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The Closing of Inner-city Catholic Elementary Schools and the Impact on Community: An Ethnographic Instrumental Case Study of Two Neighboring Communities

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THE CLOSING OF INNER-CITY CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
AND THE IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

by

ANA MARIA LABORDE DE LA PORTILLA

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

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“Who is my neighbor?” That is a question we must all ask regardless of where we live and work. The people of my parish community are my extended family. They became my pillars of support during many trying times. Through their sincerity, acts of kindness, encouragement, and prayers, I was able to persevere. This is their story, and it is my honor to bring their words to life to others. May they inspire you as much as they have inspired me.

Ana María Laborde De La Portilla

DEDICATION

My entire PhD journey is dedicated to *mis abuelos sabios que me apoyan del trono celestial y mis queridos padres que, aunque no están conmigo, gozan de saber que la injusticia contra el prójimo es algo que uno, como Cristiano, debe defender y enfrentar. Gracias, Papá Alfredo Luis y Mamá Ana María Zamudio Laborde*. You always encouraged me to give it my all and not give up. In addition, I wholeheartedly dedicate this to my husband, Gilbert C. De La Portilla, who amidst everything was always a constant pillar of love, support, and motivation.

In a special way, this is dedicated to all those who attended Catholic elementary schools and are now successful in their careers. The Catholic school system needs you; it needs your vision, talents, and abilities. Many children in communities such as the ones depicted in this dissertation would greatly benefit from a Catholic school education, but none is available in their immediate area and/or none is affordable to them. Let us help our neighbors in need.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my children, Maria Christina and Michael Alfredo: never forget where you came from and always reach out to those less fortunate than yourself. God holds you in the palm of His hand; do the same for others.

THE CLOSING OF INNER-CITY CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
AND THE IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

Ana María Laborde De La Portilla

University of the Incarnate Word, 2018

The focus of this ethnographic instrumental case study is to communicate the seriousness of a growing trend in the United States: closings of inner-city/urban Catholic schools by the local diocese. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) and the Church's Catholic social teaching, this study examined the question: What does it mean for the parish community and the church, as a whole, when the Catholic school that was once a big part of community life is no longer there? This research study examined community members' role(s), response to, and experience of a closing; examined the implications on person-community-Church relationship; and examined the values and practices of Catholic social teaching in relationship to the community process of communication.

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Chapter 1: Overview and Scope of the Problem

“Catholic schools ensure that the Catholic tradition is passed on to children who are the future of the Church,” stated Kathryn Ann Connelly (2003, p. 1), former president of the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education division of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). In the last 12 years, more than 1,700 Catholic schools closed their doors to “the future of the Church.” Despite this notable 50-plus year trend, there is minimal empirical research examining the human phenomenon associated with school closures.

Research on the challenges facing Catholic schools throughout the United States was noticeably addressed by scholars during the 1970s and 1980s. However, since then, during a critical time in Catholic school history when schools, particularly elementary schools in inner-city and urban areas, are closing their doors, little has been written on the topic. For this reason, many of the documents in the review of the literature addressing Catholic schools are dated. More recently, Groome (2003a), among other authors, identified a gap in scholarly work on the “largest independent school system in the history of the world” (p. 28) as a demonstration of the unwillingness of the system and its overseers to address, transform, and adapt to the needs of the people, the community (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011; Grace, 2002; Greene & O’Keefe, 2001; McLaughlin, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1996).

In a 2010 article in *America*, a publication addressing Catholic issues, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), stated:

As long as we Catholics refuse to acknowledge that the overall health of the church in the United States is vitally linked not only to the survival but the revival of the Catholic school, we are likely to miss the enormous opportunity this present moment extends. (para. 17)

Decades ago, O’Brien (1987) and Greeley (1998) touted a similar message. Only within the last 12 years have Catholic school advocates, like Storz and Nestor (2005), Smarick and Robson

(2015), Stern and McClosky (2011), and Welsh and Campbell (2011), disclosed growing concern for Catholic schools and called for sustainability.

Brief History of Parochial Schools in the United States

Catholic elementary schools in the United States have a history of association with a parish and are considered the educational arm of the parish community. Referred to as parochial schools, their history can be traced to the early-to-mid-1700s when nearly every Catholic parish had a school house. In 1852, a mandate from the bishops of the First Plenary Council of Baltimore, a governing council of the Catholic Church composed of regional bishops and the Pope, stated that all parishes were to establish a Catholic school on their premises, with the parish priest as the primary decision-maker of and for the school (Cassidy, 1948; O'Brien, 1987).

In the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Catholic parochial schools suffered a major socio-economic blow resulting from a Council mandate permitting the members of religious orders (commonly known as sisters and brothers, though some schools had priests as educators, like the Jesuits) who had been the principal educators in these schools, to leave Catholic schools and practice in their primary field of study. This action resulted in a mass departure of sisters, brothers, and religious priests from Catholic schools who had provided years of education, yet had received little monetary compensation for their service (Cassidy, 1948; Youniss & McClellan, 1999). The inexpensive labor and Catholic identity these religious women and men provided to Catholic schools likewise exited with them. Lay persons were hired to fill teacher/administrator slots after their departure, necessitating an increase in tuition rates. Enrollment rates decreased as parents, perceiving that the loss of the religious personnel would diminish Catholic identity, withdrew their child(ren) from the local parish school (Greeley, 1998; Youniss & McClellan, 1999). These challenges—tuition increases and decreased enrollment—

among others, have plagued the Catholic school system for nearly a half-century and are credited as the cause of many Catholic school closures, especially in inner-cities throughout the United States.

Problem Statement and Significance

Catholic schools in the United States continue to face tremendous socio-economic challenges. The impact of an unstable economy, population shifts, lower birth rates, and rising costs in Catholic school tuition has been evident for over 40 years (Cunningham, 2015). These factors are detrimental to the survival of Catholic schools and contribute to the decline in Catholic school enrollment, especially in inner-city/urban neighborhoods (Brinig & Garnett, 2012; Gambitta, Jones, & Acevedo, 2006; Groome, 2003; Hamilton, 2008; Meyer, 2007; Montejano, 2010; Owens, 2005; Zehr, 2005). In the past 12 years, another factor has been added to the list of challenges: competition from tuition-free charter schools in vacant inner-city buildings once occupied by Catholic elementary schools (Brinig & Garnett, 2010, 2012; Meyer, 2007).

The literature has addressed the many challenges Catholic elementary schools in inner-city/urban areas have been experiencing; nonetheless, few studies have discussed or described the effects these inner-city/urban school closures have on the human, cultural and social capital of communities. Most studies on this topic have relayed their findings by means of statistical data reports and quantitative figures (Brinig & Garnett, 2010, 2012), but have lacked qualitative data analysis specific to the closed schools and the impact those closings have on the people of the community.

Smarick and Robson (2015) posed the question: “What are the most pressing problems that need to be solved?” (p. 61) in order to help Catholic schools. Though the literature has

provided several sources of the problems, the connection to the affected population remains unexamined; in other words, studies detailing school closures have tended to focus on the causes and not on the nucleus of the phenomena, the people and the communities where parochial elementary schools have closed. This study examined the two concepts—Catholic social teaching and Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice—in relation to the role of community in school closures and their implications for both Catholic school governance, and effects of the closures on the community-Church relationship. This study is specifically concerned with trying to understand the phenomenon of the relationship between community and Church, given the philosophy of Catholic social teaching, through the experiences and interpretations of participants from two Catholic parish communities whose schools were closed. These two communities are less than a mile apart from each other. One school was built in the 1800s for the immigrant German people moving to the area; the other was for the influx of Mexicans taking residence less than a mile away on the southern part of the railroad tracks.

Additionally, this study may provide insight to Catholic administrators, diocesan and private, on better practices when making decisions regarding school closings. As Frabutt, Holter, and Nuzzi (2013) discovered, “Renewed scholarly efforts to engage...serious and emerging questions will allow educational leaders to help fashion Catholic schooling in ways that benefit the common good” (p. 91).

Purpose of the Study

This study originated as a means to communicate the seriousness of a growing trend in the United States: the closing of inner-city/urban Catholic schools by the local diocese. The reasons for these closings always appear to be due to financial reasons. Welsh (2009) stated that research on Catholic school closings has been “downplayed” (p. 29) for years. Thus, the purpose

of this study is to explore two neighboring parish communities whose schools were both closed by their diocese, as well as give voice to the members of the communities impacted by the closures. An ethnographic instrumental case study approach was used so as to derive “a holistic, intensive, rich description and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46) of what occurred. The instrumental case study approach is used in order to give insight to the larger issue, not specifically this particular case (Stake, 1995). Essentially, the details of this case study help in understanding the larger phenomena occurring in many U.S. cities.

The purpose of this study is three-fold: (a) to examine the community members’ role(s), response to, and experience of the closing of a parochial elementary school; (b) to explore the implications on community-Church relationship; and (c) to examine the values and practice of Catholic social teaching in relationship to the community process of communication. The focus of this study is not to investigate the reasons for the closure, as some other studies have done, rather, it is to add to the limited number of qualitative studies on the perspective of the people—the community—impacted by Catholic parochial elementary school closures in America’s inner-city neighborhoods.

Applying a qualitative case study design with an ethnography approach and using a conceptual framework based on teaching and practice, constructed from Catholic social teaching and Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, this study proposed to examine (a) a community’s role and response to two school closures, (b) community members’ experiences of the school closure, and (c) the implications on Church-community relationship. Both communities experienced a school closure, though one occurred 40 years prior to the other, and neither school reopened. The case study method allows for community members’ and leaders’

voices and perspectives to detail what transpired before, during, and after a school closure, as well as for a comparative analysis of the two adjoining communities.

Research Questions

The larger question: “What does it mean for the parish church community and the Church, as a whole, when the Catholic school that was once a big part of community life, is no longer there?” was posed by the following research questions that guided this study:

1. What was the experience and impression of persons who experience a school closure?
2. How did the community respond to the news of the school closing?
3. What did persons recall most about the school closure?

Subsequent questions were: How are community members involved in the decision to close a parochial elementary school? What was the sense of community—school, church, and neighborhood—members experienced prior to, during, and after the closure? Further, what was learned from this experience?

Conceptual Framework

Catholic social teaching and Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, form the conceptual framework that guides the examination of the community’s role and response to school closures and explored what implications those have on Church-community relationship. Research that examines the outcome of decisions to close Catholic schools in inner-city neighborhoods and what those decisions have on the relationships/social ties of community—school, parish, and neighborhood— is limited (Brinig & Garnett, 2012; Garnett, 2014). Cook and Simonds (2011) described these relationships as essential indicators of a Catholic school.

The Church’s social teachings stem from the Acts of the Apostles, later detailed and emphasized in Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of Labor)

addressing the Industrial Revolution. Adopted by the popes and bishops of the Catholic Church in response to the social issues of the world, this body of thought is referred to as Catholic social teaching (Mich, 2012). The Social teaching of the Catholic Church follows Jesus in asking, “Who is my neighbor?” and by emphasizing the virtue of “seeking together the common good and well-being of all” (USCCB).

Though the Church does not consider itself a democracy, its social teaching addresses principles that bind the church with its people: the dignity of the human person, solidarity and social justice, are key principles of Catholic social teaching and supported by the Catholic Church. Rougeau (2009) stated that when the person in community, the common good, and preferential option for the poor are considered, a viable question guiding the premise is: “How do our economic, political, and legal decisions affect those who are least able to speak for themselves and who are more often than not in the worst position to bear sacrifices that might be necessary for the common good?” (p. 348). Catholic social teaching represents the “social consciousness and concern in the church” (Hug, 1991 in Henriot et al., 1998, p. ix), thus a Church that proclaims “justice to the world must itself be seen to be just” (p. 12); and if affected populations—people and communities—are unattended to in a critical time of need, the relationship between Church and community could be strained.

Catholic schools have “served as longstanding members of their parishes and the neighborhoods in which they are located, offering social support and cohesion to the surrounding communities” (Decker & Car, 2015, p. 81). Kukstis (2011), among others, stated that “[h]istorically, pastors of parish schools and local bishops have held the authority for planning decisions for Catholic elementary schools” (p.42). School principals and/or administrators, religious or lay, may be consulted about a possible school change, such as that of closing the

school, however, the ultimate decision makers are the pastor and the bishop who oversees him (Kukstis, 2011). This structure of decision making has not changed or been adapted to respond to the Catholic school crisis in the United States (Greeley, 2005).

Pertaining to the teaching on the dignity of the human person, Henriot, Deberri, and Schultheis (1998) stated that the question must be asked: “What is happening to people?” (p. 22). The researchers’ question came from the assertion that as the human is made in the image and likeness of God, “human dignity can be recognized and protected only in community with others” (p. 22). Since education is an important means of improving the lives of people, socially and economically, this study examined “what is happening to people” of a community, and to the larger surrounding community after an inner-city parochial school is closed. “We are not a true community if we leave people behind; and the ones we are most likely to leave behind are those with the least ability to keep up on their own” (Incandela, 2000, p. 301). It is in Catholic school community, according to Storz and Nestor (2005), where “we see a link with children—the one’s least able ‘to keep up on their own’ – where Catholic Social Teaching and education intersect” (p. 2).

Specific to this case study’s framework, Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice offers a viable platform appropriate to a social structure, such as neighborhood parish school community. Figure 1 incorporates the *fields* or structures represented by circles in the middle of the diagram. To the left are the internal factors that constitute the formation of those structures. On the right are the external factors: those dispositions that impact the relationship within each structure.

Bourdieu’s concept that *practice* results from *field* plus *habitus* plus *capital* is interconnected. Fields are the structures, environments, spaces, subspaces of a person. Fields, such as institutions or associations, assimilate the person to specific tasks, needs, situations. The

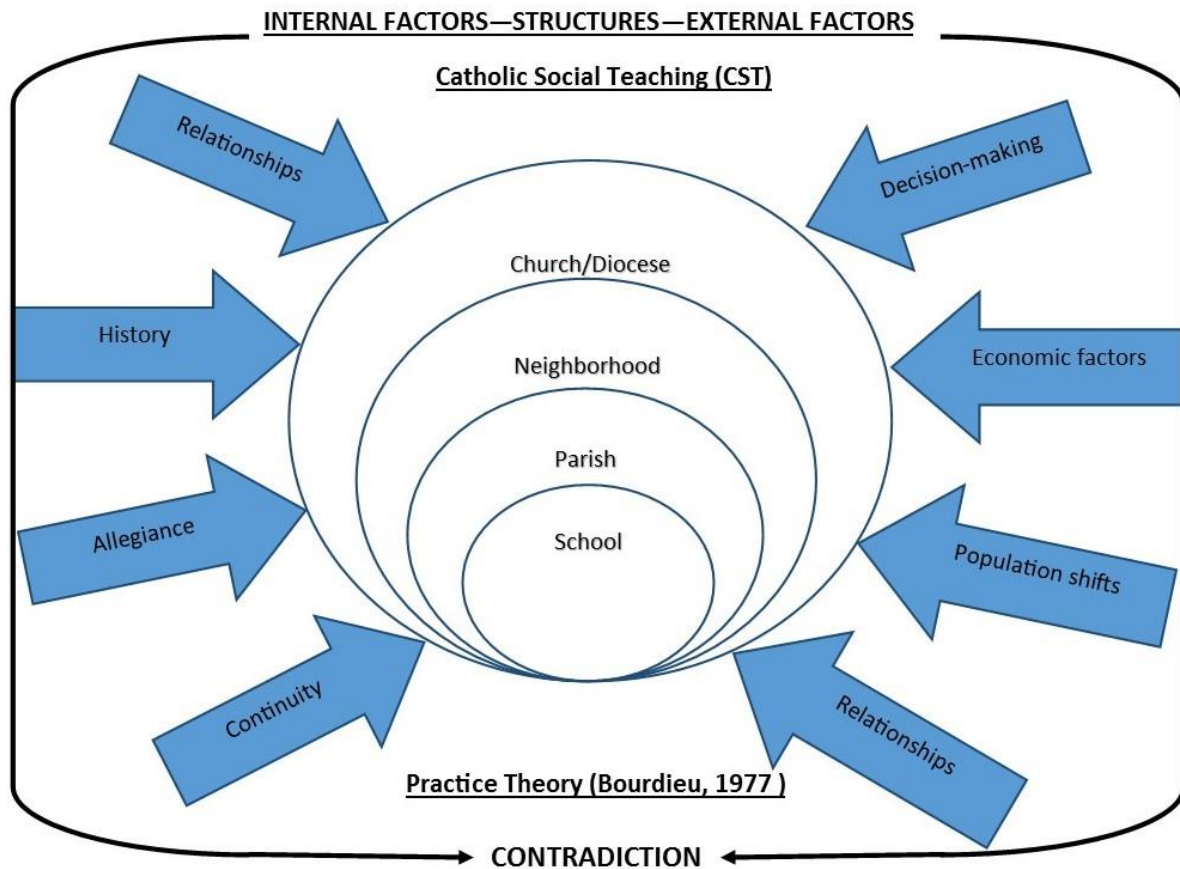


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework of Catholic social teaching and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice.*

habitus is the collection of dispositions resulting from particular practices ensuing from those environments: the social, the cultural, and the economic capital that is gained from those associations. Bourdieu defined habitus as “a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (p. 83; italics in original). His model for this relational sequence is [(habitus) (capital) + field] = practice (Bourdieu, 1977). The individual in community is a dominant part of the whole concept.

By utilizing this conceptual framework (see Figure 1), this case study (a) examined the community members' role(s), responses to and experiences of the parish elementary school closing, (b) explored the implications on community-Church relationship, and (c) examined the values and practices of Catholic social teaching in relationship to the community process of communication. What the literature has shown is that the habitus or the features (symbolic or real), appear to contradict the practice of what Catholic social teaching exemplifies.

