study. The chapter ends with a description of the data analysis strategies I used, my research subjectivities, trustworthiness of the methodology, and the benefits and risks to the participants in the study.

## **Chapter V**

Chapter V is the description and data analysis of the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School (pseudonym) and First Presbyterian Church (pseudonym). I describe the partnership's activities and analyze its effectiveness against the backdrop of legal, political, and ethical considerations; rural characteristics; and dimensions of social capital.

## **Chapter VI**

Chapter VI describes and analyzes the data I collected about the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church (pseudonym). I describe the partnership's activities and analyze its effectiveness in regards to legal, political, and ethical considerations; rural characteristics; and dimensions of social capital.

## **Chapter VII**

Chapter VII describes and analyzes the data I collected regarding the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church (pseudonym). I describe the partnership's activities and analyze its effectiveness in regards to legal, political, and ethical considerations; rural characteristics; and dimensions of social capital.

## **Chapter VIII**

Chapter VIII analyzes the data to compare and contrast the partnerships among Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church. Placed against the backdrop of legal, political, and ethical considerations; rural characteristics; and dimensions of social capital, I seek to determine areas of strength and need in the partnerships.

## **Chapter IX**

Chapter IX states the conclusions I reached in my study and implications for the future of these partnerships with the school and future study. Undertaking a study of partnerships among a rural, public elementary school and faith-based organizations is an idea worth examining. This is especially salient when this partnership is examined against the factors that will impact the partnership's success. Conducting a study for study's sake is an important academic endeavor. However, it is a sacred duty of educators to research avenues that can be used to benefit the students in our charge and attaining their life's dreams and goals.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: PARTNERSHIPS AND THE LEGAL, POLITICAL, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Building partnerships among public schools and faith-based organizations is a noble undertaking. While there is little in the literature regarding these partnerships, there is a plethora of research regarding partnerships between the school, community, and family. In the following literature review, I endeavor to examine the importance and kinds of partnerships that are in practice in the community. I then take this information and examine it against the backdrop of the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships among faith-based organizations and public schools and how this can affect the educational programs in a rural, public elementary school. I next explore what the literature states about the frameworks of social capital and how do cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership with faith-based organizations. Finally, I look at what the literature explains as cultural factors in the rural setting that influence the partnerships among public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations. Next, I examine the outcomes of these partnerships and their effects on families and the school community.

#### **Importance of School-Community Partnerships**

Society has long recognized that schools, families, and communities are the socializing agents in our society. These spheres of influence that converge and overlap to influence our children help them reach their educational goals (Epstein et al, 2002). At

the same time, changing family demographics in our society; demands on working parents in the workplace; and diverse student populations command a multi-faceted approach to educating our young people. Schools are faced with an array of demands that impact both academic and social learning and require resources beyond what each entity can provide alone. Independently, schools and families cannot provide the resources that children need in order to become productive members of society. School-family-community partnerships are one way to combat these problems and generate social capital that promotes students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. These connections do not constrain themselves to geographic boundaries, instead they transcend traditional boundaries to envelope all those who care to be involved in the partnership (Sanders, 2001).

### **Types of Linkages Between School and Community**

When I examined the literature about the various partnerships involving schools that exist, I found various types of collaboration occurring in today's communities. Schools may link themselves to community businesses for a variety of reasons and those partnerships differ in focus, scope, and content. Another linkage between the school and community is with primary service organizations such as churches or a local service club or senior centers. Sanders (2001) also found that schools form partnerships with universities; government and military agencies; cultural and recreational organizations; and individuals in the community. These collaborations provide resources and social support to youth. Activities found in these partnerships are mentoring; tutoring; job shadowing; academic enrichment; providing services, equipment, and supplies to

students; and the building of relationships between members of the organization and the schools. Integrating schools and specialized service organizations such as health clinics and social services agencies provide parents with access and support for their children in one localized place, thus making the services easier and more efficient to access.

Working together, these activities lead to improved student outcomes, both academically and socially.

### **Characteristics of Successful Partnerships**

For any partnership to succeed, it must be a collaborative effort. Roussos and Fawcett (2000) define a collaborative partnership as “an alliance among people and organizations from multiple sectors such as schools and businesses working together to achieve a common purpose” (p. 369). The partnership also commits to empower the stakeholders involved (Swick, 2003) so that articulated goals and missions are accomplished. These temporary networks of equal representation from various segments of the community pursue a joint action (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008). Out of concern regarding specific community issues such as teen pregnancy, housing, and child abuse these collaborative networks work together to build a stronger community.

### **Collaborative Networks**

In the world outside of education, research has explored two types of collaborative networks. One coalition is that of public and private stakeholders that focus on public health and community planning. The other coalition is that of service delivery networks that seek to coordinate and provide a continuum of services (Bazzoli, Stein, Alexander & Conrad, 1997). Working together, these collaborative partnerships have

determined that the goal cannot be reached by an individual or group working alone. These collaborative partnerships have also learned that participants in the partnership should represent the diversity of the group of people involved in reaching the goal or being served. Finally, the shared goals and mission help the members of the partnership reach a consensus that allows the partnership to move forward in meeting its stated goals (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

When examining partnerships with faith-based organizations, religious congregations are already an essential ingredient in the network of social services. These congregations provide services such as food and clothing pantries; financial aid to pay for utilities and rent; tutoring; mentoring; child-care; language classes; and self-help programs. Congregations support these programs through financial contributions, in-kind donations, and volunteer assistance (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). While in some areas of the country single congregations engage in these activities, in other areas of the country, the congregations join together to form coalitions. Interfaith coalitions are one of six types of religious service organizations that join together organizations and congregations to provide services and social action that meets the needs of the community (Cnaan, 1999). Many times these initiatives are beyond the scope that a single congregation can provide. Two other important characteristics of these coalitions are that they bring together various congregations of a local community into one organization and they provide social ministries that range from emergency in nature to on-going programs (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). These organizations might label themselves as “coalitions, community ministries, clusters, associations or neighborhood ministries” (p.54).

In these coalitions, a director is usually hired to oversee the day-to-day activities. It is interesting to note that typically the member clergy take on the roles of cheerleader and encourager and are not involved in the work of the coalition except to encourage congregants to participate and financially support the endeavors. A Board of Trustees composed of members from each of the representative congregations oversees the budget, programs, facilities, and staff. While the Board of Trustees has final approval of all the major decisions, the director's recommendations are typically followed. All of the coalitions depend heavily on volunteers for their daily operations and programs to proceed. In the majority of the coalitions, there is a core volunteer force that is assigned work schedules and duties and other volunteers are recruited on an as needed basis (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002).

Originally, funds to run these programs came directly from congregation donations. As the coalitions' programs have grown, the need for additional income has grown also. Therefore, coalitions have reached out and begun other revenue-producing activities such as resale shops. The shops are stocked with second-hand items that people in the community have donated. Shoppers can find clothing, toys, house wares, furniture, appliances, and computers and these resale shops can also function as clothing closets for people in need. These in-kind donations help stock the food pantries as well as the resale shops (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002).

The challenges that these faith-based coalitions face range from maintaining their budget to maintaining their volunteer force. Aging congregation members, declining enthusiasm for the activities initiated, and the transitions of leadership are issues that the

coalitions must problem solve in order to maintain their viability (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). It does not matter whether the coalitions are directly involved in the schools or not. The fact is their ministries impact the school families living in the community. Providing these needed services enable schools to achieve their mission.

### **Collaborative Efforts Between Local Congregations and Local Health Department**

Another type of partnership found in the community is a collaborative effort between the local churches and the local health department. Whole Health Outreach was formed in 1999 in rural Missouri to provide access to health and social services to citizens. Many of these citizens lived in isolated areas and experienced family violence. Members of the collaborative effort were individuals from local congregations and religious organizations, a lawyer who worked with survivors of domestic violence, social service workers, teachers and school leaders, law enforcement officials, and other interested members of the community. The group focused on individual, social, community, and policy factors that influence family violence. By working with the schools, social service organizations, law enforcement agencies, local health department, hospitals, child care centers, and churches, the group affected change in the community in the arena of family violence. A residential shelter for victims of family violence and abusive situations was set up, support groups and educational classes was started, and a Resource Mothers program that provides pre- and post-natal home visits began. The community continues to be involved in the activities of preventing family violence and the rural area is a better place for families to live (Baker, Homan, Schonhoff, & Kreuter, 1999).

## **Alliances and Grass-Roots Advocacy Efforts**

Other forms of collaborative partnerships are alliances among service agencies, coalitions of community members and groups, and grassroots advocacy efforts and initiatives. In each instance, there is a strong alliance among varied people and organizations from multiple walks of life. Schools, businesses, faith-based organizations, health-care organizations, and social services are just some of the groups that come together and work to achieve a common purpose. These alliances may have both top-down planning with the use of experts to plan the activities or utilize grass-roots as the organizational structure of the alliance (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). The vision and mission of the partnership may focus on a continuum of outcomes that include specific issues, broader concerns that are interrelated, and fundamental social determinants of health and development. Participating in collaborative partnerships has become an increasingly popular strategy that communities utilize in solving these issues and meeting the needs of its citizenry. These partnerships are composed of multifaceted approaches that seek to change the environment and establish and maintain healthy behaviors (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). The bottom line is that these partnerships that involve various agencies are necessary to meet the needs of the community. No one agency or institution can solve the problems and accomplish its mission as a sole entity.

The literature provides examples of partnerships that are alliances, coalitions, and collaborations. In each of these cases, goals and missions are stated with roles delineated in some form. These formal partnerships serve a purpose to better the life of community members. What is missing from the literature is an examination of the more informal

partnerships, especially those among faith-based organizations and schools. My study will examine (1) how the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships among faith-based organizations and public schools affect the educational programs in a rural, public elementary school; (2) how the frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership with faith-based organizations; and (3) what cultural factors in the rural setting influence the partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations.

I found it intriguing to examine the make-up of these partnerships; the roles the leaders play; and characteristics of effective partnerships. The literature provides answers to many of these questions. Partnerships vary in their structure, complexity, duration, scope, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and costs and benefits to those involved. Amey (2010) found in her study that the most common partnerships are those that are loosely coupled and more informal in nature. Many partnerships are outgrowths of formal associations or personal relationships between the individuals involved. These collaborations also have the ability to "fly under the bureaucratic radar" and much of their success may be attributed to this.

For any partnership to succeed, it must be a collaborative effort. Roussos and Fawcett (2000) define a collaborative partnership as "an alliance among people and organizations from multiple sectors such as schools and businesses working together to achieve a common purpose" (p.369). The partnership also commits to empower the stakeholders involved (Swick, 2003) so that articulated goals and missions are accomplished. It is imperative that the partnership include members from the diverse

ethnic and socioeconomic groups found in the community. Members from these groups bring various perspectives that are many times overlooked or devalued because these groups lack power in the decision-making processes.

### **Strategies that Empower Successful Partnerships**

In Baker et al's work, *Principles of Practice for Academic Practice/Community Research Partnerships* (1999), the authors identify six strategies that empower partnerships to be successful. Relationships must be built on mutual trust and respect. Building a trusting relationship requires a time commitment to the relationship that may not be compensated monetarily. Also members of the partnership must acknowledge that the significant commitment of time and energy will occur at the beginning and at different periods throughout the partnership. In order to build and maintain this trusting relationship, communication and sharing of information must occur from all parties to all other parties throughout the relationship.

Building these necessary communication skills may not come naturally to the members of the partnership, but members can employ strategies that will build their capacity to communicate with others. Swick (2003) states that "trust-building is essential to having authentic, meaningful, and growth-promoting communication" (p. 275). He further explains that when the partnership member employs the skills of being approachable; sensitivity to the other person and his message; flexibility by providing needed space to the other partnership members as they communicate; and dependability, then trusting relationships will flourish.

Partners in this communication process must be willing to take on the roles of nurturer and nurtured. They must approach the table with an attitude of helping solve the problems at hand. By utilizing responsive listening, then partnership members not only listen to what is being said verbally, but are attuned to the body language portrayed. This responsive listening also requires a thoughtful response from individuals as they take into account all of the information gathered while respecting the other person's stance on an issue. As members of a partnership group working together, the group members must employ group functioning skills that allow individual personalities to shine through so that the group's mission is accomplished. At the same time, strong personalities will emerge and for a partnership to move forward, a leader must emerge. Someone must be responsible for moving the group along on its agenda so that time is not wasted and the group does not lose its momentum. By the same token, employing effective problem-solving strategies is another important communication process that shapes partnership efforts. Finding solutions to problems, effectively gauging the workability of proposed solutions, and brainstorming different perspectives require not only thinking in traditional ways, but thinking in an unconventional manner as well (Swick, 2003).

While members of the partnership communicate in a myriad of ways such as faxes, phones, regular face-to-face meetings, retreats, board meetings, workshops, and opportunities to provide feedback on or evaluation of the program components, members must realize that the partnership will grow and membership may change. One of the challenges of communicating in a partnership is that new members to the group may be

added. It is imperative that these new individual members must establish their own relationships and find their role in the group dynamics (Baker et al, 1999).

If not enough time is devoted to building the communication relationships in the partnership, then the alliance will get off to a rocky start or is doomed to failure.

Members of the partnership must value the diversity of the voices present at the table so that all members of the group are empowered to make a change. Input from all members must be valued and shaped so that it focuses on the mission of the partnership and goals are accomplished. In acknowledging the diversity of perspectives in the alliance, group members must also acknowledge the cultural differences in the manner of communication that shapes the group dynamics. While it is easy for members to rely on stereotypes in their communications and relationships with other group members, it is imperative that the group members become cultural learners regarding the strengths and talents that each member brings to the table. Changing these stereotypes may require research on the part of some group members to expand their cultural knowledge, but the result will be the building of deeper, trusting relationships that enable the partnership to move forward (Swick, 2003).

Members of the partnership join for a variety of reasons and bring their own agendas to the table. It is important that all members of the group feel comfortable articulating their agendas. Real efforts must be made to meet the needs of all members. Keeping these factors in mind, it is important that a common purpose or mission is articulated. Collaborative planning must identify goals and changes that need to be made to the environment at hand (Baker et al, 1999). These goals must be tailored to the local

context, or they will lack meaning and the alliance will not be able to move towards solving the issues at hand. A strategic plan must be designed that organizes the needs that the group has identified into attainable goals that are both long-range and short-range in nature (Fawcett et al, 1995). Identifying the goals and issues the group will address and defining the scope and focus of the partnership are imperatives that must occur for collaborations to succeed.

The approaches that the partnership will utilize to reach its mission will be influenced by individual, social, and community factors. Partnerships must draw expertise from multiple arenas and perspectives and bring these people together to forge ahead in meeting the partnership's goals. The skills that are brought together must complement each other rather than compete (Baker et al, 1999). Activities that the partnership sponsors may be student centered which provide direct services or supplies to students; family centered which focus on parents or entire families; school centered which benefit the school environment, facility, or school staff; or community centered which focus on the community and its citizens. In examining available resources and talents, the group may be too narrow in its focus. For example, when thinking about forming a partnership with a senior citizens organization, many schools think of visiting senior citizens facilities and providing a program for its members. Partnerships fail to realize that these senior citizens can share information, mentor, and tutor students thus enabling the school to improve its students' academic achievement (Sanders, 2001). Examining available resources in new and different ways allows ideas to surface that creates a deeper alliance and attains the mission of the partnership.

As the partnership matures and moves towards reaching its mission and goals, the group must evaluate the programs that are in place. It is important that all members of the partnership are involved in the evaluation process, from creating the evaluation instrument to determining what will be evaluated and how it will be assessed to disseminating the information gained from the evaluation process. The evaluation methods must fit the process followed by the partnership in moving towards reaching its goals and should include both an evaluation of the process, impact on the institution, and outcomes presented. Not only should the partnership evaluate the intervention activities, but the qualities of the partnership as well (Baker et al., 1999). If the evaluation instrument is not tailored to the approaches and strategies employed by the partnership, then the information gained lacks meaning and does not provide the breadth of knowledge that is needed to determine whether or not an endeavor is successful.

Finally, members of a partnership must realize that the alliance will mature and naturally progress through transitions that will bring about changes to the partnership. Partnerships move from the initial formation, to planning, to implementation, maintenance, and institutionalization (Baker et al., 1999). The various stages of the partnership require attention to different tasks, talents, and perspectives available in the group dynamics. As always, members change in a partnership and this requires the acclimation of these members to the initiatives in place and enabling the new members to find their roles in the organization. These new members will also bring new areas of expertise to the organization that may alter the path to reaching a goal that the organization has undertaken.

### **Leadership Qualities Present in Effective Partnerships**

Determining whether a school-community alliance is successful rests on many factors. However, researchers have determined the quality of leadership that the principal exhibits is one of the most determining factors to the success of the school-community partnership (Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Bauch, 2001). The successful school leader must release traditional models and embrace those models that are relational and build on the school community's own sense of place. Partnerships that are built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within the community are most successful. Shared decision-making around the areas of community goals, needs, and the purposes of schooling and that actively includes all stakeholders are of utmost importance. Community voices must be heard in the decision-making process. Bauch (2001) proposes that the successful school leader who forms these partnerships is constructivist in his or her thinking. These school leaders must understand reciprocal processes that allow the leader to move outside herself; to practice trust, caring, empathy, and compassion; to hear and understand the perceptions and ideas of others; and to engage in the processes of making meaning with others in an educational community over time (Budge, 2006). These leaders must understand that knowledge is founded in the relations between human beings.

The effective school leader needs to be able to take the old myths and assumptions of how things are done, deconstruct them, and bring new meaning so that others will understand where the alliance is headed (Budge, 2006). In the new conversations that take place, the leader must frame the articulation of the new ideas,

goals, and planning approaches and connect it with the information she has learned from conversations with others. Her actions must also reflect these reciprocal learning. At the same time, the effective leader must be able to consider the views of other members from diverse groups within the community and synthesize all of this information into a body that moves towards the attainment of the goals in mind. Constructivist leaders also are flexible in that they understand that cycles occur in the community and there must be an unrestrained flow of information and feedback (Bauch, 2001). Communities are always in flux and must welcome diverse thinking so that they can respond well to the need to reinvent. Finally, these leaders are driven by a sense of moral purpose. These leaders articulate a common purpose for schooling that benefits the growth and well-being of children, their families, the community, and society.

Effective principals who lead a strong school-community partnership must exhibit several, specific leadership qualities. The principal must be committed to creating an academically rigorous and supportive learning environment that nurtures students (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). For community partners, the visibility of this commitment is paramount in attracting them to form the partnerships with the school. These community partners feel that their contributions are helping the school provide a richer learning environment for the students that the principal supported. A second finding was that the principal must support and communicate a vision for community involvement. In interviews, the researchers found that the principal viewed the school, family, and community as a seamless web of supports and resources for student learning. By supporting community involvement, the principal displayed an open and responsive

attitude towards opportunities for school-community collaboration. Not only did the principal believe this, but her actions backed up her beliefs.

The principal used the school's Action Team for Partnerships to build capacity of others to facilitate partnership-program development (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). The principal plays an active role in the Action Team for Partnerships and ensures that the team's co-chairs regularly report the team's progress to the School Improvement Team. The principal also provides coverage for classes one day during the month so that the Action Team can meet regularly and have time to plan. Also included in the School Improvement Plan is a goal regarding school-community partnerships.

Formal acknowledgement of the efforts of the community partners is communicated by principal, teachers, and Action Team. While the community partners feel that their acknowledgement is in the results for the students, they also acknowledge that they appreciate being told "thank you" for their efforts. In this warm, engaging school climate, partnership members found two-way, open communication to be especially beneficial to the parties involved. This communication allowed for roles and responsibilities to be clarified. Honesty on the part of the principal is especially important as it makes everyone fully aware of the intent and expectations of the other. This honesty also allows the school to express its needs and the community partners to express what they can offer so that conflicts that might threaten the viability of the partnerships can be avoided (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Thus, school-community partnerships can blossom and intensify over time. While the study examined urban school leaders, these same leadership principles are needed for strong school-community partnerships to flourish in

a rural community. An area of need in the literature is to examine these leadership qualities and whether or not they are present in these school-community partnerships in the rural areas.

Partnerships that are leader-centered rather than the group's members owning the vision and goals have the most difficulty being sustained over time (Amey, 2010). I stated earlier that in the majority of instances where a faith-based organization is involved in a partnership, the member clergy is not a leader in the partnership (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). However, when a school is involved in a partnership, the principal is one of the leaders in the partnership. In order for the partnership to succeed, the leader must have a strong sense of passion about the mission and must also work to empower others to continue the leadership of the program. The leader of the partnership must create a vision that establishes a need for the partnership to be in existence. The leader must work to ensure buy-in from the members of the collaboration; communicate the goals and outcomes; and show and generate a high level of commitment to the activities of the partnership.

The previous information discusses the use of Action Teams and distributing the leadership throughout the partnership. Another intriguing idea I found in the literature discusses the leadership style of principals described as "a lamb" (Jacobs, 2009). Amey (2010) also discusses the fact that effective leaders of partnerships must exhibit shepherding leadership qualities. Leaders who exhibit the qualities of lambs (Jacobs, 2009) must be transparent in that they possess personal goals as well as a vision for their school; possess answers but also have the ability to ask good questions; are strong but yet

aware of personal weaknesses; possess the power to persuade others and yet are dependent upon others to get the job done; and know when to hold on and when to let go. These leaders who exhibit lamb qualities understand how to empower others to exercise leadership in their areas of professional expertise. I have worked for leaders who have these qualities before and I know how powerful it is to be empowered to make decisions and yet imbued with the responsibility to do the right thing.

While the vision of this leader is his own, he also works with others to make this a shared vision that all will buy into and make their own. In all of their words and actions, this vision directs all that everyone in the partnership does and the leader cajoles others in the partnership to keep this vision in the forefront. Considering the partnership's vision and the common good are the standards by which all decisions are measured. In order for the partnership to move forward, the leader must interact with many different people: parents, students, teachers, board members, and community members. How does he or she access information? Is the leader always telling or is he listening? Listening and asking good questions to elicit good information are the hallmarks of this effective leadership style. Lambs are not weak, but compensate for what they know their personal weaknesses are. In fact, they develop capacities to cope and allow others to lead in areas of their weaknesses. Probably one of the greatest strengths is the area of communicating. It is easy to "roar" (Jacobs, 2009, p. 15) and show one's strength while not listening. Lamb leaders understand true communication is a two-way avenue that is interactive. These leaders endeavor to discern what others are communicating which can be very different from what they are saying. Ultimately, these leaders understand how to build

their organizations and partnerships to continue the vision and the work they have undertaken.

When examining effective partnerships between faith-based organizations and public schools, it is important to weigh the activities of the partnership against the backdrop of legal, political, and ethical considerations that affect public schools and faith-based organizations. In the next section of this literature review, I will consider the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships between faith-based organizations and public schools.

### **Legal Aspects of Faith-Based Partnerships and Schools**

When investigating the notion of faith-based partnerships with public schools, one must examine how the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of these partnerships between faith-based organizations and schools affect the educational programs in a rural, public, elementary school. Since the infancy of the United States of America when the Founding Fathers wrote and the states adopted the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the idea of separation of church and state has been paramount as one of the basic freedoms we, as citizens of this country, enjoy. Knowing this, how have the courts ruled on the idea of the constitutionality of public monies being used to support sectarian schools? The ideas that the Court used in making its decisions have relevance when examining the issue whether or not it is appropriate for faith-based organizations to receive federal monies to provide social services. The idea of charitable choice allows citizens to choose faith-based organizations that provide social services. One of the legal and ethical dimensions that must be examined is how far does this notion of charitable choice extend

when discussing the issue of a partnership between a public school and faith-based organization.

### **The Lemon Test**

The underpinnings of the majority of the Court's decisions find its roots in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, (1971) and the Lemon test that the Court developed in deciding whether or not the issue in question violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. In *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), the Court heard this case concurrently with *Earley v. DiCenso* (1971) and *Robinson v. DiCense* (1971). In Pennsylvania, a statute provided financial support for teacher salaries, textbooks, and instructional materials for secular subjects in nonpublic schools. The Rhode Island legislature provided a 15 percent salary supplement to teachers in nonpublic schools who taught secular subjects. Some of these nonpublic schools were sectarian in nature and mission. The Court held that the cumulative impact of the statutes existing in each state caused an excessive entanglement between government and religion. The Court also reasoned that these state programs held a divisive political potential that could have political candidates aligning themselves along religious lines thus creating political divisions. These political divisions developed along religious lines are the basis of the protection of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In their holding, the Court developed what is known as the Lemon Test. This is a three-prong standard that laws dealing with religious establishment must meet in order to be found constitutional by the courts. To be constitutional, the statute must have a secular legislative purpose; neither advance nor inhibit religion; and must not foster an excessive

government entanglement with religion. This litmus test is used by courts today to determine the constitutionality of laws under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

### **Charitable Choice**

In 1996 when President Clinton signed legislation that worked to transition clients from remaining on the welfare rolls to leaving the welfare rolls through gaining meaningful employment, the Charitable Choice option was part of the legislation (Lockhart, 2005). This language allowed faith-based organizations to receive government funding to provide social services without having to give up faith-related practices. It is important to note in the language of the legislation, the term “faith” is used rather than “religion.” The use of the word “faith” allows organizations that do not conform to mainstream or organized religions to access funding (Chambre, 2001). Americans are ambivalent about the role of religion in social services. They know the good that can come from the local community congregations responding to needs of the community, yet they are concerned about protecting the rights of religious minorities, atheists, and agnostics (Shirley, 2001). Partnering with a public school is one avenue local congregations can use to respond to the needs of the community in this idea of charitable choice.

The charitable choice language in the legislation requires states to include religious organizations in their allocations of funds provided if states contract with nonprofit organizations to deliver social services. States may not require that a religious organization alter its form of governance or remove religious art, scripture, or other

religious symbols as a condition for receiving a contract to deliver services (Chaves and Tsitos, 2001). The law also asserts that the religious organization retains control over the definition, development, practice, and expression of their religious beliefs. Clearly, a religious organization is not required to change how they do business in order to be awarded public funds to provide social service programs. However, faith-based organizations must be sensitive to the clientele they serve and whether or not they are proselytizing with these religious symbols. This is an ethical issue as we consider faith-based organizations that partner with schools and provide facility space for the programs or activities or partner with public schools to provide specific programs. In my study, the idea of charitable choice is appropriate to consider because one of the activities provided by a local congregation to English Language Learners in that particular public, elementary school is an after school tutorial program. The program is conducted in the local congregation's facility and uses many of the rooms that are used for programs on Sunday mornings. Abiding by the tenets of the Lemon Test (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971) is imperative so that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment is not violated.

According to the legislation, faith-based organizations may use government funds for any activity that is not "inherently religious" (Saxon, 2004). Activities such as mentoring, job training, counseling, and tutoring are not "inherently religious" activities whether they are provided by a faith-based organization or a secular organization. However, these social services can be provided in a highly faith-intensive environment. The language of the legislation, however focuses on the "religious content" of a social service with otherwise "secular goals." Basically, a faith-based organization social

service provider may incorporate religious instruction, worship, proselytization or other religious activities into the services as long as they separate by time or location, the activities that are “inherently religious” or of “religious content” from the activities funded by the government. Because the local congregation may also provide opportunities for students at the public school to participate in musical programs or performances that are held at the congregation’s facility, then parents of the students need to understand the activities they are allowing their children to participate in and the relationship between the local congregation and the public school. Understanding the idea of charitable choice enables parents to make better informed decisions regarding activities in the community that their children may participate in.

What if there are no governmental funds provided to the faith-based organization to run the partnership’s programs? What if the funds used come from the members of the faith-based organization or donations to the organization? Do these findings continue to hold true? The courts have not ruled on this idea, yet there is the ethical dimension at play here. Where faith-based organizations partner with public schools, the separation of church and state must be maintained, especially where students are concerned as they can be considered a captive audience. While their parents choose for their children to attend these program activities, ethically the congregation members should conduct themselves in such a manner that even subtle proselytization does not occur. Using the Lemon Test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) as the litmus test to weigh the proposed partnership activities against the idea not endorsing or promoting a religion or an excessive entanglement

between religion and government is an appropriate ethical standard to meet in this situation as well.

Charitable choice provides a vehicle for congregations to partner with public schools. Congregational members who lead the activities must refrain from proselytizing in an overt manner. However, we also know that subtle comments can be made that can encourage one to participate in religious activities. The leaders from both the school and congregation must be aware of how this can happen and provide training for the adults to raise their level of awareness of the issue. There is a place for partnerships between schools and faith-based organizations, but care must be given to ensure that the students who will benefit from the partnership activities will not be coerced into participating in inherently religious activities. If this occurs, then the Lemon Test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) has not been met and the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment has been violated.

### **Faith-Based Organizations**

#### **Definition and Characteristics**

“There’s *power, wonder-working power*, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people...” encouraged George W. Bush (in Farnsley, 2004) in his speech supporting the work of faith-based organizations and community partnerships. The federal government has no official definition of faith-based organizations; however the 2003 AmeriCorps Guidance document provides that faith-based organizations have the following characteristics: a religious congregation such as a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple; an organization, program, or project sponsored by a religious congregation; a

nonprofit organization founded by a religious congregation; or a collaboration of organizations that clearly and explicitly includes organizations from the previously described categories (<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>).

The working definition of faith-based organizations for this study is a religious congregation that sponsors programs that encourage its members to participate in acts of compassion that can transform lives. The mission for many of these organizations is to encourage congregation members to participate in these acts. Many believe that the utilization of faith-based organizations will lead to greater service effectiveness than it is possible for just secular services to provide (Lewis, 2010). At the basis of the Bush administration's faith-based initiative is the element of providing services and programs to the targeted groups because the local community possesses a better sense of the community's needs. According to Conning and Kevane (2002), involving the local faith-based community in the area of providing services may lead to better screening, monitoring, and accountability of resources. While my study will not involve the local congregation providing social services, this idea is important to examine as it pertains to the motivations of congregation members participating in the partnership's activities. These researchers also raise concerns regarding rural areas and whether or not there are available personnel to maintain appropriate accounting records; that community-based targeting may increase divisions or conflict in the community or be subverted to serve the interests of the elite; or that political support is undermined for more effective approaches. While these cautionary issues are raised, no solutions or words of advice are offered. These ideas are important to the idea of partnerships between public schools and

faith-based organizations in that it is important that all voices and perspectives from the school community are acknowledged in the partnership activities.

### **Executive Orders Concerning Faith-Based Organizations**

In order to level the playing field for faith-based organizations to access federal funding to provide social services to their communities, President George W. Bush signed two executive orders that established a White House Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives and Centers for Faith-based Community Initiatives in five federal agencies. Building on the language included in Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the faith-based community initiatives advanced the movement that gave religious groups expanded access to government funding for providing social services to community members (Chaves & Tsitos, 2001). Creating an opportunity for faith-based organizations to compete for federal funding allowed faith-based organizations to deliver social services while focusing on the idea of a holistic delivery of services. The idea is to focus on a personal transformation of the person receiving the services so that he or she develops the skills needed to find solutions to his or her problems. Focusing on building relationships that nurture the person, the faith-based organization works to connect the clients it serves to social networks and resources. While the local congregations in my study do not receive federal funds to deliver social services, the congregations do focus on building relationships that nurture the person and build self-confidence.