Community, being in communion, una comunidad are terms the Catholic Church advocates in its doctrine and its mission of Catholic schools. Scholars on Catholic education underscore the importance of relationships in Catholic Christianity (Groome, 2003b; Sullins, 2009); however, few scholars focus on the relational constructs between the parties involved (Greeley, McCready, & McCort, 1976). Relational constructs are the organizing mechanisms (Bourdieu, 1977) from which mutually beneficial relationships stem, a key principle of Catholic social teaching (Storz & Nestor, 2005).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide a common understanding for terms included in this study that are specific to Catholic elementary schools and the Church:

Archbishop. Archbishop is defined as the title given to a bishop who governs an archdiocese (usccb.org).

Archdiocese. Archdiocese is defined as the principal diocese (of a group of dioceses) of a church (ecclesiastical) province governed by an archbishop (usccb.org).

Bishop. Bishop is defined as the title given to the chief priest in a diocese or archdiocese. It is the highest order in ordained ministry (usccb.org).

Catholic elementary school. Catholic elementary school is described as a private school under the jurisdiction of a diocesan parish or religious order, servicing pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. (K-8) (usccb, 1972).

Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching is defined as the social principles and moral teachings of the Catholic Church. The three essential principles are human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the poor. Promoting social justice is also a major component of CST (usccb, 1998).

Code of Canon Law. The Code of Canon Law is defined as the general laws governing the Church (including employees), last revised in 1983. The canons denote ecclesiastical (church) directives such as administration and church goods (usccb.org).

Community. Community is described, as the Catholic Church refers to its *community*, as the union, or communion, of multiple communities where “one person’s problem is everyone’s problem and one person’s victory is everyone’s victory” (para. 22); it is a unique community based on trust and love where the meaning of community is learned by experiencing it. According to the Church, the greater community of this world is the Kingdom of God. The Church’s community is also described as *community (church)*. The Second Vatican Council describes the Church as “a community existing round an altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 26). The U.S. bishops’ message regarding Catholic education, in *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), define community as “life in the spirit which unites its members in a unique fellowship” (para. 22). *Community (parish)* refers to a specific community within a diocese, under the authority of a pastor, and with its own church building. It consists of families within the geographic boundaries of the parish and those outside of parish geographical boundaries who choose to make that parish church their primary place of worship. *Community*

(school) refers to a Catholic elementary school that constitutes a community within the larger community of the parish. In the United States, Catholic schools have a history of association with a parish and are considered the educational arm of the parish community.

Diocese. Diocese is defined as “a particular church” and a territory of the church governed by a bishop (uscgb.org).

Inner-city. Inner-city is described as a geographic area close to the center of a city; usually an impoverished area of a large city. It is characterized by a low median family income, poor housing, high unemployment and crime rates, and a scarcity of educational centers, including early childhood and elementary-to-secondary schools (Census.gov). In this study, *inner-city* refers to a specific geographic area encompassing six neighborhoods, two registered as historical, with approximately 11,000 households and 4,200 children. The ethnic makeup of the area is predominantly Hispanic (10,100) with a growing immigrant Latino population and close to 2,300 foreign born persons of low-to-mid-average income. This area is considered to be an undereducated populace (City-Data, 2016). The two parishes/schools in this ethnographic case study are located between 1.5 and 2.0 miles south of the downtown business district of the city.

Lay / laity. Lay / laity is defined as members of the Catholic Church who are not ordained, such as priests and deacons, and/or members of a religious order, such as nuns/sisters or brothers (uscgb.org).

National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) is a professional membership organization for U.S. Catholic schools “that provides leadership, direction, and service to fulfill the evangelizing, catechizing, and teaching mission of the Church” (NCEA.org).

Religious women and men. Religious women and men are those who are in consecrated life, other than priests, who take formal vows in an order, a religious community, of their choosing. Women are referred to as sisters and men are referred to as brothers (uscgb.org).

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education is a pontifical branch of the Catholic Church that regulates Catholic education, its institutions and publications (Vatican.va).

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the Church hierarchy in the United States tasked with exercising governance of lay and religious people and with promoting the greater good for the people of the church. In 2001, the assembly was created from two councils: the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) which included not only bishops, but clergy, other religious, and lay ministers. The USCCB is organized as a civil corporation composed of active and retired U.S. bishops (uscgb.org).

Vatican Councils. Vatican Councils (the First Vatican Council or Vatican I, and the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II) are composed of bishops of the Church. These ecumenical councils were called by the pope to discuss specific interests or matters of the universal Church. Vatican II, an ecumenical council of bishops convened by Pope John XXIII to renew the Church of the 20th century, ran from 1962-1965. Vatican II produced many important changes affecting Church documents, programs, and practices (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review consists of peer-reviewed documents and other sources, such as newspapers and magazines/circulars. Studies on Catholic schools discuss and examine topics on Catholic identity, leadership characteristics, governance models, transformative programs, mission advancement and finances, and the argument for school vouchers. Catholic school proponents use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method approaches in their studies to present arguments on curbing the closing of Catholic schools—elementary and secondary (Brinig & Garnett, 2010, 2012; Garnett, 2014; McDevitt, Dosen & Ryan, 2006).

From a national perspective, a substantial number of articles have been published, though many of them are not peer reviewed, such as those published in newspapers (Stern, 2009; Stern & McClosky, 2011), that speak to the topic of declining enrollment in Catholic schools in inner-city/urban areas. The majority of those studies were of secondary and postsecondary schools. Most studies concerning elementary schools (K-8) reported the causes for the closing of the school, but few explored the attitudes and experiences of the community and its people. The majority of these articles proposed revisiting the traditional Catholic school model, and emphasized the need for transformation (Cimino, 2008; Dobzanski, 2001; El Ghazal, 2006; Greeley, 1998; Hughson, 2010). However, a small number of studies within the past five years have examined the “attitudes, perceptions and values” (Hallenbeck, 2012, p. 5) related to the closing of a Catholic elementary school in relationship to the community—the people—while studies on public school closings gave more voice to community response (Epple, Jha, & Sieg, 2014; Hallenbeck, 2012; Irwin, 2012; Mertens, 2013; Noble, 2010; Oncescu & Giles, 2014; Santos, 2013).

McDevitt, Rosen, and Ryan's (2006) mixed-method action research study provided for a diocesan grieving program that would counsel and console community members affected by the closing of their Catholic school, but provided no information of the persons' grieving. No qualitative study on Catholic parish/parochial school closures has posed the question of how the community has been affected or impacted by the closure, nor what their experience can lend to others.

Historical Perspective

The historical perspective, according to Greene and O'Keefe (2001), is key to understanding the issues stemming from an immigrant people to the present time and how a mixture of factors—religious, academic, geographic, and socioeconomic—portray a phenomenon of idiosyncrasies connected to Catholic schools in the United States. Additionally, the governance authorities, who have historically been and continue to be the key decision makers in the closing of schools, will also be addressed in this section.

Catholic education in the United States began in the 17th century (Brinig & Garnett, 2012) with schools grades first through sixth. In the initial days of U.S. Catholicism, Catholics were seen as immigrants (beginning with the Irish, German, and Polish) and outsiders. At the time, the Catholic schools were formed to provide an alternative to the “American institution” (p. 163)—Horace Mann's common school of the time. Not only was the establishment of Catholic schools seen as countercultural, but also as intrusive or “sectarian” (Hunt, 2005, p. 164), causing much controversy over its necessity and usefulness (Greene & O'Keefe, 2001; Hunt, 2005). Nonetheless, Catholic elementary schools became havens for children of devout Catholic parents who, feeling excluded in the common schools that favored and promoted Protestantism, sought a faith- and value-based instructional atmosphere (McLaughlin, et al., 1996).

In 1884, at the Third Plenary Council meeting in Baltimore, the bishops agreed that Catholic (parochial) schools would be established in every Catholic parish within two years unless an exemption was obtained from the local bishop. This decision caused dissension within the Church's own hierarchy (bishops, priests) and among the laity as to whether or not parochial schools were deemed necessary: stirring controversy among those for and against. Nonetheless, Catholic parochial schools saw a steady increase in enrollment between 1880 and 1959. By 1950, the Catholic school system had grown to 11,000 schools with an enrollment of 3.1 million students (NCEA/McDonald, 2006).

In the period before the 1961 Second Vatican Council (also referred to as Vatican II), schools in the United States were filled to capacity. New school buildings were erected by the diocesan neighborhood parishes to meet the increased enrollment, primarily children of the immigrant population who fled Europe during World War II to come to the United States. Catholic school enrollment peaked with more than 5.6 million students in almost 13,500 schools across the nation (McDonald & Schultz, 2014).

Years later, Catholic schools started to see a decline in enrollment. Since the late 1960s, the Catholic Church in the United States lost over 48 percent of its schools and enrollment declined by 63 percent (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011). Vatican II was one factor that brought about dramatic changes in the Catholic Church and its parochial elementary schools. For example, most of the parochial schools had been staffed by vowed women and men religious who lived in a community and received little monetary compensation for their service. After Vatican II, they were allowed to serve in other areas more in line with their professional training, such as accounting and social work. The absence of religious made it necessary for lay persons

to be employed by the school, resulting in salaries and benefits which had never before been part of the school's budget.

Another way in which the Council brought about changes to parochial elementary schools was by moving from the authoritarian structures of the earlier Church toward more “democratic or quasi-democratic structures” (Greeley et al., 1976, p. 7), allowing for more involvement of lay personnel. Parents who viewed the Vatican's decision as a drastic departure from the traditional model withdrew their children from the Catholic school which, to them, was less Catholic in the absence of the religious' presence. There were other factors that led to the decline of the Catholic parochial school: decline in church attendance, increased tuition, suburbanization, and lower birth rates (Sander, 2005).

The 1970s-1980s saw further decline in Catholic school enrollment, with the steepest decline taking place at the elementary school level, dropping to 2.5 million from the 5.2 million in the 1960s (NCEA/McDonald, 2015). Between 2005 and 2015, NCEA reports more than 1,600 schools nationwide closed or consolidated, decreasing the Catholic school population by 481,016. Parochial elementary schools (kindergarten through eighth grade, otherwise referred to as K-8) in underprivileged, inner-city/urban neighborhoods were significantly affected (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

Every year, additional U.S. Catholic elementary schools close. The drop is significant, yet as Greeley et al. (1976) stated, “American Catholicism has traditionally refused to engage in systematic research on itself, so while theories as to the reason for the decline abound, there is no evidence to support any of them” (p. 10). In the United States public school system, most closures have been attributed to low student achievement, especially on standardized tests (Epple et al., 2014). In contrast, Catholic schools have not reported closures due to students' low

performance, but from financial burdens the schools encounter, such as costly tuition, maintenance of older buildings, and higher wages to lay administrators, faculty, and staff. These factors burden the parish and school with financial problems few have overcome.

Dioceses in Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania closed their Catholic inner-city/urban schools due to decline in the number of students (Borneman, 2007; Hamilton, 2008; Hunt, 2005; Meyer, 2007). Similarly, Texas, a state with a Catholic population of 7.4 million (Texas Catholic Conference, 2016), has closed many of its Catholic parochial schools. For many years, Texas Catholic schools thrived in the larger metropolitan areas of Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. Today, compared to the 1,065 parishes in Texas, there are slightly over 200 Catholic diocesan and parish elementary schools with an enrollment of less than 53,000 students (Texas Catholic Conference Education Department, 2016).

Current Literature on Catholic School Closings

The establishment of the Catholic Educational Association in 1904, later known as the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), was a testament to the vitality of Catholic schools during that period. The NCEA is a repository of educational documents, research, and data on Catholic schools in the United States. However, few publications of the NCEA, other than those of historical nature or financial reports, have addressed Catholic school closures, the impact of closures on the community in which the schools were founded, and even less on the impact the closures have on its people.

Catholic schools and Catholic education in the United States are 200-year-old traditions in crisis. Smarick and Robson (2015) recounted that throughout their existence, Catholic schools have been participant communities in furthering civil rights, public service, and social justice. Their findings summarized the general dissatisfaction with what is occurring as: “an acceleration

of the tragic decline of urban Catholic schools, and the eventual regret that we did nothing over half a century while one of the nation's greatest educational treasures disappeared" (p. 130).

The impact of Catholic school closures on their communities has been scarcely addressed in the literature within the last four decades (Welsh & Campbell, 2011). Literature addressing Catholic school closures is next to non-existent compared with that of public schools (Hallenbeck, 2012). In his dissertation on the decline of Youngstown, Ohio's urban Catholic elementary schools, Welsh (2009) stated that research on Catholic school closures has been "downplayed" (p. 29) for years.

Over the past 12 years, the opening of charter schools in proximity to a Catholic parochial school or even occupying vacant buildings and classrooms of former Catholic schools, primarily in distressed inner-city/urban areas (Carr, 2014; Horning, 2011; Waddington, 2012) has contributed to the struggle. Decker and Carr (2015) address the closure of a Catholic school and its reopening as a charter school with "religious" practices. As the authors discovered, studies have looked at the possible legal complications of charter schools, such as the vague "parameters of the separation of church and state in school settings" (p. 82). However, none of these studies recount the impact of such scenarios on the people or the community affected by the closure of the Catholic school or the opening of a charter in its place.

The 2005 address on "Catholic Schools in the Third Millennium," the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education stressed the importance of Catholic schools in impoverished inner-city/urban neighborhoods—schools that are prone to declines in enrollment as well as closure. The address notes that the Catholic Church's mission is not about closing schools, but about making Catholic education "accessible" to all who are interested amidst the difficulties encountered in today's society (2005). The Catholic Church's goal, as affirmed in its

doctrines and teaching, is to keep Catholic schools thriving by means of sound education, strong Catholic culture, and authentic leadership. As a result, many dioceses nationwide are embracing the challenge of reviving Catholic inner-city/urban schools through partnerships with foundations, universities, and for-profit institutions, as well as implementing transformational programs that will infuse a spirit of communal sharing that is based on doctrinal teachings (Borneman, 2007; Borrero, 2010; Brinig & Garnett, 2010; Cimino, 2008; Haney, 2013; Montejano, 2010; Owens, 2005).

Nonetheless, Catholic elementary schools in poor, inner-city/urban areas continue to struggle to keep their doors from closing (Dallavis & Cisneros, 2013; Kukstis, 2011; Waddington, 2012). According to Frabutt, Holter, and Nuzzi (2013), “policymakers often need to understand patterns in school closing” (p. 91), for it is only through these scholarly efforts that Catholic school leaders will help the common good while responding to the needs encountered in many inner-city/urban area Catholic schools. These authors’ message echoes the 1972 message of the U.S. bishops who recognized the “crisis” facing Catholic schools in the United States and “call upon all members of the Catholic community to do everything in their power to maintain and strengthen Catholic schools” (para. 118). The bishops called for creativity, relationship-building, and reorganization in order to ensure the survival, success, and sustainability of Catholic schools.

The majority of the current literature addresses the evident problems of financial/economic constraints (Huchting & Cunningham, 2013; Meyer, 2007), geographical disbursement (Garnett, 2014), diminished resources, and principal/organizational leadership (Boyle, 2010; Cook, 2008; Hobbie, Convey & Schuttloffel, 2010) experienced by inner-city Catholic schools. In their respective quantitative works, Brinig and Garnett (2012, 2014), and

McDevitt, et al. (2006) addressed the impact school closures had on the various communities: those persons affected by the closures and the changing face of the neighborhood.

Community is formed through human participation and is a topic scarcely addressed in literature pertaining to Catholic school closures within the last four decades. McDevitt, et al.'s (2006) action research attempted to address the "unique impact" of a school closure on the individuals assigned to the school, that is, administration and staff. In their study, McDevitt, et al. provided a resource for members of a Catholic elementary school community in Chicago to express their grief. In association with the Archdiocese of Chicago, they embarked on applying the "Process of Compassion Workshop" to assist as school leaders "minister effectively and lead through a...time of transition" (p. 24). According to the authors, they formulated the workshop when it became evident to them "little had been done [by the archdiocese] to systematically provide the types of personal support that would help school leaders," (p. 24). This intervention stopped short of supporting and assisting the other members of the school's community: students, parents, and other stakeholders. However, the authors applied techniques and utilized resources that would help the school staff and made them available to other parish school communities undergoing a closing. "The tragedy of a school closure for students, parents and faculty is that it is the abrupt ending of a series of relationships and the dismantling of a community that has been built over the course of decades," stated McDevitt, et al. (2006, p. 25).

The findings of Brinig and Garnett (2012) on school closings in three major U.S. cities reflected the corrosive effects Catholic school closings have on a community's social capital, including loss of cohesiveness. Their quantitative study inspected closed inner city/urban Catholic elementary school communities in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. Their research on these schools exposes a "lost community" which has been abandoned by both public

and Catholic schools. Their “lost community” label came from statistical data that depicted those neighborhood areas once served by Catholic schools as bleak and subject to much criminal activity. Though the communities had not been without their share of disorder, the “sacredness of place, local culture, values, history, and tradition” Mertens (2013, p. iv) spoke of what was respected when the Catholic school was a part of the neighborhood. Brinig and Garnett’s (2012) study results indicated an increase in crime in areas where Catholic elementary schools closed and charter schools currently exist, speculating that the ethos of social cohesion left with the closure of the school.

Newspaper and circular articles about the closing of Catholic schools supported and enlightened this topic since such publications often considered the perspective of the community. Empirical studies, substantially more quantitative than qualitative, are limited in scope and have contributed little in portraying the impact on a community (Hawley, 2015; Welsh & Campbell, 2011), as they do not represent the voice of the communities who lived through the closures. Notwithstanding, these articles provided a foundation for this scholarly investigation.

Various Dimensions of Community

Ecclesiological documents have held *relationship* and *community* at the core of Catholic social teaching (Cook & Simonds, 2011). The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education’s document, *The Catholic School* (1977), states, “Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good” (para. 62). When the common good is considered, it is the initial step toward building up the Kingdom of God—the greater community of our world—thus putting theory into practice (The Catholic School, 1977).

The universal Church community is the people of God who carry out God's mission amidst their humanness. This community is one referred to as "the people of God" for they have formed a covenant with God—not because they are better than any others—but because they, like their ancestors in faith who experienced "communion" with God by sharing a sacred meal on Mt. Sinai more than two thousand years ago, partake in "communion" with God in the celebration of the Eucharist. Unlike any group or crowd of people physically gathered together, the Church community is one who is sacramentally bonded and shares in the salvific mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and shepherd.

The local Church community encompasses the local diocese with a (male) bishop as the head of the diocese. The parish community is one who has its roots in the neighborhood where the parish church stands. Hawley (2015) stated that Canon Law defines parish as "a certain community of Christ's faithful...maintained by the relationships of family, school and parish" (p. 48). It consists of families within and outside the geographic boundaries of the parish who choose to make that church their primary place of worship. As directed by the 1884 Third Plenary Council of the U.S. Catholic Church, every parish community was to have a Catholic school which would provide a formation in the doctrine of the Catholic Church to children of the parish ages six through 13. The primary leader of the parish community is its pastor, a priest (male) who has received formation at a theological seminary either diocesan or of a private religious order. Per Hawley (2015), a staunchly devoted pastor is "key to a successful parish school" (p. 49).

In their message regarding Catholic education *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), the U.S. bishops define community as "life in the spirit which unites its members in a unique fellowship" (para. 22). According to the bishops, this community, centered in the Spirit and promulgated by

Jesus Christ and his apostles, is a unique community where “one person’s problem is everyone’s problem and one person’s victory is everyone’s victory” (para. 22), based on trust and love where the meaning of community is learned by experiencing it in solidarity with one another.

In Catholic school, an emphasis is placed on relationship and community (Cook & Simonds, 2011). This essence of community is termed *charism*, a word synonymous with religious congregations who share *constitutive* characteristics, practices, and commitments (Cook, 2001; Strike, 2000). The social capital of the Catholic elementary school community is built on the relationships the school community has with its extended communities—alumni, parish contributors, volunteers, benefactors, and other stakeholders—and the participation of one or more with the others (Strike, 2000). A parochial Catholic school community is a community within a wider community which consists of both parishioners (members of the parish) and non-parishioners who have children at the school, but do not fully participate in the life of the parish community other than in association with the school. Collaboration between the pastor and the school principal require a cohesive message to the wider parish and extended communities— an additional challenge to the sustainability of Catholic elementary schools.

The extended community consists of the broader participants in and of the community, such as former residents, stakeholders, school alumni, neighbors, and neighborhood businesses and institutions. Of the latter, neighbors make up functional communities—persons residing within the particular neighborhood or geographic area where the school is located. These communities may continue to function with the closing of a school within its geographic boundaries, but the value community, what Coleman (1987) refers to as persons with shared values, may not. Because the Catholic elementary school once was a dominant stakeholder in the neighborhood, the closing of its doors may leave children, parents, families, neighbors and

neighborhoods without resources, social capital, and value consistency. The former relations and interactions of one community with the other may also dissipate.

Catholic Church-School-Community Relations

At the time the Catholic school system was enacted in the United States, the Church was a hierarchical society with the Pope being the supreme authority, though, as O'Brien (1987) states, "the pastor was not to be outdone by the pope or the bishop" (p. 18) when it came to the parish community, including the parish Catholic school. Ten years after the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, deliberations became intense among bishops, priests, and the Council as to the establishment of Catholic schools in every parish. What resulted was a 14 point proposition from Rome's Archbishop Franco Satolli (made official by Pope Leo XIII) that permitted the local bishop to decide whether or not he deemed it amenable for parochial schools to be built at every parish (O'Brien, 1987).

Strained relations also existed among the clergy, that is, bishops and priests, and the women and men religious who were the primary educators in the schools. The religious orders invited by the clergy to teach in the Catholic parochial schools were paid by the parish/diocese a minimal salary. Members of a community would take their earnings and place them in the community's account. When the religious order's superior requested, even pleaded, to the local bishop of the area for higher stipends, the response was usually not favorable, thus causing tension between the educators and the clergy (O'Brien, 1987). These strained relationships would resurface later in history.

Studies state that the relations between school and parish became even more strained in the 1970s-1980s when declining enrollment forced parishes to funnel additional money to schools (O'Brien, 1987; Walch, 1996). The pastors, most of whom did not have the Catholic

schooling of their predecessors, or any background in managing multiple budgets, did not see the need for funneling money into a school that was not able to sustain itself. This perspective caused a division in the community and the parish was pitted against the school, rather than considering the school as a parish entity.

Examples of studies that addressed the “community” of Catholic schools that have long served their respective neighborhood community, borough, or area, include Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore’s (1982b) comparative study of public and private schools and social capital. Coleman et al. focused on establishing grounds for the nature of community in public and private educational settings. Their results showed that the Catholic school model presented a much healthier picture of social capital through inclusion and collaboration. Lockwood (2014), in his study on the reasons parents choose Catholic schools, confirmed that a “sense of community” was a top contender. The inner city/urban Catholic elementary school community, due to decreases in enrollment, tends to be small—parents know each other from the parish, neighborhood, or as former students. Unlike the neighborhood public school, the Catholic school community gathers together as a faith community, beginning their day with prayer.

A contrasting perspective of a Catholic school’s community was presented by Strike (2000) when he stated that Catholic schools, in abiding by a “constitutive doctrine” (p. 618) may marginalize, oppress, or segregate others who do not follow or agree with the doctrine, thus forming a community that is not inclusive of all. This non-inclusive title has been more prevalent in the last 20 years, focusing on a lack of special educational services (Carlson, 2016) and escalating costs, which leads those who cannot afford tuition to seek out other alternatives.

The sample of studies within the last 12 years that have addressed elementary school communities is small. Few were of a qualitative nature (Irwin, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Martinez &

Ulanoff, 2013; Mertens, 2013; Santos, 2013). Fewer were of Catholic elementary schools (ElGhazal, 2006; Horning, 2013; Kukstis, 2011) and did not represent the number of school closings that have occurred every year nor of the human phenomena associated with the closings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overall Approach and Rationale

Since the desired outcome for this study was to represent the community members' voices in their own words, the applied research design is a qualitative case study using an ethnographic approach. In qualitative research, the researcher tries to understand the issue and interpret what that means; it focuses on "discovery, insight, and understanding from those being studied [and] offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 1); it "tends to see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 29).

The reason for choosing a qualitative case study method was to examine what occurs to persons and communities where inner-city Catholic elementary schools have been closed by listening and speaking with individuals and recounting their stories. Specifically, as an instrumental case study, this case study will help to gain "understanding of other cases, activities, and events but also an understanding of each one's uniqueness" (Stake, 1995, p. 44), that is, an understanding of the issue occurring in communities nationwide, and how the story is unique in each community, where a once thriving religious educational and social institution is no longer. Thus, a comparative analysis of the two communities studied was conducted, considering the 40-year gap from the closing of the schools. In essence, this particular ethnographic case study presents a descriptive experience of the people of the parish communities who were confronted with the issue of the school closure, from first learning about it to the present (Stake, 1995).

This case, this bounded system, reveals a multitude of human emotions, awareness, and cultural responses of those who experienced the closing of their Catholic school. The local

Catholic Church as a cultural entity in this process was examined through the lens of its people (Merriam, 2009).

Ethnography is both the method and the product of the study of people and cultures, descriptive in nature, and valuable in understanding the meaning of cultural practices (Merriam, 2002). Having its roots in anthropology, ethnography is a study of the social behaviors of a group, of the group's cultural aspects, or of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). This form of inquiry requires the researcher to be a participant observer in the settings (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002): two neighboring communities who each experienced the closing of a Catholic parochial elementary school, 40 years apart.

As an ethnographic study, the plan was to explore the “culture” of the persons in their social structures: parochial school members and stakeholders, parish members (referred to as parishioners), neighborhood residents, and church agents. This ethnographic case study sought “to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43) within the bounded culture system of church and school community. Through the voices of community members, the study revealed details about a phenomenon that has not been examined but avoided by the educational system of the Catholic Church (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011; Grace, 2002; Greene & O’Keefe, 2001; Groom, 2003; McLaughlin et al., 1996). This ethnographic study allowed for an examination and description of what occurred to persons and communities by speaking to individuals and recounting their stories in a descriptive manner.

Descriptions of their particular sentiments, actions, and activities associated with the years prior to, during, and after the closing, and how these community members experienced and interpreted the closing were collected from the participants. Alongside the accounts of the participants, the researcher’s version of what transpired is likewise included as a heuristic inquiry

component to this research study (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas recognizes heuristic research as the use of the researcher's personal knowledge and experiences: "Self-dialogue is the critical beginning; the recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself" (1990, p. 16). The combination of the autobiographical—the value of self-experience and self-dialogue that Moustakas refers to—with dialogues from others written in a narrative format, uncover "underlying meanings of important human experiences" (p. 15).

Research Site

The diocese of the area under study encompasses approximately 20 counties, with 195 parishes, 100 diocesan and parish elementary schools, and a Catholic population of approximately 516,000 (diocese.org). In 2015, Catholic diocesan and parish elementary schools numbered fewer than 30 in the city where the diocesan main office is located (diocese.org). Enrollment declined from an estimated 15,000 in the mid-1990s to 8,248 in 2014-2015 (CCED, 2015). Within the past five years, six Catholic parochial elementary schools were closed or consolidated by the diocese. These consisted of parish schools (also referred to as parochial schools) in inner-city/urban neighborhoods. This is not the first wave of school closures for this diocese. Several elementary schools were closed in the 1970s, all located in the poor, west side neighborhoods of the city.

Two neighboring sites. The research site is an area near the downtown of a south central Texas city where two Catholic parochial schools once thrived. More than a century ago, both school buildings were the first structures erected in those parishes: the German school by the congregation of religious women, and the Mexican school by the pastor. The two neighboring church and school sites are less than a mile away from each other. The most obvious landmark

that partitions one neighborhood from the other is a set of railroad tracks. The German community resided on the northern side of the tracks; the Mexican community, relatively new to the area and a growing population, took residence on the southern side of the tracks. One is on a major thoroughfare while the other is nestled in a neighborhood. One was founded in 1893 for the purpose of serving the German population in the area; the other opened 21 years later to serve the growing Mexican population. Both communities are now predominantly Hispanic.

The now-closed parochial elementary school communities are located in neighborhoods with similar characteristics as others throughout the country—primarily low-income, established for the then-immigrant population, though today, many immigrants from Latin America are residents of both communities. Currently, the German school building is used for catechetical classes by the operating church. The Mexican school building has been leased by a charter school for the last three years. Both church communities have parishioners who are predominantly 55 years of age or older. The youth programs at both churches are not thriving as in years past due to a lack of resources and programs to attract teenagers and young adults.

Participants. Twenty interviews were conducted in 2017, from January through June. Six of the 20 were exclusive to the German community; 12 were exclusive to the Mexican community; two crossed over, having been at the German community before transferring to the Mexican community. Two of the participants are members of the clergy (former pastors at the Mexican community); one is a woman religious who taught at the German school; 10 are married and seven are single; 14 are female and six are male. All except the three in consecrated life are active in either the Mexican church or the German church, and were active in those respective communities prior to and during the closing of both schools. All were assigned

pseudonyms for the purpose of this study. This researcher includes herself as a contributing participant.

Using purposeful sampling with a snowballing strategy, members of both parish church communities were invited to participate in this study and refer others whom they knew, specifically those who were active when the school was thriving, during the year the closing was announced, and after the school closed. The majority of the interviews took place at a location on the parish church grounds, either a former classroom or in a parish office. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and began by asking the open-ended interview questions, often times with three-to-four or more follow-up questions throughout the interview. In three instances, the participant requested to clarify, upon which the explanation was noted in brackets (their words) or in parentheses (the researcher's words).

In order to ensure an objective perspective from the participants, several selection criteria were used: (a) employment status at the time of closing, (b) role during the closing (employed by the diocese, volunteer, parent, alumnus), (c) residential status (within which parish boundaries), (d) level of authority (school site versus diocesan office), (e) their stance on closing (for or against), and (f) current role in community (participant or non-participant).

The decision to cease additional participant interviews came after recognizing commonalities which appeared in the participants' data from both the Mexican and the German communities.

Instrumentation

The literature review revealed that few qualitative research studies examine, analyze, and voice the personal stories of the school community individuals who experienced a Catholic elementary school closure. The primary instrument in this study was the voice of the people of

the two communities who agreed to participate in this study. Additionally, the researcher's perspective—thoughts, experience, reflections, and observations—are used to inform the personal dimension in an autobiographical format. Adding the researcher's perspective from the personal affiliation with and in these communities, specifically as an administrator at one of the schools during the time of its closing, presents an internal understanding, a tacit knowledge, of the experience (Moustakas, 1990).

To gain a representative picture of the problem for this study, the researcher (a) collected existing data on the former schools, (b) conducted observations of the geographic location of the individual church, school and neighborhood community, (c) performed note-taking in separate color-coded journals to distinguish the persons and community of each respective locale, (d) had conversations with the persons who agreed to be interviewed, (e) provided a list of the research questions to participants in order to maintain continuity, (f) conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with follow-up conversations, (g) collected personal documents and/or articles from the participants, e.g. yearbooks, news clippings, and DVDs, and (h) lent a personal account/reflection from a different perspective (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1990) through self-dialogue, “pursuing intuitive clues or hunches, and drawing from...knowledge within the tacit dimension” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

Each method applied helped to develop insight into the experiences, insights, and impressions of the participants. Collectively, using participants and the additions of the researcher as co-participant, this study constructed through members' narratives—what Creswell (2014) refers to “an impressionistic tale ... [that] presents a compelling and persuasive story” (p. 233)—details of what transpired in the community as a result of their respective Catholic

elementary school closing. Most especially, this ethnographic case study has given dignity to the voice of the human person.

Fieldwork

The process of collecting the necessary data began by getting permission from the university's institutional review board to conduct the study. Emphasis was on respecting the privacy of the individuals interviewed and of the location sites, thus pseudonyms were used for all participating informants and the parish, church and school names. Upon receiving the IRB's approval, the initial step in the data collection process was to contact members of the respective communities to request their participation. Simultaneously, research on the history of each parish and school (if available) was done electronically. National Catholic school depositories and local archive offices of the diocese and the respective communities who ministered at the schools were contacted in order to attain access to their records, documents, and other information pertaining to the history of the schools.

The observation phase of the fieldwork began with extensive visits to the sites of the former Catholic schools. This became a six-month process that included taking photographs of the sites; care was taken not to identify specifics in order to maintain anonymity. Employing the data collection prescriptive for qualitative case study of Merriam (1988) and the heuristic process of Moustakas (1990), the researcher conducted the following:

- Note-taking in a spiral notebook, one for each of the sites.
- Identified persons with whom to converse (purposeful sampling) and sought referrals from them for other participants (network sampling) to take part in the conversations. Participants included generational members, former diocesan personnel and members of the clergy, a sister from the congregation of one of the schools, parents, former

- staff members, and teachers who were associated with the diocese and/or school during the time of the schools' closing. Initial contact was made in person or by phone call.
- At the initial meeting, and prior to consent for participation, the topic and the purpose of the study was explained to each participant. They were given an overview of the research design with a consent form that explained the procedures, risks and benefits of the study, confidentiality, duration of the study, voluntary nature of the study, contact and question information, statement of consent, and request to provide personal documents and mementos relevant to the case (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).
 - All participants took part in a face-to-face meeting arranged at a time and location mutually agreed upon. Upon meeting, the participants were asked to provide a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. The pseudonym would be used in the results of the study.
 - The consent form for participants included their acknowledgment and signature allowing the use of their words, materials, and/or artifacts or personal belongings they provided as part of the collection and documentation for the study. Stated in the consent form was that if the need arose for follow-up questions or clarification, they would give permission to re-contact them. The follow-up contact made to select participants in this study was conducted by cellular phone.
 - In order to capture as much in-depth information as possible from the informants and to preserve the information for analysis, the researcher recorded every interview while simultaneously taking notes.

- Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the topic, one-on-one interviews were the preferred method. In one case, a family of three participated in a group interview.
- The interview questions were primarily open-ended, followed by broad questions interjected in between so as to draw participants to share personal stories and experiences. This allowed participants to voice what was/is important to them, without having to select any one response. This approach allowed for more diversified data.

At the end of each interview session, the participants were reminded of the possibility for a follow-up interview, either by phone or email to clarify statements or if additional questions needed to be made. The time frame for each interview was determined mainly by the participant. After each conversation and interview, the audio recordings were transcribed to a Microsoft Word document using a table to categorize key points for the organization of themes.

The researcher's side bar, referred to as bracketing in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), is what Moustakas (1990) refers to as "self-dialogue": "In self-dialogue, one faces oneself and must be honest with oneself and one's experience relevant to the question or problem" (p. 17). The researcher's self-dialogue was also noted in the Word document, on a separate column alongside the corresponding question, response, topic, pattern or theme. The researcher's journal notes, impressions, and reflections in response to the participant interviews also became part of the data.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative methodology often includes the description of the researcher as the instrument of inquiry and whose biases must be identified and acknowledged to ensure valid and reliable findings. In this study, the researcher's role was to design the study, develop interview

questions, collect and analyze data, and to be a co-participant in the research. The researcher carefully listened to the participants and their stories and respected their individual perspectives.