Creating the Compassion Capital Fund was an integral part of leveling the playing field for faith-based organizations in that it provided technical assistance and funding to

small community faith-based organizations that would provide social programs (Saxon, 2004). This particular fund would allow social service programs to be provided in small communities and by local congregations across the country rather than focusing just on larger alliances located in urban centers. Because congregations are located in the local community and can respond more quickly to the needs of its citizens, including community faith-based organizations in partnerships allows the response to be more flexible and responsive to the specific needs and not encumbered by bureaucratic processes (Gibelman & Gelman, 2002). In the community in my study, the local congregations have joined together to form a Christian, community ministry to meet the material needs of providing food, clothing, and shelter to members of the community who do not qualify for help from other social agencies. While funding from this program does not directly impact the school, many families in this school community do take advantage of the services that are available to them. It is also important to recognize that this is one aspect of charitable choice in action.

### **Motivating Factors to Participate in Partnerships with Faith-Based Organizations**

For most congregations in the mainline Protestant faiths, the congregation is the fundamental unit that fosters these acts of service. Members are encouraged to “help the stranger among you” or assist those in need as the biblical model of the Good Samaritan. The congregation fosters involvement through volunteerism, direct services, and collections of donations of money and other goods. These activities may be part of a project that the congregation supports or individual activities. Other congregations may also be involved in the efforts. In any manner, the emphasis is placed on individual faith

and the obligation to practice faith through works to help others. Members also support the idea that individuals' collective efforts contribute to the greater good of the community and society in general. Members of the congregations who participate in these efforts also understand that this is not the time to proselytize, but to provide service to all who need it (Schneider, 2007). Providing service through participating in partnership activities between the faith-based organization and public schools is one mechanism that accomplishes this goal.

One of the questions that my study will address is determining the motivating factors that compel members to participate in a faith-based organization and school partnership. Second, I want to investigate how these congregation members maintain the equilibrium needed to not advance or inhibit religion or foster an “excessive entanglement between the government and religion” (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971). While “helping the stranger among us” is a powerful motivating factor, Alcorn, a religious leader and writer, in his book, *The Law of Rewards: Giving What You Can't Keep to Gain What You Lose* (2003), discusses the role that tangible and intangible rewards play in our motivation of how we spend our time and money. In the spiritual realm, Alcorn proposes that our behavior determines our eternal rewards. By not giving our money to His ministry, we do not just rob God or others of blessings, but we rob ourselves of the rewards God wants to give us. While this argument presupposes a belief in God, I believe the argument also holds true of any religion. I believe this is true not just of our money-spending habits, but of how we invest and spend our time. Time is a finite quantity. Investing it to help children in our communities and schools to reach their full academic

and social potential to become productive citizens of our society will provide rewards to the giver not just in the present, but in the community's future. While much of the book discusses the giving of money, this question from the author resonates with me when discussing motivating factors.

Where in the world (and in my community) do You want me to go, to see, to participate in Christ-centered ministries meeting physical and spiritual needs?  
(Alcorn, 2001, p. 34).

Along with the religious motivation, what are other motivating reasons that faith-based organizations offer social services to the community? We have already discussed the idea of these organizations providing services that transform the individual and "help the stranger among you," but there are other motivating factors as well. Belcher and DeForge (2007) found in their study that volunteers have a genuine desire to help. Other contributing factors that motivate these volunteers are the time they socialize with each other while helping clients, the social network they form with other volunteers, and the sense of belonging to an endeavor that is greater than the individual. Gibelman and Gelman (2002) found in their study that participating in faith-based organizations offering social services promoted civic responsibility and pride among the volunteers. In other words, congregations help not just members of their own religious group, but a broad range of people who make up the community. Public schools are a part of our communities and these motivating factors that push members of the congregation to participate in the faith-based organizations partnership's activities with the local school are valuable factors in the success of the programs. Again, it is important to point out the

ethical dilemma that can manifest itself in the name of providing moral guidance and teaching individual responsibility (Chambre, 2001).

Another question that I am examining in this study is what cultural factors in the rural setting influence the partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organization. By keeping in mind the underpinnings of the legal, ethical, and political dimensions involved in these partnerships, the effects of the rural culture on these partnerships must also be explored.

In the next chapter of my literature review, I discuss the characteristics of rural communities and how these characteristics interact with school communities. I will also examine the frameworks of social capital and how it can help with equalizing the access of services for those citizens who are members of marginalized groups. These citizens may be members of these marginalized groups because of differences of class or culture. However, for the partnership to be effective, their voices must be heard.

**CHAPTER III**  
**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: RURAL COMMUNITIES AND**  
**BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL**

**Rural Communities**

In the state where the school I am studying is located, many schools are set a in a rural community and face issues that are endemic to the rural setting of educating students. This public, elementary school faces many of these challenges. Bauch (2001) conducted a study of school-community partnerships in rural areas. The researcher explored how rural schools could improve their educational processes so that their students would gain a sound education. The study found six types of connections in rural communities that are needed in developing authentic school-community partnerships. While the social capital of the community is strong in many rural communities, other important connections are cultivating a strong sense of place, providing opportunities for parent involvement, strengthening church ties, building strong school-business-agency relationships, and using the community as a curricular resource (Budge, 2006).

**Characteristics of Rural Communities**

In most rural communities, the modeling of social norms for children falls to the family, church, and school (Bauch, 2001; Theobald, 1995). While rural communities tend towards religious cohesiveness because many of the families who settled the community shared a common church denomination, some rural communities do share more diversity

in the congregations found in their community (Bauch, 2001). The ties between the local church congregation and the school are strong with many interwoven threads. Many times, the minister is hired as a teacher and provides an additional authority figure in the school setting while other church volunteers regularly tutor students and provide other volunteer services in the local schools (Bauch, 2001). In the local schools, many of the teachers who taught there also served as regular Sunday school teachers in the church, thus providing an additional strengthened network connection between the school and community. Not only do these high expectations of students manifest themselves in increased academic achievement, but in students having higher aspirations for themselves (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). These high personal aspirations influence how students prepare for their life choices.

In many rural communities, banks, businesses, local industries, and other groups provide needed resources in the form of additional monetary funds and volunteering personnel in the schools. Bauch (2001) found that principals tend to enjoy a high level of prestige in the local community and if the school has a need, the principal feels free to contact a local business, bank, or industry to raise funds to meet the need. While these relationships are informal in many ways, members of the community take great pride in providing for their own. This builds upon the community's sense of "taking care of their own" and not relying on outside governmental agencies to take care of their needs. Schools can also utilize local businesses in providing information about various careers and transitioning youth from school to work. Helping students connect to local businesses also lessens the influx of students out of the rural community when they graduate (Bauch,

2001). Instead of leaving, the students have a deeper connection to the community and remain there to work and raise families. Instilling this deeper connection to the community for young people is imperative because rural economies tend to rely upon manufacturing, agriculture, or extraction of natural resources (Budge, 2006). While these jobs paid wages that families could support themselves, they have been replaced by jobs in trade and the service industries that pay minimum wages. Adults find themselves working more than one job to meet the financial needs of their families. Young people see this and determine that for them to have a better life, they must leave rural communities (Hammer, 2001; Howley et. al, 1996; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Smith, 2003).

According to 2006 figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, 22% of rural children across the United States live below the federal poverty level of \$20,000 for a family of four. That is an increase of 19% since the year 2000. Many of these rural communities are in transition as manufacturing jobs have disappeared. In this particular geographical area of my study, textile jobs have disappeared in the last ten years. Because these are few jobs to be found in these small towns, young adults migrate to other areas of the state and country to go to school and find work. For those families who choose to stay in these rural areas, parents face long commutes to their jobs in other towns. For those who live in the small towns, public transportation is nonexistent, so families have difficulty accessing their children's schools and other needed social services. Many families are forced to move frequently to find low-cost housing that they can afford, thus forcing children to move from school to school. Drugs are a growing problem in many rural areas and the poverty that many families find themselves in moves from generation to generation

(Viadero, 2008). Carlson (2006) found in her study that rural poverty is particularly resistant to change. These forces come together to place major life stresses on the family that result in poorer parenting practices in families and weaker cognitive growth in children (Viadero, 2008). Budge (2006) found in her study that this sense of isolation from the outside world brought a sense of unity and independence so that community members take care of their own. Herzog (1995) found that these tight-knit communities provide a sense of security and connectedness to others that is a stabilizing force.

Socially, residents of rural areas strongly identify with their sense of place (Bauch, 2001; Budge, 2006; Gjelten, 1982). Many rural residents choose not to leave their communities to pursue job or educational opportunities. Relationships and connections to other people are of prime importance. Many families can trace their genealogical roots back several generations in the community. Direct, verbal communication is the norm because the layers of bureaucracy are not present. A person's word of honor is a binding agreement and many deals are finalized with a handshake. Community members value the traditional ethics of discipline, hard work, and the importance of education (Bauch, 2001). Many rural communities are homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status (Gjelten, 1982). These citizens tend to be less mobile than their urban counterparts and so maintain a strong sense of belonging in their community. Cultivating the community and cherishing the traditions of the community are of prime importance to the residents and how they view others as well as themselves (Bauch, 2001). Schools that nourish this sense of place enable students to value and celebrate their community with its inherent values, culture, and relationships. It

is also important that students learn to critically analyze and confront the social, political, and economic problems in their communities (Budge, 2006).

While this sense of connected relationships in the rural community is important, one of the issues that educators face in rural communities is helping students understand the relevancy of their education to their lives (Budge, 2006). Because many students plan to live in their communities after graduation from high school, they fail to understand how their education relates to their current lives or the lives they envision for their future (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). Isolation from other geographical areas compounds the problems of limiting the quality and quantity of experiences that students need in order to broaden their horizons. Aspirations are broadened by those fascinating or noble endeavors that adults pursue and are modeled for students (Sizer, 1996). Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova (1996) found in their study of rural communities that outside of “lack of money for education,” students and parents perceived “lack of knowledge about career opportunities” and “not knowing the right people” as major barriers to students accomplishing a desired career. Students and parents rated “being successful in my job or career” and “being able to support myself comfortably” as the two most important factors to their personal futures. The majority of rural schools provide fewer course offerings and extracurricular activities in their total school program than non-rural schools do. Teachers in rural schools are often required to teach multiple subjects or grade levels (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). Therefore, communities can also be used as a curricular resource for the schools (Bauch, 2001). Because of the strong connections between the school and community, there are many opportunities for schools

to access the community resources outside the classroom. Forming school-community partnerships provides opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge about careers or form relationships with mentors who can help them in the future.

Combining the intellectual knowledge gained from the curriculum combined with experiential learning is a powerful instructional strategy and builds a stronger knowledge of self (Theobald, 1995). Focusing on the sense of place in the community is a lens that students can use in the variety of planned learning opportunities that can be accessed (Bauch, 2001). By using this set of lens, students can be actively involved in community planning and seeking solutions to problems in the community. Students realize their value to the entire social network and not just themselves as they participate in these activities (Bauch, 2001). They also begin to have more of a buy-in as a stakeholder to the community as they participate in these activities and the migration of youth from the rural community is slowed. While schools realize we live in an age of accountability, education is not just about improving standardized test scores, but learning to live well in a community (Theobald, 1995). Capitalizing on the sense of belonging and place in the rural community to provide learning experiences educates the whole child.

Bauch's (2001) assertions of strong relationships and a sense of belonging in the rural community are accurate portrayals of life in a large number of rural communities. In the community of my study, the population of white and African Americans is approximately equal with Hmong and Latino families comprising the other 17 percent of the population. Religious congregations in the community are mainline Protestant with one Catholic congregation. There is a diversity of socioeconomic levels; however, 87

percent of the children who attend the public, elementary school in my study are children from families whose income falls below the federal poverty level (Stanly County Child Nutrition, 2010). Traditions and historical buildings hold great value in this community. Many people are related to each other through birth or marriage and can trace their ancestry in the community back several generations. The community is viewed as a safe place to live and raise a family.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages for Rural Schools**

Rural schools are isolated and this offers some advantages and disadvantages to the students. Because of the smaller enrollments, rural schools tend to cultivate a positive school climate that is orderly and nurturing (Bauch, 2001). Employing high expectations of student behavior and academics, there is a high level of student-faculty engagement and better school-community relationships. Bauch (2001) also found the dropout rate for rural schools is smaller than in urban areas. The exception is the dropout rate for African American students which are the same in both rural and urban areas. The school serves as the cultural and social center of the town and maintains strong links to the community it serves (Gjelten, 1982; Bauch, 2001). Rural youths, ages 18 to 24, are slightly more likely than their urban counterparts to not be in school or working. Generally, residents of rural communities achieve lower levels of education than their urban counterparts (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). In 1990 high school completion rates were 7.8 percent lower in rural areas than in urban areas of the country (Bauch, 2001).

Because of the smaller tax base of the rural area, the schools are often underfunded and offer fewer course offerings and special programs. The schools often

reflect the economic and social stratification of their communities and are strongly influenced by the economic outlook of their community (Bauch, 2001; Herzog, 1995). While rural schools typically have not implemented technology to the same extent of their urban counterparts because the infrastructure is not place, this is not true in the elementary school in my study. Three years ago, this elementary school used Title I monies to implement a one-to-one laptop initiative that placed a laptop in the hands of every fourth and fifth grader. Computers are widely available to the other grades in the school and the school is networked and wireless. Teachers also make use of Activboards and other technology to enhance their instruction.

The educational professionals in rural schools receive their professional education outside the community. Teachers are younger and less experienced than their urban counterparts, have less professional development, are paid less, and receive fewer benefits (Viadero, 2008). To make ends meet, teachers in rural areas are more likely to take a second job or work during the summer. Teacher behavior is scrutinized more in rural areas and teachers many times feel vulnerable to community pressures. Preference in hiring is given many times to locals who have returned to the community because they are perceived as understanding the needs and values of the community. While these rural communities enjoy social engagement and the advantages of working in a small school setting, it is difficult for the rural community to attract high quality teachers, especially in certain specialty areas (Bauch, 2001; Viadero, 2008).

## **Community Networks and Relationships**

While rural communities are smaller in size in terms of population, their communication networks may be more complex than in a large city (Ricketts & Place, 2009). It is important that leaders in rural communities listen to all of their constituents to gather all of the facts, not just the information that benefits certain segments of the population. Accessibility and having an open door policy for constituents builds trust and credibility. Having accurate information leads to good decision making, problem solving, and active civic engagement.

While many rural communities experience a high level of economic deprivation, the schools prosper because of the strong relationship bonds between the school and community. High levels of social capital are found where there is a participation in networks; reciprocity; trust; social norms; resources have a shared ownership; intergenerational closure; and social agency. Students who benefit from this social capital are usually members of families who have long-standing roots in the community and are middle to upper-class (Bauch, 2001). In the past when the economy in a rural area was self-sufficient, providing educational opportunities in an equitable manner was not as imperative as the situation rural communities find themselves in today. In order for rural communities to survive, the leaders must develop new job opportunities, attract working-age people, and redesign schools to educate students to provide for their future families (Herzog, 1995). Forming school-community partnerships is a vehicle to accomplish this goal.

While Bauch does an excellent job of describing the characteristics of a rural community and the challenges of educating students in this setting, he does not address the issue of equity of access for all families. One of the issues that must be addressed is how the schools can be more inclusive in their sharing of social capital with all students who attend the school, not just those students who were born in the community. Schools need to go beyond the basics of a partnership program to recognize and address obstacles to family and community involvement to improve students' learning and academic achievement.

Some challenges schools face are providing information for parents of children who do not speak or read English well and finding ways that parents who cannot easily visit the school can help their children at home (Sheldon, 2003). Schools must strive to include parents of children who do not speak or read English well in their school-family-community partnerships. While extra efforts must be taken to ensure that parents of children who do not speak English as a first language understand what is going on, the richness of experiences and support that they can provide can be invaluable to a school partnership. In my study, one of the areas that I will examine is how the diversity of race/ethnicity and class affects the partnership between the school and faith-based organization. In the school I will study, several families are first-generation immigrants to the United States. I will examine how these partnerships that their children participate in may benefit the family in building social capital.

Parental involvement is an important predictor of student success. From volunteering at school; attending meetings and other school events; attending parent-

teacher conferences; monitoring homework; talking to their children about their school day; to talking with children about their future educational plans and goals, the tightly knit social structure of rural communities fosters increased parental involvement in all aspects of the students' lives. While these communities have increased parental involvement, there is still a low participation of parents in school decision-making processes (Bauch, 2001). North Carolina General Statute 115C-205.37 requires schools to include parent members as part of the School Improvement Team. Parent representatives must be elected by a parent group and the representation of parents on the School Improvement Team should represent the demographic make-up of the school.

At the center of any partnership involving schools is the goal of creating the safest, nurturing learning environment possible that allows all students to reach their potential. Early on, school leaders realized that the school cannot accomplish this goal by themselves but must join together with other interested organizations to create a partnership that draws from the positive attributes of each group and strengthens the whole organization. While families and communities look to schools to provide resources for the child, these stakeholders also realize that providing these resources is a collaborative effort that must be nurtured. Loza (2004) proposes that the values that society and educational shareholders place on education are intrinsic. She further believes that these partnerships create an enabling environment that addresses social issues and builds social capital. Sanders (2008) argues that when a gap exists based on unequal power and status between the school and home, there is a breakdown in the relationship between the two. Consequently, the students suffer. I believe that community-family-

school partnerships are an avenue to building a school culture that values diversity of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic levels. Narrowing these gaps of power and status builds relationships between teachers, families, and school administrators. Working together as a team minimizes the effects of poverty on the students. Building partnerships among faith-based organizations and schools adds additional tools to the arsenal to level the playing field for students. Thus, schools and their students are the beneficiaries.

### **Hearing Everyone's Voice**

In an effective school-community-family partnership, it is important that all the various perspectives are listened to and invited to the table to offer solutions to challenges facing the school. In rural areas, Lichter and Johnson (2007) found that poor minorities are highly concentrated in rural areas. The isolation that many families experience escalates because of their lack of access to educational and economic opportunities. It is especially important at the beginning stages of planning in the partnership that all questions are worthy of consideration, none are pushed aside as unimportant. No one is considered insignificant or not having a rightful place at the discussion table. It is also important to include the professionals whose daily practice will be affected by any activities that the partnership will initiate along with the parents of the children in the school (Gardner, 1992). Including the professionals whose daily practice is affected is important because these people can introduce resistance to the efforts of the partnership in both a passive and aggressive manner.

Representation in the partnership of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups in the school is important because many of the voices of minority or poor parents may have

been ignored in the past (Budge, 2006). Fischer, Harvey, and Driscoll (2009) found that for many immigrant parents, there is a disconnect between what their culture values in the parenting of children and what the dominant culture values in the parenting of children. Their study found that Latino families living in the United States highly value relational qualities, role modeling, and firm parental control. The parental control is characterized as authoritative in nature. Relying on the closeness and loyalty to the extended family, these values are instilled in the children of Latino families through close, warm, affectionate relationships between parents and children. The study also found that Latino parents least endorsed the values of obtaining economic resources that are highly valued by Anglo families living in the United States. While this study is limited in the fact that it studied Latino immigrant families living in two urban areas of the United States, these parenting values do provide consideration when examining how dominant cultures must interact and respect minority cultures present in the community. Schools are built upon the beliefs of the middle-class and Byrne (2009) found in her work that white middle-classness is considered the norm in society. Those who do not fit into these particular constructs are perceived as deviating from the norm.

Educators must make intentional decisions to value the perspectives of all parents and students in the school. Minority and immigrant parents bring a perspective to the group that is important when trying to engage all parents in an initiative. When an organization values all voices within the community, then the community members are richer because the positive attributes of all cultures are valued and supported (Budge, 2006). Middle-class parents are very confident in navigating the education system

(Byrne, 2009) and care must be taken that these parents do not monopolize resources or power in a partnership. In a school that fosters a climate of social justice, equity for all members of the school community is important. Creating an inviting school that fosters an inclusive environment is built on the values of respect, optimism, trust, and intentionality (Carlson, 2006). When the school, parents, and community work together to create these partnerships, then the school provides equal access of educational opportunities and achievements for all students.

Living in a rural area is rife with advantages and disadvantages for the community's citizens. Many characteristics of life in a rural town do influence partnerships between the school-family-community. Strong partnerships can be formed, but extreme care must be taken to allow access to everyone who lives in the school community to benefit from the programs in place. While a sense of place and belonging is very important in building self-esteem, recognizing and listening to the perspectives and life stories of other citizens in community who have not lived in the community for generations will enrich the educational experiences and lives of all our students.

As I examine the issues surrounding the partnerships between public elementary schools and faith-based organizations, it is also important to think about how culture and class diversity and the frameworks of social capital impact the programs partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations that may have in place. Building social capital in a community is especially important because this is the currency that allows members of the community to bargain with others to meet their family's needs, physically, economically, spiritually, and emotionally.

## **Influences of Immigration and Culture**

In the town where this elementary school is located, the 2000 Census population was recorded at 15,680 people. Of those residents, 4.16% of them are Asian and 1.87% of the residents are Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In the school community that I am researching, approximately 18% of the student population of 310 students is from a family that is a first-generation immigrant family. When these families move to an area to live, they are looking for jobs to support their families financially and to participate in the American dream (Pipher, 2002).

Moving to a new country is stressful because the family has separated from their extended family and friends, must learn a new language, and learn a new cultural system (Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Lnares, & Wiesner, 2010). While finding a safe neighborhood to live in with affordable housing is of vital importance, living near the family's ethnic group is also important. Because of language barriers and the unfamiliarity of the American culture, many of these families experience the feelings of isolation and powerlessness. "Work is the source of dignity; without dignity, people are powerless" (Pipher, 2002, p. 100). Relying on children to translate for the parents in the business or health areas that most adults control upsets the hierarchy of the family and places the children in a position of power and responsibility that they are not mature enough to understand or handle. Arbona, et al's.(2010) work supports the effects of environmental stressors on immigrant families when they must overcome the challenges of obtaining the goods and services needed for daily survival by navigating their way through the maze of finding employment, accessing health care, and understanding a

language that is not native to the immigrant family. Other stressors the families must deal with on a daily basis are re-establishing family and social support systems and dealing with the conflicts that arise from changing gender roles and intergenerational roles within the family. Thus, educators become the culture brokers for these families. These culture brokers help families navigate this foreign culture they find themselves inhabiting.

While the goal is to provide for one's family and guide the children to becoming successful citizens in society, many immigrant families find that their native cultures clash with American culture. While many of these immigrant families are hesitant to voice their thoughts, feelings, and concerns, it is imperative that their thoughts and concerns are acknowledged and they are helped to understand how to voice their thoughts. Building this social capital also allows these families to become change agents in the community and bring their unique perspectives to the table. Schools and faith-based organizations forming partnerships is a viable vehicle that helps school community members build social capital. Increasing a family's social capital improves their access to educational and economic programs that will enable the family to become contributing members of society and find their niche of the American Dream.

### **Social Capital**

Picture this scenario. The prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel, Chapter 37) hiked through a valley full of bones. The bones were dry and weathered having laid there for many years. God asked Ezekiel a question: "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel answered that only God knew the answer to that question. God then instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones to hear the words of the Lord and that tendons would be attached to the bones, breath would

be put into the bodies, they would rise up and form a vast army that would bring Israel back to its sovereignty. The dry bones began to rattle, the army rose up, and hope grew in the people of Israel.

In many of our small towns and inner cities, our communities are without hope. They are communities in ruins as the valley of dry bones was in Ezekiel's day. When these "dry bones rattle," community members are awakening to the power they have to bring needed changes and hope to their community. Forming school partnerships with businesses and faith-based organizations can bring hope to these areas by encouraging the building of social capital. Warren (2001) argues that building social capital in communities is the "key to making democracy work"; it is the "features of social organization such as networks norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. x). Not only does building social capital in a community build hope, but it allows all voices, even those from marginalized groups of people in the community, to be heard. New, democratic leaders emerge that help to build healthier communities that allow its members to compete locally and globally. While only one or two bones may rattle in the beginning, the rattling grows in number until a groundswell occurs.

Social capital connotes the idea that a person has assets, wealth, resources, and investments along with a considerable amount of potential benefits and liabilities. Inequalities exist in one's ability to access social capital because of the uneven allocation of resources in the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of a community (Doe, 2002). For centuries, women have invested in social networks that would provide

them and their families these benefits. However, most of the social capital they invested in was that in their own neighborhood or community. Social capital is important in that it allows individuals to advance their goals and interests within a sociocultural context; to the community and normative behaviors that define and benefit children and adults, those of various socioeconomic levels, those who are members of marginalized groups, and the larger society (Alfred & Nanton, 2009).

Two themes emerge regarding social capital (Alfred & Nanton, 2009). One theme is that of information benefit. Information benefit refers to those members of the social network who have access to the relevant information they need and how quickly they can access the information. Control benefit, on the other hand, refers to being an important player in this network. A person who has a major source of “control benefit” not only becomes aware of the information as soon as possible, but controls who has important access to the information. This control also plays into the amount of bargaining power this person maintains. Being able to bargain to meet the needs of oneself or family is a powerful tool. While the ties in the network may be loose to some extent, they are also dense and multi-layered. Membership in the social network reinforces the person’s identity, influence, and social credibility beyond what the person can accomplish individually. To achieve his goals, the person must be well tied in to the social network.

### **Primary and Secondary Social Capital**

Primary and secondary social capital differs in important ways (Alfred & Nanton, 2009). Primary social capital includes networks consisting of family, church or spiritual groups, peers, and friends. These groups build upon a sense of belonging and an

establishment of the identity for the individual. In rural communities when someone new moves into the community, it is typical to find out family ties or church ties. It is also important that the person's friends vouch for him in this new environment. Secondary social capital includes networks that provide the external connections to the world outside the community. These networks promote individual growth and allow the individual to transform himself. Consistently used by members of the middle and upper social classes, members of lower socioeconomic groups must have more access to social capital in order to become change agents to effect the needed changes in their schools and neighborhoods.

In a study of private school students (Alfred, 2009), the researcher found that these students perform better academically because there was a stronger sense of community. Parents, teachers, and student embraced the norms of behavior that the community espoused. Based on this information, building social capital would convey significant benefits to poor and marginalized communities and offset some of the impact of socioeconomic disadvantages. Social capital is concerned with how the social networks embedded in the families and school community are useful in helping children grow and develop their cognitive and social abilities. Social capital is a resource that involves an expectation of reciprocity and yet, moves beyond the individual to wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values. This trust and shared values are the bonding cement of these relationships. By the same token, social capital also carries a value dimension because it operates in the context of the community within the realms of class, culture, economics, and politics (Doe, 2002).

When the structural attributes of social capital successfully work together with the family and community, then higher educational achievement for the students is an outcome of the alliance.

### **Components of Social Capital**

Social capital has four common components of social capital: networks, resources, norms, and trust. The core assumption of social capital is that the goodwill shown to members of the community by others is a valuable resource to be harnessed and used for the individual's good and society's good (Alfred, 2009). The benefits of social capital are legion and far-reaching. While social capital assumes that a person's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset that can be accessed in times of need, utilized for individual gain, or enjoyed for the sense of friendship and camaraderie, the benefits of social capital fall into four areas.

One benefit is the facilitation of the flow of information from those who possess the knowledge to those who need to know the knowledge (Alfred, 2009). Social networks that are located in strategic locations where the decisions are made or certain position of power within an organization can be very powerful. These members of the network will possess more information about the economic market and work opportunities for the area. These networks also can become an information broker between leaders of institutions because they help each other.

Secondly, social ties may influence those in power positions to behave favorably towards those who rely upon them for help in improving their living and working conditions (Alfred, 2009). Exerting influence on the individuals making the decisions

about who to include and exclude from the organization yields decisions that can be made to improve one's working or living conditions or to do nothing. Strengthening these social ties allows a good word to be put in for the person at the right time that would increase the likelihood of a positive decision to be made in the person's favor.

Third, those in positions of power may serve as social credentials for those individuals seeking to improve their individual lives and those in positions of power can vouch for the up and coming (Alfred, 2009). Putting in a good word for a network member signals the trust that someone who is a valued member of the network has of the newcomer. This reassurance to the other members of the network is important because they feel safer in making a decision to accept the newcomer.

Finally, social relations are expected to reinforce an individual's identity and visibility within a social group or community (Alfred, 2009). Participating in a social network increases one's sense of personal identity. This "identity capital" is especially important for women as they move up the ladder in corporate organizations and in affecting change in their communities. It is important that there is a match between the wants and needs of the individual and those of the social group.

Both the clergy in faith-based partnerships and principals as leaders of the schools must work with the existing organizations (Warren, 2001). However, these leaders must also understand that they must work together and separately with their organizations to rebuild the connectedness to build public citizenship. Participating in creating needed change in an organization is a powerful thing and must be nurtured in order for it to

mature. Leadership development that reflects democratic participation is powerful, empowering, and transformative for the individuals involved.

### **Bonding Social Capital**

Bonding social capital allows community members and the communities themselves to build stronger connections with others who are like the community members (Warren, 2001). However, for communities to grow and change to meet the needs of their members, bridging social capital must be nurtured as well. Bridging social capital is building alliances across racial, economic, and class lines that separate communities from each other. Bridging capital also allows people to gain assets beyond their usual social groups (Lockhart, 2005).

Mentoring of a young person is a way to build both bonding and bridging social capital. This role can be played by a staff person or a volunteer in the school. Mentoring this young person provides opportunities to impart and model new behaviors and attitudes and provide social support for coping with many of the stresses of life. Providing opportunities for bridging social capital would be important for Title I schools to help students develop the behaviors, attitudes, and skills that would make graduation from college a reality for them. In my study, I will examine the kinds of activities provided for students with the partnerships between faith-based organizations and schools. While graduation from college is not an outcome that I can directly measure from my study, the mentoring activity should be one of the activities in place.

## **Bridging Social Capital**

The conflicts of racism, inequality, and oppression must be confronted if the efforts to build bridging social capital are to succeed. The basic premise for building both bonding and bridging social capital is that when people come together to work together, they become aware of their commonalities and develop a strong sense of working together to accomplish something good for the whole, not just the individual (Warren, 2001).

Revitalizing democracy in our country is a mammoth undertaking. No longer are we a country where a majority of our citizens participate in political parties or join civic groups such as the Rotary Club or Civitans. However, our civic responsibility as citizens in our communities have not waned, but increased as we have members of our communities who suffer inequitable housing, have little or no access to health care, and have difficulty achieving an education that will enable them to become globally competitive citizens. Whether one is examining federal, state, or local government, power still lies in these political entities. How then, do we teach others and motivate others to come together to access this political power, actively participate in democracy, and affect change in their lives and neighborhoods?

The Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) is an interfaith, multiracial network of community organizers who work together to accomplish these goals (Warren, 2001). This network engages using the “faith traditions to construct politics that addresses the concrete needs of families who live in low-income communities of color and working Americans ” (p. 4). The organizations work to strengthen the “dry bones” of

neighborhood life by building housing, improving schools, developing job-training programs, and constructing parks and libraries. Working with members of these communities and nurturing leaders within these communities relies on the recognition that faith values can bring essential resources to the table. The deep religious faith of the people and the support they receive from the local congregations work together to build the vision and confidence necessary for these folks to emerge as community leaders from long-forgotten communities.

### **The Work of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation**

While the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) has forged several alliances that create change in blighted neighborhoods, probably the most effective collaborations have come with partnerships with two schools in Texas. Warren (2001) and Shirley (2001) cite an example of a principal working in Forth Worth, Texas at an inner city middle school. When the principal arrived, the school was in such chaos that her office was fire-bombed the first day. She knew that she needed help and she began seeking help by visiting the congregations of the African American churches in the community. She introduced herself, explained that she was frightened of her new responsibility, and asked for help. The ministers and lay leaders of the churches, along with members of the Texas IAF, stepped up to the plate and began making home visits urging parents to become involved in their children's schools and to attend upcoming assemblies at the middle school that would explain how they could become engaged at their children's school.

Many times, the leadership and support team work together to support the structure of the group so that it can grow in its capacity to bring about change (Fawcett et

al, 1995). At the Morningside Middle School in Fort Worth, Texas, the faith-based organization offered parent training events that explained to parents how schools work, what schools teach their children, and how parents can reinforce at home what the child learns at school. Because of the shared leadership and support in place, teachers made conscious efforts to reach out to parents and talk to them. For parents who had not experienced a simple conversation with their child's teacher, this was a momentous occasion for them. Because the home visits were made to each family, everyone was included and welcomed to the school (Shirley, 2001; Warren, 2004). Sanders and Harvey (2002) point out that the successful school leader in these partnerships views the school, family, and community as a seamless web of supports and resources for the students. The school must have not only an open and responsive attitude towards these partnerships, but their actions must reflect these beliefs as well.

Community action is action taken by the partnership members and leaders to make changes in the community that are related to the mission and goals of the initiative (Fawcett et al, 1995). In the studies Shirley (2001) and Warren (2004) conducted, they found that when the faith-based organization and the school worked together to provide the assemblies for parents, parents became engaged in the school and began to provide volunteering efforts, extra attention to at-risk students, and reading to small groups. As parents attended the training sessions provided by the partnership, the parents learned more about the school and how it operates leading to increased reinforcement at home of what the student learned in the classroom.

The faith-based organization and school leaders also provided guidance to the teachers and parents in organizing their strategies to affect change in the school community (Shirley, 2001; Warren, 2004). Practice in conducting one-on-one meetings allowed members to role-play listening to others to identify their major political issues. This was important in identifying support for any major initiative. Conducting a power analysis of the community allows partnership members to understand where the various power sources in the community are located and how they can be used to further the initiative. The power analysis also allows the partnership members to better understand the issues of accountability for specific areas and control. Finally, the school staff and parents learned to conduct research actions of public officials to identify resources that were not readily apparent so that these resources could be utilized in attaching concerns that confronted the school community. At Morningside Middle School in Forth Worth, Texas, for the first time, parents shared their concerns with staff members at a staff development workshop held for parents and teachers. Holding a joint parent-teacher staff development activity was a new program for the school community. The partnership also formed task forces to research and address issues that were presented to the group. By working together, partnership members initiated relationships and worked together to target areas of concern. The group was able to develop their political clout so that city and school revenues could be redirected to benefit the school.

What were the outcomes of this partnership? Community capacity was built and the community was able to pursue its chosen purposes and courses of action in both the present and the future (Shirley, 2001; Warren, 2004). Student achievement soared. In the

school district at the end of the year, the school placed third in the area of academic achievement on the Texas standardized tests. In previous years, the school had placed last in the district. Because of the grass-roots efforts of the Texas IAF, community, and school working together, students continue to meet high academic and behavior standards at the school

In creating local IAF organizations, the Christian religious tradition is seen as the glue that helps to cement the ties. Members from different racial groups often have difficulty believing that they have anything in common with members of other racial groups. A set of common beliefs and a belief in God allows people from different racial groups to focus on what they have in common (Warren, 2001). This common focus builds relationships where there is conversation and negotiation, where all voices are heard, where support is founded, and the common goal is kept in sight. Lockhart (2005) found that faith-based organizations tend to focus on the mutual responsibilities in a community. Focusing on the religious values promotes the unity needed for these democratic groups to succeed.

### **Outcomes of Partnerships**

#### **Freedom to Explore New Situations**

There are several benefits to communities participating in partnerships with other organizations. Participating in the partnership allows some individuals the freedom to explore new situations that they might not have been aware of before this opportunity came along. If a person continues to participate in the same organizations without widening his or her horizons, then it is easy to develop tunnel vision and or a narrowing

of the issues that affect the community (Green, Daniel, & Novic, 2001). Partnerships also allow people to work together and share the responsibilities. It is difficult for one organization to shoulder the responsibilities of several issues that needs addressing. Working together with other organizations allows the responsibility to be spread around. Also, when the public sees several organizations joining together to work on an issue, its visibility in the community is heightened and others join the cause. When a large enough group of people join together, then change can be accomplished and resources leveraged.

### **Additional Tools to Help Educators**

Many times, educators are aware of the difficulties the families in their school face, yet because of time constraints, family commitments, and other distractions, educators find it difficult to participate in activities by themselves. Participating in a partnership provides faculties with an additional set of tools to help perform their jobs more effectively (Butin, 2007). When educators commit to entering these partnerships, they build trust with their communities and the parents and students, build collaborative relationships that provide other benefits, listen carefully, and learn about the real community needs. All of this translates into educators possessing a more thorough knowledge of their students and their goals and aspirations and how to help these students reach their goals.

In the building of social capital, the value of building relationships has been spoken to several times. In the academic setting, relationships can help students navigate and manage an unfamiliar environment when someone provides guidance, information, and emotional support (Moschetti & Hudley, 2008). While these activities may not seem

obvious in an elementary tutoring setting, the seeds of academic achievement and how to maneuver in the academic setting are sown. When these relationships continue in the community setting, then the young person can receive guidance regarding accessing higher education or job training. In my study, I plan to examine these relationships to identify outcomes for the people involved.

### **Increased Access to Services**

Another outcome of forming partnerships with schools is that students and their parents gain greater access to services. The belief is that coordination of services can provide comprehensive, flexible, support to prevent and alleviate problems that our students and families face (Levy and Shepardson, 1992). The school is the location of our students and the one institution that almost all families have contact with at some point in their lives. The school encompasses a skilled staff that interacts regularly with students and their families and education is believed to be an avenue that students and families can break away from their cycles of problems. In the community, the school is often the most accessible facility and is perceived as a center of positive activities for students and families. Partnering with schools allows social service organizations to meet the needs of the majority of the members of the community. While this outcome is difficult to quantify in numbers, the reality is evident in the positive attitudes and lessening of needs by families in the communities that are not being met.

### **Needed Community Changes Occurring**

In rural communities, building social capital is especially important because the likelihood of needed community changes being successful hinge on this commodity.

Effective communication is a cornerstone of a functional community and in the rural community, access to information through networks is vital (Ricketts & Place, 2009). Leaders in rural communities recognize that information must be shared through the media and other outlets, but that the most effective sharing of information is through networks. Effective leaders in rural communities also encourage participation of young leaders in the community. Encouraging these young people to participate at an early age allows them the opportunity to understand the unique challenges found in rural communities. Mentoring these young people, especially young people who are members of marginalized groups in the community, builds bridging social capital and allows these young people to become knowledgeable about fundamental leadership principles and promotes buy-in to the community. When these young men and women complete their education, they tend to return to these rural areas and work to better their communities. Thus, building social capital in young adults in rural communities is another outcome of partnerships with the community and organizations.

### **Increased Student Attendance and Achievement**

School-wide programs of school, family, and community partnerships demonstrated that student attendance improved when these partnerships are implemented. Programs that linked planned family and community-involvement activities to school goals and reached out to all families reported significant increases in student attendance over the previous school year (Sheldon, 2007). The implications are clear. When students are in school, they are present in class and are educated regarding the skills needed to advance to the next grade level and perform at grade level or better on standardized tests.

Students with regular school attendance tend to not drop out of school in high school and reduce the likelihood of using tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs. For the student attendance rate to remain high, the quality of the partnership programs between the school, family, and community must be high. When parents are involved with their children's education through parenting, communicating with the teachers and administrators, volunteering, reinforcing at home what the child has learned at school, decision-making processes in the school, and/or collaborating with the community to affect needed changes, then their children benefit academically, physically, and emotionally (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). When the internal and external models of influence intersect and work together to promote student learning and development, then students succeed at higher levels (Griffin & Steen, 2010). It is of significant importance that all families of all students in the school are included in this partnership and outreach.

### **Including Families in the Decision-Making Process**

Also of importance is that families are included in the decision-making process of the school (Griffin & Steen, 2010). When families are included, then they have more of a buy-in to the process of helping ensure that their children meet high academic and behavior standards. When parents' voices are included in deciding on the activities and programs that their children need to succeed in school and these parents' voices are valued, then the parents learn to become advocates for their children. As they grow in their roles as advocates, then these same people form alliances with others and become change agents for their communities. Once again, another valuable outcome is validated in the concept of school, family, and community partnerships.

## **Positive Publicity for the School**

Another example of a school-community coalition with successful outcomes is the partnership between the Johnston County School District in rural North Carolina and the Johnston County Chamber of Commerce (Faulconer, 2010). This collaborative effort recognizes excellent teaching practices and deserving teachers. Believing that success in the schools meant creating a positive culture in the community, Dr. Tom Houlihan, Superintendent of Schools, approached the chamber of commerce about joining together in an endeavor that would recognize these deserving educators. Taking the politics out of the recognition plan that was in place, the new program was called Flame for Learning Award. Any teacher could be nominated for the award and a school could have as many nominees as deserved.

The secondary goal was to better publicize the accomplishments of top educators in the school system. The chamber of commerce would provide financial resources and with school personnel, would provide the human resources to implement the program. Guidelines were sent to the schools and each nominee was asked to submit a best practice to the selection committee. Judged against a rubric, the selection committee, comprised of business and community leaders, selected 20 semifinalists from the more than 300 entries they received. The semifinalists again presented their best practices to the selection committee who used a different rubric to evaluate the presentations and rank them while choosing a winner and three finalists. Business sponsors donated cash prizes so that all semifinalists received a small cash award and the three finalists received larger cash awards. The winner was also named the Johnston County Teacher of the Year at a

banquet for all semifinalists, their families and principals, and members from the business community.

The partnership was successful because goals were clearly defined and solid planning has continued throughout the years. Relationships have formed throughout the years between the school system representatives and the chamber representatives that have created an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The outcomes are positive press for the school district and chamber businesses and a showcasing of best teaching practices in the school district. With this recognition and implementation of best practices, students win as they succeed academically and socially.

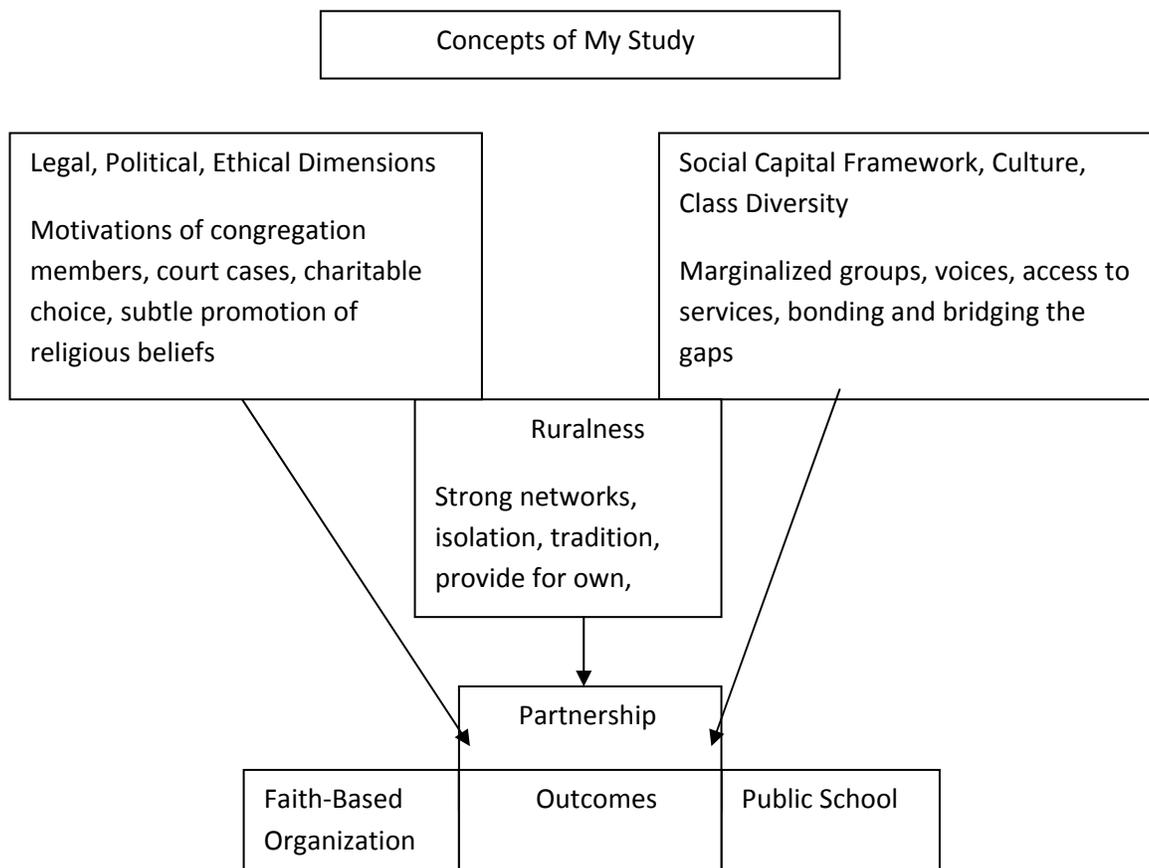
### **Building the Argument**

The literature strongly illustrates the value of partnerships between the school, family, and community. Faith-based organizations are members of the community and are in a unique place to partner with public schools to provide social services and build social capital in the community. Capitalizing on the strong motivations of congregational members to join this partnership and provide opportunities for many people to find their place of service is a strong base from which to build the partnership. By working together and involving parents of the school community, students gain better insight into their significance as citizens of the school and community and the opportunities their futures can hold. For students and families who survive on the fringes of the community, building these networks with the school, community, and faith-based organizations allows them greater access to needed services and economic possibilities to support their families. Possibilities that they never contemplated are within their grasp.

Ideally, we would also like to think that these partnerships would occur with no negative outside influences. Reality is, that as educators, we must be aware of the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of this issue that can affect our students and must take steps to ensure that all students and families are treated ethically. The school I am investigating is set in a rural area. While I have noted the disadvantages of living in a rural area, the advantages can be linked with the building of social capital to help the families in the school access the bonding and bridging capital that is available. Rural communities pride themselves of taking care of their own. The school working together in partnership with faith-based organizations will help marginalized families feel that they are valued members of the school community. These families will be allowed to enter the valued networks of power. Thus, the community will feel that it is indeed, taking care of its own.

As an educator, I feel that we are called to investigate all avenues available to us to ensure that all of our students have equitable access to educational programs and to attain their dreams. Forming partnerships with faith-based organizations allow unique opportunities to open doors for our students that might remain closed to them under other circumstances. We are charged with the responsibility to open doors of opportunity for our students.

On the next page, Figure 1 depicts the major concepts of this study and how they impact partnerships that are formed among public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations.



**Figure 1. Concepts of My Study**

The basic conceptual framework of my study is to examine the partnership between a faith-based organization and a public, elementary school. Partnerships are never set in isolation and this partnership is no exception. On one hand, this partnership is set amidst the backdrop of legal, political, and ethical considerations that must be examined. When determining whether or not it is appropriate for schools and faith-based

organizations to partner, court cases and the rulings regarding the separation of church and state must be taken into consideration. In the political arena, how the notion of charitable choice affects this partnership must be considered as well. And because local members of the congregation are involved in this partnership, the motivations of these members to participate in these activities and the possibility of subtle promotion of their religious beliefs must also be taken into consideration.

On the other hand, all communities have marginalized groups of citizens who live in the area. These citizens may be members of these marginalized groups because of differences of class or culture. The building of social capital in a community is a valuable resource that allows all members of a community to share in the available resources and realize their dreams. Examining the frameworks of building social capital and its impact on this school community is an important aspect to explore as well.

This partnership is also set in a rural community. Rural communities are isolated from urban areas in many ways. Because of this isolation, strong networks develop in the community. People who have lived in the area for many years develop a true sense of belonging in the community. By examining the outcomes of the partnership between the public, elementary school and faith-based organization, I will gain more insight into how these three areas affect the life of school community members and their ability to encourage their children to attain their dreams of becoming successful, contributing citizens of society.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the methodology I used to investigate this issue. Using the single case study method, I examine the aspects of my conceptual framework to

determine the effectiveness of the partnership between a public, elementary school and faith-based organization.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of this study, how it can benefit our schools and communities in the future, and the methodology I used to conduct the study. Using the case study method to conduct this research study, this chapter focuses on the research questions that were investigated. I define the key concepts of the study and describe the research participants. Included are the data collection methods I employed. I also include the interview protocol that I used when interviewing participants in the study. A table illustrates the relationship of the interview questions to the research questions of my study. I describe the research setting. Next, I address the data analysis segment of my study which includes my research subjectivities, the trustworthiness of my research, and the benefits and risks of this study to the participants.

#### **Building the Case for Further Study**

The literature supports that there is a strong connectedness to others in rural areas with most partnerships being of an informal nature (Bauch, 2001). Many rural areas are fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Bauch, 2001; Budge, 2006; Theobald, 1995). Because of this state of affairs, it is easy to disregard the perspectives of those who are small in number or are different in ethnicity and socioeconomic level from the majority of the community's citizens. The school, community, and families must work together to put mechanisms in place that actively

solicit and value the perspectives of those in the minority or from marginalized groups. All families must be made to feel they are partners with the school in their children's education. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by building a school, community, faith-based partnership.

Building upon the strengths of the members of the local congregations and their sense of connection to other members of the community is a natural fit for many partnerships. Little research has been done in the area of school and faith-based partnerships. Because of the motivation and talents that congregation members can bring to the initiatives, I contend that these are valuable partnerships that can strengthen a school and community. Care must be made to value all religious and non-religious points of view and to not infringe upon others' beliefs. At the same time, congregation members can help build social capital in these young people that will pay dividends as they grow and work to make their communities a better place to live.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it is written for school leaders and leaders of faith-based organizations who are interested in forming a partnership. While the study will focus on a rural, public, elementary school, I hope that school leaders at other levels can generalize the major concepts and use them to organize an effective partnership with a religious organization in their communities. This study is also significant in that it focuses on the notion of charitable choice which is a federal initiative to provide social services to the community through faith-based organizations. While these partnerships that I studied do not deliver social services to the parents of the students who attend the

school, I investigated the building of social capital for these families that might empower them to become change agents in the community and advocate for their children.

### **Research Questions**

From the research, we know the characteristics of effective partnerships between the school and community organizations. We also know that in many rural areas, these partnerships are more informal in structure. In my study, I examined three primary questions:

1. How do the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships between faith-based organizations and schools affect the educational programs in a rural, elementary public school; and
2. How do frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership with faith-based organizations; and
3. What cultural factors in the rural setting influence partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations?

I have three secondary research questions:

1. What are the activities in which members of the congregations participate in these faith-based partnerships with schools?
2. What motivates these congregation members to participate in the partnership?
3. What are the outcomes of this partnership?

### **Methodology**

The research method used in my study is the single case study. Creswell (2007) defines the case study method as providing an understanding of “an issue using the case

as a specific illustration” (p. 73). Case studies yield both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Quantitatively, information will be gained on the different kinds of activities and the number of members of the congregations who participate in these different activities. Various themes should emerge from the data that can be described in the case study (Creswell, 2007).

I studied an elementary school in a rural school district in the South. The school currently is adopted by two local congregations, and there may be informal partnership activities with other local congregations in the neighborhood. One congregation provides many services and sponsors activities in the school while the other local congregation provides a tutoring service to English Language Learners in an after school program.

### **Description of Key Concepts**

One concept that needs to be defined is the “partnership” between the school and faith-based organization. The research literature describes a range of partnerships that move from formal to informal. Partnerships can also be called coalitions, alliances, networks, and relationships (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Piper & Ebaugh, 2002). The partnership between the school and faith-based organizations are defined by the characteristics of effective partnerships and how these “relationships” fit into the range of definitions.

The notion of a faith-based organization is defined as well. While the literature describes no definitive definition of a faith-based organization, my working definition for this study is based on the work of Lewis (2010). In his work, he defines a faith-based

organization as a religious congregation that sponsors programs that encourage its members to participate in acts of compassion that can transform lives.

While the literature describes effective partnerships between schools, businesses, and community organizations (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Piper & Ebaugh, 2002), it is necessary to define how I recognized an effective partnership between the school and faith-based organization. The “effectiveness” of the partnership is defined by the outcomes of the partnership. Outcomes can range from increased student achievement on standardized tests and reading and math performance, increased student attendance, increased self-confidence of students, to a positive learning environment in the school. Another outcome is the feeling regarding the value of the congregants’ participation in the partnership’s activities. Many of these outcomes cannot be tied specifically to the school and faith-based organization’s partnership; however, the positive influences of the partnership cannot be ruled out.

### **Research Setting**

The research setting was an elementary school set in the downtown area of a rural community in the southern part of the U.S.A. The city is also the county seat of the geographic area. According to the 2000 Census, there were 15,680 people living in the city in 2000 with 6,291 households and 4,158 families residing in the city’s geographical boundaries. The racial makeup of the town was 72.8% White, 20.50% African American, 0.24% Native American, 4.16% Asian, and 1.87% Latino. According to the *Enrollment by Gender and Race Month 9 for 2009-2010*, the school ended the year with an enrollment of 310 students. Of the student population, 0.3% is Native American, 5.8% is

Asian, 11.9% is Hispanic, 36.5% is African American, 36.8% is White, and 8.7% is Multi-Racial. The majority of the Asian and Hispanic families are first generation immigrant families to the United States. The school has 86% of its students from families living below the federal poverty level. Because of the high percentage of families living in the poverty range, the school receives Title I funding. According to the 2000 Census Data information, the median income for a household residing in the city geographic boundaries is \$31,442 and the median income for a family was \$41,729. Males had a median income of \$31,001 whereas females had a median income of \$20,589. Of the residents in the city geographical boundaries, 11.8% of families and 15.7% of the population were living below the federal government's poverty line. Herzog (1995) found in her work that there is a greater likelihood of families in both the general and school-age populations living in poverty in a rural community. I selected this setting for my study because I knew that the school and faith-based organization partnerships are in place with two congregations and that there are other informal partnerships with this particular school and other local congregations.

The geographic attendance area of this elementary school is bounded by portions of the downtown area to the south of the school. Located in the downtown area within a few blocks of the school are four Protestant congregations and one Catholic congregation. To the east of the school is an area of town where the majority of the African-American population of the city historically has resided. Bordered by a federal housing project, this east side of the school attendance area is comprised of rental houses with absentee landlords and some older, retired families owning their own homes.

Located in the center of this area of the neighborhood is an apartment complex of three one-story buildings with several small apartments in each building. Families with several children live in these apartments and many of the Latino families whose children attend the elementary school in the study live in these apartments. Surrounded by the African-American community, these families are isolated members of this community.

On the western side of the school are several houses that were originally owned by the textile mills that operated in the city. Prior to the mills closing in the late 1990's, the textile companies sold these houses to either the people who lived in them or to investors as rental properties. Some of the houses are well-kept while others are in a run-down condition. The area hospital is located three blocks west of and behind the school. Professionals who live in homes with neatly manicured lawns inhabit this area of the community. Middle and upper income families and some retirees live in the area and people regularly are seen walking and jogging throughout the neighborhood. The community that this elementary serves is diverse in terms of culture and socio economics.

### **Research Participants**

I interviewed the principal of the school, clergy of the three congregations involved, the English as a Second Language Teacher, the Literacy Facilitator, members of the School Improvement Team, six teachers who work at the school, parents of students who participate in partnership activities, and congregation members who participate in the partnership activities. I interviewed one teacher from each grade level. I contacted four congregational participants from a list provided by clergy members. I

interviewed four people who currently participate in the partnership activities. These interview participants provided a range of people who plan and carry out the activities of the partnership. I interviewed four parents whose children participate in the after school tutoring program for English Language Learners. I used an interpreter to interview parents who do not speak English as their native language.

### **Data Collection**

I reviewed archival records such as School Improvement Plans, School Improvement Team minutes, volunteer handbooks, Superintendent's Leadership Surveys for Parents and Teachers, attendance and discipline data, test data, and other appropriate records. Based on the data I gathered from these sources, I found evidence of planning, stakeholder input, and articulation of expectations for those who participate in the partnership activities. The School Improvement Team minutes, volunteer handbooks, attendance data, discipline data, and test data were accessed at the local school in the administrative offices. Copies of the Superintendent's Leadership Surveys for Parents and Teachers are maintained for several years in the Central Office of the Board of Education. Requests to access these documents were granted as the school district approved my conducting this study of the local elementary school in their district. Several of these pieces of information are public information. For those documents that are not public information, aggregate information without student identifying information included in the documents was obtained at the local school level.

Interviews were conducted in a private place outside of the school day. Interviews with parents of students who attend the after school tutoring program lasted

approximately 20 minutes each. Interviews with the principal, clergy, members of the School Improvement Team, and chairperson of the Missions Committee lasted approximately one hour in length. Interviews with teachers lasted around 40 minutes in each interview. Interviews with the volunteers lasted 30 minutes in length. Building rapport with the individuals who were interviewed was important so that they communicated their thoughts and feelings to me. This rapport between the interview participants and myself led to a deeper understanding of events and why they participate. Because I know many of these people on a professional level, I engaged them in conversation about subjects of common interests. As the interview progressed, the person interviewed became more engaged in telling his or her story. Follow-up interviews with participants were conducted to check the accuracy of the data I collected.

The interviews were scheduled separately so that only one participant was interviewed at a time and there were no overlap of participants. Participants were given pseudonyms, and any personally identifiable information was either deleted or changed to protect the participant. No schools, agencies, or churches were mentioned by their real names.

### **Interview Protocol**

In my interview protocol, I followed the list of questions below to stimulate a conversation that the participant and I engaged in that was meaningful regarding my study and that I could interpret the data that emerged. The interview questions below were stated in appropriate language for each of the groups that I interviewed: principal, clergy, volunteers, teachers, and parents. Also, some questions pertained to some groups

and not others. Appropriate adjustments were made in questions each group was asked. However, it is important for the reader to understand how these interview questions relate to my primary and secondary research questions. To illustrate this, I provide a table showing the interview questions and its relationship to the research question.

**Table 1. Relationships Between Research Questions and Interview Questions**

<b>Related Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>
<p>How do the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships between faith-based organizations and schools affect the educational programs in a rural, public elementary school?</p>	<p>What activities do the members in the partnership participate in?            What activities do you participate in?            What motivates you to participate in these activities?            How do you refrain from promoting religion as you work with these students?</p>
<p>How do the frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership with a faith-based organization?</p>	<p>What are the goals and mission of the partnership?            What kind of planning takes place with the partnership?            Who is included in this planning?            How are goals developed for the partnership?            How are various members of the partnership involved in making decisions that promote building social capital in the school and its families?            What kinds of efforts are made to include concerns and issues of the various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups in planning the partnership's activities?            How do the school and faith-based organization partner in promoting the idea that all the voices of parents in the school community are heard?            How has the school community been affected by this partnership?            What are some of the outcomes that you see with this partnership?            How have the students who participated in the partnership activities grown academically and socially?            What are some examples of the students' families whose children have participated</p>

	<p>in the partnership activities becoming more involved in the school programs?          What kinds of activities involve the parents of the students in the school to create needed changes in their community?</p>
<p>What cultural factors in the rural setting influence partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations?</p>	<p>Describe the partnership between your congregation and the school. How long has the partnership been in place?          What kind of planning takes place with the partnership?          Who is included in this planning?          How are goals developed for the partnership?          How has the leadership in this partnership changed?          How did the partnership accommodate these leadership changes?          How do you maintain the momentum or re-energize the partnership?</p>

### **Data Analysis**

I transcribed the data from the interviews. Data from all sources was analyzed and coded into meaningful segments and assigned labels to ascertain emerging themes and generalizations. As I analyzed this data, I reflected and wrote questions across my notes and described and analyzed relationships among the categories. I also wrote analytic memos that noted common areas where the data intersected; outliers from the data; and other intriguing areas that begged investigation. One of the ways that I show the connectedness of the data is to diagram the major themes of the data and show how the data supports the outcomes of the school and faith-based organization’s partnership. Since building social capital is one of the outcomes of school-community partnerships, I

examined the data looking for evidence that the school and faith-based organization builds social capital in the school community.

### **Researcher Subjectivities**

Six years ago, I served as principal at this elementary school. While I have been away from this school setting long enough for personnel to change, there are still some original instructional staff working at the school from when I was principal. I interviewed both teachers I had worked with before and some I had not. I kept these relationships in mind as I worked through the data I collected and made meaning of my observations in the study. Because I was also part of the partnership in the early stages, I possess intimate knowledge of some aspects of the data or where to find archival information. I was very excited about what I discovered about how this partnership has grown and adapted to change over the years. However, there were many things that I wanted to learn about these partnerships with the elementary school. Based on my prior experience at the school, I knew that First Presbyterian Church had adopted the school. Many of the volunteers who work in this partnership are power-brokers in the community. While I support partnerships between schools and faith-based organizations, I realize that tensions can exist. I was sensitive to any tensions that might be present in this partnership on the part of the school and the congregation members and how they are balanced. Members of the congregations who participate in the partnership activities are predominately White, middle class. They are working in a school that has a rate of 86% of students who receive free and reduced lunches. What tensions, if any, were present in these relationships? Many schools and religious organizations shy away from forming

partnerships because of the issue of educators feeling that they are ceding control of their classrooms to a religious group and religious groups feeling that they are only needed for what they can provide such as facilities (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). Were these tensions present, I wondered.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is very important to any qualitative study. I used member checking to solicit the participants' views of the credibility of my findings and interpretations. Member checking elicited the views of the participants concerning the reliability of my findings and interpretations of the data. I also included rich description of my context and data so that readers can determine whether or not the information can be transferred to other settings because of the shared characteristics (Creswell, 2007).

### **Benefits and Risks of the Study**

Participants did not directly benefit from this study except that they helped to provide data about a program that is in place and its effectiveness to the school community. Participants gained a personal sense of satisfaction from participating in this study. There were minimal known risks to participating in this study. If a participant felt uncomfortable about any part of the interview, he or she withdrew at any time.

Pseudonyms were assigned to interviews to protect participant's confidentiality. Informed consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at my home. Signed informed consent forms were collected from each person interviewed.

To some people, a partnership between a school and a faith-based organization is just another partnership that can help the school. I contend the members of the

congregation participate in these partnerships because of many reasons that can promote the building of social capital in a school community. For many of our students in schools in small, rural areas, building self-confidence and meeting high academic and behavior expectations is a difficult task and these partnerships can stimulate this process. As stated previously, schools have long known that they cannot educate a child by themselves; an entire community must work together to do this. Faith-based organizations are part of our community and in the past have been ignored as a source of help because of a fear of violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. However, with recent legislation and an eye to how effective partnerships work, building these partnerships can be instituted effectively and reap many results not only for the school community, but for the community at large.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Across the United States, small rural communities dot the landscape. In many of these communities, there is little hope of accessing the American dream for the citizens who inhabit this area. Isolated from their more affluent neighbors, these citizens dream of a better reality for their children.

Schools are an agency many families in a community interact with on a regular basis. Located in these communities are local congregations that see a need and want to help members of their community attain their dreams and become productive members of society. There is a need for partnerships to be formed among the school and faith-based organizations located in the community. In my study, three local congregations, First Presbyterian Church (pseudonym), First Lutheran Church (pseudonym), and First Baptist Church (pseudonym), partner with the local, public elementary school, Cardinal Elementary School (pseudonym), to help the school meet the needs of its students and its families.

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected in my study of a public, elementary school located in a rural area and its partnerships with church congregations. The organization of this chapter was based upon the findings of data collected during interviews with participants in the activities in the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church. Also incorporated is my own

understanding and knowledge of the partnerships as former principal of the school and current Director of Student Services for our school district. Hearing the participants tell their stories provides unique insight into their lives and their worlds.

### **Partnership Between Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church**

“Help a child build a successful year. Contribute school supplies for Cardinal Elementary School! Supply lists are available for all grade levels,” read the signs on the bulletin board inside the foyer of First Presbyterian Church. Announcements are included in the weekly newsletter to the congregation and announcements are made from the pulpit each Sunday during worship service. It is time for the annual collection of school supplies that First Presbyterian Church conducts annually for the neighborhood elementary school they adopted in 2003. Sign-up lists are also available for those who are willing to donate a salad or dessert or serve food at the Welcome Back luncheon for the teachers on their first day back to school.

At lunch on the first day back for staff, the teachers walk in with smiling faces, laughing and talking. They sit down and are served a delicious salad luncheon with scrumptious, homemade desserts that the Missions Committee has coordinated. Many people have taken the time to prepare food for this occasion. There are always leftovers that the teachers enjoy later in the day. Waited on hand and foot, the teachers visit with each other and catch up on what has transpired over the summer. The latest happenings of their families are the most important news of the day. At the end of the luncheon, the teachers receive the school supplies that have been collected for their students who cannot afford to purchase their own school supplies. All the items that were on the supply

sheets are accounted for and the teachers load their cars to take the supplies back to school. The teachers leave the church with smiles on their faces, relaxed, and know that they are appreciated.

Over the summer, there are always new families who move into the school neighborhood or families whose children have outgrown their school clothes from the year before. Cardinal Elementary School is a “uniform school” in that all students who attend wear school uniforms. Sometimes new families or families who have an adult who has lost his or her job have difficulty finding the money to purchase pieces of the school uniform. Members of the congregation who do not wish to buy school supplies can donate to the “Uniform Collection” that is used to help families provide school uniforms for their children. The congregation has also begun and regularly contributes to a “uniform closet” at the school for students who need help with school uniform clothing throughout the year.

On the first day of school, teachers pay close attention to who may need school supplies. The school supplies that were donated from the First Presbyterian Church are given to those students who need them. The teacher has them on hand and when the student needs something, she quietly provides it. “You can see the look of relief on their faces; they are just like everyone else,” related several teachers. The teachers know where the donated supplies are stored and access them as needed. As more than one teacher said, “I’m very thankful to the church for providing those materials for us.”

Move ahead to the middle of November. The call goes out for members of the congregation to adopt a child from the Angel Tree and provide Christmas for them.

Teachers from Cardinal Elementary School provide names of children whose families will have difficulty providing even the basics for a holiday this year. Working with the local Christian ministry, Helping Hands, the families are screened to ensure that their needs are met. This year, there are 90 students and their siblings from Cardinal Elementary School who will benefit from the largess of the congregation. The families fill out a worksheet stating the clothing needs and a toy that the child would like. Members of the congregation select a name from the tree, purchase the items, and bring them to the church. As one of them said,

Just when I go there to take all the gifts to Christian Ministries so that they can be distributed to the families and have to make 2 or 3 or 4 truckloads, you get a real feeling of helping others when you do that.

A partnership is not just providing for those big occasions, but it is also meeting needs as they occur during the year. There have been times that the congregation from First Presbyterian has paid the utility bill of a staff member or paid rent for a student's family who was about to be evicted. Providing meals to students over the Christmas break because the children would not have food was another instance of the congregational support this year.

One of the most enjoyable times is when the principal, Mrs. Evans (pseudonym) visits First Presbyterian Church and speaks to the congregation. As she shares the needs of her students, the congregation warms to her vibrant, loving personality that "keeps people involved," as one member stated. On another Sunday, Mr. Dickens (pseudonym), the music teacher who has been working with the chorus after school, brings his choral

students to the church to sing during Sunday worship time. “It was difficult to tell who had the bigger smiles on their faces, the students or the congregation,” remembers the pastor of the congregation. It was a highlight and “many people say it was the best thing that ever happened in our congregation.” Because of the many interactions, some of the families who are members of the congregation have also transferred their children so they can attend Cardinal Elementary School.

During times of difficulty, the members of First Presbyterian supported the staff and school. A few years ago, a beloved member of the staff collapsed at school and died later at the local hospital. The next day, the minister from First Presbyterian visited the staff to talk and listen to them. That afternoon, she participated in a short staff meeting that allowed staff members to share their memories of the deceased staff member. Through the following months, the minister supported the principal and staff, and the congregation prayed for them. Earlier this school year, the principal, Mrs. Evans, lost a child to miscarriage. When she returned from her leave, she received a note with a check enclosed from the congregation at First Presbyterian. The note directed Mrs. Evans to use the money to “bless the children.” The card said that “they knew I had lost the baby and wanted to give to other children and this (the love offering) was a way to do so.” These are just two examples of the ongoing support the congregation provides.

During the school year, members of the congregation volunteer in classrooms, arrange books in the media center, bring the new card catalog online, work with teachers and students to complete projects, proctor for End-of-Grade tests, or have lunch with a student. The possibilities are endless and provide a variety of levels for the congregation

members to engage in volunteering their time and energies. They also tend a table of muffins or donuts for parent events or join in the spring carnival events. “They are an inherent part of the activities here,” remark Mrs. Evans and her teachers.

Forming a partnership is based on building trusting relationships. In this case, First Presbyterian Church formally adopted Cardinal Elementary School eight years ago. The word “adopt” means to “raise a child of other biological parents as if it were your own” or to “take up a cause and follow it” (Encarta Dictionary, 2007). In this instance, the congregation of First Presbyterian has joined with the school staff and supports the school community. The principal, Mrs. Evans, describes the relationship in this manner.

They are our adopted mother. They have taken us under their wing to fill any void that we might have in terms of trying to support the vision and ideals of meeting all the needs of our students here.

Working together, the local congregation of First Presbyterian Church and Cardinal Elementary School strive to meet the needs of the children who attend this school. The church congregation has truly taken up the cause of working together to educate the children of the school community and encourage them to achieve their dreams.

### **An Analysis of the Partnership Between Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church**

Effective partnerships share many characteristics, and the partnership between First Presbyterian Church and Cardinal Elementary School is no exception. As I interviewed the minister, members of the Missions Committee, volunteers, member of the

School Improvement Team, and staff members at Cardinal Elementary School, there were many common themes that I found running throughout the conversations that the literature supported regarding effective partnerships.

### **Planning**

When I interviewed the principal, members of the School Improvement Team, and members of the Missions Committee, they all spoke about the partnership being a collaborative effort with a common purpose. While the planning was more informal in nature because there were not set meeting dates and minutes of the meetings kept, the Chairman of the Missions Committee and principal meet during the summer to discuss the needs of the school for the coming year. The Chairman of the Missions Committee then takes the information back to the Missions Committee for further discussion and planning regarding the implementation of the events during the school year. While this planning does occur between the principle members of the committee and school, more planning opportunities for teachers and the Mission Committee need to be provided. This would allow relationships to grow so that more teachers would request volunteers to work in their classrooms. When I interviewed the Literacy Facilitator, she mentioned this idea to nurture the partnership. One of the volunteers of the church congregation spoke of the frustration in having people who are willing to volunteer and teachers who do not request their help. As she stated,

Maybe a planning session with the groups, just getting the people together, and more partnering on a personal level because when you bring someone back into your classroom for tutorial, you want to know who is coming into your classroom and what they are doing and [have] time to plan. Maybe [designating] a planning

time during the summer to serve the needs of the school instead of saying here is a warm body.

Structuring this planning session would enable trusting relationships to grow that would benefit the students as these volunteers work in the classrooms. This planning time would provide teachers opportunities to prepare the volunteers for the classroom activities they would work with the students on. Teachers and volunteers would feel more comfortable with each other.

**teacher leader.** I have noted the planning that occurs between the principal and the Chairman of the Missions Committee. In previous years, there was a teacher who was the liaison between the church and the school. This teacher is a member of First Presbyterian and also teaches at Cardinal Elementary School. For several years, she solicited and coordinated volunteer tutors and the classrooms in which they worked. In the last couple of years, she has stepped away from this role and no one has taken her place. One of the needs of the partnership noted when I interviewed a member of the School Improvement Team and Literacy Facilitator was the need for a teacher-leader to step up and take on this role. Swick (2003) talks about leaders who are involved in the partnership activities emerge as the need arises. The Literacy Facilitator also stated that our discussion sparked and refocused the need for this to be discussed at a School Improvement Team meeting. Checking back later with her, I learned that this item will be discussed later this spring at one of the planning meetings for next year. Encouraging a teacher to become the liaison for the partnership would focus on the fact that there are willing volunteers, but not enough teachers have expressed a need for them in their

classrooms. Interviewing one of the volunteers and members of the Missions Committee bore this out as she stated her frustration with having folks who want to volunteer, but not enough teachers requesting their services. This person also acknowledged that it takes time for teachers to plan what the volunteer would work on with the students and that this could be a possible roadblock for teachers.

Another component of teachers not requesting tutors to volunteer in the classrooms is that Cardinal Elementary School has been in School Improvement for the past two years because the school has not made Adequate Yearly Progress in the area of math under *No Child Left Behind* legislation. As part of the sanctions of School Improvement, the school must hire tutors to come in and work with students. The school must also offer supplemental tutorial services after school to students who qualify for free and reduced lunches. Because these tutoring services are in place, it is difficult to plan for another tutoring service in the classroom. It should also be noted that several congregation members talked about that when the partnership began, the school's scores in reading were declining. There were no other tutoring services in place at the school.

The need to volunteer to read with students was a communicated goal that could be achieved and was manageable. As the school's reading scores improved, their math scores declined and thus they were placed in School Improvement. This outside force influences the availability of classrooms where volunteers are needed. At the same time, teachers communicated that there is a need for their students to see members from the community in their classrooms because these volunteers exhibit positive role models and build relationships with students that allow them to blossom. Engaging an effective

teacher-leader to coordinate these efforts would strengthen the partnership on the part of the school.

### **Leadership**

Amey (2010) discusses that many partnerships are informal in nature because of the close relationships that can be found in the community and that these partnerships are outgrowths of those relationships. The partnership between First Presbyterian Church and Cardinal Elementary Schools began around 2003 when the minister of the church broached the idea of adopting Cardinal Elementary School to the session. There were several reasons that the idea was broached: 1) Cardinal Elementary School is located two blocks from First Presbyterian Church; 2) the Presbyterian Church has a long tradition of supporting public education; and 3) the congregation has a strong emphasis on missions, whether locally or internationally. It was common knowledge in the church community that many of the children of families who attend Cardinal Elementary faced economic difficulties. This was a need that was almost next door to the church and the congregation felt led to adopt Cardinal Elementary School as a mission project. While the minister was instrumental in bringing the partnership about, she then moved to more of a support role while relinquishing the lead role to that of the Missions Committee.

**principal leadership.** Another aspect that makes this partnership successful is the leadership that the principal provides. Mrs. Evans spoke about the fact that the principal before her started the partnership with First Presbyterian Church and how the church approached her when she became principal at Cardinal Elementary School. According to Mrs. Evans, the Missions Committee stated, “They were here to plug into her

administration as well.” While the initial setting was in place, it has been important for Mrs. Evans to continue to foster this relationship. She is a visible leader in the school and when working with members of the partnership. Both the chairman of the Missions Committee and the minister of the church spoke about planning sessions with Mrs. Evans at the beginning of the school year. Both the Missions Committee Chairperson and the principal take their recommendations and ideas back to the Missions Committee and School Improvement Team for further discussion and refinement, thus promoting shared decision making. The chairperson of the Missions Committee also talked about how they love to have Mrs. Evans come speak to the congregation because she is so passionate about “her kids” and her genuine love for people and warmth shine through in her actions and words. Mrs. Evans can effectively articulate the needs of her school to the congregation so that they understand the goals and mission of the partnership. The effective principal leader in these partnerships must embrace models that are relational and built on the community’s sense of place. Because these partnerships are also built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships, agency is promoted (Bauch, 2001; Budge, 2006; Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

As Mrs. Evans works with the partnership, she must also keep in mind the views of all the stakeholders in the school. Several people who I interviewed talked about parents from various ethnic groups and socioeconomic levels bringing concerns to the School Improvement Team. They also discussed how the grade level representatives not only brought concerns from teachers, but parents as well to the table. These ideas and needs are also communicated to the church’s Missions Committee. I did find that the

chairperson of the Missions Committee is not a member of the School Improvement Team and as stated before, the communication is between the principal and the chairperson. One suggestion from the Literacy Facilitator who I interviewed is that the teacher-leader who would serve as the liaison would also serve on the School Improvement Team and meet with the Missions Committee. This is a valid suggestion that would strengthen communication on both sides.

In my interview with Mrs. Evans, she talked about the importance of saying thank you to the church for what they do. Members of the Missions Committee talked about the smiles on the teachers' faces as they leave the appreciation events as being a thank you. Volunteers spoke of the smiles on the children's faces and their excitement when they walked in the classroom door. The school communicates its appreciation in all these ways, but they also include handwritten notes from the students for specific things. These items are especially exciting as they can be passed around the congregation for reading and posted on bulletin boards for all to read. They also hold child-like simplicity that communicates volumes in their plain words and message.

### **Relationships**

Continuing with the idea of partnerships emerging from close relationships, one of the volunteer couples that I interviewed conveyed that they became interested in volunteering at Cardinal Elementary School because they knew one of the third grade teachers who attends their church. This teacher related that the couple adopted her and her classroom and volunteered every week in her classroom. The couple enjoyed reading with the students and building relationships with them. The children enjoyed getting to

know the older couple. The couple never missed a week they were scheduled to volunteer. Both the couple and the teacher report that they discussed various children or things from the classroom when they saw each other at church. They enjoyed the close relationship with the teacher and the students. Because both the couple and the teacher attend the same church, they viewed their donations of time and energy as working towards a common cause. This common cause is to work together to educate the children of the school community and help them realize their dreams.

For these relationships to flourish, the leaders must be approachable and sensitive to the other members of the partnership and the messages they communicate (Baker et al, 1999). The chairperson of the Missions Committee and the principal talk openly and honestly about the needs of the school. At the same time, there is respect for what the church congregation may see as its role in the partnership and what the school visualizes as its role. As the principal states, “It is not a take, take, take relationship but one of giving back and forth.” Examples of this are the chorus singing at the morning worship service or the rewards that the volunteers talk about when they work with the students or the appreciation that the staff feels during the year. The chairperson of the Missions Committee talked about the reciprocity of the relationship with the staff when he sees,

The teacher who recognizes you and thanks you for what you did for us at the beginning of the year because they might have been a new teacher or from another school and not experienced anything of the love and sharing that we are trying to do.

According to the minister, “We have gained a lot with our partnership with [Cardinal Elementary School] and we feel like we have had an opportunity to give a lot.” This sentiment sums up the feelings on both sides of the partnership.

There might be difficulty maintaining the energy or reigniting the energy for a partnership over many years of existence. According to the minister, if the Missions Committee would decide to drop the partnership, there would be enough conversation among members in the congregation that the partnership would continue on an informal basis. “It has become a part of the church’s identity.” Another finding is that several families have children who now attend Cardinal Elementary School or they have transferred their children to the school. Because these families are engaged in their children’s education, there is a conversation that takes place at church about what is happening at Cardinal Elementary School. Hearing the conversational buzz keeps the partnership in the forefront of members’ minds and priorities.

Sanders (2001) reports that successful partnerships offer a variety of activities that are student-centered, family-centered, school-centered, or community-centered. The congregational support that First Presbyterian Church provides is predominately student-centered. On an emergency basis, the church will step in to provide payment for utilities or food in desperate situations. Over the life of the partnership, there have been several people who have served as tutors in the classrooms and others who have helped with short-term projects in the schools such as organizing books in the media center, placing books on the correct reading levels in the media center, or upgrading the new card catalog and check out system to a computerized process. Collecting school supplies, providing

food for the teacher appreciation lunch and brunch, supporting a child from the Angel Tree, or donating money to school uniforms provide opportunities for congregation members to become involved on a short-term basis and give back to the community. These long and short term missions opportunities that the congregation participates in correlates directly to the comments of the minister who talks about the fact that many of the members of the congregation hold full time jobs and do not have time to commit long term to a project. At the same time, the congregation members know that the needs are present and want to help alleviate them. Again, the school and congregation work together in the cause of educating the school community's students and helping them become productive citizens of society.

### **Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

#### **Legal Dimensions**

Because this partnership occurs in the public school setting, one of the first questions that must be answered is whether it violates the separation of church and state. Using the Lemon test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) as the basis for the decision begs that we examine this partnership from three angles. In Pennsylvania a statute provided financial support for teacher salaries, textbooks, and instructional materials for secular subjects in nonpublic schools. The Rhode Island legislature provided a 15 percent salary supplement to teachers in nonpublic schools who taught secular subjects. Some of the nonpublic schools were sectarian in nature and mission. The Court held that the cumulative impact of the statutes existing in each state caused an excessive entanglement between government and religion. Out of these cases, the Lemon Test was developed to

determine whether or not the activity in question violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The first question that we must determine is does the partnership have a clear, secular purpose (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). Several of the comments below regarding the goals and mission of the partnership illustrate that the partnership has a clear, secular purpose. The partnerships' goals and mission are to provide support for the school, its staff, students, and families in a myriad of ways. A member of the Missions Committee states,

We are trying to demonstrate that we are good community supporters and the goal is to help our students who are in need to grow and to feel good about themselves. To grow academically and just have a good feeling about education and show them somebody else [cares] other than the teacher.

When she was asked to articulate the goals and mission of the partnership with Cardinal Elementary School, one of the volunteers and another member of the Missions Committee stated,

I would say academic achievement, but also you know just to show good citizenship in the community and how to give back and to share the knowledge that we have with each other.

A fifth grade teacher who also serves on the School Improvement Team stated that the purpose of the partnership with First Presbyterian Church is

To benefit the student; you want to see growth in the student as far as educational and academics. And even, just our population, having a positive role model in their lives is very good also.

And Mrs. Evans, the principal, states,

The goals of the partnership are to allow students to excel; to help those children excel by any means necessary. To use the volunteers to give the children some confidence in themselves and their abilities, to let them know that they are supported and to help them reach their potential. To help the children get to their fullest potential.

The minister of First Presbyterian Church stated the purpose of the partnership is

To support the school and staff. To provide prayer support for staff and the principal in her personal loss.

While there is mention of prayer support, this is not done at school or in an outward manner. The prayer support is quiet and requested on an individual basis by adults to members of the Missions Committee or other members of the congregation. Because the adults on the staff make these requests as individuals, there is no violation of the Establishment Clause. Activities that support the students have a clear, secular purpose of helping students reach their greatest potential academically as good citizens and serving as role models for many of these students.

The second question that we must examine under Lemon is whether the partnership neither advances nor inhibits religion. In the earlier section, I discussed the music teacher bringing his chorus students to sing at the morning worship service that morning. While there was sermon preached during the service on that Sunday, parents

gave permission for their students to attend and participate in the activity. While school students are assumed to be captive audiences, in this situation, they chose to participate and had parental permission, thus negating this principle. All the other activities that the partnership participates in such as providing teacher appreciation meals, volunteering, providing money for the Angel Tree, meeting emergency monetary needs of school families, or being lunch buddies, neither advance nor inhibit religion.

The third question that we must determine under Lemon is whether the partnership fosters an excessive entanglement of the government with religion. The school and congregation of First Presbyterian Church do work together in many activities. Volunteers work in classrooms or man tables at school events. Congregation members donate money to the school or sponsor students for the Angel Tree at church for Christmas. All of these activities serve the purpose of benefitting the students and supporting the school. The donations are made from the generosity of the congregation with no expectations of anything in return. Thus, there is no excessive entanglement of the government with religion.

When examining each of the three aspects of the Lemon test (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971), there is no evidence that the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

### **Political Dimensions**

In the political arena, we must examine the idea of charitable choice. One aspect of charitable choice is that the faith-based organization providing the service may

incorporate religious instruction, worship, and proselytization as long as they are separated by time and location the activities that are inherently religious. The minister of the church spoke about several children who had attended the morning worship service when the chorus sang and some of the students who participated in their summer programs and music camp. Parents gave permission for their children to attend these activities and these activities occurred on the weekend or during the summer, not during school time. Also, there was no mention of how these students and parents were made aware of the opportunities. The church had a large sign on its front lawn for everyone to see and word of mouth could have also been responsible for spreading the word to these parents about the summer programs.

Even though the congregation does not accept any government funds, it does partner with the local Christian ministries through the Helping Hands program. At Christmas, families of Cardinal Elementary School students and other families in the community who will have difficulty providing Christmas for their families apply through the Helping Hands program. Information is provided to these families through the school guidance counselor. Some families contact the school directly and other families are recommended by teachers at the school. Families choose to participate or not. Therefore, if the family does not celebrate Christmas for either religious or personal reasons, then they are not pressured to participate. Families who participate are screened to ensure they are not being helped by several agencies at the same time. First Presbyterian Church is given names of Cardinal Elementary School families and their first names are placed on the Angel Tree located in the Education Building's main hallway. Members of the

congregation choose a name and purchase the items requested by the child, wrap the gifts, and bring them to the church where they are delivered to the school and families pick them up. This past Christmas, the congregation helped 90 students and siblings of Cardinal Elementary School. In past years, they have helped more; it depends upon the needs of the families. Teachers several times spoke of the students who received Christmas from the Angel Tree and the differences it makes in the students' lives. One fifth grade teacher described how receiving gifts from the Angel Tree relieves some of the pressures on the family.

Especially with the Angel Tree, just making sure that the kids get what they ask for and kind of are on the same playing field and get what they do usually ask for. I think that's a big difference. It probably makes a huge difference in the parents' lives too because it takes some of the stress off them.

Leveling the playing field of economic opportunity in the school setting for its students is a challenge Cardinal Elementary School faces on a constant basis. One of the first grade teachers spoke to this challenge and how her students who received gifts from the Angel Tree react when they return from Christmas vacation.

You can tell that it makes a huge difference for the families because when the kids come back from the holidays, it's not like I didn't get anything. They got something. I've had parents say things to me before about how Christmas time was special because they [the students] were able to get gifts and get things.

She also shared from her own childhood experiences.

What child does not want something for Christmas! And, I will tell you from my own experiences as a child who grew up in extreme poverty; I know what it is like to not have a gift on Christmas morning. I've had that happen twice in my life. And that's painful and I know there are still some students whose parents don't apply for it and that's really sad because for those that do, and those children get a toy and an outfit or two, I mean that just has to make such a positive impression on them. They learn that people care about them.

Another segment of the political arena that also leads to ethical considerations is Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996 where faith-based organizations are encouraged to provide services that build relationships that nurture the person (Chaves & Tsitos, 2001). The legislation encouraged local congregations and other faith-based organizations to provide the needed social services in their own communities to help adults gain marketable skills that would allow them to maintain gainful employment and provide for their families. One component of this program is building relationships between a volunteer and the client. At First Presbyterian Church, members are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms and other areas of the school. Building relationships between these adults and the students nurtures self-confidence, goals, and dreams in the minds of the students. Building personal relationships is a significant part of the volunteer relationship between adults and students.

It was interesting as I interviewed volunteers to hear the motivating factors for their volunteerism. Many of the volunteers stated,

It gives [me] a sense of fulfillment when I go in the same classroom week after week or read with the same child each week.

Using the life experiences that come with maturity, this elderly volunteer stated, “It is very important to read. If you can’t read, you can’t do anything basically.” She and her husband wanted to share their experiences with others. They said, “Just giving back in life really. We’ve had a good life. We got smiles, hugs, those kinds of things.” Another volunteer stated,

I have a lot of history being a volunteer tutor in schools since the 1970’s. When I came here, I joined First Presbyterian and there was a partnership with Cardinal and I wanted to tutor.

Another couple was interested in shorter term projects.

Helping in the library was interesting to me. My background is elementary education. I was aware of AR [Accelerated Reader] and that kind of stuff. I love children. I love little children and my husband does too. And we thought that was something we could do and it not have to be on a regular basis. We could do it when we were available.

One of the retired members of the congregation who volunteers has a background in technology. He stated why he chose helping to place the library’s catalog online and work with the staff.

I took a special interest in getting involved, especially with the faculty. Number 1, it interested me with the technology part that we were working with; to be progressive and help the students go ahead and be on the level they need to be to increase their knowledge. The second reason is that I just really like Lisa (pseudonym), the librarian at the time, and I’ve always worked well with Lisa and I just wanted to give her some help.

It is evident that strong, caring relationships develop between the volunteers and the adults and students who they work with. Hopefully, these relationships help students to begin to envision a successful future for themselves where they realize their dreams.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

Another area that must be considered is the ethics involved in this partnership. While it is evident that these volunteers are building relationships that nurture the students, the volunteers realize that this is not the time to proselytize; their motivation must be to serve all who need it. Several of the volunteers spoke about working with all the children in the classroom at some point and the joy they received from getting to know the students. All volunteers must participate in a volunteer orientation before working in the classroom. During this orientation, the principal discusses the issue of proselytization from the school's point of view. The volunteer handbook that each volunteer receives addresses this issue as well. It is evident that this partnership fosters involvement for the congregation through volunteerism, direct services, collections of money and other goods. But, this partnership is also based on the genuine desire to help as one member of the Missions Committee stated.

Back in the early years of the partnership, the school was having difficulty with a group of students not reading at grade level. The church resides in the same neighborhood as the school and the church wanted to be a good community citizen by helping meet the needs of the families of the school.

This genuine desire to help (Belcher & DeForge, 2007) also allows individuals to contribute not only their money, but their time to bring about greater good. This sense of belonging to an endeavor that is greater than the individual is a tenet of our democratic

society. Alcorn (2003) states that how we invest our time shows our priorities.

Volunteering in the partnership also allows congregation members to promote civic responsibility and pride (Gibelman & Gelman, 2002), helping to educate the whole child, not just the academic component. Seeing members of the community working in the classroom and other areas of the school demonstrates the giving back of time and talents that is so important for students to learn if they are to become productive members of society. At the same time, they see positive role models that they, they students, can build relationships with and broaden their horizons and their goals in life. Thus, in this partnership, helping the students and staff of Cardinal Elementary School is an important task that the congregation of First Presbyterian undertakes.

### **Rural Communities**

While rural communities tend to be homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status, the community of Cardinal Elementary School has changed over the years. The demographics of the town is a population of 15,680 people living in the city's geographical boundaries. The racial makeup of the town is 72.8% White; 20.50% African American; 0.24% Native American; 4.16% Asian and 1.87% Latino (U.S. Census, 2000). Cardinal Elementary School has been designated an English Language Learner site for elementary students who live in the geographical boundaries of the city and require these services. A full time English as a Second Language teacher and teacher assistant who also serves as a translator enhances the direct communication with the English Language Learner families. Looking at the population statistics, there are various ethnic groups represented in the school community, yet the majority of the population is

White/Caucasian. There are approximately 11 Protestant congregations located in the school community and one Catholic congregation. No other religious faiths are located in the community. In terms of socioeconomic status, the families in the school community range from professionals to those families living below the poverty line as determined by the federal government. While each family is unique in its situation, the community as a whole is homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status while acknowledging those families who are members of another race, religion, or socioeconomic class.

### **Relationships**

Set in a rural community in the southern section of the United States of American, the partnership between First Presbyterian Church and Cardinal Elementary School is influenced by its rural community setting. Even though the school is located in the downtown area of a small town, rural characteristics of the community still play a role in shaping the partnership between the two. Bauch (2001) and Teobald (1995) discuss several characteristics of a rural community that can be found in partnerships with schools. The family, school, and church work together to model the social norms of the community. I found in my study that there are strong ties between the local congregation and the school. Church volunteers tutor students and participate in other activities to help the school community. The family, school, and church work together to articulate high expectations of behavior and academics for the students so that they build higher aspirations for themselves to prepare for their life choices.

Mrs. Evans, the principal, explains the relationship between the congregation of First Presbyterian Church and the school.

They have taken us under their wing to fill any void that we might have in terms of trying to support the vision and ideals of meeting all the needs of our students. If there is a need, the church will help. There is a willingness of the congregation to donate school supplies, food, volunteer, and help with parent events like Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads. They are always here for us.

The principal enjoys a level of prestige in the community, and there are informal relationships between the principal and business leaders. There is a pride of providing for their own. The missions' emphasis at First Presbyterian Church is not just international missions, but local missions as well. The congregation looks in the church community to identify the social, emotional, and financial needs of its citizens. Taking care of the community's needs is part of the independence and resilience found in small, rural towns. Because these areas are usually isolated from larger, metropolitan areas because of geography or lack of major thoroughfares, members of the community must reach out and help each other when the needs are present. The minister of First Presbyterian Church states, "It [partnering with the school] has given us a stronger mission in our community. We are part of the downtown community." The reciprocity of the partnership is evident when a member of the Missions Committee remarked, "We just love her [Mrs. Evans] when she comes [to talk to our congregation] because she is such a vibrant person and lets us know what's going on in her school." Mrs. Evans sums up the partnership this way. "The church always lets us know we are here on standby to help your families, to help our families." Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church work

together with the families of the school to build a deep connection to the community that we find in rural areas.