Additionally, the researcher, as a member of one of the parish church/school communities in this case study, and as a former administrator of one of the closed schools, presents an internal understanding, a tacit knowledge, of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). Thus, as a co-participant in this case study, the researcher was careful to reflect often on her own experiences and appropriately bracket these experiences so as not to allow them to prejudice the interview process, data collection, or analysis, but instead lend to the collection from an insider's viewpoint. This self-dialogue concept is an effective means of ensuring that the voices are accurately represented, are unique to all participants and simply not that of the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher adhered to specific research guidelines established by the university and completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course prior to conducting interviews. As previously noted, the study was conducted within the parameters set by the document approved by the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's university. Great care was taken to protect the rights of all participants, their identities, and their rights to privacy. Pseudonyms were provided by each participant to protect confidentiality. Each person who willingly signed an informed consent document and agreed to have their voice recorded was a participant in this case study. If they requested, the participants would receive a copy of their signed consent form giving the researchers and the university license to use their information.

The data collected throughout the phase of this study has been protected by scanning the collected paper documents, transferring them to a digital flash-drive in an Adobe PDF format, and uploading them to a cloud folder, after which the paper documents were shredded. All

scanned documents have been digitally encrypted to protect the privacy of the participants. As proposed, all collected data will be maintained for a five-year period, or for the length of time proposed by the university's IRB.

Summary

Although several studies discuss the possible changes Catholic schools can make in order to be sustainable and to avoid closure, supporters of Catholic schools believe a more thorough investigation of what is occurring with inner-city/urban schools will be useful in the struggle to preserve these institutions (Brinig & Garnett, 2012, 2014). Employing a qualitative instrumental case study design with an ethnography approach was the most appropriate process for examining the impact the closing of a Catholic elementary school has on the persons in the community—those individuals affected by the closing—by asking them to share their experiences (thoughts, impressions, decisions). Case study was selected “for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46).

Applying an auto-ethnographic approach by being a co-participant in the study provided details others are/were not privy to before, during and after the school closing phase. In addition, it provided for clarification on certain aspects of the case. The self-dialogue and reflections of the researcher regarding the community and occurrence of the school closing lent a different perspective to the case study of these two neighboring communities. The proposed outcome for this study was to have a narrative representation of what the persons in the community learned and experienced about a reoccurring phenomenon in the Catholic Church. Key elements revealed through this study offer useful insight and recommendations for local diocesan leaders before considering additional closures of Catholic schools, especially in the inner-city.

Chapter 4: Findings

Transcription and Description of Analysis

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact the closing of an inner-city Catholic school had on the community; therefore, the data collected via voice recording and transcription was interpreted in a manner that would provide meaning to the narratives of the participants. Following Merriam's (2009) process for analysis of qualitative studies, content analysis was applied in this case study. This analysis centers on "communication, especially the frequency and variety of messages, the number of times a certain phrase or speech pattern is used...the communication of meaning is the focus" (p. 205).

The data analysis began with each individual participant interview and included any relevant artifacts that the participant may have provided. Field notes were organized according to each participant and individual site, and kept in separate folders for further analysis. Archival records from each site were gathered from the respective institutions, or from each participant, and kept in the respective folder in chronological order. The MP3 recording of each participant interview was downloaded from the smart phone and imported into Voice Walker, a free audio software package.

Each interview was transcribed by typing full sentences on a numbered Microsoft Word document in a three-column table format. The left column contained the participant's transcription, the middle column would contain extracts of key words and/or phrases taken from the transcription, and the third column would contain the researcher's personal perspective, somewhat in response to the participants' comments of what occurred, but also to clarify misconceptions perceived by the researcher. The extractions and/or interview clips taken from each transcript were placed in the middle column as a detail of a sentiment, action, thought, or

phenomenon, according to the perspective of the participant. After each transcription, the document would be re-read and annotations made of key words and phrases: the beginnings of building a pool of clusters that would later be sorted into categories and subcategories for specificity.

Once a participant's transcript was completed, coding began in a more generalized format by adding any scribbles found in the field notes that were not reflected in the original transcription, such as "cries" or "pounds the table." Extraneous utterances including "umm" and "uh" and other sounds, such as laughter, were included if they were found to have a direct bearing on the meaning of the words transcribed. For instance, if laughter indicated the presence of sarcasm and influenced the meaning of the transcribed sentence, it was included. Utilizing the conceptual framework of Catholic social teaching and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice as a guide for what threads to identify, a synthesis of the coded words and phrases that surfaced from each interview followed. These words and phrases were placed in clusters.

Upon completion of all individual transcripts, the next step in coding was sorting through each site's transcript by conducting a synthesis of the clusters and arranging them into categories. Qualitative research analysis uses an inductive approach in order to gather what is meant by certain words, phrases, and the like, used by a participant. For example, "lied to parishioners" and "the consortium deceived us" were placed in a cluster with similar words and phrases and later moved to the category of "honesty." These words and phrases were grouped to reflect more holistic categories.

Upon labeling the categories and using the same practice for the transcripts, again, a Word document table with three columns was created: one for the general categories with similar words /phrases; the second column for the pseudonym of the participant, and the third for the

narrative pertaining to that specific category. If the narrative likewise pertained to another category, then it would be placed in that one as well. If a category was multifaceted, it would be subdivided. For example, the category of “leadership” contained three subcategories representing the chain of command in these two Catholic schools: school, parish, and diocese.

The next step was to organize the archives collected from both communities, from the local diocesan office of archives and the two congregational archive centers, and the annotated transcripts for each site. The organizing consisted of editing each transcript for repetitiveness. Following the process, each site was identified by categorical commonalities.

The process became more intense as one progressed through each transcript, especially in the responses to one question: “What was learned from this experience?” This question gave light to the impact of the closing not only on a person but on the entire a community, what one participant termed as “a dark moment; it was a dark cloud that hung over the parish.” In broader terms, insight was gained from the participants on the larger question: “What does it mean for the parish church community and the Church, as a whole, when the Catholic school that was once a big part of community life, is no longer there?” Additionally, the last question evoked hope for many participants, as well as a call for “transformation” on how the Church hierarchy addresses closing practices and issues.

This chapter contains an analysis of the findings according to identified categories based on specific questions. These findings are documented by the narratives of the participants. The themes that stemmed from the categories are then provided and likewise supported by participant narratives. The narratives verify the study’s credibility and reliability on the basis of the lived experiences and insights of people who are members of the community under study.

Content analysis as a research method. “Synthesis combines different things in order to form a new whole, and it is the primary heuristic for qualitative analysis,” states Saldaña (2016, p. 10). The purpose was to develop a consolidated yet thick description of the phenomenon, making inferences from the interviews, both of the Mexican community and the German community, for the purpose of providing insight into the sentiments, thought process, insights, and a true representation of the impact of the closures on the various communities.

Explanation of Major Categories of Impact

Eight categories, followed by five dominant themes, emerged from the participant interviews. The purpose was to follow the conceptual framework of the Catholic Church’s social teaching along with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, and purposely convey the participants words, phrases, sentiments, and explanations of how the phenomenon of closing Catholic schools in impoverished areas, specifically inner-city and urban areas, is being addressed by the local diocese and the council of bishops.

The research questions guided the process of sorting words, phrases, sentiments, physical and emotional reactions that reflected each contributor’s holistic response to each question. For example, the first question asked the participant to talk about his or her experience regarding the closing of their respective school. Thus, categorizing began by sorting through each typed transcript and gathering text relevant to the question. At times the questions were not in the planned order or the participant would answer the question at a later point in the conversation.

A second Microsoft Word document table with three columns was created: one for the general categories with similar words/phrases, the second for the pseudonym of the participant, and the third for the narrative pertaining to that specific category. If the narrative likewise pertained to another category, then it would be placed in that one as well. If a category was

multifaceted, it would be subdivided. For example, the category of “leadership” contains three subcategories representing the chain of command in these two Catholic schools: school, parish, and diocese. Building this digital document of different clusters with similar extracts of transcript text assisted with keeping the purpose of the study and the questions guiding their responses in mind.

Category finding: Distress. Much of the first 10 minutes of each interview focused on the deep sadness that permeated all of the participants. Throughout the interviews, the distressing factors—ranging from five years to 46 years ago—were deeply embedded in their stories. At times, they asked to take a few minutes to collect their thoughts, words, and emotions; many were tearful, angry, and unapologetic about how they felt at the “mistreatment” by diocesan leaders.

Three factors consistently mentioned were hurt, anger, and sadness felt by the members of the community of the school, church/parish, and neighborhood. These words were categorized under *distress*, denoting the participants’ personal sorrow, ache, and trauma, as well as that of their family, children, and/or fellow community members. When asked to relay their experience of the closing of their respective school, the majority (19 participants) expressed feeling disturbed by a decision made by persons outside of their community, specifically the diocesan authorities.

Hurt. Father Antoine, former pastor of the Mexican church during the time the school closed, gave this reaction:

[W]hat I said to myself is this, if you’re hurting because the school is closing, imagine the faithful of the community and how they’re hurting. Unfortunately, when an announcement like that is made it’s going to hurt, it’s going to hurt those that are deeply invested in the community. It was very difficult for me to see [the children] hurting, see them crying, in pain, cause their pain is real. It was very difficult to see that.

Anger. A former school teacher at the Mexican school, Jenny, spoke for nearly three hours about every aspect of her experience as a student intern, teacher, administrator, and parent, as well as of her years as a parishioner at the Mexican parish. Jenny was forthcoming, as were the majority of participants, when talking about the impact of the closing. The emotional impact was the first to be mentioned.

I felt we got sideswiped or stabbed in the back. When I heard about [the closing] I was very angry and I was very upset. Its closing wasn't justified to me and it still isn't justified. I would say this is a perfect time when people were very disillusioned. It was a sad moment to hear all of that [because] our school was a strong part of the community and our parish was strong with our school, with our parish community as well. As I see it now, there is, it's a sadness to say but I feel like there's something missing because again through liturgies you taught these children to be lectors and then when they graduated or went to high school they would continue this [practice but somehow or other people were so dismayed they left the community, they left the community, and even if they were coming from afar they decided to go back to their own churches because there's nothing left for them here after the closure, so yea, our community has suffered, I think, with the closure of our school, we're here [but] something is still missing. I think people are still very upset. I still think today, because I know I get a little upset and angry and I think you can hear it my tone as I was talking to you because it brings up this fire in me.

Her over 34 years of service to the Mexican school were evident in the strong, emotional comments in Jenny's statements.

Sadness. Father Philip, former pastor of the Mexican church during the time the Mexican school was a parochial school, stated:

I was deeply saddened by the news, especially when I heard that so many of the parents had reacted with deep sadness, and even anger, feeling that the process was not done the way that had been promised. I still feel the sense of sadness that it happened. It's a very demoralizing thing to happen to a community. Because when I left the parish we trusted that the diocese was going to have a process that was going to assure that these schools would stay open, though that didn't happen. I didn't know why, I'm just sad that the process did not work and that it had to come down in such a hurtful way and such a way that was a surprise that it was being closed.

These sentiments were part of every participant's conversation. The emotional outpouring of the people affected by the closing of the Mexican school is echoed in statements from the neighboring German school, who likewise mourn the loss of their school more than 46 years ago.

Category finding: Leadership. *School, local parish, and diocese* were identified as the three principal sources of leadership in the two sites. Figure 2 is a diagram of the leadership structure of the two Catholic schools during their history. Initially, the religious congregations provided the day-to-day academic and spiritual leadership in the schools and reported directly to the local pastor. Years later, the structure changed and schools reported to the diocese's Catholic schools office, who in turn reported to the bishop of the diocese. The German school closed under the former model, while in 2010, the Mexican school became part of a consortium

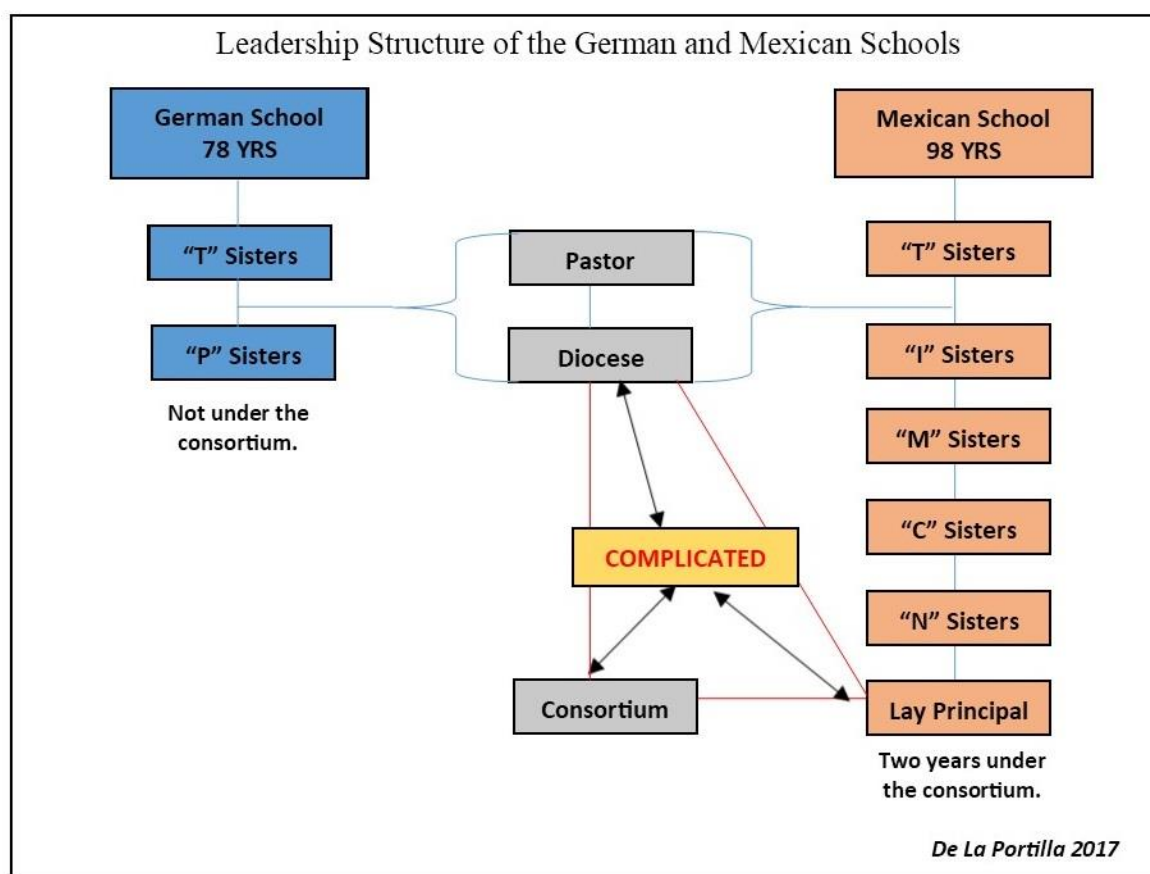


Figure 2. Leadership structure of the German and Mexican schools during their existence.

composed of nine other inner-city schools that would collectively work toward rebuilding their schools by implementing a “school district-type” system. The people of the Mexican community who shared their stories believed the addition of the consortium complicated the leadership role for the Mexican school in its last two years. The consortium had a director who answered to the board and was considered equivalent to the director of Catholic schools. However, that was never clearly understood. Thus, the principal of the Mexican school no longer answered to the local pastor nor to the director of the Catholic school’s office, but to the consortium director who in turn answered to the consortium board of directors, who in turn answered to the local bishop.

School managed by Sisters. The school piece was sectioned in two: one with responses regarding the leadership under religious congregation(s), and the second regarding lay personnel hired as principals. In this study, school leadership consisted of the chief administrator, that is, the principal of the Catholic school, along with members of two consultative groups, particularly the school council and parent teacher committee (PTC). Since their inception, the leadership of the German and Mexican schools had been under the direction of a religious order of women.

The German school first operated under the leadership of a lay person. According to Julianne, a congregational archivist, the German school had its beginning in a home of a local parishioner, back in 1893 (Congregation one, 1996).

The very first teaching was in [a] house. Somewhere there, there’s a street [named after the family] and she taught the interested students. They had about 50 students. And so they said, it’s too much to teach in a house, so our congregation decided to build a school, so they built that big brick building which cost about \$9,000, I think, at that time; and there were two floors, four classrooms on the first floor, there was a science lab, and another classroom, and between the two sides there was a small room and they taught typing in there and then there was another classroom there. On the first floor there was a sewing room, and in another one [next to it] they had choral in there. They (the parish priests) didn’t teach religion, they didn’t come to the classrooms to teach religion, we taught our own.

After the school building was built, the German school was led by one religious congregation of women who took charge of the religious formation and academic life of the school.

Monica was educated at the German school along with the rest of her four siblings. She describes the leadership of the Sisters as such,

The nuns were the ones that really gave out all the education, the foundation, and they were very up to par with the education. They were knowledgeable. In questions of education itself they were very sharp, very smart, and very intelligent. They studied to be educators. I think with the sisters at [the German school], because they were so strong with us, that some of us continued but I can tell you sometimes that some of our students there, because we would go to church every day, we'd start off our day at church every single day that I remember my brother, he said, 'I went to church for the rest of my life I don't have to continue going to church on Sunday.' (Laughs)

Her mother preferred the congregation administering the Catholic school and when the school closed, she placed her children at two other schools where those same Sisters were teaching.