### **Strong Sense of Place**

The citizens of the school community possess a strong sense of place. The minister and members of the Missions Committee refer to Cardinal Elementary Schools as “our neighborhood school.” The school itself traces its origins back to the late 1800’s and the congregation was formed in the late 1800’s as well. Many of the families who attend First Presbyterian Church can trace their membership in this congregation back several generations. Two of the current congregation members teach at the school, and several have retired in the last few years.

### **Cultural and Social Center**

The school serves as a cultural and social center in the community. Building parent involvement and providing activities for families in the school community are important components of this function for schools. In the School Improvement Plan for 2007-2010, the school held science fairs, technology nights, curriculum nights, Muffins for Moms, Donuts for Dads, spring carnivals, talent shows, celebrations for English Language Learners and the school families, and Parent Teacher Organization meetings where students performed. Volunteers from the congregation helped with these activities. The goal of all these events is to involve parents in their children’s education by persuading them to attend events where their children are involved, meet the teacher, and have face-to-face conversations with the people who their children spend several hours each day in their care.

## **Communication**

The school and First Presbyterian Church engage in face-to-face communication which is a key component of building trusting relationships. The principal and Chairperson of the Mission Committee meet and plan together. Volunteers from the congregation engage in face-to-face conversations with the students they work with and the classroom teachers. These conversations work together to begin building trusting relationships that are needed for partnerships to flourish.

## **Cultural Broker**

For the English Language Learner families, the school has become a cultural broker (Pipher, 2002). Many of the immigrant families do live in one area of the school community that does have a higher crime rate than other parts of the community. Many of the adults in the families work menial or entry-level jobs while holding down more than one job at a time. These families find it difficult to attend school functions. Because they do not attend school functions does not mean that they parents are not interested in their children's education. It means that they participate in a manner different from what schools traditionally perceive as being involved with the child's education. This deficit manner of thinking about parent involvement (Cooper, Riehl & Hasan, 2010) is an area that the partnership can address to help strengthen the families' relationships with the school.

## **Social Capital**

The research of Alfred & Nanton (2009) supports that building social capital in families is the key to making democracy work and allowing all voices in the community

to be heard. Individuals have the opportunity to advance their goals and interests and new, democratic leaders emerge. In interviewing educators and members of the congregation, it is evident Cardinal Elementary Schools sees its mission is to educate the whole child and provide opportunities for students to excel academically and become productive members of society.

### **Flow of Information**

In the partnership with First Presbyterian Church, building both bonding and bridging social capital were outcomes that were evident. Volunteers spoke of spending time, talking to, and getting to know the students. One of the couples who volunteers in a third grade classroom relayed this incident.

We were rather surprised on one occasion that one child didn't have any books at home. In conversation, he said, well, neither of my parents can read and we don't have newspapers or books. She realized that reading was important.

This student realized that reading was important because she spent time each week reading with the volunteer who encouraged her. Through conversations, the student became more aware of what she could accomplish with her life if she could read. She began to understand that with improved reading skills, she could access information and learn new things on her own. Gaining this new independence fostered increased self-confidence for this child. The teacher of this child reported that all the students who worked with the volunteers increased their reading skills. It should be noted that since the 2008-2009 school year, Cardinal Elementary School has met Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind legislation for all subgroups in reading.

## **Access to Networks**

Building these networks allows the students to build the beginnings of relationships they can utilize as they grow older. Seeing members of the community and local congregations working in the classrooms may open doors as the students seek college scholarships or jobs in the future.

Social capital for the families in this study develops because of the joint efforts of all of the churches in partnership with Cardinal Elementary. We will discuss social capital further in Chapter VII.

The partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church is an effective partnership that benefits the school's students and its families. In the next chapter, I analyze and discuss the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church.

**CHAPTER VI**

**PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CARDINAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

The following chapter describes and analyzes the data that I collected in my study of a public elementary schools located in a rural area of the South and its partnerships with faith-based organizations. The organization of this chapter is based upon the findings of data collected during interviews with participants in the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church. Also incorporated is my own understandings and knowledge of the partnership as former principal of the school and current Director of Student Services for the school system.

It's a beautiful, sunny winter afternoon and Bus #166 pulls into the driveway at First Lutheran Church. Nine students from Cardinal Elementary School descend from the bus, smiling, laughing, and playing. "Hey, Miss Monica!" (pseudonym) "Hey, Miss June!" (pseudonym) can be heard as the children greet the director and tutor for the after school tutoring program for English Language Learners at First Lutheran Church. The children scamper into line and head into the gym at the church. Twice each week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the scene repeats itself.

Inside the gym, the children go to the tables where they will begin working on their homework. Before they settle down, they go to the counter and get their snack.

Snack today is chips, salsa, and Kool-Aid. The students spend time chatting with each other and the adults while eating their snack.

About 15 minutes later, the children settle down to work on their homework. Miss Monica walks to each child, checking to see what he or she is working on that afternoon. Miss June settles down with two students as they work on math problems together. After checking on everyone, Miss Monica walks over to a fourth grade, male student who is working some math problems. He is having difficulty setting up an array for the problem at hand. “Look at something like this line of stripes. How many do we need to go across?” “Four,” answers the young man. “Good,” affirms Miss Monica. “Now, how many rows do we need to go down?” “Six,” replies the student. “Now, what do we need to do?” The student begins counting. “Don’t panic,” encourages Miss Monica. The student heaves a big sigh. “I see panic in your eyes.” The young man continues to focus on his counting. “Yes, I’ve got it!” he whispers as he jams his fist in the air. “That’s easy.” Thus, continues the rest of the afternoon tutoring session as Miss Monica and Miss June work with each of the students. The volunteers spend their time encouraging, redirecting, probing for more information, affirming, and talking with their young charges. Every situation is turned into a learning experience, even lining up to go home for the day.

“How do you spell ‘government’?” asks Miss Monica. “I know, I know,” resounds as several children enthusiastically raise their hands. Miss Monica calls on a student to spell the word and listens carefully to the letters as they are sounded out. She then asks the student to pronounce the word correctly, listening intently for the middle

syllable. The children in this group speak Spanish as their native language, and several have difficulty articulating middle consonants and syllables. “Good job,” she states as the student pronounces the word correctly. She also gives other students an opportunity to pronounce the word, listening intently and gently correcting as needed. The students exit the gym, ready to go home. Miss Monica and Miss June walk with the children to the parking lot where each parent speaks to one of them before driving off with their children.

Miss Monica and Miss June send the children off into the afternoon and quiet settles into the gym where organized chaos reigned not 15 minutes before.

## **An Analysis of the Partnership Between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church**

### **Planning**

The partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church is a collaborative effort with a common purpose (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). The director of the after school tutoring program and the school’s English as a Second Language teacher talk in person at church and on the phone and email often. Classroom teachers convey the student’s needs through the English as a Second Language teacher, email, and writing notes in the students’ agendas. The director and volunteers in the after school tutoring program spend time on Thursday evenings discussing the various students and their needs. They also plan for the week ahead. All of the members of the partnership work together to help the students improve their English language skills. While the focus has been on helping the students complete their homework, opportunities are provided for

the students to practice speaking English, become more comfortable communicating with others, and make friends.

Helping with homework is deemed the focus of the program. This effort is an opportunity for the English Language Learners to practice their English language skills on a practical level, provide an adult to spend time with the students, and provide special attention to them. Helping with the homework also provides an accountability component for the students. Having an adult follow up with the students and their homework teaches self-discipline and exposes the students to positive role models. The English as a Second Language teacher states why the homework help is so vital when she says,

I think in the beginning, a lot of them [parents] don't realize that homework is very important. They just see it as something extra and don't realize that in order to keep up with what's going on in school, they have to do homework.

Another teacher stated,

One area that was lacking was homework. Not because the parents don't want to help with the homework, but because they are unable to help most of the time.

However, when the student attends the after school tutoring program, the teacher said,

If they have help after school, the homework gets done, things get looked at where as if they don't have an adult with some of these organizations, their planners don't get signed; they don't know what they have for homework; there is no accountability.

The activities that First Lutheran Church provides in this partnership are student centered. The purpose of this partnership is to encourage academic achievement through

helping with homework and providing opportunities for students to practice their English language skills. These goals support the student and the school. Families are supported when they are encouraged to talk with teachers and school personnel about their children and to attend and participate in programs that help them feel a part of the school community.

The congregation of First Lutheran Church has provided on-going support to the program. The church provides space, materials, and snacks. Four years ago, the church provided a bus to take the children home after the tutoring sessions. Funds to make this possible came from the pastor's discretionary fund. At Christmas, members of the congregation adopt some of the students whose families need help providing for Christmas for their children. Church members take the children shopping and purchase the gifts. The children's smiling faces show their appreciation to the church members.

Provision through the pastor's discretionary fund is also made for the students to go on various field trips within the community. One of the recent field trips was to the county courthouse. Students visited with the district court judge inside a court room, and he answered the children's questions. Not only did this trip educate the students about services the courthouse provides, but the students also learned an experiential lesson in how our judicial system works in a democratic society. Not only does this provide an opportunity for the students to broaden their understanding of American culture, but to practice their English language skills in a setting other than the classroom. In our interview, the English as a Second Language teacher related that these students come from a culture where they do not participate in many of the activities that other children

in American society participate in. Some of these activities might be going bowling or eating out at a restaurant. The tutoring program provides these activities as well so that the children who attend the tutoring program are provided additional opportunities to broaden their life experiences. Participating in these activities also allows the children to practice their English language skills in a more informal setting with people who they do not know. The students' self-confidence grows as they learn to maneuver in unknown circumstances.

### **Leadership**

In an effective partnership with a faith-based organization, the clergy predominately plays a cheerleading role (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002). The pastor of First Lutheran Church not only encourages this partnership by providing needed funds to supply services or talking about the after school tutoring program with the local congregation, he also undertook an active role in the program by tutoring a group of fourth and fifth graders each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for two years. Building relationships and crossing racial and socioeconomic barriers were important reasons for him to spend his time working with these students.

Smooth transitions in the leadership of a partnership are also an important segment of an effective partnership and can be viewed as a challenge to maintaining a viable organization. During the 10 years the partnership has been in existence, there have been three different directors. The partnership began when former pastor's wife, who was a retired school teacher, began the tutoring program. She realized that there was a need for homework assistance. The next director took over when the original director moved

away to another city. This leader provided a well structured program that also focused on homework and helping children succeed academically. The current director speaks Spanish fluently. Not only does she provide well planned activities, but she also communicates well with the parents of the students. This builds trust for the program which also translates into trust in the school. Each of the directors enjoyed strong, direct communication with the English as a Second Language teacher at Cardinal Elementary School; however, both the classroom teachers and the English as a Second Language teacher remarked about the increased email correspondence with the current director of the program.

### **Relationships**

While this partnership does rely on relationships between church members to facilitate communication, this partnership is more formalized in nature. The retired pastor's wife who began the program taught at Cardinal Elementary School for many years before retiring and saw the needs first hand. First Lutheran Church also sponsored a Hmong family to settle in the town in the 1980's and worked with the family to help them navigate the new culture where the family found themselves living. The relationships between the church congregation and school lend themselves toward a more informal nature. However, the fact that students are transported on a school bus every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from the school to the church requires more planning and communication than is typically found in an informal partnership. While the communication between the director of the program and the teachers does not occur on a set schedule, there is frequent emailing between the two to discuss student needs. Notes

also flow back and forth in the students' agendas. There is also a hierarchy of communication in this partnership that if the teachers do not communicate directly with the director of the program, they go first to the English as a Second Language teacher who then speaks with the director and the information is conveyed to the tutors regarding the child's needs.

One challenge that this partnership must come to grips with is maintaining a volunteer force. The number of children who attend the after school tutoring program is much smaller this year and the current volunteer force is able to handle the group and provide individual attention to each student effectively. Currently, Cardinal Elementary School is in School Improvement under *No Child Left Behind* legislation and must offer a tutoring program under supplemental services to those students who qualify for free and reduced lunches under the federal school lunch program. This tutoring program serves many of the English Language Learners who would normally attend the tutoring program at First Lutheran Church. However, when Cardinal Elementary School exits School Improvement sanctions under *No Child Left Behind* legislation, this after school tutoring program will increase the number of children it serves. It will be a viable program that is offering its services free to the school. The need for volunteers will grow significantly at that point.

In the past, the tutoring program has partnered with students at the local high school who are taking Spanish II classes. According to the English as a Second Language teacher, these students were diligent in their participation last year working with these English Language Learners. The teacher also remarked that she sees increasing the

volunteer force as a real challenge for the program as it moves into the future. The issues of commitment, time available, and energy are considerations that volunteers must come to grips with before committing to an endeavor such as this.

Communicating and sharing information with all parties and being approachable and sensitive to other people and their messages are important strategies that must be employed for the partnership to succeed (Baker et al, 1999). Miss Monica communicates on a weekly basis with the English as a Second Language teacher and classroom teachers as needed. Teachers also write notes in the children's agendas regarding areas of need for the tutors to work with the students. Miss Monica is also sensitive to the needs of the families and children. She makes a point to meet and introduce herself and her volunteers to each parent. Parents understand that if they have a concern or something they need to talk about with the tutoring program, they may speak to her or one of the tutors. When parents pick up the children from the program, they are required to come in and get their children. This requires the parents to speak to Miss Monica before the child leaves and provides an opportunity for conversation to occur.

Miss Monica and her staff are attuned to the needs of the children as well. She related a situation that occurred around Christmas time with one of the younger, Hmong students. The second grade student was having a very difficult time participating that afternoon and was very withdrawn. Miss Monica invited her to take a walk with her, and they visited the sanctuary where the Christmas tree was decorated. As they exited the sanctuary, they bumped into another church member and Miss Monica introduced the two. Conversation ensued and the church member began relating how the church had

sponsored the original Hmong family to settle in the town. The child's face lit up because she knew the family personally and this was a story about them. In later conversation that afternoon, Miss Monica found out that the parents of the child had just lost their jobs. She is one of 14 children and the family was having difficulty feeding their children. Miss Monica and the other volunteers contacted church members, and purchased food and necessities for the family. That night, they delivered the supplies to the family. When the family saw the 50 pound bag of rice that was being given to them, the parents burst into tears because this would feed their family for several weeks. Not only are Miss Monica and her volunteers transparent in their communication; but embody the role of nurturer and being nurtured in this partnership.

Listening to and meeting the needs of the children builds trusting relationship with the families. Several of the parents whom I interviewed remarked about how they trust the church and Miss Monica. Miss Monica also related a story about another young student who was having difficulty pronouncing words correctly. This problem was making it difficult to understand the student when she spoke English. Already shy, this difficulty was hurting the student's self-confidence in communicating her thoughts verbally. Miss Monica worked with the student and gave her specific things to practice at home. She then called the parents and talked with them about the problem. The parents asked what they needed to do. Miss Monica told them she wanted to try having the child read aloud to others and concentrate on saying the words correctly. The parents promised to help with this. Within a few weeks, the student was speaking more clearly and she was volunteering to read aloud to others.

## **Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

### **Legal Dimensions**

Because this partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School involves students from a public school, we must determine: Does the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment? According to the courts, we must examine this partnership using the Lemon Test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). We must determine (1) whether the program has a clear, secular purpose; (2) whether or not it neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) whether or not it fosters an excessive government entanglement with religion. This after school tutoring program has a clear, secular purpose in that its purpose is to encourage academic success in a group of students who needs an extra level of services. The extra level of services is provided when the tutors help with homework and provide additional opportunities for English Language Learners to practice their English language skills. Homework is an integral component of the expectations of students and their academic performance. Providing additional opportunities for English Language Learners to practice their English language skills and receive feedback is an academic component of the educational process. Thus, the first level of this test is satisfied because the program supports a clear, secular purpose.

In order not to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, the program must also meet the standard of neither advancing nor inhibiting religion. While the program meets in the gym of the church, this is merely the provision of a space and a

facility to hold the program. The church also provides the materials that the students use in their tutoring program and food for snacks. The materials are purchased from a commercial company that produces educational materials. The books that the students read come from the school library or the church library. There is no religious content in the books. Some of the books deal with subjects about character development. The program neither advances nor inhibits religion; therefore, the second level of this test is satisfied.

The program also must not foster an excessive entanglement with religion. Religious subjects or content are not discussed in the tutoring program. The program focuses on helping students with their homework. While the church does help families who are in financial need with items such as food and clothing, there is no excessive entanglement between the church and school families. Charitable choice legislation encourages congregations to provide social services that transform families and this activity falls in that line of thinking. Also, when funds from the Pastor's Discretionary Fund were used to pay for a bus to transport the children home from the tutoring program, there was not excessive entanglement with religion. The term "discretionary" in the fund's name allows the monies to be used to meet the needs of church and community members as the pastor deems appropriate. Thus, the third level of the test is satisfied. Therefore, this partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

## **Political Dimensions**

In the political arena, this partnership is viable because of the language included in the charitable choice legislation. While the congregation is aware that they must protect the rights of religious minorities, the religious organization does not have to alter its form of governance, remove religious art, or other religious symbols from the place where the partnership activities occur (Lockhart, 2005; Chaves & Tsitos, 2001). The children who attend this tutoring program are from families who are first-generation immigrants from Latin American or Southeast Asia. While they may practice a religion other than Christianity, this is not an issue in the tutoring program because the program focuses on academic needs. Also, when the students go on a field trip in the community, they visit places that will expose them to the American culture and government such as visiting the county courthouse or eating at an ethnic restaurant. None of these activities are religious in nature.

Charitable choice legislation also allows the church to maintain its religious art or religious symbols on the grounds. The gym where the program meets is joined to the main church building by a hallway. The students enjoy visiting the sanctuary “because of the beautiful stained glass windows with the sun shining through” or because “the Christmas tree is so beautifully decorated.” There are also several artifacts that depict the church’s history located in glass cases lining the hallway. The children enjoy hearing the stories behind these artifacts. Not only does this sharing of stories help these students to understand their place in history, seeing the real objects increases the child’s appreciation for art. While some of these families who are served by the tutoring program do attend

services at the Lutheran church, there is no concerted effort to recruit them. Volunteers who work in the program realize that the children are a young audience and while their parents do give permission for them to attend, they are a captive audience for the time the tutoring program runs. Therefore, they pay close attention to not proselytizing or evangelizing their religious beliefs to the children. One of the program's volunteers noted in the interview with Miss Monica:

It's amazing how we show God without even talking about Him... You do good, you expect good. And kids will grow.

While this effort does have religious overtones, it is not evangelizing in nature and it is important to note the difference. The volunteers in the after school tutoring program treat each child with respect, dignity, and love. The child's individuality is cherished. Providing individual attention to students who need additional opportunities to practice their English language skills is doing good. Exemplifying and communicating high academic and behavior standards to students to expecting to meet or exceed the community's expectations of them is expecting good of students. Striving to meet high expectations about oneself stimulates one to grow. The result is students realizing their goals and dreams. Thus, the students do good.

Another aspect of the political arena to note is that this partnership relates to Section 104: Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996. In this legislation, local congregations are encouraged to provide programs to the community that are holistic and transformative in nature; develop skills in the clientele that they need to find solutions to their problems; and build relationships that nurture the person

(Chaves & Tsitos, 2001). This tutorial program fits these characteristics. While the tutoring program focuses on helping students with homework, they also provide another adult to speak English to or who listens to the student for an additional two hours twice a week. This is in addition to the time the students spend in the classroom each day.

Practicing their English language skills in a small group setting allows the self-confidence of the students to increase and transforms the student's self-esteem as well.

The English as a Second Language teacher relates,

My students are typically very shy and withdrawn and they are not going to speak in class very often. You know, in a classroom setting, they don't have many opportunities to talk, they just don't, and not often are they willing to raise their hand and speak in front of the whole class. So, giving them the chance to practice their communication skills with each other because they are comfortable is good. In a small group, they are willing to talk.

By working on their English language skills, the students also practice critical thinking skills that increase their ability to solve problems and find solutions. In the tutoring program, finding solutions to the problems at hand might be more practical in nature and the students may transfer those skills to their daily lives. Because this tutoring program works to develop the whole child; builds relationships with caring adults who nurture the student; and helps the child build skills that will enable him to maneuver in a global society because he can communicate his thoughts clearly; his world has been transformed and he has a greater chance of maturing into a productive member of society who can care for his family.

Not only does the church provide tutoring for these English Language Learners, but in the past has offered English language classes to adults in the surrounding area. The

mother of one of the students who has attended the tutoring program since kindergarten attended these classes. When I met her six years ago, she spoke almost no English. Today, she speaks English well. When I interviewed her for this study, she wanted the questions asked in English and replied to me in English. This program has transformed this woman's life because she is now gainfully employed at McDonalds and expresses that she feels that she is more a part of the school community.

The after school tutoring program that First Lutheran Church provides builds relationships that not only nurture the students, but their parents as well. An example is the woman who I spoke of in the above paragraph. She loves Miss Monica, her staff of volunteers, the church and the school. Because of the nurturing relationships at the tutoring program, one parent stated:

My son has more friends. He is more social. He does not have friends at home. I like that there is more contact here and they pay individual attention to the students.

Clearly these two programs meet the goals of charitable choice legislation. First Lutheran Church is working with the school to meet the needs of those families in the community who do not speak English as their native language and need additional guidance in accessing social services for their families. Young lives are being transformed.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

When examining the ethical dimensions of this partnership, we must also look at the motivating factors for the volunteers to participate in this program. Many volunteers are motivated to participate in partnership activities because of their sense of obligation

to practice their faith through works to help others; their individual efforts contribute to the greater good of mankind; a sense of belonging to an endeavor that is greater than the individual; and a genuine desire to help. While none of the volunteers specifically stated why they work with this partnership in these words, these themes came through in the thoughts and beliefs they articulated. Miss Monica related why she became involved with and directs the after school tutoring program.

I moved from California and I was retired and I love kids. When I found out the church had an ESL program, mainly Hispanic kids and Asian kids, I was interested because it gave me a chance to practice my Spanish better and I can have an understanding of multi-cultures. I was excited to work with them.

Realizing she needed volunteers, Miss Monica personally contacted Miss June to recruit her help.

[Miss Monica] called me and said I need some volunteers with the ESL program. I said, well what can I give to the ESL program? I had absolutely no Spanish. I came here and just fell in love with the kids. They are so precious. Sometimes you are looking at them and they are saying words, "Oh my, what are they saying?" but it's great to see them blossom after you've worked with them for an hour. They catch something that you say and you explain something to them and a light bulb goes off.

Both volunteers agree

It's the children that re-energizes. It's not us, they are what energize us. It's the specific needs; they all have different needs and that's what keeps us going. They are the reason I get out of bed. It's just for the children, because if it wasn't for this, what would I get out of bed for? But for the children, they make my day. Just to see them, just to hear their voices.

Volunteers are motivated to give of their time and energy because of the transformation that is taking place in children's lives. They can see this transformation taking place in front of their eyes and it makes all the commitments worthwhile.

### **Rural Communities**

While rural communities tend to be homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status, the community of Cardinal Elementary School has changed over the years. The school has been designated an English Language Learner site for elementary students who live in the town's geographical limits and require these services. A full time English as a Second Language teachers and a teacher assistant work with these students on a daily basis.

Set in a rural community in the southern section of the United States of America, the partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School is influenced by this setting. Characteristics of the rural community still play a role in shaping the partnership between the two entities.

### **Relationships**

The family, school, and church work together to model the social norms of the community. I found in my study that there are strong ties between the local congregation of First Lutheran Church and the school. Church members volunteer to tutor students and participate in other activities to help the school community. The family, school, and church work together to articulate high expectations of students so that they build higher aspirations for themselves to prepare for their life choices. Miss Monica related the following incident where she, the parents, and the school worked together to

communicate the expected behavior standards of the students participating in the program.

There were a couple of boys who wanted to call names and I don't like bullying in any sense or form. I think that's when the Asian kid found out I could understand just a few words of what he was saying in his language. I talked to both parents, talked to the kids, and got on the phone with the ESL teacher and it was cleared up.

In this particular partnership, the principal is not highly visible. While she is involved in arranging bus transportation for the students to the tutoring program, other staff members interact on a more regular basis with the program's director. When the families of the English Language Learners attend functions at the school, the principal is highly visible in her interactions with the families. Mrs. Evans works to help families feel that their children are loved and nurtured at the school. Teachers work to connect with the families of English Language Learners and listen to the needs of the students. Building trusting relationships between the school and its families is important for students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

### **Strong Sense of Place**

The citizens of the school community possess a strong sense of place. The minister and members of the tutoring program refer to Cardinal Elementary School as their neighborhood school. The school itself traces its beginnings back to the late 1800's and the congregation was formed in the late 1880's. Many of the families who attend First Lutheran Church can trace their membership in this congregation back several

generations. One of the current congregation members teach at the school and a former pastor's wife retired from teaching at the school several years ago.

### **Cultural and Social Center**

The school serves as a cultural and social center in the community. Building parent involvement and providing activities for families in the school community are important components of this function for schools. The School Improvement Plan for 2007-2010 supports a variety of family-oriented activities to be held during the school year. The goal of these events is to involve parents in their children's education by persuading them to attend events where their children are involved. Special efforts were made to communicate with families whose native language is not English to ensure that they understood the invitation and were made to feel welcome. The leaders of the after school tutorial program strongly encourage their parents to attend programs at the school and to talk to their children's teachers.

### **Communication**

Face-to-face communication is a key component of building trusting relationships. The kindergarten teacher who I interviewed is completing a conversational Spanish class so that she can better communicate with her Latino parents who speak Spanish. She related the success that she has had this year in working with the translator to write notes to parents in their native language when communicating with them directly about their children. The parents see the teacher as a partner who is truly interested in working with them to help their children succeed. This kindergarten teacher is also perceived as someone who is interested in their heritage and stories. They sense that the

teacher does not see the parent as someone who needs to be told how to parent their child (Cooper, Riehl & Hasan, 2010). Miss Monica also requires parents to speak with her or one of the volunteers before taking their children home for the day. This face-to-face communication provides opportunities for exchanges of thoughts, feelings, and expectations on the part of both sides. These methods of direct communication pay off in building the trusting relationships that are needed between families and the school. The five parents who I interviewed said that they attend school programs more since their children have been attending the after school tutoring program. They feel welcomed and can talk to the principal and teacher about their children's educational progress. They also credit Miss Monica in encouraging them to participate. It takes everyone working together to accomplish this goal.

### **Cultural Broker**

For many of the English Language Learner families, the school has become a cultural broker (Pipher, 2002). Many of the immigrant families do live close to other families of their ethnicity, but it is in an area of the town that has a higher crime rate. Because of this increased crime rate, many of these families do feel a sense of isolation. Many of the adults in the family work menial or entry-level jobs while holding down multiple jobs at one time. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for them to attend parent conferences or other events at the school. Teachers and staff work with the families to arrange conference times that the parents can attend. A translator is available to aid in communication if she is needed. At the same time, the director of the tutoring program is attuned to the needs of the students and their families. Miss Monica encourages the

parents in the tutoring program to attend these conferences and other school activities. She has also helped these families navigate the maze to accessing social services for themselves when they need help. The school and tutorial program work together to foster understanding of the American culture and accessing needed services so that these families can flourish.

### **Social Capital**

Within the framework of understanding social capital, it is important to note that an important tenet is that social capital is a mechanism to allow all voices to be heard and is what makes democracy work. Building social capital in individuals and families also conveys significant benefits to the poor and marginalized groups allowing them to offset some of the socioeconomic disadvantages the individuals and families find themselves dealing with. Social capital also adds a value dimension because it operates in the context of the community within the realms of class, economics, and politics (Alfred & Nanton, 2009). The partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School embodies these tenets of building social capital in the families the partnership serves. The families served in this partnership are first generation immigrant families from Latin America and Southeast Asia. English is not their native language and the adults in the families work menial, low paying jobs to provide for their families. In many cases, the adults work more than one job at a time. Because of the isolation of living near members of their own ethnic group and not being able to communicate in the English language, this group of families who participate in the partnership's tutoring activities receive significant benefits. The children have an adult who spends time with them individually

listening to, speaking with, and allowing the students to practice their English language skills an additional four hours each week.

The school district realizes that the English Language Learners are a group of students who need additional help. One of the things that the district has done is make Cardinal Elementary School an English as a Second Language Center for all elementary students who live in the area of the former city schools. These students are provided transportation to the school where they are served by a full time English as a Second Language teacher and teacher assistant. The teacher assistant also serves as a translator. Parents have access to the information in their native language that they need to help their children become successful in school. Face-to-face communication between the parents and school is encouraged. The partnership with First Lutheran Church provides an extra layer of services to these families that helps them to meet their needs. Miss Monica and her staff also work with parents helping them understand where they may need to go for help with accessing services. Providing the English language classes for adults in years past has also helped the adults navigate a culture that is foreign to them.

### **Flow of Information**

One of the most important components of building social capital in this partnership is the flow of information from those who possess the information (the school) to those who need to know (the students and their families). The majority of the families who the partnership serves live in areas in the community where other families who speak their native language live. For the majority of the Spanish-speaking families, this is an area that has a higher crime rate than other parts of the school neighborhood.

Isolated not only because of the language barriers but also because of the crime surrounding the neighborhood, it is important for these families to gain information about job opportunities and how to access services. In this partnership, Miss Monica and her volunteers serve as information brokers between the families and the schools. As Miss Monica and her volunteers gain the trust of the families, they confide in her about various concerns they have about their children and their progress in school or needs that the family has in general. Miss Monica encourages the parents to talk with the teachers and principal about their concerns and to attend parent trainings so that they can learn to help their children at home. She also helps them access social services when needed.

Building social capital in the children who participate in the partnership's tutoring activities also reinforces the individuals' identity and visibility. The majority of these students are shy in class and do not raise their hands to speak or answer a question in class. As they build their self-confidence by practicing their English language skills, their personalities emerge in the school setting and they are encouraged to participate more in school activities. Miss Monica relates an incident with one fourth grade Hmong student who allowed his reading abilities to shine through with some individual attention.

He didn't want to read, so I took him one-on-one. I was so amazed. "What do you like? What interests you?" Shrug. I'm sitting there looking at the books and not looking at him, just listening. He began to relax and a little bit and I said, "Oh, what do you think of this book?" I could see him flip the pages. "Aw, this one's easy." "Just read a page and let me hear what it's about." I could hear in his voice, voice inflection and pauses. I could have cried because here is this Hmong kid reading this English. When he finished, I said, "Do you know what you just read?" He said, "Yeah, the story's about..." and I said, "WOW!" I told Miss June, it's amazing. He's hiding his brains to be the bully to get attention.

Teachers report significant academic and social growth in their English Language Learners who attend the after school tutoring program.

This partnership builds social capital in the students by providing access to connections to the world outside the community. An example is the visit to the local courthouse to talk with the district court judge. None of the students had visited the courthouse before, much less spoken with a judge who answered their questions. These are also students who do not typically participate in structured recreational activities in the community such as bowling. When the tutoring program sponsors a field trip to the local bowling alley, not only are the students participating in a new sport for them, but they are also exposed to a different environment that is not a normal part of their neighborhood. Eating out in a restaurant is also a new experience for these students as it is something extra that many of the parents cannot afford. The after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church sponsored the field trips and recreational outings. Not only do these students work on academic endeavors, but they interact with others in new, unfamiliar settings. By providing guidance to the English Language Learners in these settings, these students experience an activity that many Americans take for granted and gain more knowledge about American culture and how to access the various social agencies and services such as the judicial system.