A transfer from the German parish to the Mexican parish when she was looking for a Catholic school for her daughters, Monica found reassurance in the presence of women religious—"nuns"—at the Mexican school:

I started looking around for other Catholic schools. I started kind of investigating and I realized that [the Mexican school], when I started looking into their tuition, their program, who was the nun running it, I liked how Sister was very welcoming and very outgoing when she interviewed me, and she opened the doors for my daughters. That's why I chose it, because of her personality and her welcoming us to the school.

Rose, a parent of two girls who attended the German school, and a life-time parishioner of that parish, valued the Sisters from the various religious congregations who contributed to the Catholic education of her daughters. "We had Sisters from [two different congregations], both nuns, the Americans and the ones from Mexico. It was a beautiful teaching I believe with what little money they were making and tuition. The Sisters were terrific teachers, wonderful teachers; it was a very good school."

The Mexican school officially opened in 1914, one year prior to the church, and it too was managed by nuns from four different congregations. During its 98-year history, the school was led for 92 years by women religious until 2007.

Dolores, a former teacher at the Mexican school, and a substitute teacher during its last year, is mother of an alumna who was also teaching at the school, and grandmother to a middle schooler who had been there since pre-kindergarten. She recalls fondly her initial visit to the school in the late 1980s:

I came first as a parent [in 1987]; my daughter was in public school. I had wanted her in Catholic school. I went to Catholic school so I wanted her in Catholic school but at that time we just kept her in public school. I visited different schools, Catholic schools, I visited about five different catholic schools and when I came to [this school] the Sisters made me feel so welcome when I came to tour the school. I saw the respect children had, how well they were taught; their interaction with the people that came to visit. No, we didn't live in the boundaries and didn't belong to the parish. I was an active member at [another parish]; like I said I toured five different schools I even toured the school I went to and that would've been more convenient for me because my mother lived nearby. After I left here and after I talked to the Sister, principal at that time, I said this is the place where my daughter belongs and we belong. [Now] I come, I teach CCD here and I see the rooms and all the memories, who's in what room, the Sisters, what love they had for us too, the nuns. You walk down the halls and you remember. I remember last summer I was here helping clean, get ready for bible school, this young man came and he was on vacation from California, he brought his wife, his children to see if he could see the classrooms. Of course I opened the doors and he walked down the halls. He was telling his children the names of the teachers the Sisters who were here and everything and that's what it was about.

When asked what words would describe her 25 years of teaching at the Mexican school, she said, "Christian family, let's put it that way."

The importance of the leadership and overall role of religious in the early formation of students was one factor validated in 14 of the interviews given in answer to a subsequent research question asking them to describe the sense of community. The religious leadership was so impactful that the majority of the families displaced by the closing of the German school

followed the Sisters to another school where their same congregation was in leadership, or to one where those Sisters were the primary instructors.

School managed by laity. Beginning in 1914, the same religious congregation of women held the academic leadership role at the Mexican school for 65 years, except for a one-year period when two lay administrators took the helm of the school due to an unexpected absence of the Sister who was principal at the time. However, the same religious congregation continued in a leadership capacity for another two years before leaving entirely. In 2007, an out-of-town public school administrator was hired by the local pastor and a search committee consisting of the director of the diocese's office of Catholic schools, school staff, and school council members. Soon after her first year, the climate of the Catholic school changed under her leadership.

Matthew, formerly a parishioner at the German school, but a transfer to the Mexican school when he enrolled his children there, had this to say,

[The last Sister] she did her best and she made this school very good for the resources we had, but I know when she left and the 'other one' came in that we were gonna sink and we sunk fast. [Why?] Because she came from a public school system and though that's not THE reason, she was just under the belief of, although not publicly stated, but the belief of separation of church and state: 'So this is a school and so I'm gonna treat it as a school,' not as a community or as a parish and she alienated a lot of folks a lot of people that had been here for a lot of years, including [my wife] and myself. We were here just for the sake of my son and we were gonna continue to support and everything, but you could see it, there was complete division and we knew that the end was gonna be coming. At our sporting events there was no one, no parents, nothing of any recognition, whereas you saw the other schools, there was an abundance of staff. We knew it, we knew it. So if you're [the principal] and not gonna support, how do you expect others to do it?

Elizabeth, a life-long member of the parish, alumna of the Mexican school, and mother and aunt to other alumni of the same school, reiterates Matthew's sentiments:

At that time the principal we had was not a good choice. She came from a public school environment. We started having problems losing that connection that sense of compassion, she was getting support to go down that road from the administration, which you know [was the consortium] so she was following that rule. We were losing that Catholic base; I mean within the first weeks of her being here she let go of a very loved

and very dedicated coach that all the kids just adored, and that just threw us, and the parents were like: 'Woah what is going on here?' You just don't do that type of stuff. She had the mentality of 'you don't like it there's the door.' Well this isn't public school, there's the door, there goes the tuition. You need those people to stay in order to continue to operate. She had a very different concept so that caused friction. The way that the [consortium] was going only gave her support to continue down that road. So the two did not mix, it didn't mix with the parents and the way that [the school] was normally run.

A newly-appointed pastor to the Mexican parish, Father Antoine, saw and experienced the climate change as well:

When I took over under the principal at that time, more focus was on 'organizing our fun days' or the next Christmas pageant or the next social activity than there was actually focused on spirituality, on religiosity, that is religious practices, and even on the future, vision for the future. It was almost this attitude of we're okay let's just continue to do things the way we've always done them.

Through the pastor's insistence, the diocesan office of Catholic schools and the consortium did hire a female lay person to serve as principal: a member of the parish, a graduate of the school, and a product of Catholic schools. However, unbeknownst to her, the pastor, and the school staff at the time, she would be the last principal of the Mexican school. As Robert, parent of two elementary school-age children at the time, stated, "If the diocese knew they were going to close the school why did they bring in a new principal? Let her make the changes and the wonderful changes that she made and then shut the door on her. Why?"

Angelica, a member of the parish and the school's cafeteria manager the year it closed, had this to say about the change in the school leadership under the direction of the newly-hired lay person that year:

The last year, or at least when I was here, it really had a sense of building relationships with the parish, the parishioners, and the school. In previous year [with the other principal], it wasn't that much between the school and the parishioners, with exception of those people that they were active in the parish that we're got a chance to meet and they came often, but at least that friendship with them but other than that it was, to me, it was like separate, like they, well this is the way I feel, nobody told me, but the way we used to feel it was like they were thinking they were better than us. It was different, yea [the last year] between [the church and school]; the person that was in charge, she was more

spiritual more conscious about the community, about working with the parents and also to work with the parishioners.

Robert, the father of two children enrolled at the Mexican school, stated this about the school leadership during that last school year:

[S]he was a longtime parishioner as was her family, well respected, and very, very transparent and made it known to all the changes that were going to be made; she had an open door policy. At that time there was difficulty because of our enrollment in the school because the prior administration did not take care of the situation properly. With this new administration she was able to help parents secure monies from sponsors to help them bring [and] keep their children in school because, of course, the education was very, not expensive but for some who were blue collar workers made it difficult. But she was able to provide scholarships for many parents during her time that she was there and as I stated the changes of the teachers was evident also. They were more accessible where before they were not so we could see the changes in the school, you could just see the school as a whole changed completely, also. She would walk the grounds and you would just see the children surround her. You could actually feel love in the school again where before it felt very cold and this was quite a change, and the enrollment started going up because of her; the initiative that she had to make changes, because she had a vision.

Local parish. For the purpose of this study, the local parish leadership is represented in the pastor. However, members of the Mexican parish's pastoral and finance councils contributed to this study, but not as representatives of those councils.

Attributing the closing of the German school to poor decisions made by the local leadership—specifically the parish priests—Glenn stated:

We had sufficient funds to keep it open but they [priests] didn't want to keep it open. We had money to build the dance hall, the gym, and once they built it they didn't want the kids to play basketball. Now the principal tried to keep [the school] open. We had sufficient funds, yet they closed the school; the people had no choice about the closing, they didn't like it, nothing we could do about it.

His wife, Rose, interjected, "We had all new priests. They didn't know who we are (sic), they had no idea. We were very upset. We just had to swallow whatever came."

When asked about the responsibilities of a local parish priest, Father Philip described it like this:

Each priest is different, each priest has got his own priorities level. A priest is like a ring master of a three ring circus, you've got all these needs, all these people, and all these different people pulling at you. You have to decide what the important values are and, of course, for me, being a pastor of an inner-city Catholic school, I knew the school was a great priority. I'd say a pastor of an inner-city school would have to count on his workload increasing about 25 percent. Having a parish and having a school, that increases the amount of time, because you have to do Masses and other things, other committee members, committee meetings, councils on top of that, but the payoff of course of that is you do increase the number of people that come to the parish and that's where it's a good, a very good thing because I can honestly say that the parish thrived and increased membership by having a good dynamic Catholic school. You know having children there on the playground and the school building every five days a week it adds a new dynamic. There's a lot more activity, there's also the activity that develops as parents come and drop the children off at the beginning of the school day, pick them up at the end of the school day, various extracurricular activities, the sporting events, the academic things, the science fairs, all of that added to what I would call a more bustling dynamic community having a Catholic school there.

Father Antoine, the priest who succeeded Father Philip at the Mexican parish, inherited a changed climate in the school, what he termed "social" in nature. Seeing the lack of religiosity among some of the school staff and administration, he decided to act on it.

It was after that first year that as pastor I realized we needed to change the leadership of the school, we needed a new principal and unfortunately because of the [consortium] I couldn't do anything administratively. I wasn't in charge of that and so that's when I brought it to the attention of the [consortium] and told them there needed to be a change. I think they understood that I'm the one who's got the boots on the ground, so to speak, and I'm the one that's observant of what's happening on the campus and so I believe that yes they understood that if I'm saying there needs to be a change in leadership, they understood there needed to be a change in leadership.

As a newcomer, Father Antoine did not have the insight of other seasoned parishioners, but, unlike them, could take action as head of the local parish.

Diocese. The diocesan leadership consists of the local bishop and his staff members, such as those in the Catholic schools office, consortium personnel and its board members. In 2010, the Mexican school lost its parochial status with the implementation of a consortium formed by the local diocese. This consortium would encompass the inner-city/urban area Catholic schools with dwindling enrollments, unpaid receivables, and who were struggling financially. This consortium

of Catholic schools was formed by diocesan leaders who hired an out-of-town director for the consortium to provide leadership for its declining schools. One year later, that director was let go and another out-of-towner was hired to lead the consortium. Both directors answered to a board primarily comprised of four local clergy, two of whom were pastors of consortium schools, three lay persons, and the bishop who oversaw the department of Catholic schools (diocese archives, 2010).

April was a parent at the Mexican school during its last year. She was also employed by the consortium during part of that year. At times she wept while telling her story, especially when referencing her association with the consortium. She swore never to apply for a diocesan position ever again due to the hurt she experienced at the time.

When I became a part of the [consortium] portion of the school because beforehand I wasn't, it seemed like the whole network was there to make sure that all the schools . . . [stayed open] in October (thinking) 2011, and then by December the board had already decided so suddenly because the [consortium] had just been placed together. I felt that the diocese (carefully said) could have been more supportive of the [consortium] in order to, if that's what they really wanted to keep the schools open, to help them stay alive. I felt there was a lot of pushback. The [consortium] itself was not something they really wanted; it was placed together to keep the schools alive, but was not really cared for in order to do so. [The diocese was] operating the [consortium]. These decisions that were made came from the board; we [the consortium employees] cannot do that. Financially we [the consortium] could not have sustained ourselves and they knew that. The finances were put together from all the schools and when we needed something then we would go to the diocese. I felt like being in the [consortium] you were pulled both ways, no one wanted you here and no one wanted you there at either place. There was a lot of back and forth, he said, she said, meaning it was just all over the place.

Referring to the leadership of those in the consortium, their decisions, and how things unfolded, Father Antoine had this to say:

I attribute that to the wrong people in the leadership positions as far as director, as far as some of the board members that did not have the vision, they did not have the wherewithal to make it work. I still believe that in theory the model is a good model and that it should've worked but I believe, from my perspective, that there were the wrong people in place that just did not have the, this is my own opinion, assertiveness, did not

have the confidence, and at times even an aggressiveness that's necessary to get things done in this model.

Category finding: Participation. In response to the question of what role the school community, that is, parents, alumni, teachers, and staff, played in the decision to close the Catholic school, especially one that serves a population and an area that is on the lower end of the economic scale, many indicated a lack of participation from all members of a parochial school community in the process. According to the participants, *having a voice* was not an option for community members of either the German school or the Mexican school, not even for the principals at the time. "She just sat there and didn't say anything," stated Glenn of the nun who was the principal in attendance at the meeting when the announcement was made to close the German school."

Aside from feeling voiceless in the decision process, members of both communities felt they were *pushed aside* and forgotten by those who made the *autonomous* decision: diocesan personnel.

Having a voice. Matthew, who served on the school council of the Mexican school for several years and was involved in various ministries of the church, said the school was told of the closing and was not invited to participate in discussions or decisions regarding its closing.

We thought the bishop was going to come and hear about whether or not we should close and hear some ideas. But then as it started we knew for a fact that it was more of a formality to say 'hey guys no matter what you say or do, threaten and yell and scream at me, even in the church of God.' I remember, the priest who was making pleas and telling folks 'please you have to understand this is a bishop, please respect him,' and they'd start the respect, and it just came right back up again. And I would be too. I was very upset to see this school that I'd fallen in love with and spent so many years here, not as much as some of you all, it's sad, because for me, when [the German school] closed, the parish was dying, okay.

The other participants expressed similar sentiments: that their right to participate in the decision-making process to keep the school open was not an option.

A resident of the Mexican neighborhood, Robert, is a retired veteran who has seen a career of confrontation. From his perspective, what occurred with the diocese concerning the closing of the Mexican school was like nothing else he had experienced.

We [the community members] were not given the opportunity to voice our opinion . . . We were devastated that they, the diocese would do this without listening to our pleas, and when they did claim that they listened to us, well the decision was already made no matter what we said, no matter how we felt, they had already made up their mind, that's what I truly believe because it finally came out later through the grapevine and then if you look at it now the [consortium] is dissolved, they were never able to do what they had planned. Why would they wanna close a school that's been there since the 1900s? And especially where it was in the heart of the city where it benefitted a lot of the blue collar workers as well as the older families that were there in the neighborhood that made it, it was a flourishing parish, we had over 500 parishioners at the time, and the school was a big part of the church. They closed their ears to the pleas of our school.

Pushed aside. A former parent at the Mexican school, Maria, now a full-time volunteer at the Mexican parish, had this to say about the community not having a voice:

I think it was like an institution that's always been there and their Catholic faith was being somehow dismembered, but they were being pushed away by the church because the school wasn't gonna be there anymore. That was something that would gather them. I kinda wanted to fight to support whatever was good for the community because the community was going to be impacted big time. And that was kinda like really sad. I don't think [the school parents] were consulted; they weren't given a role. It seemed like it was so ABRUPT, it just POOM, I don't think they explained what was coming down the line; [school council members] weren't given enough time to get in and try to make a decision about how they would keep the school from closing. If they were given maybe more facts and work towards whatever it was that would be able to keep the school from closing, maybe they would've.

Maria stated that she is not one to criticize others or put the blame on people, but the secretive process and exclusion of the local community in a major decision that directly impacted them agitated her enough to speak her mind, as it did many other participants.

Autonomous decision. Matthew, who had served on the school council and the parish finance committee, stated the decision to close the school was made strictly by the diocesan hierarchy, including the consortium board:

From what I understood and what I was told, but not by them, these were people that had a buy-in to make [the consortium of Catholic schools] work. And I didn't see the buy in. I saw it as a financial responsibility to see what was the best at which of these parishes or which of these schools were more viable to keep open and which ones were not. I was waiting for these fundraisers that I heard were supposed to take place to create a fund so that it would make these schools viable. And I heard that from these folks and I never saw it . . . (shakes head).

A former parent and an employee at the Mexican school the year it was closed, Angelica talked about the diocese's autonomous decision.

They (school parents) were hurting and they were not accepting [that] it wasn't the parish decision but yet they feel left out because they didn't get the support from the parish priest. I used to tell them, well, remember that we have a new priest, remember that he doesn't know what's going on, he doesn't know how to react to this problem.

Category finding: Honesty. The question of what the participants recalled the most about the school closure created a category of honesty. Participants unanimously stated that the person or persons making the closing announcement and the reasons for it, had not been fully honest with them. The words *lack of transparency* included what participants felt was a *misrepresentation of the truth*. A stronger word and sentiment expressed by others was that their Church leaders *lied* to them. These descriptors are evident in the general transcripts and in the specific descriptions of the people delivering the message of the school closing.

Lack of transparency. The Church institution in this case study is the local diocese, represented by the local pastor, the bishop, and the staff under the bishop's authority, including the consortium and its board. One of the former pastors of the Mexican school, Father Philip, is an ardent supporter of inner-city Catholic schools since he is a product of that system. During his last years at the Mexican parish, he worked with other pastors in the area to help make their schools affordable and to maintain them open. He spoke openly of the perceived lack of honesty, relayed to him by members of the community:

Whenever the Church is not transparent it serves to create a lot of negative feelings in people because people expect more of the Church and they have a right to expect that. I believe that didn't happen in this process. It's a very demoralizing thing to happen to a community.