Building these connections to the outside world also allows the children to see a world beyond their small community. By gaining different experiences and seeing how other people conduct themselves in situations encourages the students to set goals for themselves and to accomplish their dreams. This bridging social capital is important as

these students become adults navigating a world that is global in nature. Miss Monica relates the following story about a fourth grade, male student in the tutoring program.

I watch him write and listen to him read. He's smart. I ask him one-on-one what he wants to do when he grows up. He's one of 14 kids. You don't see it now, I tell him, but I promise you, if you will allow your brains to come out a little bit, you will be accepted by a group of people who right now, you are not exposed to. He said, "Huh?" I broke it down. You are going to have friends in high places if you do the good things for yourself. Like college.

By encouraging this student through the above conversation, he will hopefully develop attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that will lead him to college and allow him to better himself economically. This encouragement of developing this bridging social capital was evident in the responses parents gave when I asked the question: What would you like for your child to do when he/she grows up? One parents stated that she wants, "For him to go to college is my biggest dream. He says he is going to work as a policeman and give me tickets because I drive too fast." Another parent stated he wants his son to, "Learn as much as possible and be the best he can be." "I want him to go to college and then get a job," shows the value these parents place on attaining an education and creating a successful future for their families.

In examining the frameworks of social capital, one of the most important aspects of this partnership is the outcomes that can be traced directly to the partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School. One of the most important outcomes of this partnership is the building of collaborative relationships between the school and the families. Teachers want to meet and get to know the parents of their

students so that they can better work with the student and understand his or her strengths and needs. One kindergarten teacher who I interviewed stated,

We really need to be able to be one-on-one with these parents. We need to talk to them, show them what's going on in our classrooms. Let them see what's going on. I'm a big believer that you have to earn the respect of those parents and if they believe that you have their child's best interests at heart, they are going to back you 100%.

When parents participate in programs that the school sponsors and take time to talk with their children's teachers and the teachers practice good listening skills, then these trusting relationships emerge. Epstein & Sheldon (2002) state that increased parental involvement in the schools is a key to high student achievement. The winner is the student who benefits from everyone working together towards a common goal. However, educators must realize that there is a difference between parent involvement and parent engagement (Auerbach, 2010). Parent involvement has traditionally been thought of as attending various functions and programs at the school. However, parent engagement occurs when parents voice their families' dreams, goals, and concerns, and educators work together with parents to help the student realize these dreams.

When educators provide a welcoming atmosphere to parents and truly listen to what parents have to say, then this relationship carries over into the community. I know that when I was principal of this elementary school, I could travel anywhere in the community, even the higher crime areas, and be safe. As one of my African American parents said to me, "Somebody is always watching your back because they know you

care about our children.” This trust only comes from building authentic relationships based on honesty and caring about the children with whom we are entrusted.

At the elementary school level, the seeds of high expectations for academic achievement are sown. One of the gauges that the school district has of student achievement for the English Language Learners is the ACCESS testing done each year to determine the level of proficiency the student has of the English language in the realms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The goal is to exit a student within five years of their original placement in the English as a Second Language program. Last year, three of the students from Cardinal Elementary School in the English as a Second Language program exited the program at a proficient level. I was not able to determine whether or not these students attended the after school tutoring program, but there is a strong likelihood that they did. Testing for this school year is currently taking place and we do not have access to the results.

Social capital for the families in this study develops because of the joint efforts of all of the churches in partnership with Cardinal Elementary. We will discuss social capital further in Chapter VIII.

The partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Lutheran Church is an effective partnership that benefits the school’s students and its families. In the next chapter, I analyze and discuss the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CARDINAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**

This chapter describes and analyzes the data that I collected in my study of a public elementary school located in a rural area and its partnerships with faith-based organizations. The organization of this chapter is based upon the findings of data collected during interviews with participants in the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church. First Baptist Church is located just down the street from the school. This partnership is not as formalized in nature in that the congregation has not officially adopted the school as First Presbyterian Church did or set up a program such as the after school tutoring program for English Language Learners that First Lutheran Church sponsors. Instead, the church congregation responds to needs as they are made aware of them.

The bell rings and children spill into the classroom. “Hi, Pastor Timmons (pseudonym),” says one little girl. “Good morning,” responds Pastor Timmons. Soon the children settle into their seats, announcements are made, and everyone stands for the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence. The day begins. Pastor Timmons works with two students who are working on a report on famous Black Americans. After about 30 minutes, he moves to another small group where he listens to a student read a book to him. Pastor Timmons listens patiently as the student reads. He nods and encourages the

second grade student, gently pronouncing words where the student has difficulty. Thus, a typical Friday morning begins for Pastor Timmons as he works with students in his daughter's class and then moves to his son's class to spend some time working with students in his class.

## **An Analysis of the Partnership Between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church**

### **Planning**

The partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church has been in existence for the past six years. First Baptist Church is closer in geographical proximity to the school than the other two congregations who partner with the school. Historically, First Baptist Church has not partnered with the school. Today, the partnership is a more collaborative effort that supports a common purpose even though it is more informal in nature. The partnership began when the former principal, who is a member of First Baptist Church, approached Pastor Timmons about some of the needs of the school. Pastor Timmons's older child also began kindergarten that year, and he wanted to be involved in his children's education in a hands-on manner. The partnership has strengthened as he has worked with the current principal for the past four years.

Over the past six years, the congregation of First Baptist Church has provided financial support by donating school supplies for the entire fifth grade, tutoring students, providing adults to be an "extra dad" for Donuts for Dads, and allowing the school to use the fellowship hall to hold various meetings or their fall festival.

Several years ago when the school was located in their old building, the geographic proximity of the church was a lifesaver for the school. As staff entered the building that cold, winter morning, the smell of smoke wafted up the hallways from the cafeteria. Understand that the building was built in 1927 and had the original hardwood floors as the flooring in the hallway that connected the cafeteria to the other parts of the school. The school had to be evacuated immediately and students were arriving by bus and being dropped off as car riders. Staff was also arriving for the day. The parking lot to the church backed up to the street that the school was located on. Several men who were attending a prayer breakfast were interrupted by the principal pounding on the door to find out if students could be housed in the fellowship hall until it could be determined what was going on in the school building. The school had a plan in place to evacuate the school at the Senior Center that is located at the end of the street. However, this agency opens at 8:30 in the morning and it was 7:30 a.m. The men at the prayer breakfast gladly opened the doors to the fellowship hall and children had a place to wait in the warm. The fire department determined that there was no fire in the walls and the school was safe to open. Granted, the principal knew that the men were meeting that morning, but if they had not been there, access to the building would have been provided because she possessed a key to the fellowship hall. The principal and Pastor Timmons had also discussed this scenario before.

### **Leadership**

As I have noted before, the clergy typically plays a cheerleading role in partnerships among the church congregations and community partnerships. In this

situation, Pastor Timmons plays a central role. Not only does he volunteer at the school every Friday, but he is also president of the Parent/Teacher Organization. He has also organized events at the school such as Donuts for Dads and the fifth grade graduation luncheon. An integral part of the school, he communicates several times each week with the teachers and principal to discuss needs as they arise. He and the principal also meet monthly for lunch to discuss concerns for the Parent/Teacher Organization and to plan for this organization's meetings.

As I have noted, this partnership is more informal in nature. However, the pastor of First Baptist Church serves as a member of the School Improvement Team. He serves on this committee because of his role as president of the Parent/Teacher Organization. The result is that trusting relationships grow between the congregation of First Baptist Church and Cardinal Elementary School. The students are the beneficiaries of this partnership.

### **Relationships**

Declining enthusiasm for the partnership's activities is one of the challenges that partnerships must face. When I interviewed Pastor Timmons, he stated that he feels that the church congregation better understands the needs of the school and wants to help, more so than in the past. From the information I gathered, this can be credited to the congregation being more aware of the needs of the school. Pastor Timmons regularly communicates needs the school may have as possible areas of service to Sunday school classes or church staff. Church members who also work at the school communicate needs as well.

Pastor Timmons approaches each situation with an attitude of solving problems. When several students would not have a “dad” to eat donuts with them at Donuts for Dads, Pastor Timmons asked several men of the church to attend the event and be an extra male figure. Several older men in the congregation enjoyed spending part of their morning visiting with the students and eating donuts. While these men did not continue to volunteer at the school, the children whose dads were not able to attend had a male adult to pay individual attention to them during this activity. These children felt special and yet as though they were just like the other students who had dads present. The church has also allowed the school to use the church’s portable sound system for various events. Pastor Timmons usually asks a staff member of the church to make sure that the sound system is set up and ready to go.

Another example of a need being met is when the Chris Newton Sunday School (pseudonym) class donated school supplies to all the fifth graders at the school. The fifth grade teacher related that every year, only 3 or 4 students come in with every item listed on the supply list. One of the supplies on the list is a trapper keeper that the teachers request to help students organize themselves and prepare for middle school where they change classes. Trapper keepers are more expensive than a regular 3-ring binder. The secretary of the school took a call during the summer from a lady wanting to know a classroom that she could adopt. The secretary took that idea and presented it to the Sunday school class who agreed to donate the supplies. The result is that all of the fifth grade students have all of the supplies that they need for their school year. The classroom teacher also reports that interruptions to the learning environment are reduced because no

student is without a pencil or paper. If they run out, the teacher replaces the needed item from the stored supplies. Students are also more organized and hand in their homework assignments because they know where they are stored in their binders and can easily access them.

The activities that I found in this partnership are student centered. Students' needs are met through tutoring and volunteering in the classroom. Supplying the students with the supplies they need puts everyone on a level play field while taking stress off of families to provide these items when they struggle to meet the basic needs of their families such as food and clothing. Allowing the school to use facilities and materials when they need to do so exemplifies caring on the part of the congregation. The school's faculty and staff feel supported.

### **Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

#### **Legal Dimensions**

When analyzing whether or not a partnership between a public school and a faith-based organization violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, we must look at the courts to discern their lines of reasoning in this matter. In *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), the Supreme Court determined that in order for the issue under discussion to not violate the Establishment Clause, it must meet the three prongs of the Lemon Test.

First, the partnership must have a clear, secular purpose. In this particular partnership there is a clear, secular purpose. The purpose of this partnership is to help the school meet the needs of the students so that they can succeed both academically and socially. Succeeding both academically and socially are goals that public schools

envision for their students and are not related to religion in general or specifically. Thus, the first level of the test is satisfied.

Second, the partnership must neither advance nor inhibit religion. While the Sunday school class donated the school supplies, no messages proselytizing the church's faith were enclosed in the supplies donated to the students. A member of the Sunday school class delivered the supplies to the school with wishes for a successful school year. Thus, the partnership neither advances nor inhibits religion and the second level of the test is satisfied.

Third, the partnership must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion. All of the activities that members of the congregation participate in are very straightforward in meaning. Members who serve as an extra "dad" for Donuts for Dads do so as positive role models who enjoy spending time with children. Enjoying a donut is enticing as well, but not the motivating factor to participate. Allowing the school to use the church fellowship hall for their fall festival does not entangle the government, school in this case, with religion. The fellowship hall of the church is used for a variety of functions where groups can meet, eat, and fellowship. Community groups may rent the facility to use for various activities that benefit them. The activities that typically go on in the fellowship hall are eating and fellowship. Using the fellowship hall for the fall festival follows the line of activities supported in this facility. Thus, there is not excessive government entanglement with religion in this partnership and the third level of the test is met. Based on my information gathered in this study, the partnership between Cardinal

Elementary School and First Baptist Church does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

### **Political Dimensions**

When thinking about the arena of charitable choice and this particular partnership, it is important to note that the congregation of First Baptist Church does not receive government funds to provide social services to the families of the school. In fact, the closest the partnership would come to providing social services is the mentoring relationships that Pastor Timmons has developed as he volunteers weekly in the classrooms. Providing the school supplies is a direct donation from the members of a Sunday school class in the church congregation. Pastor Timmons talked about in his interview that there have been faith questions that have arisen over the years as he has volunteered in the classroom. He acknowledged that conversations took place. However, he took special care to give factual information that answered the questions, yet protected the rights of religious minorities. Because he has volunteered in the classrooms from kindergarten through fifth grade, he has been sensitive to the clientele he is working with and taking care that no subtle proselytization occurs.

Charitable choice also allows the use of the church facility for school events. In the fellowship hall that the school has used, there are no religious symbolism or art on the walls. Bulletin boards announcing ministry opportunities adorn the hallway entrance to the fellowship hall, but those are the only religious messages in the area. Even though they are present, the language of the charitable choice legislation does not require that the church remove these messages when the school uses the facility.

## **Ethical Dimensions**

The members who volunteer their time and money to this partnership do so for a variety of reasons. One of the Sunday school class members stated that she donated school supplies because,

We are helping the community around our church. I also know that this is a school where many families need help. Otherwise, the students would not have what they need. I want to give children a chance that otherwise would not have one.

Pastor Timmons related why he continues volunteering at the school.

I honestly feel like it's the right thing to do. We all know that our schools have all sorts of struggles, resource wise and finances, and for First Baptist to not be involved in helping our neighbor school achieve as much as it can, it just seems that would be wrong. It just seems like we should take on that responsibility and obviously our neighbors, First Presbyterian, feel the same way.

With a twinkle in her eye, another congregation member volunteered her motivation for helping the school.

I feel good that we are providing help for those in need...following God's command. That's what Jesus would have us do. Also, to whom much is given, much is expected. I also want to give children a chance that otherwise would not have one. There is also a satisfaction of knowing that kids are getting a chance they might not otherwise get. I don't need to be thanked or acknowledged for what I do.

These volunteers of their time and money do so because they feel that individual efforts can contribute to the greater good of society and benefit others. These folks have a genuine desire to help meet a need of someone who needs help. They also acknowledge

that they have an obligation to practice their faith through activities that help others to grow and succeed in life. Notice, it is not important to these folks to receive praise for what they have done or to preach a message. They believe that they are helping others in an endeavor that will pay itself forward. And yes, civic pride and responsibility is promoted.

### **Rural Communities**

In rural communities, the modeling of social norms to the younger generation is usually done through the family, school, and church. Working together in partnership, these positive role models teach children the expected behaviors to succeed in school and society. There are also usually strong ties among the local congregations and the school. The senior pastor of a local congregation whose children attend the local public, elementary school volunteers every week and serves as president of the Parent/Teacher Organization. All of these elements working together enable students to build higher aspirations for themselves as they prepare for their life choices.

There is a sense of pride in providing for its own. Several of the volunteers who I interviewed talked about the close geographical proximity of the church and the school. They also talked about knowing that some of the families in the school have needs and because “they” (these volunteers) “have much,” these volunteers should provide help.

An analysis of the characteristics of rural communities and their impact on the educational programs of a public, elementary school and its partnership with a local congregation, finds that many of these characteristics do in fact influence the partnership’s activities. This informal partnership does not conform to as many of the

parameters that the other partnerships embody. However, there are several characteristics of a rural community present in this partnership and they shape the partnership of today and the future.

### **Social Capital**

In terms of social capital, this partnership conveys benefits to the poor and marginalized groups. One benefit easily identified is the donation of the school supplies to the entire fifth grade. The donation of these supplies offsets some of the socioeconomic disadvantages these students deal with on a daily basis. Instead, all of the students began the year on an even playing field with no one being embarrassed because they did not have the needed school supplies. The teacher talked about how the donation started the year off in such a positive fashion and that it cuts down on class disruptions even this far into the year because there are still supplies for the students to use as they need them. Therefore, no one interrupts class because they do not have a pencil. For many of these students who are members of marginalized groups to feel just like the other students builds their self-confidence to grow academically and socially.

One of the outcomes of this partnership is that the needs of many of the families in the school are more visible and more people have become involved in the partnership between Cardinal Elementary School and First Baptist Church. Prior to Pastor Timmons becoming the pastor of the church, there was little interaction between the church and the school. His involvement in the school has heightened the visibility of the school and many of its needs. This has resulted in positive publicity for the school and the students. The families are the beneficiaries of these endeavors.

Each of the partnerships with Cardinal Elementary School meets a specific need. The partnership between First Presbyterian Church and Cardinal Elementary School supports staff members and students. Whether volunteering in classrooms, donating school supplies, sponsoring students for the Angel Tree at Christmas, or showing appreciation to the staff, the congregation seeks to help the school meet the needs of its students and families. The goal is to strengthen families. The partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School focuses on a more specific need. The goal of this partnership is to provide help for homework and additional opportunities for the school's English Language Learners to practice their English language skills. Here families are strengthened as they are encouraged to participate in their children's education. The partnership between First Baptist Church and Cardinal Elementary School provides volunteers in the classrooms, donations of school supplies for the fifth grade, and allows the school to use the church's facilities when they need to do so. Meeting the needs of the school's students is again the order of the day. All of the partnerships work together with the school to strengthen the community and help these students grow into productive citizens able to reach their goals and dreams.

In the next chapter, I analyze the data I collected about the three local congregations who partner with the local public, elementary school and compare and contrast their similarities and differences to determine areas of strength and areas where these partnerships can work to strengthen their efforts.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS OF THE PARTNERSHIPS**

In this chapter, I analyze the themes that emerged through my research and how they support strengths and areas of growth in the partnerships among the school and faith-based organization. There are several themes that will be noted in the analysis of social capital that are present in the school, but cannot be attributed to any one particular partnership. I have grouped those themes together and will discuss them in this chapter as well.

#### **Characteristics of Effective Partnerships**

##### **Planning**

In the analysis of the data, there are themes that transcend the three partnerships. All three partnerships are characterized as collaborative efforts with a common purpose. The articulated purpose is for the school and the church congregations to work “hand in hand” to “support the vision and ideas of meeting all the needs of our students here,” states Mrs. Evans. While each partnership approaches this in a different manner, the results are that stakeholders are empowered to accomplish their goals and vision. Stakeholders are school personnel who work to educate students to their fullest potential; school community families who want their children to learn as much as possible and reach their fullest potential; and the community who will benefit as the students grow into productive citizens who become members of the workforce and raise their families in the

community. Working together to meet these needs builds strong families in the community.

A strength in all three of these partnerships is planning. However, the Literacy Facilitator who I interviewed would like to see more planning take place between classroom teachers and the Missions Committee of First Presbyterian Church. She believes that this would strengthen the volunteer component of the partnership's activities. In the after school tutoring program, planning takes place weekly with communication between the school and the director of the program. The director and her volunteers also go out to dinner on Thursday nights and spend time socializing and talking about the needs of the students in the program. They also plan the next week's activities. Mrs. Evans and Pastor Timmons meet monthly to discuss the needs of the school and plan for the monthly Parent/Teacher Organization meeting.

It is also interesting to note that while effective partnerships seek to include members from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups, the one partnership that does this is the partnership with First Lutheran Church. The director of the tutoring program is African American. The other volunteer in this program, Miss June, is disabled. The volunteers from the partnerships with First Presbyterian Church and First Baptist Church are White and middle-class to upper middle-class. Some of the volunteers are senior citizens. However, the faces of these volunteers do not reflect the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the school's population. However, these partnerships work hard with the school to meet the needs of the students and help them to succeed. As I note later, there are many positive outcomes of these partnerships that cannot be attributed to

any one partnership, but is the result of everyone working together. This is the situation here.

All three congregations provide direct support to the partnerships. The level and variety of support is evident based on the goals of the partnership. First Presbyterian Church has adopted Cardinal Elementary School and provides financial support, personal support such as volunteering and helping with events, and intangible support in terms of prayer support and appreciation for all the staff's efforts. First Lutheran Church tutors English Language Learners in an after school tutoring program that focuses on homework and providing extra opportunities for the students to practice their English language skills. The congregation provides financial support and volunteer support. First Baptist Church provides financial support, volunteer support, and facility space. Notice that the support from all three congregations is on-going and has been in existence for several years. While each year may bring different needs in the partnerships with First Presbyterian and First Baptist, the support remains dependable and steadfast. The activities that the partnerships provide are predominately student-centered. The school is assured that the needs will be met.

### **Leadership**

In each of the three partnerships, the clergy members play a supporting role. In my study, I found, however, that two of the clergy members take a more active role in the partnership activities. The pastor from First Lutheran Church tutored fourth and fifth graders for two years building close relationships with those individuals. The pastor from First Baptist volunteers in both the classrooms of his two children and serves as president

of the Parent/Teacher Organization. He has also organized various parent involvement events and helped in some capacity in other activities.

The after school tutoring program that First Lutheran Church sponsors has a volunteer director for the program. A strength of this partnership is the director of the program because of the communication that flows between the school and the tutoring program's volunteers. Miss Monica is the conduit that ensures that the homework assignments and other areas that teachers request help for the student with are conveyed to the volunteers. She ensures these requests are accomplished. She is also the communication link between the tutoring program, the parents of the students who attend the program, and the school. When a parent has a question, they many times ask Miss Monica. Miss Monica encourages her parents to talk to the teacher and principal about the academic and social progress of their children.

The only partnership to experience a transition in leadership has been the tutoring program with First Lutheran Church. The director of the program has changed 3 different times while the program has been in existence. The current leader volunteered when she first moved to the town and joined the church congregation. When the second director decided to give up the program, the current director stepped up and became the director of the program. The current director speaks fluent Spanish and works hard to develop relationships with the families the tutoring program serves. The former director did not allow the students to speak Spanish or their native languages while they were attending the program. The current program director allows the students to speak their native languages, but does not encourage it. She encourages the students to speak English, but if

they communicate in Spanish or Hmong, she does not reprimand them as was done previously. Accepting the individual heritages of the students encourages trust to be built between the students, volunteers, and families. One of the outcomes of this is the depth of the trusting relationships that Miss Monica has developed with the parents. These trusting relationships have transferred to the school.

While the partnership with First Presbyterian uses communication between the Missions Committee, principal, and School Improvement Team to plan and direct the activities of the partnership, one of the needs voiced by some of the teachers who I interviewed, is the need for a teacher-leader to coordinate the aspect of the partnership that deals with volunteers in the classroom. In past years, there was a teacher who coordinated this aspect of the program. The staff perceived this aspect of the partnership to be much stronger. However, this person has not been in this role for the past four years and the number of volunteers in the classroom has decreased. One of the volunteers and member of the Missions Committee voiced her frustration with volunteers who want to work in the classroom and not having enough teachers request their help. She feels that having a teacher directing this aspect of the partnership activities would strengthen them.

A key to the success of these partnerships is the leadership that the principal exhibits. The leadership of the principal is highly evident in the role she plays with the partnerships with First Presbyterian Church and First Baptist Church. She plays more of a supportive role in the partnership with First Lutheran Church as the English as a Second Language teacher is the key school contact in this partnership. The principal is particularly praised for articulating the common purposes of the school that benefits the

well-being of its students, their families, and the community. She is also committed to creating an academically rigorous and supportive learning environment that nurtures students to blossom. Another strength is the relationships that she builds with students, staff, families, and members of the community. As I observed the talent show, I noted Mrs. Evans visiting each family in attendance before the beginning of the program. She passed out hugs, words of greeting, and hellos as she moved through the crowd. In her remarks to the audience, she praised the students for having the courage to stand before an audience and perform and for the outstanding job they did in their performances. From the reactions of the crowd, it is evident that strong, trusting relationships are in place at the school.

### **Relationships**

While all of the partnerships are informal in nature because they grow out of relationships in the school community and churches, two are more formalized than the third one. The most formalized in terms of program structure is the after school tutoring program that First Lutheran Church sponsors. In this program, the learning activities of the students are structured through constant communication among Miss Monica, the English as a Second Language teacher, and the classroom teachers. Students are transported on a school bus that arrives at a set time each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon and the program maintains the schedule of the school. While First Presbyterian Church has formally adopted Cardinal Elementary School, the partnership activities are dependent upon the needs of the school during the school year. Some of the partnership activities such as the teacher appreciation lunch and brunch, donation of school supplies,

and donations to the Angel Tree, and volunteering in the classrooms are consistent from year to year. Other activities are dependent upon the needs of the school. These activities range from helping with Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads to proctoring for the End-of-Grade tests. The partnership with First Baptist Church is the most informal in nature. While the pastor does volunteer weekly in the classrooms of his children and is the president of the Parent/Teacher Organization, other activities of the partnership are dependent on the needs of the school and the response of the congregation.

Effective partnerships face many challenges. While our country's economy has been in a recession during the time of my study and this community has not been immune, the challenge of maintaining a budget for the partnership has not been an issue. The partnership with First Lutheran Church uses the pastor's discretionary fund to meet the needs of the tutoring program; however that fund is dependent upon donations from the members of the congregation. Donations from the members of the congregation at First Presbyterian Church fund donating school supplies, sponsoring a child from the Angel Tree, providing emergency funds for a family's or staff member's need, or providing food for a lunch. The level of donations has not decreased during this time and these partnerships are such a part of the culture of the congregations that if it was decided to formally discontinue the partnership, members would continue to help.

### **Maintaining the Volunteer Force**

The issue of maintaining the volunteer force varies from congregation to congregation. With the partnership with First Lutheran Church, the English as a Second Language teacher would like to see more volunteers participate. When the school exits

School Improvement sanctions under *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the school will no longer provide supplemental tutoring services. The tutoring program for English Language Learners will see an increase in the number of student who will access this service. More volunteers will be needed at that point. While the current program works with 9 children each semester, the two (and sometimes three) volunteers provide much individual attention to the students. However, an even smaller adult to student ratio would benefit the students in this program.

A member of the Missions Committee with First Presbyterian discussed the frustration of having more people willing to volunteer than classrooms willing to have them. If these people are not utilized in some way, then their enthusiasm will wane. They may not be willing to work with students when many of the tutoring programs that are currently in place are not available. I believe that the school being placed in School Improvement by *No Child Left Behind* legislation and the sanctions that follow this designation hurt this aspect of the partnership's activities. There are prescribed programs in place that the classroom teacher must plan for. During these activities, the students are placed in groups and not available for whole group instruction. There are times in the instructional day when the teacher instructs the entire group. Having another set of volunteers in the classroom would cut down on the amount of time available for this whole group instruction. Yet, care must be taken to be creative in how these volunteers might be used.

The teachers and leaders on the School Improvement Team want to continue the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church and acknowledge the academic

and social growth their students have experienced over the years. One of the ideas that a second grade teacher posited is that she would like to see one of the other church congregations develop a tutoring program for students in grades 3-5 who score a Level I or II on their End-of-Grade tests in reading and math. There has been discussion of First Presbyterian Church offering a tutoring program for second grade students, but it has never gotten off the ground. With the program in place at First Lutheran Church, the idea has sat in the background. Broaching the idea of the tutoring program for students who score a Level I or II on their End of Grade tests to First Presbyterian Church would be an alternative. This viable program would benefit students in grades 3-5 at Cardinal Elementary School who need extra help in reading and math. It would take planning and training of volunteers to work with the students, along with a plan for communicating students' needs. This would dovetail very nicely with the recommendation from the Literacy Facilitator of planning sessions taking place during the summer between the Missions Committee and teachers.

### **Communication**

The members of the partnerships work to communicate and share information with all of the parties involved and to be approachable. I found in my study that information flows between the Missions Committee and the principal in the partnership with First Presbyterian Church. The principal relays the information to the School Improvement Team. Because there is not a member of the Missions Committee who serves on the School Improvement Team, an opportunity is missed for deeper communication to occur. Having a member of the Missions Committee serve on the

School Improvement Team would allow teachers to talk more openly and honestly about the need for volunteers in their classrooms and how volunteers could be used. This is a resource that has untapped potential in this partnership.

In the partnership with First Lutheran Church, there is constant communication among the English as a Second Language teacher, the classroom teachers, and the director and volunteers. The result is that the students have someone to help them with their homework and hold the students accountable for their learning. At the same time, these students grow academically and socially. All of the teachers interviewed discussed the growth they have seen with their students through this program.

The minister of First Baptist church serves as the president of the Parent/Teacher Organization and serves on the School Improvement Team. He sees first-hand the needs of the school. He and the principal also have lunch monthly to discuss the needs of the school. Needs that the congregation can help with are communicated to the appropriate groups. This communication strengthens the partnership and builds trusting relationships.

In my interviews, the principal and teachers discussed the dependability of each of the members of the three partnerships. “They are always there. They are an integral part of our school,” sums up loyalty that is present in these partnerships.

The following table, “Table 2. Characteristics of Effective Partnerships,” organizes visually the major themes I found in my study regarding effective partnerships. While each of these partnerships is strong individually, working together, they are much stronger as a whole.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Effective Partnerships**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>FPC</b>	<b>FLC</b>	<b>FBC</b>
<b>Planning</b>	X	X	X
Collaborative effort with a common purpose	X	X	X
Congregations provide support	X	X	X
<b>Leadership</b>	X	X	X
Clergy play cheerleading role	X	X	X
Clergy plays a significant role in partnership		X	X
Principal's leadership is evident	X		X
Transition of leadership		X	
<b>Relationships</b>	X	X	X
Trusting relationship	X	X	X

Notice, there are 10 different themes that are present in the partnerships among the public, elementary school and its faith-based organizations. Of these themes, 70% are present in all of the partnerships. The key areas of differences are in the leadership theme. Clergy plays a significant role in two of the partnerships; the principal's leadership is evident in two of the partnerships; and one partnership experienced a transition in leadership. All of these partnerships are viable and effective partnerships that adjust to

the various levels of leadership present and work to meet the needs of the students at Cardinal Elementary School.

The next section of this chapter compares and contrasts the partnerships against the background of legal, political, and ethical dimensions that must be considered when analyzing a partnership among a public, elementary school and faith-based organizations.

### **Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

#### **Legal Dimensions**

All three of the faith-based partnerships meet the Lemon Test (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971) and do not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. I noted in my study that each of the faith-based organizations approached their partnership activities differently. The purpose of the partnership with First Presbyterian Church is for the congregation to support the school and staff so that they provide for the needs of their students. The purpose of the partnership with First Lutheran Church is to provide a mechanism to help English Language Learners with their homework and to provide students additional opportunities to speak the English language and improve their language skills. The purpose of the partnership with First Baptist Church is to help the school meet the needs of its students. The means of support do vary in the partnerships. All of the congregations provide monetary support in some form; two of the partnerships provide volunteers in the school setting and one partnership provides volunteers in an after school program. All are willing to help the school meet any need.

However, First Presbyterian Church provides prayer support for the staff. This is a quiet support that is provided at a different time and location than activities that take place on the school grounds. Even though the congregation has invited the chorus to sing at a Sunday worship service, parents chose to allow their child to participate in and provided written permission for them to attend because this activity meets the criteria of a school field trip. Therefore, the students were not a captive audience in that parents and students knew the content of the service and chose to attend. This also meets the criteria of charitable choice legislation in that religious activities must be separated from those activities that are school-related by time and place. This event took place on the weekend, Sunday, and at the church, First Presbyterian.

While the after school tutoring program takes place in the gym at First Lutheran Church, the materials that are used in the program come from the students' classrooms, the church library, or are purchased materials. None of the materials used have religious content; the closest would be the character traits that some of the library books emphasize. This, in and of itself, is not inherently religious as promoting positive character building in young lives is a tenet of a democratic society. The program seeks to help students grow academically and to encourage their parents to participate in their children's education.

In the partnership with First Baptist Church, the pastor volunteers in the classrooms and serves as president of the Parent/Teacher Organization. The church also allows the school to use its facility or equipment when needed. A Sunday school class has donated school supplies for the entire fifth grade. All of these activities are secular in

nature. In the case of the pastor, parents are encouraged to volunteer at their children's school. Because the pastor is the leader of the Baptist congregation and the church is in such close proximity to the school, an outgrowth has been the participation in activities with the school and a growing partnership.

### **Political Dimensions**

The purpose of charitable choice legislation is to allow citizens in a community to have a choice of social service providers that can include faith-based organizations. These faith-based organizations are encouraged to offer services that transform the lives of individuals who they serve. In the donations of school supplies and Angel Tree participation, the three faith-based organizations provide services that help to transform children's lives. Families who are not able to provide the needed school supplies for their children or to provide for their children for Christmas are relieved of some of the financial stress that damage families. Families in the community have experienced severe economic hardships over the past couple of years with the disappearance of many jobs in the community. The school's rate of 86 percent of the students who receive free and reduced lunches through the federal school lunch program speaks to the depth of the economic crisis. Helping relieve some of this financial stress in the family is welcomed allowing the family to concentrate on other aspects of family life. The children enter the classroom on a level playing field with other students. They are not embarrassed because they do not have the needed supplies or did not get anything for Christmas. Students are better able to focus on the learning at hand so they can reach their dreams of tomorrow.

Volunteers in the partnership with First Presbyterian related how they spent time with students talking about the need for learning to read better and why that would be important. One of the volunteers talked about a young man who did not want to read with them. He planned when he grew up to be a mechanic. He was already learning how to fix cars as his father was teaching him. When asked what he would do if he came across a problem he could not fix when he was older, he responded that he would ask his dad. The volunteer asked him what he would do if his father was not available to ask. The young man was stumped and went home to ask his father for advice. He came back a couple of days later and said that he would have to learn to read because if his father was not available to answer the question, then he would have to read to find the answer himself. This was a life transforming moment for this third grade student because he began to have a true understanding of why he needed to learn to read better. He was able to form a connection between the importance of his education and his goals in life. He has since become a much better student who is working to prepare himself to realize his dreams.

Miss Monica also related a transformational moment with a Hmong student who she was working with. She talked about how he wanted to deflect attention from learning to read to being the class bully because reading was difficult for him. When he read so beautifully for her one day while including all the appropriate pauses, voice inflections, and meaning into the selection, she helped him understand the world that could unfold for him and the life-changing opportunities he would encounter. This is another success story.

First Lutheran Church has also gone further in the offering of social services for families when they provided English language classes for adults in the community. I related earlier the story of the mother who I met several years ago who could speak very little English and the difference when I interviewed her. She took part in these English language classes. One of the issues that I remember early on with her was that she could not find a job to help with the household expenses. Her husband was also out of a job for a period of time as well. By improving her English language skills, she has been able to obtain gainful employment. She is helping provide for her family and sees the importance of participating in her children's education. Not only that, she is now able to do so because understanding the English language is no longer a barrier for her. This family's economic balance, sense of identity, and pride has been transformed because this congregation offered this social service.

Charitable choice legislation and the Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996 make possible the partnerships such as these to offer these opportunities to the school and community. When these faith-based organizations offer activities that occur at the church, they are not required to remove their religious artifacts or art. However, they are required to separate the inherently religious activities from those that are not. All of the partnerships have done that. The point is that whether the activity provides time to read with a volunteer and develop a relationship, work on homework with an adult who also provides the student additional opportunities to practice his English language skills; take field trips into the community to learn about various agencies; or use the church's facility for a fall festival, the opportunities are

provided for children to grow academically and socially. Lives are transformed and children yearn to accomplish their dreams. These partnerships among the school and the faith-based organizations work hard to accomplish this goal.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

I found it interesting that in my study to examine the reasons the volunteers participate. The reasons that the volunteers continue their work are the knowledge that their individual efforts contribute to the greater good of mankind. This is a worthy value to espouse and to contribute your financial efforts and time to accomplish. Each of the congregations identifies a specific need or needs of the school and feels compelled to offer assistance to meet those needs. Not only is it the congregations' neighborhood school, but their faith calls them to meet the needs of those who need help. Children and families who live in poverty and immigrants from another country are members of marginalized groups who live on the fringes of American society. These groups have difficulty accessing the benefits of the American dream. Working to eliminate barriers is a way to help others. The volunteers realize that as individuals, their contributions do not amount to much, but added together and joining with others, lives can be transformed. Truly a difference is made and this is true in the lives of the families at Cardinal Elementary School.

In each of the partnerships, the volunteers mention "showing God's love" as a motivating factor. However, each person also realizes that the classroom is not the place for proselytization, no matter how subtle, to occur. The volunteers show their belief in God through actions, however, this is related more to the fact that the partnerships occur

in a rural area rather than a true proselytization of faith values. Pastor Timmons acknowledges that conversations surrounding faith issues have occurred while he has volunteered in the classroom. These could be discussions that occur because of the death of a beloved class pet or other situations that occur in real life. Children want answers to their questions, yet care must be taken to answer honestly and in a factual manner. Working from his experiences as a parent and pastor, Pastor Timmons has answered these questions accordingly. Rural communities enjoy strong ties between the church and the community and are a fact of life in the rural South. Care must be taken to be sensitive to the religious beliefs of all members of a classroom and this has been done by the volunteers.

It is also interesting to consider that the only partnership that talks about an opportunity to socialize and build other networks occurs with First Lutheran Church. The director of the program enjoys communicating with the English as a Second Language teacher, but she and the other volunteers also go out to dinner on Thursday nights to talk about the needs of the students and plan for the following week. While this is a small network, these ladies brainstorm ideas about how to help the families and involve others as needed. A case in point is the young girl who is one of 14 children. Her parents had been laid off from work just prior to Christmas. The parents were having difficulty providing food for the family and other essentials. Miss Monica and Miss June went to work that Thursday evening accessing their networks to help this family. The result is that the family was fed for several weeks. I understand that one of the parents is now working full time and the other parent continues looking for work. These networks are

important to the volunteers in that they supply opportunities to socialize, but they also provide opportunities to access others when someone needs help. This connectedness and pride in caring for each other is what charitable choice legislation promotes. These are prime examples of this concept working in a rural community.

The table that follows examines the dimensions of the legal, political, and ethical issues of the partnerships among Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church. In this table, the reader can compare the similarities of the partnerships in these areas.

**Table 3: Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>FPC</b>	<b>FLC</b>	<b>FBC</b>
Legal Dimensions	X	X	X
Meets the Lemon Test	X	X	X
Political Dimensions	X	X	X
Charitable Choice	X	X	X
Section 104: Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996	X	X	
Ethical Dimensions	X	X	X
Obligation to practice faith through works to help others	X	X	X
Individual efforts to contribute to the greater good	X	X	X
Not a time to proselytize, but serve all who need it	X	X	X
Investment of time shows priorities	X	X	X
Genuine desire to help	X	X	X

When working with the children in a public school setting, one must weigh the volunteer’s actions in light of legal, political, and ethical dimensions. The congregational members of these partnerships take care to provide services that can transform the lives of individual students while respecting the personal dignity, heritage, and religious beliefs of each student.

The next section of this chapter discusses how these partnerships are influenced by the rural setting of the public elementary school and the local congregations.

## **Rural Communities**

### **Relationships**

In rural communities, the modeling and communication of social norms is a joint venture between the family, school, and church. All work together to communicate to children, babies to young adults, the expectations of behavior that the community has of its citizens. Each entity approaches this modeling and communication from a different angle, but all work together. Such is the case in the partnerships among Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church. The common values of hard work, discipline, and the importance of education are stressed and these high expectations are communicated daily. This communication on the part of the congregations can take the form of volunteering in the classrooms; serving as a extra male or female adult for student for such events as Donuts for Dads or Muffins for Moms; eating lunch with a student and developing a mentoring relationship; or a variety of other ways. The important thing is that time is spent with the young people so that they begin to build higher aspirations for themselves to prepare for their life choices. Many of the parents who I interviewed stated that their greatest desire is for their child to “be the best they can be” and “go to college.” These strong ties between the school and local congregations can help these dreams materialize by all working together to achieve a common goal.

In the rural community, the principal enjoys a level of prestige. This is evident in these partnerships. First Presbyterian invites the principal to speak to the congregation about the needs of the school and how they can help. Her visibility and warmth help to

build the close bonds upon which trusting relationships grow. While the principal does not play a high profile in the partnership with First Lutheran Church, her support is still there. She ensures that the bus transportation in the afternoons to the church takes place. She talks with teachers and parents about how their children are progressing. Her actions also support her words. In the partnership with First Baptist Church, she and the pastor meet monthly for lunch to discuss the needs of the school. While this planning occurs because he is the president of the Parent/Teacher Organization, there is no indication that it will end when his term in office is finished. The outcome of these relationships is that when there is a need in the school, Mrs. Evans can pick up the phone and call one of the ministers. Help will be provided.

I also noted in my interview with Mrs. Evans that these volunteers also see things that need to be done and do them without asking. In December, Mrs. Evans was out for surgery. When she returned to school in early January, she noticed that the sign outside the school that posts upcoming events had been updated. Pastor Timmons had done this without being asked. He knew where the letters are kept, knew the upcoming events from their planning sessions, and took care of this important piece of communication. These characteristics of a rural community intertwine to build strong schools and families in the community.

### **Strong Sense of Place**

These ties in the community help students and their families identify with a sense of place in the community. Many of the parents of families who live in the school community were born in this area. The adults in the immigrant families were not born in

the area, but by working with the school, they see groups of people working together to help the school and its students. These families begin to find their connection to the community. Relationships are important and I discuss this further in the section on “Social Capital.” Direct, verbal communication is valued by all parties. Note that Miss Monica takes particular care to introduce herself and her volunteers to the parents of the students who they work with. Parents are also required to come in and pick up the students at the end of the tutoring sessions ensuring that some level of communication between the two groups takes place twice each week. When people communicate face-to-face, bonds of trust are built and strengthen as the parties continue to work together.

### **Communication**

One of the areas of need that I noted in my investigation is that of the leaders listening to all constituents and including parents in the decision-making process. Parents are included as part of the School Improvement Team and should represent the demographic profile of the school. These parents must be voted on by a parent group to represent them. The Parent/Teacher Organization at Cardinal Elementary School does this. However, many of the parents of poor and immigrant families may not attend these meetings. Examining the make-up of the parent members of the 2009-2010 School Improvement Team, I found two White females, two African American females, and one White male. The White male has a child with disabilities who the school serves. Thus, immigrant families are not represented on this committee. I could not discern from my data whether any of these families qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. This is why the encouragement of Miss Monica to the parents to become involved in their

children's education is such an asset to the school. In the parents I interviewed, they all stated that they do attend more meetings and programs at the school because of the encouragement of Miss Monica to do so. The school does send out information on the School Messenger in the families' native languages and posts the meetings on the school sign. Meeting dates and times also go out in the school newsletters that are translated into the language of the students who do not speak English as their native language. All parents are invited to attend, but many do not because they are working more than one job to support their family or do not make the time to do so. A question for further study would be to investigate why parents do not participate in these meetings.

Listening to all the constituents in a rural community can be an area of need for many communities. In terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status, this community is fairly homogeneous. However, the races and ethnicities of African American, Latino, and Asian are represented in the community's families. The school has a free and reduced lunch rate of 86% which indicates that many families live below the federal government's defined poverty rate. Because there is not a very large segment of any one race other than White, it would be very easy for the school leader to not take the time to listen to the concerns of these groups. Earlier this year, the Parent Involvement Coordinator sent out a survey to all parents in the school. Of the 350 surveys sent out, 175 were returned. The Parent Involvement Coordinator also stated that all of the parents of the English Language Learners returned their surveys. Parents felt that they knew what was going on in the school; they felt that teachers supported their children; and that their children were learning what they were supposed to be learning. Because many of the

adults in the school's families work more than one job to support their families, these surveys are one way that the schools can use to elicit feedback. I discuss other aspects of this communication in the section on "Social Capital."

### **Cultural Broker**

I found in my study that the school makes a concerted effort to provide information for families in their native languages. The district provides a full time English as a Second Language teacher and translator who also serves as a teacher assistant for the school. The translator works with families who do not speak English as their native language to communicate information, successes, and needs regarding the children between the school and home. One of the teachers is taking a conversational Spanish class to sharpen her Spanish skills so that she can communicate better with her Latino families. The English Language Learners she has had in her classroom over the past few years have been predominately Latino. Miss Monica works with the parents at the after school tutoring program to communicate the importance of working with the school to help their children in their education. Parent trainings are also offered in how parents can work with their children to help them with homework. Especially when working with the school's immigrant population, these services build relationships between the school and families. The school also becomes a cultural broker for these families because when they need the help of a social service, they know that someone at the school can point them in the right direction.

The following table depicts the major characteristics of rural communities found in my study. The reader can compare these characteristics in the analysis of how the

setting of this public, elementary school is affecting the partnerships among the school and its partnerships with faith-based organizations.

**Table 4: Rural Communities**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>FPC</b>	<b>FLC</b>	<b>FBC</b>
Relationships	X	X	X
Strong Sense of Place	X	X	X
Communication	X	X	X
Cultural Broker	X	X	

The reader can generalize from the table above, that the relationships and face-to-face, verbal communication that one finds in a rural community is in place in the partnerships among Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church. Members of the partnerships can trace their place in the community back several generations. Efforts are made to integrate families who are not originally from the area into forming relationships with others in the community so that these families begin to feel as though they belong.

The following section will discuss the themes my research identified in the arena of social capital. Building social capital in families that operate on the fringes of society is an aspiration that the community strives to achieve to strengthen families.

### **Social Capital**

In the conversation with Mrs. Evans, she referred to First Presbyterian Church as the “mother church.” When considering the notion of a “mother church,” one envisions a

group of people who join together to minister, support, nurture, and meet the needs of those in the community with whom they come in contact. Mothers tend to their children's needs, love unconditionally, and listen intently to the spoken and unspoken words their children utter and support and guide them. Mothers give of themselves, no matter what the cost. In the role of "mother church," the congregation of First Presbyterian Church works together to help Cardinal Elementary School meet the needs of its students and families, both physically, socially, and emotionally. The congregation realizes that supporting the adults strengthen them to care for the students in their charge.

During the times that the staff, as a whole or as individuals, has suffered a loss, the pastor has listened to the spoken and unspoken thoughts uttered. Encouragement is shown through teacher appreciation luncheons, unexpected treats of food, or cards of encouragement. As Mrs. Evans states,

We know that First Presbyterian Church is always there, not only when we need them, but in the day-to-day. They think about us when we don't even know it. They make sure our needs are met; like a mother to a child.

Sometimes it is too easy to depend upon a group who you know will always be available to help. For this reason, the school also works to build ownership of projects in the students and encourages them to work to achieve goals.

It is important to provide for our families in the community, at the same time it is important to equip them to provide for themselves. Mrs. Evans stated in her interview that not only do they, the school, "feed" their students, but they "teach them to fish" so that they can build a future for themselves. She then gave this example. When the school

has a need, they know that they can call on one of the area congregations to help them. However, the staff believes that it is important that the students learn to work for things themselves. If the school needs a new bulletin board, classes will work together to raise money by having the students compete in a contest to bring in the most change. The change is collected, counted, and a winner announced. If the collected funds do not quite cover the cost, then other measures are taken to cover the costs. The benefit is that the students learn that they can make a difference in their school community. Encouraging this ownership in the students begins to build the belief that they, the students, can affect change.

The students in the school also learn to take part in projects outside the school. I received this email from a staff member:

We, our EC class, are currently taking up dimes for Relay for Life. One 16 oz. bottle full of dimes is equal to \$100. That's \$100 to put towards cancer research and all that Relay for Life stands for. It might not sound like a lot, but every little bit helps. All we're asking is that if you have some dimes lying around and don't mind supporting a great cause, is to save them for us to add to the class water bottle. We are trying to fill up 2 water bottles to put towards our school's goal. Our kids are really excited about this. Billy (pseudonym) is even considering having a bake sale. Thanks so much for your time and hopefully your dimes.

These are two examples of the students taking ownership in projects to better not only the school community, but the community at large. Taking ownership of changing your community takes on additional value because it operates in the community in the realms of class, economics, and politics. These students know nothing of these constructs that adults note. Instead, they understand that they are participating in meeting a need in their school and community. Yes, they need help and guidance to accomplish these things, but

that is where the adults in the partnership activities can step in an help. Notice that these students are also learning a lesson in democracy, no “voice” or contribution is too small; all have a place that hold significance.

The idea that building social capital is a key to making democracy work is especially evident in the partnerships with First Presbyterian Church and First Lutheran Church and the school. The Presbyterian Church has a long history of supporting public education and is mission oriented. When the mission is located next door to the church, then there is an immediate call to practice the tenets of the congregation’s beliefs. The congregation helps school families who have needs in many ways. Whether it is a member donating his or her time or money to an endeavor, the students in the school see that others who they do not know care about them. When volunteers visit the classroom, they see appropriate interactions between the adults that they may not witness on a regular basis. All of these pieces woven together help a child to learn that he can make a difference in his community.

The partnership with First Lutheran Church does the same thing, with a different group of students. These students are members of a marginalized group of American society; those who do not speak English as their native language. Providing help with homework, providing additional help with the English language skills, and helping parents to understand the importance of communicating with the school are ways that these parents grow in their knowledge and families are strengthened. Not only are these families being fed for a day; but they are “learning to fish for themselves” as well. For

these families to have a greater access to improving their family's economic picture, this is imperative.

In the partnerships with First Presbyterian Church and First Lutheran Church, there are opportunities for new democratic leaders to emerge. There is a need for a teacher-leader to take over as a liaison between the church, its volunteers, the school, and those teachers who would like a volunteer in their classrooms. The director of the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church is an example of a leader emerging from the volunteer force when the need was articulated. Miss Monica works to build the self-esteem and confidence of the students who she works with. Who knows? The next President of the United States may be attending the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church. Because of the opportunities to grow and increase his or her sense of personal identity, the students who are served will achieve his or her dreams. I may one day see this happen.

### **Flow of Information**

One of the most valuable currencies for building social capital is the flow of information. In this situation, the school possesses the knowledge of what the student needs to know to be able to master academic subjects. The school also strives to educate the whole child and it takes parents, the school, and the community working together to do so. For many families of English Language Learners, there is a barrier to the flow of information reaching the families and being understood. That is why the partnership with First Lutheran Church plays such a vital role. Miss Monica, the director of the program, is the information broker between the families and the school. She communicates to the

parents of the students who she works with how imperative it is to talk with the school about their children and their progress. She also encourages them to attend programs where they can learn to help their children with their homework and how valuable it is to their child's academic success. The school district provides a full time English as a Second Language teacher to the school along with a teacher assistant who is also a translator to help facilitate the flow of information from the school to these families. However, these families trust Miss Monica because she has taken the time to get to know each family and its story. This flow of information is also important because it widens the networks outside of the neighborhood where the majority of these families live and provides access to improving their family's economic success.

### **Access to Networks**

Volunteering and tutoring activities from all three partnerships promote individual growth. This growth is not only academic, but social as well. Spending time with adults who form caring relationship as these volunteers and students do models appropriate interactions between individuals. Students also learn that it is possible for them to set a goal of going to college and achieving this goal. While this is an elementary school setting, the seeds of achievement of individual's goals and dreams are sown. When the student is old enough to apply for college, he may use the volunteer as a reference or may seek him out for a job to help pay for school. Even though the majority of the volunteers in these partnerships are White, middle class adults, the children who they work with come from different races and ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. The bridging social capital that these students are building with others is invaluable as they mature into

adults. These relationships will also help the young people to develop attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that will enable themselves to better themselves economically and achieve their dreams of going to college and having the career they dream of having. These relationships can truly help the student transform himself into the person he or she chooses to be in the future.

### **Outcomes Not Attributed to a Specific Partnership**

In my analysis of the data for social capital, I found that there are several outcomes that cannot be attributed to a particular partnership, but are outcomes because of the strength of the three partnerships working together with the school. Increasing parental involvement has been a goal of the school and school district for several years. Goal IV of the Strategic Plan (2008) of the school system states, “The system will identify, analyze, and address the barriers to positive family and school partnerships.” Cardinal Elementary School’s School Improvement Plan for the same time period states, “Cardinal Elementary School will have 90 percent active participation by parents in their child’s education.” Parent involvement is a focus of Cardinal Elementary School. At the August, 2009 School Improvement Team meeting, the team discussed why the school has moved into School Improvement under *No Child Left Behind* legislation. One of the questions for discussion was: How are our parents involved in maximizing their student’s achievement? This topic continued to be discussed at the October 14, 2009, January 12, 2010, and April 14, 2010 School Improvement Team meetings. The set of beliefs for Cardinal Elementary School for the School Improvement Plan during this time states:

Students: Cardinal students will be respectful and demonstrate positive behaviors while learning within their ability level.

Parents: Our parents are actively supportive of Cardinal Elementary School's goals, understand and support the school's mission, have an attitude of respect, are accountable, have high expectations for their children, and provide a home "family" environment conducive to learning and success. Students, teacher, staff, community members, and parents are all equal partners in our school's mission.

Because Cardinal Elementary School is designated as a Title I school, they must also have a parent involvement plan in place. The plan states that the education of the children is a cooperative effort between the families and the school. With all of these beliefs in place, how does Cardinal Elementary School involve parents in the education of their children?

One of the most important components is to designate a Parent Involvement Coordinator. The current Parent Involvement Coordinator is a teacher who also serves on the School Improvement Committee. She believes that once parents believe that you truly have the best interest of their child at heart and are showing that every day, they will back you 100 percent. This teacher is also the one who is taking the conversational Spanish class so that she can communicate more directly with her parents of English Language Learners. Her actions and words match her beliefs. Parents understand this.

There is also a Parent Involvement Committee that works to provide a variety of opportunities for parents to visit the school and become involved. Some of the activities are academic in nature while others provide opportunities for family entertainment and fun. Activities include the annual Title I meeting where the School Improvement Plan is shared with parents; Donuts for Dads; Muffins for Moms; Greetings for Grandparents; the Bull Pup Fashion Show; parent drop-ins and luncheons with the classrooms; honor

roll celebrations, science fair/technology night; Red Ribbon Week; Story Character Day; Dr. Seuss Week; reading lock-ins; grade level sponsored curriculum nights; quarterly parent conferences; weekly classroom newsletter; Title I monthly newsletters – “Parents Make a Difference” and “Home and School Connection”; community choir concert; talent show; art show; kindergarten orientation; parent workshops; and Parent/Teacher Organization meetings where students perform. These activities provide opportunities for parents to involve themselves with the school. However, for partnerships to occur with parents, parents must engage themselves (Auerbach, 2010). Providing information to parents on how to navigate the school’s bureaucracy and participate in the school’s reforms engenders the engagement that schools are seeking (Cooper, Riehl & Hasan, 2010).

Communication of these events is through school and classroom newsletters provided in the native language of the parents, School Messenger calls to families, and posting information on the sign in front of the school. Miss Monica also makes sure that parents are aware of upcoming meetings for her parents and encourages them to attend. Parents are always invited to join their child for lunch in the cafeteria. Parent involvement has increased at the school. All of the teachers interviewed stated that they usually have around 90 percent of their parents attend these events. These teachers also stated that all of their parents of English Language Learners have shown up for open house and parent conferences this year.

Schools can provide as many parent meetings and opportunities to come to the school as they would like, but if the school environment is not safe and inviting to

parents, they will not return. In the survey the Parent Involvement Coordinator sent to parents, 95% of the parents agreed that the school welcomes them and is willing to talk with them about any problems their child may be having. Ninety-six percent of the parents also agreed that the school is a safe, secure place to learn. When I enter the school, I find smiling faces on the teachers and children, some of the fifth graders who remember me from before give me a hug, and greetings abound. I have noticed parents who are visiting the school either scheduling a time to talk with a teacher or the teacher being able to take a minute for a short chat in the hallway. There is a sense of working together to meet the needs of the students. Teachers report that between 95 to 99% of their parents attend quarterly conferences.

How then do the partnerships help with this outcome? Volunteers man tables of food for Donuts for Dads, Muffins for Moms, or Greetings for Grandparents. They also serve as extra adults to students who do not have an adult to sit and visit with them. These volunteers from the church congregations are extra adults who lend a helping hand wherever they are needed. They also greet parents and make them feel welcome. Miss Monica ensures that her parents are aware of the events and encourages them to attend.

As the parents are more involved in the school, teachers have more opportunities to hear the stories of the families of their students. Learning these stories is invaluable in building trusting relationships with these parents. When the teacher knows that a student comes from a family of 14 children, she knows that there may not always be time to check homework or that the student she has may have many home responsibilities that interfere with completing assignments at home. Classroom size at Cardinal Elementary

School is kept small; usually no more than 18 students in a classroom. This allows the teacher to get to know her students as well so that she knows and understands their fears, dreams, and aspirations. Not only does she know them, but she can help a student overcome a fear or work towards achieving a dream.

Volunteers from the church congregations who work with the students can build these relationships as well. One of the first grade teachers relates that a student who is a top student has excelled even more this year because she spends time with a volunteer working on her reading skills. Yes, the student could read well, but she had some areas of difficulty. Because the volunteer built a nurturing relationship with the student and worked on specific areas in her reading, the child has flourished and is at the top of her class. Not only are the seeds of academic excellence sown, but the student can envision accomplishing her dreams in life.

Another outcome of these partnerships is increased student attendance. Attendance at Cardinal Elementary School has traditionally been greater than 95%. Attendance for the 2008-2009 school year was 97%. Attendance for the 2009-2010 school year was 96.6%. Children at Cardinal Elementary School attend school regularly. The school works to intervene in situations where a student begins to collect tardies to school or absences from school. The school's data manager calls the parents of each student who is absent each day to let the parent know that the child is missed. Teachers call parents as well when a child has been absent for two or three days. When needed, the school social worker or school nurse talks with the family to determine if there were barriers that they can help remove. In order for a child to learn, he or she must attend

school regularly. The staff strives to ensure that all children attend school regularly. Because parents find the school to be a welcoming place and a safe, secure place for their children to learn, parents want their children to attend school as well. Education is seen as the means to attaining life's goals and securing the life that a student yearns to achieve. Attending school is important because a child cannot learn if they are not attending school. How do the partnerships help with this outcome? The help is not direct; it is simply when the partnerships help meet the needs of the students and their families, a barrier to school attendance may be removed. A need might be school uniform clothing that the child has outgrown and there is not enough money in the family's budget to purchase new clothes. It might be paying a utility bill of a family that is far behind and in danger of having the utilities cut off. It is difficult for a student to bathe if the water and electricity have been cut off for nonpayment of a bill. Coming to school would be a warm place for the student, but if other students begin to make fun of him or her because of the way he or she smells, then the student begins to avoid school. The partnerships with faith-based organizations can help in these situations.

I must acknowledge the fact that Cardinal Elementary School is in School Improvement under *No Child Left Behind* legislation because they have failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress in math for the past three years. The two subgroups where the school does not meet the criteria are Black and Economically Disadvantaged Students. Because of these sanctions, the school has instituted remedial sessions during the school day and offers supplemental tutoring services to students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Supplemental tutoring services occur in the afternoons after

school. Offering the other mandated services does make it difficult during the school day for a teacher to plan how to use a volunteer in her classroom. Another result has been a decreased number of English Language Learners who attended the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church. Hmong student attended the program the first semester and Latino students are attending the program second semester. Even though the school is in School Improvement, its students showed Expected Growth under the state's testing accountability program. Academic achievement is promoted and expected at Cardinal Elementary School. The students rise to the occasion and the parents, students, and faculty are working hard to exit School Improvement.

One of the areas that begs attention is including families in the decision-making process. As I stated before, the School Improvement Team must have parent representatives included on its roster. The current list of parents includes males and females and White and African Americans representing the parents. However, there are no Latino or Hmong parents on the School Improvement Team. While the team makes decisions regarding policies, procedures, and programs for the school, the parents serving on the team represent this parent group as well. Parents may request and be given a copy of the committee's minutes, but most parents do not do so. Hopefully the parents serving on the team talk to other parents in the community, but it is highly unlikely that parents from the Hmong and Latino populations are communicated with unless the school does it directly. A suggestion that I am making is that the school identify a parent or two within the Hmong and Latino communities who would be willing to serve on this team. Once these parents are identified, then the principal needs to seek them out and ask them to run

on the slate of parent representatives that the Parent/Teacher Organization votes on. Engaging parents from all segments of the school community will strengthen the relationships among families in the school community and share the information that teach family needs to build social capital for themselves.

The final outcome from these partnerships is the positive publicity for the school. The minister from First Presbyterian Church talked about how the school is constantly on the minds and part of the conversational buzz in the congregation. The same is true with First Lutheran Church's congregation. With the increased participation of Pastor Timmons and members of Sunday school classes, the needs of the school have become more obvious to the congregation of First Baptist Church. This increased awareness has led to increased participation in the various activities that the congregation participates in. These congregations are also aware of the positive things that occur at Cardinal Elementary School.

The following table examines the major themes of building social capital that I found in my research. The reader can compare the similarities between the congregations and their efforts to support building social capital in the school's families.

**Table 5: Social Capital**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>FPC</b>	<b>FLC</b>	<b>FBC</b>	<b>Not Able to Attribute to a Specific Partnership</b>
Key to making democracy work – allows all voices to be heard	X	X		
Conveys significant benefits to poor and marginalized groups	X	X	X	
Helps young people develop attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to better themselves economically	X	X		
Flow of information from those who possess to those who need to know		X		
Members who have access to relevant information and quickness to access information				X
Networks consist of family, community, peers, and friends				X
Builds upon sense of belonging and establishes the identity of the person				X
Allows individuals to transform himself	X	X	X	
Heightens visibility of issues and more people become involved	X	X	X	
Educators build trust in the community				X
Educators and families build collaborative relationships				X
Educators gain more thorough knowledge of students' goals/aspirations/concerns				X
Elementary – sow seeds of academic achievement				X
Increased parental involvement in school		X		X
Increased student attendance and achievement				X
Including families in decision-making process				X
Positive publicity for the school				X

The reader can surmise that the majority of the outcomes and themes present in the area of social capital cannot be attributed to any one or two of the partnerships. All of the partnerships play a role in building social capital in the school's families. By all of these faith-based organizations working with the school, trusting relationships between the school and its families flourish and children begin to acquire the skills and network connections they will need to become productive, educated citizens competing in a global economy.