Lack of transparency from the Church hierarchy was not what Father Antoine expected either:

I was informed by one of the parishioners that they heard that [the school] will be closing to which my response was, 'that's ridiculous, why would a decision ever be made concerning the school without consulting the pastor?' Which was at the time, me. So I called then one of the priest [consortium] board members and I asked him 'What's going on?' There's rumors that are being spread, and it was at that moment that he had enough respect, I guess, well maybe that's not the right word, maybe fear might be a better word because if he had respect he might have told me sooner than that. I think it was at that moment that he realized that he needed to be forthwith, needed to be upfront, and he disclosed that 'yes,' it was actually a decision that had already been made that the school was closing. Note that he didn't discuss it at that point. I kind of lost my composure and the call ended abruptly; it blindsided me, as well as it blindsided the community. And I'm being completely honest, when I was given the news that the school was gonna close, I was floored, I was floored, I became very disillusioned even with my own calling to the priesthood. I was very disillusioned that decisions had been made without my input, that decisions had been made without bringing me to the table and allowing me to have a say.

Jenny, too, spoke to the lack of honesty from those who made the decision:

First of all I think the diocese has to be honest and open; first of all because I think you know [the diocese is] supposed to be 'our head,' so I hear, but I think it has to be honest with its people. Number one is, maybe the bishop himself can come speak before anything is starting up; let people know, the people of the school or whatever it is, the parish. Even in your parish, let them know what's happening so they can have a heads-up and say 'What can we do to prevent something like this?' Not just come in and say this is what's gonna happen. That's a scary thing, it's almost like taking your home away from you, stripping you, that isn't right.

Lied. The consortium had been formed to assist the struggling Catholic schools. They had been granted, what was understood to be, a recovery period of three years. When the Mexican school community was delivered the announcement by the bishop, they felt that it had all been a lie. Angelica, a staff member, had this to say:

The impression was that they lied to the school, to the parents, they lied to the parents, they lied to the principal, to the employees, that they were in charge, because they have

said, if you come with us we're gonna help you to maintain the Catholic school open, and what happened? A year later or two years later they come out with, well we must have to close the school.

Robert stated what he heard the evening the bishop made the announcement in the church about closing the Mexican school:

The bishop was in the church to explain they wanted to close the school, what they were planning to do, and in the church he lied to us and he was caught in a lie in regards to meeting with us 'cause he already knew the school was going to be closed so the meeting that they [parents] requested that evening was a farce, and when he said THAT, you could hear the gasp from people crying and then walking out 'cause I don't think he realized that he was caught.

According to Matthew, a former parishioner and student at the German school, it was no different for them. They learned the truth of the school closing had been kept hidden by the local priests until they made the "surprise" announcement to the school community.

Category finding: Concern. Concern for neighbors is a fundamental virtue in Catholic social teaching. In this case study of two Catholic communities, all the participants felt *neglected* by either the leaders of the school, parish, and/or diocese, with the latter obtaining the most statements on neglect, closely followed by the local parish. The lack of concern or *care*, especially during the grieving process, from the clergy and diocesan leaders, disappointed the lay participants impacted by the decision their leaders had made to close their Catholic school. Some participants noted diminishing attendance and participation in parish life was an additional result of the school's closure.

Neglect. Regarding the lack of concern by the diocese, Jenny, responding to the question of what was the community experience, candidly stated:

I felt like the diocese put us under this new thing called the [consortium] because they didn't know what to do with us and they didn't WANT us. At least meet with the people, the people that are involved, let's bring it down to community and say before it happens let us see what we can do to see if we can make it, maybe WORK with us so it can stop so that maybe you can see how concerned we are and what it means to US.

When the announcement was made to the members of the school and local parish, Jenny felt that people were crying for help and no concern for them was shown at the meeting:

Our parish priest was there, he [the pastor] did not once come to the defense of the people who wanted this heard, I don't care who he is whether he says 'I must follow what the diocese says' because you know what, we all have our own roles and we all have our opinions and the church believes what's the word, justice for all, give me a break, it's no wonder we have so many people who leave the church, I would say this is a perfect time when people were very disillusioned with our priest and with our diocese. It was a sad moment to hear all of that and as I said, when you don't even get the support of your own priest, it's even sadder.

Rachel, a mother of two, had enrolled her sons at the Mexican school one month prior to the announcement. Having had previous dealings with the diocese when her sons were at another Catholic school, she stated:

You call the diocese with your concerns and it doesn't seem like they listen to you, at least that's the feeling I got. And then the meeting that they had here, it wasn't so much to hear anyone's concerns nor reactions, it was more just okay we had a meeting and we let you come and that's it.

Care. Father Philip, while at the Mexican school, had formed a network of concerned leaders from the area's Catholic schools years before the consortium was envisioned or created in the diocese. His goal was to collaborate with others in the same situation, who had the same concerns, in restoring their institutions.

I'm a strong believer in community organizing, community organizations, social justice, but I also know that the Catholic school is a very unique and special part of the community and I graciously gave my time. They couldn't say, 'Well the pastor doesn't care for us,' I've heard that before too, but that couldn't be said about me. Social justice is a big umbrella. Certainly the Church has the option for the poor or the key tenants of social teaching and therefore the poor school. The schools in the poorer sides of [the city] needed more input and I think even [the bishop] realized that he just didn't set aside the money for it. That is why we established the [collaborative network]. We tried to pick up the slack that maybe the diocese wasn't doing. Maybe we bought a few years for some of the schools. That's one thing I would like to think we accomplished. Maybe we bought a few more years.

As an early-childhood development teacher, Dolores knew the importance of caring, so she was taken aback by the lack of care exhibited by diocesan leaders when it came to providing much-needed counseling services during a time of grieving at the Mexican school:

They knew the school was closing, they didn't care, they didn't want to waste [counseling] funds. If they had to hire somebody to come, they don't want to waste funds on us because we were closing so why should [they] waste money?

Diminishing population. Rosario, a graduate of the German school and a life-long parishioner since, has seen her parish struggle through the years, especially with diminishing attendance at church and parish activities.

There are a lot of people in the area but you can even see it at Mass, you see kids and there's some but there's not that many young kids, not like when there was a school. The pews would be full with all the kids. Now you see a few, but we just don't have the numbers and unfortunately it hurts.

Category findings: Abandonment. A sense of abandonment was an overarching sentiment described by the majority of the participants, from being *neglected* by the Church to seeing fellow school parents and members of the local church community *fleeing* the Church as a result of their disillusionment with the Church hierarchy. This was due to the manner in which the process of closing the school unfolded, in addition to what participants saw as the pastor's non-responsive nature as their shepherd during a difficult time in the life of the school.

Neglect. Rose continues to be a loyal parishioner at the German parish and vividly recalls her feeling the day the announcement was made to close the school:

When you become a parent and you're enjoying this school and enjoying the people around you and all of a sudden the door shuts on you. Belittled. Hit in the face and you have to face it; never the same.

Separation. Elizabeth, one of the members on the committee that formulated the plan of action to save the Mexican school, stated:

They took the sympathy out of it, they took the compassion out of the flexibility of them being able to work with the parents that were struggling to bring their kids to [school]. There was no thought about the people, there was no validation given that this was gonna affect people, this was going to affect a way of life. This was going to affect a history, this was going to affect a community and the longevity of the teachings in that community. Had they given you the opportunity and had told you this could happen and we did nothing about it then you know what? It is what it is.

The priest at the time was aware of certain people's feelings. Father Antoine's response regarding members of the school and church community feeling neglected was this:

Unfortunately there were some, I even heard, that felt I had abandoned them, and that hurt to hear that. The reality is I didn't abandon anyone, I was there. If I would've abandoned anyone I would've said move me, get me out of here, and I didn't because that's not what a pastor does. The pastor doesn't abandon the sheep in the moment of need. We move forward, we do our very best. Listen, we don't move forward right away, but in time, we continue to worship as we've always worshiped as a family of faith. Once a decision has been made by the hierarchy of the church there's no reversing the boat; once the ship has been turned there's no reversing that. [The decision to close the school] was out of the control of me as pastor, it was out of the control of the parishioners as faithful, it was now in control of the larger Church, of the hierarchy of the Church. One thing we have to understand, the ecclesiology of the Church. And, the ecclesiology of the Church is this, decisions are made in hierarchical form that is that a lot of times within the church decisions are made without the input of the lay faithful.

Decline. Karen, one of two sisters who attended the German school and a member of the last graduating class, spoke about the impact the school closure had on the parish:

Around the time the school closed, I think there was kind of a downturn in the amount of people that participated [at the parish]. If they had younger kids at different schools, so now they needed to participate in those, their parish festivals and their parish. It did have an ill effect on some of the parishioners.

Rachel, a mother of two children who had recently transferred to the Mexican school after they attended a charter school for two years, was glad to be back at a parochial school. Her words described the disillusioning feeling she felt as a parent.

I thought it was a lot of hard work and a lot of devotion, a lot of people that were very happy serving here the kids. It was a very vibrant community I thought, but unfortunately because of the closing it divided a lot of people and turned away a lot of people. Well I think, among even probably the parishioners that were here at the time that had their children in the school, I'm sure some of them might not even be here anymore; they

might have already left to another church. Probably because of the lack of school, they'd send their kids to another school and then they start becoming church members of the other [church] wherever they enroll their children in. Oh I think [many families left with hurt feelings]. From people that I've run into it's like you could tell that they are hurt and they have more, I don't know the word to express, but they had been here longer than I have so they had already been through changes and what not. I think that's a reason a lot of Catholics have left the church especially the ones that are low income they go where whatever is near.

Jenny and Dolores, both long-time parishioners of the Mexican parish who have remained active in the parish community, stated what they felt and observed.

Somehow or other, people were so dismayed they left the community, they left the community, and even if they were coming from afar they decided to go back to their own churches because there's nothing left for them here after the closure (Jenny).

I knew once the school closed some of the children would not go to another Catholic school. I knew the church was gonna lose out on families, some of the active families would have to find another school, and if they went to another Catholic school, of course, they were gonna belong to that church, and assessing now, they have lost a lot (Dolores).

Seeing a decline in participation and attendance at parish functions has been evident for years to Rosario, a member of the German parish community.

Once [the German school] closed, well then of course now they're gonna be supporting their other school. They may still come to Mass here but you don't have as much of the participation so you don't have the same numbers coming [to parish activities]. And, even at the Masses, it was always crowded, now it's not.

Category finding: Poor planning. The statements regarding the *plans* and *planning process* of the diocese, local parishes, and schools were considered in arriving at this category. Both communities were informed that the reason for the closing of the school was due to a lack of financial resources: more expenditures with less revenue. *The lack of communication* from the persons making the decisions and/or announcing those decisions was also considered to be an aspect of the poor planning. The *distribution of monies* allocated for Catholic education, per a diocesan appeal, was a concern for those who saw the amount allotted as not enough to support

the number of Catholic schools in the diocese, let alone those in the inner-city that are struggling to maintain their enrollment.

Poor planning. Most of the participants from the Mexican school referred to the creation of a consortium by the local diocese as a *vision without a plan*. April, a former staff member of the diocese/consortium, had this to say:

I felt that the d-i-o-c-e-s-e could have been more supportive of the consortium if they really wanted to keep the schools open, to help them stay alive. I felt there was a lot of pushback, the [consortium] was not something they really wanted, it was not really cared for in order to do so. The [consortium] board met on plans for money or what have you but not having a plan or moving forward with a plan, I think that made people upset. From what I understand, after so many months of not being able to sustain they came up with the plan and their plan was to consolidate three of the middle schools and move the schools to a seminary that used to [exist]. And they were gonna revamp it and it was gonna be really nice location that was what [the director] proposed because financially we couldn't sustain the 10 schools but it was not in any livable condition. I can't honestly tell you, to me, it did not make any sense [that all this occurred because they didn't have any money]. I think everything, the opening of the [consortium] and then the closing of the [consortium] was done very wrong. Decisions made, I don't want to say that they were not thinking, I know that they met but I don't know if they really took into consideration all that, the academy, sending the kids there, their feelings.

“I think [the consortium] was the biggest downfall for many Catholic schools here on the south side,” stated Jenny, who at the time of the Mexican school's closure was teaching at another consortium Catholic school:

I can remember, that was the biggest mess and I don't understand how the diocese could've even invested in that because it never, never, never came into being; what I believe in just working with it, they could never get off the ground because they were always making big blunders they didn't even know. They'd hire one person, then they'd hire another person and nobody knew who was supporting them to begin with. So what did it do for Catholic education? Nothing but close schools, that's how I feel.

Poor communication. As a former project manager for a major telecommunications network, Elizabeth, now retired, questions the planning of the diocese regarding the closing:

There was no plan. Because if they had a plan they would've thought about that, they would've thought, at least, if nothing else, at least, giving us the opportunity and the respect that this community deserved by even allowing us to address the board, address

the [consortium], explain to them what our proposal was. Didn't even respect us enough for that. It didn't matter, as if what [we] have to say just doesn't count.

The German school, closed in 1971 by the diocese, had a school board who knew the possibility of it closing. Parents there, as well as the administration, had closed meetings to try and keep the school open but were finally publicly told the closing was due to financial problems. The majority of those interviewed believed the financial label was given by the priests and not necessarily by the Sisters, and their silence in the matter reflected that. The only document found in the Sisters' congregational archives referring to the closing of the German school states, "[the school] will not reopen in September because of financial reasons" (congregation notes, April, 1971).

Distribution of monies. A pie chart of a diocesan appeal was shown to all participants when asked if sufficient money was being designated for Catholic education, and if they knew how much of it was allocated for the inner-city Catholic schools. The majority were astounded to learn that only ten percent of the total monies collected went toward "Catholic education," though it is uncertain if the category includes Catholic schools.

Twenty-nine year-old Renee, an alumna of the Mexican school, had this to say regarding the proposed sum targeted for Catholic education:

Four hundred twenty-five thousand, well I mean, it's definitely not a lot, as I can imagine, it's not a lot of money. Either (the diocese) is not doing a good job to stress the importance of this [appeal] or they feel that [Catholic education] is a dying breed, or at least in this side of town, and that's probably terrible to say, but Catholic education is for like a certain number: those who can afford to.

Category finding: Opportunity. In the words of Pope Francis I, "Hope opens new horizons." Many of those interviewed from the Mexican school shared the *hope, potential*, or the *opportunity to reopen* the school under a different school model, though no specifics were given. Another clear hope was for the *opportunity to change the process* that exists within the hierarchy

of the church and offer the stakeholders, the community of faithful, a seat at the planning table. Members of both parishes expressed their desire for the diocese to *increase the amount of money allotted to inner-city/urban Catholic schools* to benefit those areas and gain much needed monetary support to avoid further closings, such as the one which occurred during the summer of 2017, a few months after completing this study.

Hope. Amidst the strong words and sentiments toward the closing process, Robert, active in several pastoral ministries of the Mexican church, saw hope for the school.

I think if the school would've been open it would've even flourished more because we're getting newer, younger parents in the neighborhood, condominiums that have been built, and I see a lot of young parents in the neighborhood, whether they are Catholic or not but still it makes me wonder. I wish to see our school open again.

Though Robert's children are now in high school, he believes both the neighborhood and church communities would benefit from reopening the Catholic elementary school. Others from the same parish shared his sentiment.

Potential. Father Philip spoke to the potential he and others from those inner-city Catholic schools saw when the diocese created the now-defunct consortium:

What was promised [by the diocese] was every opportunity, every stone unturned to find ways to continue to make the Catholic schools in the inner city affordable without watering down the quality. They were going to look for donors. I was part of the process to investigate what types of models would be good. I think the Catholic schools' office should be looking at that. We have to buck a trend in society.

Change. Elizabeth, who maintains close ties with many former students of the Mexican school and has family ties to the parish for over 50 years, stated the process must change for opportunity to flourish.

There's other opportunities, there's other things. I'm gonna tell you, the wakeup call for the diocese, it didn't just happen just within these last five years, this is a struggle that has been coming with Catholic schools for as long as I can remember. Tuition has always been something that has eluded the opportunity for a lot of Catholics and a lot of people that sought to have their children being educated in a Catholic school. As tuition grew it

became less and less accessible to people. No respect was given, not even, again, just the opportunity to voice and yes, opposition I get it, it would've been different if all we came to the table were complaints, I get that. My father always used to say to come to me with a problem unless you have a solution, because I already know what the problem is, but we weren't coming to them with the problem because we knew what the problem was, we were trying to come to them with what we thought was a viable solution which, which, let me rephrase that, WE KNOW it was a viable solution, it was a plan, a well thought out plan that could and would have made sense and we could've expanded to other schools to help that same logic and help the other schools grow in enrollment and take an interest back into, but we weren't even given the respect of an audience. As if we didn't count. You know the school that exists there today is a charter school. It breaks my heart when Christmas came, Thanksgiving came, no participation in the church, it's not a Catholic school. If a charter school can survive, pay rent by the way, so it's not like they're without bills, they still have to pay their teachers. If a charter school can survive without charging tuition and survive in a Catholic school building why can't we have, taking that same logic, why can't we have a Catholic school? Why can't we take . . . there's nothing wrong about borrowing and improving, why try to reinvent the wheel? If there's opportunity out there, if there's something that's working, let's go and investigate it, how is this working? How can we change what we need to change in order for it to work for us? Are we so myopic and so closed minded that we're not willing to open the doors to those that benefitted from the Catholic education that has come to the table and said, let us help?

Referring to the potential for collaboration, Father Antoine, stated:

Now we see that that has to change in our modern times because of the investment of the lay people in our Catholic school. And so what do I mean by that, I mean that now we realize that there are lay faithful that are enormous benefactors of our Catholic school and with that being said, they have to be part of the conversation, they have to be given a seat at the table. The old model of the Catholic schools surviving off of just funds won't work. The model of impoverished urban Catholic schools surviving off of just the finances of the parish are gone, those days are done. The parish cannot support the school; cannot subsidize the school and so then we have to turn to outside benefactors which now, in modern times, if this is going to occur, they have to be given a seat at the table, they have to be given a voice, and so I think that hopefully we will learn from our mistakes of not to involve those that are tremendous supporters of the urban impoverished Catholic schools that in fact we give them a seat at the table that they have a voice in the future of their own communities. We cannot underestimate the importance of Catholic education in the future of the church. I arrived with the hopes that the school would continue, in fact, the nature that I have of optimism; I had hopes the school would actually thrive, that it would do better, that it would grow into something bigger.