Analyzing the data gathered from the partnerships among a public, elementary school and its partnerships with faith-based organizations allows the reader to begin to answer the questions: 1) how the legal, political, and ethical dimensions of partnerships among faith-based organization and public, elementary schools affect the educational programs in a rural, public elementary school; 2) how the frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect a rural, public elementary school's partnership among faith-based organizations; and 3) what cultural facts in the rural setting influence the partnerships among public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations. I examined how each of these dimensions: legal, political, ethical, ruralness, and social capital have affected the particular partnership and the school. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications that I interpreted from the data gathered in my study.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

As an educational researcher, building administrator, and central office director, I applaud the efforts of Cardinal Elementary School to nurture partnerships with the local congregations in their neighborhoods. Cardinal Elementary Schools is a school that works hard to meet the academic, psychological, and social needs of their students. In order for their students to succeed, the school knows that there must be a strong partnership among the school, family, and community. One of the ways to strengthen this academic and social achievement of the students is to increase parent involvement in the school. The partnerships that Cardinal Elementary School nurture strengthens families and increases parent involvement in the school.

Cardinal Elementary School participates in partnerships with three local, Protestant congregations who each fill a specific niche in helping the school meet the needs of its students and families. The partnership with First Presbyterian Church focuses on supporting the school through providing volunteers to work in classrooms, donating school supplies to students whose families cannot afford to purchase these supplies, sponsoring students for the Angel Tree at Christmas, and providing staff appreciation luncheons. First Presbyterian Church has adopted Cardinal Elementary School and works to nurture the staff so that they are strengthened to meet the needs of the students who they work with every day.

The partnership with First Lutheran takes on a different role. The church provides an after school tutoring program for English Language Learners that meets twice each week. Run by a director who is a member of the church, this small group of volunteers work with the English Language Learners on homework and provide additional opportunities for the children to work on their English language skills. Communication with the families is a vital component of this program and Miss Monica urges parents to communicate with the school and to attend school conferences and programs so that parents can learn to help their children and participate in their education.

The partnership with First Baptist Church is more informal in nature. The pastor, Reverend Timmons, has two children who attend Cardinal Elementary School. He volunteers in his children's classrooms and is also the president of the Parent/Teacher Organization. Because he is president of the Parent/Teacher Organization, Pastor Timmons also serves on the School Improvement Team where issues are discussed and plans made. Historically, this church was not involved with Cardinal Elementary School, but when one of the members became principal of the school several years ago and began articulating the needs of the students, then the church became aware of the needs and wanted to help. Volunteers have served as extra "dads" for Donuts for Dads, the school has used the facility for its fall festival, and a Sunday school class donated school supplies for the entire fifth grade at the school. All three of these congregations work with the school principal and staff to help students achieve academic success and begin to lay the groundwork for these students to achieve their dreams and goals in life.

## **Unanticipated Outcomes**

One of the unanticipated impacts on my study is the fact that Cardinal Elementary School is under sanctions from *No Child Left Behind* legislation because they are in School Improvement. Because of these sanctions, the school must offer supplemental services to students who qualify for free and reduced price lunches under the federal government's lunch program. Providing these services impacts the school in two ways. The first way is that not all of the English Language Learner students attend the tutoring program at First Lutheran Church. The students were divided into two groups this year. Asian students attended the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran during the first semester while the Latino students who were eligible stayed after school for the supplemental services program. At the beginning of second semester, the students switched and the Latino students attended the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran while the Asian students who qualify attend the supplemental services offered at the school. Not all English Language Learners had access to the supplemental services because of the criteria to qualify. These students only received one semester of extra services. I am unable to obtain the numbers of how many students this impacted because of the confidentiality of the free and reduced lunch program's guidelines.

The other impact on the school is that the school has implemented several programs to remediate students who need help in reading and math. Implementing these programs causes students to be pulled out of the classroom during the instructional day and makes it difficult for teachers to plan for an additional volunteer to work with students in their classrooms. The partnership activities with First Presbyterian Church and

First Lutheran Church began prior to the school entering School Improvement and in the beginning were the only extra services available to the school. These were also free services provided to the school. If the school continues in School Improvement, then the School Improvement Team and leaders in the partnership activities will need to specifically plan how they need to make changes to meet the needs of all involved and still utilize fully the volunteer services provided by the churches.

In my study, I found that the legal, ethical, and political dimensions of our American society impact the partnerships among a public, elementary school and faith-based organizations and its educational programs; that the cultural factors in the rural setting influence the partnerships among a public, elementary school and faith-based organizations and its educational programs; and the frameworks of social capital and cultural and class diversity affect these partnerships among a public, elementary school and faith-based organizations and its educational programs. In the next sections, I will state my conclusions and implications for the future of these partnerships and research. I begin by concluding that these are effective partnerships among the school and the faith-based organizations involved in the partnerships. I look at the strengths and needs of these partnerships as recommended by the research that is stated in the literature.

### **Characteristics of Effective Partnerships**

The partnerships among Cardinal Elementary School and its faith-based organizations are a collaborative effort with a common purpose. The strong partnerships offer activities that are student-centered, family-centered, and school-centered. These activities build trusting relationships that provide a give and take on both sides that teach

the students to also take ownership in completing projects themselves. By learning these lessons, students are encouraged the students to take responsibility for their own learning and achieving their dreams.

### **Planning**

Planning occurs between the school and the congregations in these partnerships; however there is a need for additional planning opportunities to occur. The principal and the chairperson of the Missions Committee of First Presbyterian Church meet and plan. The pastor of First Baptist Church serves on the School Improvement Team. Having membership for all of the churches on the School Improvement Team might improve communication between the teachers and the Missions Committee. One of the members of the Missions Committee discussed the frustration of having people who are willing to volunteer in classrooms and not enough teachers requesting their help. Improving this communication would allow the groups to get to know each other better and communicate their ideas and concerns so that they could find solutions to the issues.

Identifying a teacher-leader who will act as a liaison between the school and Missions Committee is another suggestion. This would especially help facilitate the joining of volunteers who want to work in the classrooms and teachers who would utilize them. The Literacy Facilitator discussed this need to help facilitate communication between the Missions Committee and the staff.

The lines of communication in the partnership between the school and First Lutheran Church's after school tutoring program for English Language Learners are very clear and flow smoothly. The director of the program and the English as a Second

Language teacher communicate weekly on students and their needs. Teachers also write notes to the director or email her with specific things for their students to work on.

Because of the need to understand the strengths and needs of the students who they are working with, clear lines of open communication have necessitated the creation of this structure. This is strength of this partnership.

### **Leadership**

A strength in the partnership between First Lutheran Church and Cardinal Elementary School is the weathering of a transition in leadership. The current director started out as a tutor in the program when she moved to the town. The director of the program at that time believed that all services should be provided to the students. An example of this is that she believed that the school system or the church should provide transportation home for the students attending the program. Coupling this with not allowing the students to speak their native languages while attending the program set the stage for little to no interaction with parents.

When Miss Monica became the director, she implemented changes. The first change is that parents must pick up their children from the program and must come inside to get them. This forces some sort of interaction on a weekly basis with the director of the program, the volunteers, and the parents. While Miss Monica does not encourage the students to speak their native languages while attending the program, she does allow this to occur. Miss Monica also communicates with the Latino parents in Spanish if the need arises. Therefore, deeper trusting relationships between the parents and the program have

grown and these trusting relationships have also transferred to the school because of Miss Monica's encouragement.

### **Relationships**

Relationships are very important in these partnerships. The congregations of First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church recognize that Cardinal Elementary School is a neighborhood school that has many school families with needs that the school needs help meeting. The school realizes that it cannot operate as an entity that meets the needs of all its students by itself. It takes everyone in the community working together to build strong families for students. Building these relationships with local congregations in the neighborhood taps a resource that many schools shy away from. However, forming these relationships is important to build viable partnerships that serve families. Several of the volunteers remarked that they volunteered to work in a classroom because they knew one of the teachers from church. The elderly couple who knew the third grade teacher developed a strong relationship with her and her students. Not only did the students benefit from the mentoring relationships that grew out of the time spent reading and working with students, but the teacher and couple grew closer as friends who worked together to meet a need. The couple, teacher, and students built a relationship together that will live into the future.

Many of the families in the congregation have children who attend the neighborhood school and this keeps conversation about the school and the partnership activities at the forefront of the First Presbyterian Church congregation's minds. The congregation has taken on the school as a local mission and it is a part of their

conversation. First Lutheran Church talks about the tutoring program in its newsletter and the pastor of First Baptist Church communicates needs that the congregation can help with to the appropriate people.

Members of the congregations can participate in a variety of activities that suit the level of volunteerism they choose to provide. Activities range from volunteering in a classroom or for a short term project, donating school supplies, donating food for a teacher appreciation activity, sponsoring a child for the Angel Tree, tutoring English Language Learners in an afterschool program, or donating money to meet an emergency need of a school family. Participating in these activities builds relationships with others who are participating in an endeavor greater than themselves.

The role of the clergy varied with each partnership. Traditionally, clergy members play the role of cheerleaders (Pipes & Ebaugh, 2002) and that was evident in my study. All of the clergy members communicate in an on-going manner the ways that congregational members can be involved in various activities. However, the pastor of First Lutheran Church tutored fourth and fifth grade English Language Learners for two afternoons each week for two years. Not only did he do this because he knew there was a need, but he wanted to build relationships that crossed racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic boundaries. Pastor Timmons from First Baptist Church began volunteering because his two children attend the school and he wanted to help in a hands-on manner. As different as the personalities of these individuals are, so are the differences in how they choose to become involved with their church's partnership with the school. Their active

involvement also provided symbolic leadership for their congregations and emphasized how important this work is to the mission of the church.

The principal exhibits strong leadership in these partnerships. She is highly visible and actively participates in the planning activities with the Missions Committee of First Presbyterian Church and the pastor of First Baptist Church. She also visits the congregations to communicate the activities that the students at the school are participating in, achievements and successes, and needs that are present in the school as well. Her warmth and caring for her students draw in the congregation members and incite them to help. She and members of the school, including the students, communicate their appreciation to the congregations on a regular basis Smiles on staff members' faces, student-made cards that express thank you, and relationships that are nurtured are ways that the school and its students express their appreciation.

### **Legal, Political, and Ethical Dimensions**

#### **Legal Dimensions**

The partnership among Cardinal Elementary School and First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, and First Baptist Church operates within the confines of the framework of legal, political, and ethical dimensions that must be considered in a public school setting. The activities of the partnership meet the *Lemon Test* (Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971). The goals and mission of the partnership are secular in nature. Activities do not advance nor inhibit religion because even though students were invited to perform at a church service, the activity occurred outside of school time and parents gave permission for their child to attend. No excessive entanglement of the government

with religion occurs either. Monies for the partnership activities for the school come from donations from the congregation's members. These donations take the form of school supplies, food for teacher appreciation activities, funds for emergencies for school families or staff members, and the Angel Tree. All of these donations do not include any public monies, but come from donations of individual congregation members.

### **Political Dimensions**

The partnership continues to provide activities that allow students and families to transform their lives and realize their dreams. An old Chinese proverb states that providing a man a fish to feed himself and meet his immediate needs is important. However, it is more important to teach him to fish so that he can feed himself every day. In this case, the man is a child who is an English Language Learner at Cardinal Elementary School. Providing tutoring services for these not only assures that homework assignments are completed but provides a group of students who need another level of services extra time to practice their English language skills. As these students gain self-confidence in themselves, whether they struggle academically or are English Language Learners, they will grow and achieve their dreams. Lives will be transformed.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

The volunteers in this partnership are motivated to participate in the various activities because they know there is a need and want to help. As one volunteer states, "We were told there was need in helping with the reading and it was something we could do. So, we did." There is a genuine desire to help and know they belong to an endeavor that is greater than the individual. Building relationships with students provides positive

role models, models appropriate interactions between adults and children, and shows that others, especially people who do not know them, care about them and building success.

In order for these partnership activities to meet the mandates of the legal, ethical, and political considerations, the school must pay close attention to the programs being offered and the actions of the congregations' members. Providing an after school tutoring program for English Language Learners at the local church facility does not cross the line into violating the constitutional rights of the students. Charitable choice legislation (Chaves & Tsitos, 2001) encourages churches to provide social services to families and this tutoring program is a social service. Also, the families have a choice: they can choose to allow their children to participate in this program or not. The church is not required to remove religious artifacts or symbols from its facility where the students are located (Lockhart, 2005).

“Showing God’s love” is a motivating factor for the volunteers to participate. Close attention must be paid to the fact that even subtle proselytization does not occur. All volunteers who work in classrooms are required to attend an orientation where the issue of proselytization is discussed. The principal discusses this issue with the volunteers and articulates the school’s expectations. Volunteers are also provided a handbook that addresses this issue as well. Because this orientation provides opportunities for questions and answers, the volunteers gain a better understanding of the need to respect all students’ beliefs about religious matters. Questions regarding faith issues have arisen over the years and have been handled with factual information provided to the students that answers their questions. Volunteers who work in the school make special efforts to

be sensitive to the religious differences of the students and also provide for the children's needs. However, I also must note that in the South, "showing God's love" takes many forms and is an aspect of the rural setting that is hard to avoid. I found that none of these volunteers were trying to evangelize their religious beliefs but to help an individual with a need. Compassion for others is a character trait present in human society.

### **Cultural Factors in the Rural Setting**

#### **Relationships**

The school and church congregation are set in a rural community. The family, school, and church work together to model the expected norms of behavior in the school and community. Hard work, discipline, and education are highly valued. Students understand the high expectations, both behaviorally and academically, that the school, their families, and the community have of them. Citizens in the school community have a strong sense of place. Many of the families have lived in the town for generations and feel that the town is a good place to raise a family. All of the congregations that participate in the partnership with Cardinal Elementary School were formed in the late 1800's and the school itself was formed in the 1880's. Many families who worship in the congregations trace their families' memberships back several generations.

#### **Cultural and Social Center**

Cardinal Elementary is a social and cultural center of the community. The school sponsors a variety of activities that help parents understand what is expected of their student, how to help their child with his or her homework, and develop parenting skills. Volunteers from the church congregations help these events run smoothly by manning tables to provide refreshments or running and collating handouts for the training. Other

activities promote fun and play and provide opportunities for the school staff to build trusting relationships with their parents. Many opportunities are provided for parents to visit the classroom and see first-hand how the teacher and the child interact. These transparent relationships build trust between the school and its families. Miss Monica, the director of the after school tutoring program at First Lutheran Church, plays a significant role in encouraging families to interact with the school and visit. According to parent surveys, parents believe that their children's teachers have their child's best interests at heart and support the school. Strong relationships built on trust and the school serving as a cultural and social center of the community are characteristics of a rural community that impact the lives of students and the school's educational programs.

The school communicates directly with its parents in a variety of ways. Information is sent home in the student's native language. One of the teachers is learning conversational Spanish to better communicate with her English Language Learner parents. These communication efforts help the school families, especially families of English Language Learners, feel more a part of the community. Forming connections to the community helps families feel that they are a part of the community and belong. This sense of place and belonging in the community are characteristics of a rural area that can strengthen families.

The activities of the partnership strive to help families move from a survival mode to being better able to help their children grow socially and academically and become more involved in their children's education. Pipher (2002) discusses how the school becomes a culture broker for the family as the family learns to maneuver in this culture

that is different from their native culture and surroundings. This is true also for immigrant families because they are separated from their families and all that is familiar in their home countries. Helping stem this sense of isolation will allow these families to interact with and better understand the American culture while accessing economic opportunities. Because many rural communities are isolated geographically from metropolitan areas and the services they provide, there is a strong sense of helping others and connecting with them so that the needs of families in the community can be met.

The school is a cultural broker that helps families access social services when they need them. Activities with the partnerships help the school in this endeavor when they spend time with a student working on his homework or providing extra time for him to practice his English language skills. Providing English language classes for adults in the community helps these families as well as they learn how to maneuver in a culture foreign to their own and how to access jobs and services. The school is able to act in this manner because of the trust that has been built between the school and its families and parents are comfortable talking with the school about their concerns. When the adults in the families become more proficient in communicating in the English language, then they begin to feel more connected to the community and the sense of isolation begins to dissipate. Rural communities thrive on taking care of their own and meeting the needs of others. It is also important to these community members that families who move to the community find their connections and begin to feel that this is their home as well.

The school community is predominately White. Protestant congregations dominate the landscape in the neighborhood. It is important to note, however, that the

school strives to recognize and value all races, ethnicities, and their socioeconomic status. Each student is valued for his individual talents, dreams, and achievements. Cardinal Elementary School focuses on educating the whole child, not just the academic side. For the school to succeed in educating the whole child so that he achieves his goals and dreams, the school understands that it must work with families and the community to do so. Partnering with faith-based organizations strengthens the foundation for the school and their work with these families. One of the challenges of a rural community is that students do not see relevance between their education and their real lives. One of the volunteers in the third grade classroom related the story of the third grade boy who did not think he needed to learn to read better because he was going to be a car mechanic when he grew up. His father was teaching him how to fix cars. The volunteer innocently asked what the boy would do if he came across a problem fixing a car when he was older and his father was not there to answer the question. The boy stopped and thought for a moment. The next day, he came back and said that he needed to learn to read better because his father told him that for the boy to solve his problem fixing the car, he would have to read a manual. This third grade boy made the connection between learning to read and how this skill would impact his life.

Working with families in a rural, school community is not done in isolation. The characteristics of rural communities impact the beliefs of families and educational programs that the school provides. The child is not seen from just the academic side, but is perceived by the community as a whole person with goals and dreams that he wants to accomplish. It is in the rural community's best interest to work together with the school

to help this child grow into a productive citizen who can participate in a democratic society and will stay in the community and raise his family. Schools that work with local faith-based organizations to partner in building these strong relationships provide mentoring relationships that can continue into adulthood, positive role models for students to aspire to become, and guidance in understanding the importance of gaining an education and moving through the difficult terrain of growing into an adult. It takes everyone: the school, its families, and local congregations working together to build and guide these young people into the strong, inquisitive, hard-working adults they will become who will grow their own families.

### **Social Capital**

In many of our small towns and inner cities, communities are without hope. They are communities in ruins as the valley of dry bones was in Ezekiel's day (Ezekiel, Chapter 37). When these "dry bones rattle," community members are awakening to the power they have to bring needed changes and hope to their community. Forming school partnerships with faith-based organizations can bring hope to these areas by encouraging the building of social capital. Warren (2001) argues that building social capital in communities is the "key to making democracy work" (p. x). It is the "features of social organization such as networks norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. x). Not only does building social capital in a community build hope, but it allows all voices, even those from marginalized groups of people in the community, to be heard. New, democratic leaders emerge that help to build healthier communities that allow its members to compete locally and globally. While

only one or two bones may rattle in the beginning, the rattling grows in number until a groundswell occurs.

Social capital connotes the idea that a person has assets, wealth, resources, and investments along with a considerable amount of potential benefits and liabilities. Inequalities exist in one's ability to access social capital because of the uneven allocation of resources in the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of a community (Doe, 2002). For centuries, women have invested in social networks that would provide them and their families these benefits. However, most of the social capital they invested in was that in their own neighborhood or community. Social capital is important in that it allows individuals to advance their goals and interests within a sociocultural context; to the community and normative behaviors that define and benefit children and adults, those of various socioeconomic levels, those who are members of marginalized groups, and the larger society (Alfred & Nanton, 2009).

### **Flow of Information**

The flow of information from the school to the families and from families to the school is the most important component of the social capital frameworks because possessing the right information at the right time empowers people to transform their lives. The building of this bonding and bridging social capital for students is evident in the activities of the partnership among the school and its faith-based organizations. Just by spending time talking with and listening to a student, the student begins to better understand the importance of his education and how this education relates to achieving his dreams and goals for his life. When another volunteer points out to a student what a

“good mind” he has, he begins to understand that college can be a reality in his life. The relationship bonds that these students and volunteers nurture will benefit the students in future years when they apply for college or join the workforce. The bridging networks that are built with these students will allow them to access economic opportunities that will allow them to realize their dreams and be productive citizens in a democratic society. Without building and nurturing the skills to build their own networks, these young people will have difficulty navigating and succeeding in a society that places much emphasis on networks and access to important pieces of information.

### **Relationships**

These relationships with other adults in the congregations’ membership reinforce the student’s individual identity. Working with a child to improve his reading skills increases his self-confidence. Providing additional opportunities to practice English language skills encourages students to volunteer to answer questions in class. Providing a student with needed school supplies that he cannot afford or uniform clothing when he has outgrown his pants places all children on a level playing field and removes the embarrassment of looking different or not having needed supplies. Removing these barriers to learning allows the child to concentrate on what he is doing in school and grow socially, emotionally, and academically. He is also learning that others, who he does not know, are willing to help him succeed. Therefore, he will need to help others as he matures into an adult.

Gaining access to the world outside the child’s immediate neighborhood builds a connection to needed networks that help the child navigate unknown situations. Providing

field trip opportunities, talking to and listening to classroom visitors, and interacting with adults other than school staff or family members are avenues the school uses to build secondary social capital in its students. Primary and secondary social capital differs in important ways (Alfred & Nanton, 2009). Primary social capital includes networks consisting of family, church or spiritual groups, peers, and friends. These groups build upon a sense of belonging and an establishment of the identity for the individual. Secondary social capital includes networks that provide the external connections to the world outside the community. These networks promote individual growth and allow the individual to transform himself.

At the elementary level, we do not see the outcomes that we might expect if we were discussing a partnership with a high school. However, the seeds are sown and nurturing relationships throughout the student's academic career will cause these positive attributes to emerge as part of the student's character. The partnerships help the school accomplish this by volunteering in the classroom, spending time with students as a lunch buddy, or providing funds for field trip opportunities. Building this bridging capital helps the students learn lessons they will use as they navigate their way in a global society.

The issue of diversity does find its place in this partnership. The church members who participate in the partnership's activities are typically White, middle class, Protestants. Many of these congregation members are college-educated and possess careers in various professions such as banking, sales, engineering, medicine, and accounting. Many of the females who participate in the partnership's activities are college-educated and licensed to teach school, but have chosen to stay home and raise

their children over the years. Some of the younger couples in the congregations are dual career families. These volunteers do not typically reflect the faces of the students at Cardinal Elementary School.

The school population is 36.8% White, 36.5% African American, 11.9% Hispanic, 5.8% Asian, and 8.7% Multi-Racial. The free and reduced lunch rate for the school, under the federal lunch program, is 86% (Enrollment by Gender and Race Month 9 for 2009-2010, 2010). The majority of the Hispanic and Asian parents are first-generation immigrants to this country and work menial or entry-level jobs. These adults also do not speak English as their native language and face the barriers of not understanding the English language. Many of the parents of White and African American children in the school hold menial jobs and must work more than one job to provide for their families. According to the federal lunch program statistics, 14% of the families live above the poverty line according to federal government guidelines. At first glance, one would think what would these two groups, volunteers and school families, have in common? Looking deeper at the motivations for these congregation members to participate in the partnership's activities, one finds many connections. These three churches see a need of families who live in their community, in fact next door, and they feel compelled to work together with the school to meet these needs. These three churches have established long term social and service relationships with the school that work to build relationships and nurture and strengthen families. The diversity of the students is a gift because each child is valued for his or her individuality, talents, and dreams. Building relationships with people who care about the student, even though the

person does not know the student personally, encourages the student to work to achieve his or her goals in life and become productive citizens in a democratic society.

Building social capital in families must also strive to value and respect the diversity of the families. That is why conveying the benefits of social capital to families who are members of marginalized groups of citizens is important. Nurturing the ability to access the American dream strengthens families and encourages them to voice their needs, dreams, and aspirations.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

There is a need for further research in the area of partnerships between faith-based organizations and public schools. Educators must use all tools in their arsenals to meet the needs of students and families who they serve in their school communities. Another question for further research in this area is: What do the partnerships between the African American congregations and the public school look like? How do their activities impact the educational programs of a public school in terms of legal, political, and ethical considerations? How does this partnership build social capital in the public school's families? I found in my research that two of the African American congregations partner with the local public middle school. However, these partnerships were outside the parameters of my study. Therefore, this is also an area that needs to be examined.

From my study, I have five recommendations that the school and local congregations should consider implementing. My first recommendation is that the school and congregation of First Lutheran Church and First Baptist Church should work to maintain and increase the volunteer force in the after school tutoring program. Second,

the school should identify and elect parent representation from the Latino and Asian populations at the school. The school should also identify and support a teacher-leader who will serve as a liaison with the Missions Committee of First Presbyterian Church. There is also a need for a member of the Missions Committee to serve on the School Improvement Team to facilitate communication and planning between the two entities. Finally, there is a need for one of the local congregations to begin an after school tutorial program for students in grades 3 through 5 who score a Level I or II on their End-of-Grade reading and math tests.

This study does not address those families specifically who live in poverty as determined by guidelines of the federal government. While the 86% of the student body at Cardinal Elementary School receives free and reduced lunches, these students cannot be specifically identified and studied. Students who receive free and reduced lunch services through the federal government receive these services because their parents earn less in income than the level determined by the federal government to sustain a family at or above the level of poverty. Because confidentiality guidelines of the federal lunch program prohibit the dissemination of information regarding students and their economic status, this information was unavailable to me. School districts who violate these guidelines risk losing their federal funding that benefits so many of their students. Therefore, I studied the groups of students who benefitted from such activities as donations of school supplies, the Angel Tree, or emergency assistance to their families. There was no way to separate out in my data analysis specifically if the parents of these students are more involved in their children's education because of their benefitting from

these partnership activities. I looked at all parents who participate in parent involvement activities. Therefore, I was not able to look at socioeconomic class as a specific group of students and families to determine how the partnership activities specifically affected or benefitted them. I know from observation that these students benefitted, but I have no actual data to prove my beliefs. By inference I concluded that the majority of the students who attend Cardinal Elementary School are poor because the programs choose from a student body that is 86% below the poverty level. These local churches in the rural South have taken on these service projects that involve poor, ethnic people of color—children and families- to help the school meet their needs and strengthen them so that they can access the American dream.

The partnership among the school and its faith-based organizations is a strong one. The activities that the partnerships sponsor are an integral part of the school. From interviews, maintaining the volunteer force for First Lutheran Church and First Baptist Church could be a challenge that these two congregations could face in the future. Continuing to make the congregation aware of the programs, their successes with students and families, and the needs of the school are important communications. The English as a Second Language teacher and the director of the after school tutoring program might also look to the recruiting students from the Spanish II classes at the local high school to help with tutoring. These students could also use these services to strengthen their resumes for scholarship applications when they apply to colleges in the future. The principal also should build relationships with members of these congregations so that the relationships that are so important in these partnerships are strengthened.

Volunteers are more likely to invest their time and energies when they know of a need and have a personal connection.

The School Improvement Team does not have representation from the Latino families or Asian families in the school. The legislation for School Improvement Teams requires that the parent representatives represent the racial/ethnic demographics of the school. Leaving out representation for these two racial/ethnic groups not only violates the general statute, but leaves the voices of two marginalized groups of people off the table. It is important that everyone feels they have mechanism for their voices to be heard. For all racial and ethnic groups to be represented in the planning and voicing of concerns and ideas, parent representatives from these racial/ethnic groups need to be recruited to serve on this team. It will take identifying parents who might be willing to serve and school leaders talking to these people to help convince them that they are truly needed in this endeavor. Once these representatives are on board, then the school will strengthen its relationships with all families in the school community.

The School Improvement Team should also revisit the idea of identifying a teacher-leader from the school faculty to serve as a liaison between First Presbyterian Church and the school. The purpose of this liaison would be to recruit teachers who would be willing to have volunteers from any of the faith-based organizations, but especially First Presbyterian Church, serve in their classrooms. The volunteers are available, but the acceptance on the teachers' end is lacking. The School Improvement Team is taking up this topic in their planning meetings for next year that will occur later in the spring.

Electing a member of the Missions Committee from First Presbyterian Church to serve on the School Improvement Team would also improve the communication of ideas and facilitate planning. Participating on the School Improvement Team would also facilitate direct communication and allow for more planning to occur with staff members.

Teachers voiced the need of one of the congregations in the partnership undertaking providing an after school tutoring program for students who score a Level I or II on their End-of-Grade tests. Because of the academic growth seen in the English Language Learners who have attended the tutoring program at First Lutheran Church, teachers suggest this program for this group of students. While the school currently offers supplemental services under *No Child Left Behind* legislation, not all of the students who score a Level I or II on their End-of-Grade tests qualify for these services. This is a group of students who need extra help with reading and math. The congregation that I recommend this to is First Presbyterian because they have discussed in the past setting up a tutoring program for students who are working below grade level in second grade. The School Improvement Team needs to examine this idea to see if it is feasible to implement next school year.

I have learned many things from this study of a public, elementary school and its partnerships with faith-based organizations. These lessons will be used as I work with other schools and their development of partnerships with outside groups and agencies. As I gathered data, one third grade teacher remarked to me,

It's a shame this [the partnerships] don't continue into middle school and high school. That is where the real need for mentoring is. These kids have such a hard time.

Through conversations in the community, I found that one of the African American congregations works with the middle school on a very informal basis. I plan to talk with the principal to explore the possibility of creating a stronger partnership between this congregation and the school. The current principal of the high school in this attendance zone is retiring at the end of this school year. When the principal is named and in place, then I will broach this idea with her.

Finally, this study contributes to the body of research and knowledge about partnerships in general, but specifically partnerships between public, elementary schools and faith-based organizations. School leaders have shied away from these partnerships in the past because they did not involve a transfer of monies to the school for them to use in a variety of ways because of fears of violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and possibly not knowing how to access and build the relationships in the community. What is unique in my study is that three local congregations have established long term partnerships with a public, elementary school to provide service and social activities to the school and its families. Taking the lessons learned from my study will enable school leaders to create a partnership that fits their specific needs, yet avoids some of the pitfalls that can occur.

As educators, we have the responsibility to use all avenues available and to be open to new avenues that can help schools build stronger families in its school communities. Partnering with faith-based organizations pulls together many talents,

resources, and individuals who can work together to help our children create a future for themselves that transcends their current reality and achieves their dreams and goals.

Three churches in the White rural, often segregated, South have partnered with a high poverty elementary school with a large number of English speaking children and families of color who live below the poverty level. These partnerships have occurred over a long period and they do not consist of simply exchanging money, but of building relationships and helping others in need. Their primary characteristic is that the people of the churches and the officials of the churches play a significant role in supporting the students and families in the school socially and culturally in order to give them a hand up. And they do it entirely out of a sense of volunteerism and (probably) religious obligation—to contribute, not convert. The school has opened its doors to these services and works with the volunteers to assure that the services meet the students' educational and social needs. This is a big difference from the days when communities didn't care about whether poor children made it or not. The local congregations are responding to the needs of the community. As one of the ministers stated, "There is a need here, in our own neighborhood. We are compelled to respond."

Think about what will happen ten years from now when Jose Rodriguez or Dang Phao shows up for a part-time job interview so he can support himself and his family while he goes to college. It just so happens that the employer is the son of one of the volunteers from First Presbyterian Church who worked with Jose or Dang this year and helped him turn the corner. Think of the possibilities in store for these children and their future families.

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