Five Impacting Themes

The focus of this ethnographic instrumental case-study was on the impact of a Catholic school closure felt by members of the respective school, church/parish, and neighborhood communities. Two schools, two communities with distinct attributes yet with many common threads pertaining to the nature of the closing of their school; all who participated consider the schools to have been an important contributor to the life of church/parish community.

Upon observation and careful examination of each of the categories, including the two sets of subcategories, four relevant themes emerged from the experiences of all of the individuals who participated by imparting their story. The process for this included taking each coded category and subcategory and placing them on a large-scale easel pad sheet that was later mounted on the wall and used as a visual throughout the process of reducing the commonalities among categories, not necessarily as a forced reduction, but to see which categories had overlapping characteristics, which could be discarded, and/or which could generate additional categories. In each category, words were highlighted, circled, crossed-off, and cross-referenced with other words in other categories. This was facilitated by using the search tool in Microsoft Office Word, since all the transcriptions and category tables were in Word, and by later writing them on the easel sheets. Five themes surfaced from the eight categories: emotional outpour, communication, governance, trust, and generational ties.

Impacting theme: Emotional outpour. The first theme to be identified was emotional outpour. It surfaced from four main categories: distress, concern, abandonment, and poor planning. *Lack of compassion* was the dominant perception in all four categories, followed by *avoidance* and the *lack of a support system* for the grieving community. The emotional outpour of the two communities manifested in both the joy and benefits of having a Catholic school and

its sudden loss. Though the majority of the emotional outpour had a negative connotation, there were comments of *love* and *good* in the mix.

Lack of compassion. Robert, who has over 25 years at the Mexican parish, noted:

I was hurt, I felt like I was stabbed in the back, you know. Taking that the church did us wrong, by doing, you know. Why would they wanna close a school that's been there since the 1900s? And especially where it was in the heart of the city where it benefitted a lot of the blue collar workers as well as the older families that were there, in the neighborhood. That made it, it was a flourishing parish, we had over 500 parishioners at the time, and the school was a big part of the church. It's a bilingual community it was very close during the time when we had the school, I mean it was, everybody knew everyone, the love was there you could sense it.

Rose, of the neighboring German parish, commented:

We were upset. We just had to swallow whatever came and we were happy our kids got to graduate [that last year]. All of a sudden the door shuts on you. Belittled. Hit in the face and you have to face it, they're never the same.

Avoidance. The diocese appeared to avoid the issue of closing altogether and made, what many remember to be, only one announcement after which there was no return visit. Phone calls made to the diocesan offices were not returned. Rachel echoed the common sentiments:

[The diocesan hierarchy] should've met with the local people first; they did not involve any of the local people to help, to give some input or make some decisions when people were wanting to ask questions. The diocese was not open to listening. They were already set on some type of agenda. For myself and for my sons we were UPSET even though we only had a few months there, I thought that I had found a good place that I felt comfortable with and the kids were very happy-- a positive impact in their lives.

Lack of support system. The avoidance of the diocese, as felt by the families of the German and Mexican schools, made them feel there was no support system in place to listen, assist, or even counsel them in their time of grief. Persons were raising questions, but no answers from the decision makers were ever given. Maria, who saw her daughter graduate from the Mexican school years ago, and who now volunteers in several of the parish's ministries, recalls how she perceived the school-church families:

This is a beautiful parish and you just love the people that come to church that have been there for years, the parishioners, and you can feel the sense of family that's missing because the school's not there. Shattered, that's what it is, it's a shattered community. It's a family. It's a family that was divided.

Impacting theme: Communication. *Lack of communication, lack of transparency, and misrepresentation* seen in all eight categories formed the theme of communication. The perceived poor planning of and on the part of the consortium also points to the lack and/or miscommunication between that group and their supervisors.

Lack of communication. Regarding what happened at the Mexican school, Elizabeth stated it bluntly:

I think there was a deeper plan there that was never communicated. I think the diocese knew what their long range plan was, I think they had a vision that wasn't communicated, but they had to have the right things in place, I think there was politics into play here, to be real honest, and I/we were not given the opportunity. So do I think the archdiocese knew, as did the superintendent, knew, the good shepherd knew, yea, I think they had a plan in place. I think that the schools were given pressure under this new regime (referring to the consortium), under this new way of running things that they lost control of what they can and cannot do for the schools. The communication came after all the cards were dealt and there was nothing that could be done; let me rephrase that: a lot could've been done had they been open to it.

Lack of transparency. Father Philip heard from his former parishioners the minute the announcement was made.

I'm very understanding of the feelings of betrayal which is a good way to describe some of the feelings that were described to me by the parents and staff that were there when it was announced. I believe so, whenever the church is not transparent it serves to create a lot of negative feelings in people because people expect more of the church and they have a right to expect that. I believe that didn't happen in this process.

Misrepresentation. Four of the participants from the Mexican school referenced rumors when relating their experience. Dolores, the grandmother to the middle schooler during the last year of the school, and a teacher at the same school when the consortium was formed, related her perception of what she heard at diocesan teacher meetings: "Even before the announcement,

about two years before they closed the school we had already heard rumors. We're gonna consolidate some of the schools; we already had rumors." She attributed these rumors to low enrollment in the last two years, which was not unique to that school:

We had gone down a little, but I think also people had already heard and they didn't want [to come]. I'll tell you this, because we did, we always talked to incoming parents or incoming students and I had asked a friend of mine to come and see the school for her grandchild. She says, 'No, I hear its closing so why should I put my child in there when in a couple of years it'll close. You know, that hurt us, it was already out, the rumor was out that the schools were gonna close; the south side schools were gonna close. So, when we started hearing rumors we should've worked on that and make it a goal. How do we get more people? How do we get money, funded by somebody? I include myself there. We knew parents and the grandparents, aunts and uncles, and to me it's like a divorce, you're split up. I think that's why they took it hard, and they wanted to see the school thrive, it had been here so many years, long history and some of the students were third generation coming here and some of them had to come from far but because their grandparents came here, their mother came here, or their father came here they wanted their child here.

Impacting theme: Governance. This theme is a blend of sentiments taken from different category snippets: from *warm and welcoming*, *excellent*, and *wonderful*, to *biased leadership*, *unresponsive to needs*, and *lacking compassion*. For example, the exact role of the different governing bodies—school, parish, and diocese—caused some confusion at the Mexican school, especially since another governing authority had been added to the mix—the consortium. There appeared to be a lack of knowledge about what the consortium was and who it directed.

Warm and welcoming. When recalling their first interaction with the Sisters who operated the German school and the Mexican school, all comments were about their warm and welcoming nature. Two different congregational orders, yet similar sentiments—"they made you feel welcome"—from those interviewed who had an encounter with the Sisters at the school.

Insensitive. Jenny added her sense of what occurred regarding governance at the Mexican school, the result of what she termed a lack of scrutiny by the diocese and an insensitivity in selecting the school's first lay principal:

After [the former principal] came in, there was A LOT of difficulty there and then that's really when the school [had] it's down point I would say. Number one, she was not, I don't believe she was Catholic. Number two, she had no idea what Catholic education was really about coming from a public school. I'm gonna say something here, I truly have a problem with Catholic education when they bring in a public school teacher because they DO NOT know the philosophy of, number one, Catholic education and what it takes, and particularly, they are NOT living their faith and giving witness to their faith. That's so essential. To me, that's important.

Robert felt that the diocese and consortium demonstrated a lack of pastoral leadership when it came to the closing of the school:

If the diocese knew they were going to close the school, why did they bring in a new principal? Let her make the changes, and the wonderful changes that she made, and then shut the door on her. The other schools were not flourishing at all, but yet they let one of the other schools stay open which their enrollment was not near ours, but yet I think a lot of it had to do with, my personal opinion is, that the priest over there was part of the consortium, part of their [board] and I think that had a lot to do with it.

Lacking compassion. Seeing her nephew, a student at the Mexican school, undergo the turmoil of having to see his elementary school close and not looking forward to a transition, Elizabeth talked about the lack of compassion exhibited by the diocese. She, along with a group of alumni and parishioners, wrote a plan that would help the school address the needs of its constituency, both of the parish and the neighborhood. Though they made various attempts for a meeting with the bishop, and even had the pastor hand deliver the proposal, they never received a reply. This is how she explains it:

Respect was not given, not even the opportunity to voice. Are we so myopic and so closed minded that we're not willing to open the doors to those that benefitted from the Catholic education that have come to the table and said, "Let us help"? They took the sympathy out of it, they took the compassion out of the flexibility of them being able to work with the parents that were struggling to bring their kids to [this school].

Impacting theme: Trust. In a social context, trust is a dependence on another to adhere to their word. This theme was reflected in the words and phrases of the participants as a quality that had been lost due to *false representation* by the diocese and/or those responsible for the

closing of the two schools. The *trust or the lack of trust* caused distress in school parents and other members of the school and parish community, so much so that some people ceased to participate as Catholics, while others chose other church communities to be part of—a *consequence* of distrust.

False representation. Renee, an alumna of the Mexican school, considered the structure of the consortium board to be a factor contributing to the lack of trust:

I do remember hearing about them [the consortium board] I just didn't realize that it was run by who had schools. I mean it seems awfully biased to have [the pastors] on that board if their school, church was a part of that organization. It should've been a board of more like lay persons, I would imagine. If you're out of it, you're gonna assess the situation because you're not emotionally attached, you need to have a non-biased opinion or this is gonna go (points thumb down). Being on a committee like that you need to have a non-biased opinion and not be emotionally attached to something because when you're emotionally attached to something you're gonna do whatever you have to do to keep it going and keep it moving.

Lack of trust. April recounted her experience as a staff member of the consortium and the distrust the diocese had of parents paying their share:

A large majority of the parents from some of the [consortium] schools were not [paying]. Some of the parents from some of the schools, they had owed eight years of tuition and they ended up paying, [yet] that didn't do it with the bishop. It's sad that those who were in charge that they chose those [schools to keep open] that were still financially [worse than the Mexican school] 'cause they didn't have, I think, what [the Mexican school] had. We had hope, and the community was full of love, it was much more.

When pastor of the Mexican school, Father Philip was involved in a non-diocesan group that formed to help the struggling inner-city schools. He raises the question of trustworthiness:

What in the world happened? Because when I left the parish we trusted that the diocese was going to have a process that was going to assure that these schools would stay open, though that didn't happen. I didn't know why, even being an insider, but I was not an insider when this particular (consortium) [was formed].

Consequences of actions. Father Phillip discussed how he saw the consequences of actions that should have been given more thought, especially when they impacted people and communities.

That decision took no account of that feeling of loyalty, the feeling of parish and community that (the Mexican school) and I'm sure (the other school) because those are both parishes that have been around for a long time. I guess they assumed that the parents would be very happy to do that and that isn't what happened.

Karen, an eighth grader when her German school closed, shared the consequences of the closing:

Around the time the school closed, I think there was kind of a downturn in the amount of people that participated. If they had younger kids at different schools now they needed to participate in those, their parish festivals and their parish things. (The low attendance) did have an ill effect on some of the parishioners.

Impacting theme: Generational ties. Participants from both Catholic schools spoke about family ties to the church/parish. However, every participant from the Mexican school spoke about strong generational ties, some stemming back four generations. The Mexican school participants shared their *generational history* of children attending the school with pride. Many of the families who were part of the school were there because they and their parents attended; they were and are stakeholders in the parish-school community. Many of those families came from other sections of the city, some commuting from 18 to 30 miles outside of the city limits. This generational support system of the school and parish was harshly impacted by the closing.

Dolores got emotional when recounting her memories at the Mexican school:

So much history (SIGHS). Personally, I met some of the most nicest parishioners (places her hands over her heart), your parents, I get emotional sometimes when I think of them. I loved them; didn't know them that long, but I saw the love they had for the church and the school, and of course because your father came to school here so he had such a long history, all his children came here, his grandchildren came here, and that's why I say that, I met the most wonderful people you know that I can say are wonderful here at [the Mexican school and church].

Matthew, once a student at the neighboring German school, enrolled his children in the Mexican school after visiting the campus and meeting with the staff. All too familiar with the closing of a Catholic school after seeing his father, who was chairman of the PTC at the German school, go through painstaking heartache of trying to keep the German school from closing, Matthew shared the following:

My recollection [of the closing of the German school] was simply that I remember seeing my father over a period of months really, you could say he was struggling and straining about certain things, and he would have confidential conversations with my mom and we'd walk into the room and he'd get quiet and we realized that that was the fact that they were leading to the point where [the school would be closing]. All I know is my dad came to me and my younger brother and was in tears to say that the meeting had been held. I remember the community reaction when it was announced, disbelief, there was outrage and stuff, with a tremendous amount of sadness, I knew it too well. [All] because of the fact that that school had been there for a long time and we had seen so many things. At that time those parents and staff were still of age where they had their young ones so it was of many generations of people that had gone there. So that aspect of it is what made it really sad because there was a lot of history in there. My brothers and my sister went there and [we were] just one of many who were families who had that experience.

While referring to the Mexican school and what he experienced there with the lay principal who preceded the last one, he had this to say about what occurred:

Don't alienate those that made [the school] so successful and this to me is built on families, don't alienate those families. Because what I saw from those families is as those parents got old, their children were the leaders, and then those people had children who came to this school and those people would've been the leaders. It was just generations of generations of generations.

Referring to his former German school, Matthew, there too, recalls its strong generational ties.

At the time, those parents and staff were still of age where they had their young ones, so it was of many generations of people that had gone there. So that aspect of it is what made it really sad because there was a lot of history there. My brothers and my sister went there and [we were] just one of many who were families who had that experience.

In Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore two neighboring parish communities whose schools were both closed by the local diocese and to give voice to the members of the communities impacted by the closures. An ethnographic case study approach was used so as to develop, what Merriam (2009) refers to as, “a holistic, intensive, rich description and analysis” (p. 46) of what occurred.

Subsequent questions asked how community members were involved in the decision to close the parochial elementary school, what sense of community was experienced by the members of the respective communities—school, church/parish, and neighborhood—during and after the closure, and what they learned from this experience. In the process of collecting the data by means of participant interviews, observations, archival records, and journaling, it was recognized that the contributors from the two sites had many unexpected commonalities, especially since their closings had been decades apart. Of the 20 participants, all were members of the communities at one point or another, and the majority (17) continue to be active in their respective church/parish community. Though some’s narratives were not referenced, they lent a historical perspective to this study.

This chapter provided the findings of this qualitative ethnographic research study. Multiple clusters were produced and synthesized into eight categories, producing five all-encompassing themes. The categories of distress, leadership, participation, honesty, concern, abandonment, poor planning, and opportunities, along with the five themes of emotional outpour, communication, governance, trust, and generational ties, constitute the lived experience of members of two neighboring communities whose thoughts, sentiments, and perspective remained untapped until now. A discussion of the findings and recommendations follows.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

For half a century, families in the United States' countless inner-city and urban areas, have experienced their neighborhood Catholic parochial elementary schools close. They have discovered, after the decision had already been made by local diocesan leaders, that their children will no longer be evangelized on a daily basis, and that, possibly, no other Catholic school is within their immediate area. Many inner-city/urban Catholic elementary schools have closed their doors due to financial constraints, primarily stemming from unpaid tuition by families who have multiple children enrolled in Catholic schools. Tuition rates are the primary reason many families do not choose a Catholic academic education (cara.org). This has been known fact for more than a decade; the Center for Applied Research for the Apostolate (CARA) has published approximately ten studies, dating back to 2003, on the financial stance and outlook of Catholic elementary schools in the United States. Diocesan leaders charged with maintaining the Catholic elementary schools have a responsibility both to their school families and Holy Mother Church to be informed, communicate effectively, and work to sustain their elementary schools, especially in lower-income areas, where most have ceased to exist because no plan to resolve the situation has been successfully instituted.

This ethnographic instrumental case study address those concerns by profiling two Catholic parochial school communities closed 40 years apart by the local diocese, and both for similar financial reasons. This case study delved into the impact on members of their communities—school, parish church, and neighborhood.

The two communities had similar experiences, provoking an inclusive question: what was learned from these experiences? The findings from this study generated new data which address that question; they also fill part of the gap in the literature regarding Catholic school closures,

especially those in America's inner-cities. The participants' perceptions and feelings, passed from one generation to the next in some cases, had been kept private since the closing, until now.

Background. Inner-city Catholic schools had their start as parochial schools—schools joined to a Catholic church whose parish community provides the principal monetary support for the school. During their inception, these Catholic parochial schools had religious women and men—sisters, some are often referred to as nuns, brothers, and priests—who provided educational services to the students at a very low cost. In the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Catholic parochial schools suffered a major socio-economic blow resulting from a Council mandate permitting the women and men religious to leave Catholic schools and practice in their primary field of study. This action resulted in a mass exodus by those religious women and men, necessitating higher tuition rates to pay higher salaries and benefits to the lay persons filling the teaching and administrative vacancies (Cassidy, 1948; Youniss & McClellan, 1999).

Since then, and especially during the last decade, a critical time in Catholic school history when elementary schools in the inner-city and urban areas in particular continue to close, little has been written on the topic. Groome (2003a) identifies this scarcity of scholarly literature as an example of the unwillingness of the system and its overseers to address, adapt to the needs, and transform the “largest independent school system in the history of the world” (p. 28). Thus the open-ended question all participants were asked—How does the Church read and respond to the signs of the times?—became a guide post for further research.

Discussion

“[God] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” is a well-known verse from the Book of Psalms (147:3). Through the process of having these conversations with people who

experienced a great hurt at the hands of individuals in charge of the Catholic school system in their diocese, some of their brokenness was lifted and transformed into hope. For some, it came more than 40 years too late; for others, it is still too tender in their hearts and minds.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the data, draws conclusions based on the analysis, suggests implications for actions, and proposes recommendations for further study. Eminent points of the findings follow.

Compassion. The human being is at the core of concern in Catholic social teaching. The summative point in Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice is that structures, in this case the diocesan Church, should help individuals in exercising their responsibilities. As was uncovered in this study, people on the receiving end of the closure felt that the Church appeared to have taken all compassion out of the process to focus on the economics of the situation.

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called God's people to a covenant of love and justice" (usccb.org). The Catholic Church "prides itself on pastoral care and compassion for those who are suffering," (Curtin, 2006, p. 42) yet, during these communities' painful time, Church representatives did not offer to help ease the grief and sorrow of those in the school and parish community. The Bishops emphasize the importance of community as a unique value and a characteristic of Catholic schools, but for these two schools, under two separate bishops, they felt scorned by their shepherd(s).

During the course of the conversations with the participating members of both parish/school communities, they openly and unhesitatingly describe their emotional investments in their respective communities. They expressed their sorrow and anger toward the school's

closing, specifically with the process, and toward the decision makers' lack of transparency. They expressed disappointment at the manner in which the closing occurred, especially as a ministry of the Catholic church, and they expressed regret and concern over the diocese's lack of ministry to the community during their time of grieving. Though the schools' administration did what they could to help ease the blow to the staff, teachers, students and their families, they were met with cries of disbelief over the lack of compassion exhibited by Church representatives who did not once pay them a visit during the transition period. As one parishioner said it, "Come down to the people, you are our shepherd" (Jenny).

The lack of compassion, which the majority acknowledged was a surprisingly sad show of disrespect to these long-time communities, was the harshest blow to them:

The [consortium and diocesan leaders], they were not the ones to come and tell each individual why, or to really show compassion and explain in more detail, too, so people could understand why. Okay, yes, there's debt, well there's debt and look there's money. Ask, why can't you invest, continue investing in the community to keep the community vibrant and growing and help the rest of society 'cause that effect is just a domino effect on the rest of society, it's like all these kids, they lose their way because they don't continue being Catholics any more (Rachel).

Participation and human dignity. William J. Byron (1998) points out that the "principle of human dignity gives the human person a claim on membership in a community, the human family" (p. 2). This claim allows the human person to participate in a community. How we organize institutions, structures, or social networks affects the dignity of the human person and her/his "capacity to grow in community" (usccb.org).

When asked to respond to the open-ended question of how the closing impacted the person(s) and the community, participants, by and large, opened up by stating the anger and resentment they felt toward the diocesan leaders for the manner in which the closing decision was made—without input from those who would be impacted the most. Surprisingly, even the

two clergy members expressed their concerns regarding the process, or the lack of process, that has been in existence for many years.

I think that hopefully we will learn from our mistakes of not to involve those that are tremendous supporters of the urban impoverished Catholic schools; that in fact we give them a seat at the table that they have a voice in the future of their own communities (Farther Antoine, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

There has been very little discussion about how the Church should handle situations of an emotional magnitude as experienced by the people in these two parish church communities. The importance of human dignity in relationship to community, writes Incandela (2000), is that “if we are called to community, then those who are least among us become the best barometer by which to determine how well we fulfill our charge. A chain...is only as strong as its weakest link...That is to say, we are not a true community if we leave people behind” (p. 300-301). The practice of depressing participation, such as what was vocalized by members of these two communities regarding the closing of their respective Catholic schools, is what Bourdieu in his theory of practice refers to as “symbolic power” (1977, p. 159) that is often presented or misrepresented according to the state of affairs at a particular time in a particular situation.

If immediate action is not taken to resolve the insensitive manner in which Church administrators close Catholic schools that are struggling, they are sending the message to members of the school community that the Church lacks compassion by disregarding people of a certain income bracket. As Elizabeth stated, the diocese was “taking a piece of my home” (personal communication, March 6, 2017), and she and the others, not even the pastor, could get the diocesan leaders to hear their case.

A disintegration of parish church community has been witnessed by the majority of the Mexican church participants, what they claim resulted from the “cold” treatment experienced at the hands of the diocesan leaders. The same holds true for the German school. When the pastor

delivered the message that the school would not reopen the upcoming academic year, it led to community unrest.

Communication and the common good. A statement by the U.S. Bishops on the common good calls for larger structures of society to not “overwhelm or interfere” with the smaller structures but effectively advance the common good (usccb.org, para. 48). People have a right to participate in society and matters of social concern “seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable” (para. 3). If the local Church advocates for participation and communication for the common good, her leaders failed to demonstrate this principle of Catholic social teaching to the German and Mexican communities when the closing of their schools was announced: “[Y]ou expect better from our Catholic diocese, you expect better from those in leadership of our Catholic schools. They’re there to serve for the benefit of all the people” (Elizabeth, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

Religious institutions are held to a higher standard than most organizations, simply by their professed representation and relationship with a higher being. Believers expect their religious leaders to adhere to the value of honesty in their communication. Through the years, the Roman Catholic Church has suffered and struggled with the virtue of honesty, truth, and sincerity. Sexual misconduct cases are perhaps the most prevalent examples of neglected truth and cover-up. The lack of transparency, or what one participant referred to as “hidden agendas” pertaining to parish and school communities made up of persons who experienced and continue to experience sorrow, likewise falls in the category of dishonesty. “I think the diocese needs to be honest,” (Jenny, personal communication, January 29, 2017) rings in the heart of the majority of the participants, including the members of the clergy.

The Church must make efforts to present the truth on difficult issues, such as school and parish closings, early on and not evade the issue. Collaborating with the members of the community is part of the process to bring about open dialogue and, perhaps, solutions to the situation.

Collaboration and solidarity. The Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity is best exemplified through respect of the other person, enough to dialogue, listen, and learn from them. That is the challenge and a recommendation resulting from this study.

How we organize or how we collaborate with one another or with different entities contributes to growth, stagnation, or separation. In collaboration, individuals become interdependent on one another, thus strengthening the bonds or ties that keep a group or a structure together. Bourdieu's theory of practice sheds light on how complications for effective collaboration and power relations emerge in various structures (Bourdieu, 1977). His theory argues that boundaries set people apart on the basis of their practices and thus become prominent or unimportant as practices evolve. In a family, all members matter and have key roles in their structure. The dispositions are concerted in what is good for the family and what one can do to uphold and maintain family unity. The brokenness in today's society has been earmarked as a point of concern for the Church in the new millennium (usccb.org) when discussing upholding and maintaining the family unit. This social concern has spilled over to the greater Church when structural ties between Church family members are broken due to tension and conflict between the family and Church structure.

In John Paul II's words, "Solidarity helps us to see the 'other'—whether a person, people, or nation—not just as some kind of instrument...but as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper'" (1987, no. 39). Solidarity goes beyond providing material goods to those in need but takes into

consideration temporal goods as well. Solidarity is formed when it is relational and is always mutually beneficial.

Maybe the bishop himself can come speak before anything is starting up, let people know...let them know what's happening so they can have a heads-up and say, "What can we do to prevent something like this?" Not just come in and say this is what's gonna happen. That's a scary thing, it's almost like taking your home away from you, stripping you, that isn't right. [W]here is the JUSTICE FOR ALL? Have the courtesy to at least meet with the people, the people that are involved, let's bring it down to community and say before it happens let us see what we can do to see if we can make it WORK with us so it can stop so that maybe you can see how concerned we are and what it means to US (Jenny).

Political structures adhere to contracts with little if any room for negotiation, while civil structures, such as family, church and community organizations adhere to a covenant, an agreement of mutuality. However, as Vogt (2007) writes, the contract has taken dominance over covenant, even within a family structure, and does not allow for any human aspect—such as the virtues of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality—to exist in the relationship. Catholic social teaching, according to Vogt (2007), is obstructed by the politicizing of relationships where, in essence, no real relationship exists. Jenny's response indicates that even those members of the community who had a close association with the school and parish were given no notice of the closing until it was too late for them to try and save it.

These eminent points—compassion, participation, communication, and collaboration—surfacing from the data, are recognitions of a cultural problem in the United States. Contrastingly, "Holy Mother Church" is the title associated with the Roman Catholic Church since its inception over two thousand years ago. She is recognized as the bride of Jesus Christ. She was founded as a cultural representation of and by people of different backgrounds and dialects. She was formed as a mantle of embrace for all those seeking love and mercy, regardless of personal, social, or economic status; she embraces them as her own recognizing that we are all

neighbors and, thus, called to be caring for one another. When diocesan leaders avoid or minimize people's suffering, then it becomes a cultural problem within church that contradicts its teachings.

The evangelist Luke, in his parable of the Good Samaritan, tells of a scholar of the law asking Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" only to have Jesus answer that it was the one who acted with mercy (The New American Bible, Luke 10:29-37). This parable depicts a self-awareness on the part of the Samaritan when his disposition (Bourdieu's habitus) changes from an observer and passer-by to a responder in time of need. Thus we see how the fundamental principles or virtues of Catholic social teaching in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory of relations and dispositions revolve around the importance of one individual to another, in community. Even when a structure punishes a person or persons for a wrong, that structure should grant those punished the possibility to make amends.

Storz and Nestor (2005) remind us that while Catholic social teaching "does not address the inequities in our modern educational system explicitly, its fundamental principles of human dignity, social interaction, and the primacy of the poor, are deeply embedded in the discourse on education, particularly urban education" (p. 2). They, in fact, state that Catholic social teaching "calls into question" the governing structures that impact circumstances of a school. Thus, in considering the persons—the community members—of these two school communities and the emotional outpour in response to the closing of their respective schools, there is a contradiction in the lack of compassion and the inequity of a Catholic school system that teaches and represents Catholic social teaching.

The Catholic school system and its administrators compose such a social structure as the one Bourdieu (1977) refers to in his theory of practice; one hindered by dispositions that have

not changed with time. The habitus of the theorist is “understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which by integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions” (p. 83) for those outside of the authoritative or dominant structure. The habitus is the product of the work of impressing and segmenting “those products of collective history, the objective structures to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions” in those receiving the conditioning. In other words, church representatives model for the faithful the practices which the Church adheres to and expects of others. What is to be said of Church representatives who deny the participation of the faithful or comfort to the afflicted? Much sorrow was experienced by the members of these two communities, but no form of alleviation or aid was offered or rendered.

“The tragedy of a school closure for students, parents and faculty is that it is the abrupt ending of a series of relationships and the dismantling of a community that has been built over the course of decades” (McDevitt, et al., 2006, p. 25). “Tragedy,” “abrupt,” “dismantling” are words associated with adverse effects, such as what has occurred time and time again in many inner-city communities throughout the United States. Communities, inner-city as well as urban, have suffered through not only the closure of a Catholic school, but also the “dismantling” of a parish-church community, much of it at the hand of those who have the role of administrators in the Church hierarchy.

When asked what was provided to the Mexican school and parish community members who were experiencing this tragedy, its former pastor stated,

I could speculate that maybe we could've brought in Catholic counseling; I could speculate that maybe we should've offered some form of outside assistance. What I felt was important for me to do at that moment was to help the faithful to understand the passion of our Lord, the suffering of our Lord and how suffering is in fact redemptive (Father Antoine).

Those who had learned about the consortium knew that the Catholic schools who were in that pool were struggling and the consortium was to help them consolidate efforts in order to collectively attain more resources similar to of a school district model. The diocese did show concern for those Catholic schools by establishing the consortium. However, the turn of events during its first years of operation were critical to its survival. Though there is no particular “theory” on Catholic business practice, Garvey (2003) writes that “Catholic teaching avoids specific, concrete solutions to complex social issues” (p. 529).

It cannot be denied that today’s Catholic schools have become a business, but the manner in which they operate should meld compassion with business ethics. The Church’s business leaders, the hierarchy, appear to disregard Catholic social teaching when they ignore the human person and the common good and treat these schools solely as numbers. People and the common good should not be reduced to utility or profit maximization (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research pertaining to Catholic schools in inner-city/urban areas is recommended in the following topics.

- The economics of the times indicate the need for future research in the areas of supplemental monetary resources, such as non-government associations, private partnerships or with Catholic institutions of higher education, neighborhood school advocates, and grant foundations/sources. If these partnerships have already been undertaken, have they found success, and why or why not?

- How can neighborhood parish churches and schools partner with community-specific social capital investors and/or stakeholders to maintain inner-city/urban neighborhood viability?
- How are minority children impacted by the closure of Catholic schools in their areas? And, how is that affecting their continuance in the Catholic faith?

Below are recommendations for future research on Catholic schools in general.

- Investigate the privatization of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Successful models may be developed with the assistance of Catholic college and university business and/or entrepreneurial programs which can help shape their futures.
- Aside from endowments and tuition assistance programs, develop a family budgeting service which would assist families with tuition payment budgeting and resolve a disconnect between the Church and Her people.

Finally, recommendations for Catholic schools undergoing the closure process follow.

- Local Catholic school leaders are encouraged to visit and dialogue—as many times as needed—with the individual community affected by the school closing.
- What services are or can be made available by the local diocese to help families transitioning from one Catholic school to another, or to a public school?

Restorative Justice

At his inaugural Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in March, 2013, Pope Francis made a public pledge to the Church, "We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have fallen away" (using similar words to those of St.

Francis of Assisi). Every person deserves to be treated with respect, he stated, otherwise “hearts are hardened” and can lead to destruction.

As was revealed in the results of this study, the hierarchy of the diocese’s avoidance of ministry to the neighbor in need (the inner-city parish church and school communities) created a ripple effect of dispositions held by contributing participants. Hearts were hardened when the diocesan hierarchy and its representatives chose not to invite the members of these communities to the table, failed to give advance notice of the closure, deny the concerned members of those inner-city Catholic schools communities’ a voice in the decision, and when they removed all compassion from their message and conduct.

Recognizing and acting on the signs of the times has to mean more than closing doors of Catholic elementary schools that were once the voice of evangelization in many neighborhoods and to countless families. Succession planning plays an important role in the continuance of Catholic schools in all areas of the city. The current model of operating and funding Catholic elementary schools, especially those in inner-cities and urban areas of this country where affording a Catholic school tuition has been challenging, has separated the faithful of the Catholic Church community into those who have and those who have not. May the leaders of the Church invite and involve persons from all segments of society who are invested in Catholic education—pre-Kinder and up—to become “co-workers in the vineyard” (usccb.org) and take restorative action.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB



January 22 2018

PI: Mrs. Ana Maria De La Portilla

Protocol title: Exploring the impact closing an inner-city Catholic elementary school has on community

Ana Maria:

Your request for continued review of Expedited protocol 17-01-004 titled "Exploring the impact closing an inner-city Catholic elementary school has on community" was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 01/22/2018.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
Research Officer, Office of
Research Development
University of the Incarnate
Word
(210) 805-3036
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Consent Form—Participant

“Exploring the impact closing an inner-city Catholic elementary school has on community”

University of the Incarnate Word

Introduction

You are invited to participate as a participant/contributor in a study of how a community—its members—were impacted by the closing of the parish Catholic school. This study is being conducted by Ana Maria De La Portilla, a Ph.D. candidate in the Dreeben School of Education at the University of the Incarnate Word.

Background

The purpose of this study is three-fold: (a) to examine the community members' role(s), response to, and experience of the closing of the parochial elementary school, (b) to explore the implications on community-Church relationship, and (c) to examine the values and practice of Catholic social teaching in relationship to the community process of communication. The focus of this study is not to investigate the reasons for the closure, as some other studies have done, rather, it is to add to the limited number of qualitative studies on the perspective of the people—the community—impacted by Catholic parochial elementary school closures in America's inner-city neighborhoods. This research seeks to contribute to the gap in the literature on Catholic school closings by presenting the voice of the persons who were affected in some manner by the closing.

Procedures

If you decide to take part in this research as a participant/contributor, you will be interviewed by the researcher. The researcher will pose primarily open-ended interview questions, but broad questions may be interjected in order to allow you, the participant, to share personal stories and experiences of the closing of the Catholic elementary school and the impact you have seen and/or felt in the community.

You will have the opportunity to speak to the researcher about your experience and present your perspective on the closing of the parish school. As well, you will be asked to describe, from your perspective, the impact you feel/see it has on community.

This study proposes to explore “what is happening to people” of a community, to their community, and to the overall community after an inner-city parochial school is closed.

If you agree to participate in an interview, the following three questions will be explored:

- 1) What is the impression of persons who experience a school closure?
- 2) How did the community respond to the news of the school closing?
- 3) What do persons recall most about the school closure?

Subsequent questions could include any or all of the following: How are community members involved in the decisions to close a parochial elementary school? What sense of community did the community members—students, parents, alumni, teachers/staff, stakeholders—have prior to

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and after the closure? What changes have been occurring in the community since the closing? What is learned from this experience?

It is possible that you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

In order to capture as much in-depth information as possible from the participant/contributor and to preserve the information for analysis, an audio recording of the interview with simultaneous note-taking by the primary investigator will take place.

The time frame for each interview will be determined by the participant/contributor and the primary researcher. However, only at the participant's request will the session be timed. At the end of each interview session, the participant/contributor will be reminded of the possibility for a follow-up interview, either by phone or email to clarify statements or if additional questions need to be made. The participant/contributor, thus, will provide contact information to the investigator for follow-up communication purposes (see signature page).

A second signature and follow-up date on the initial consent form will be signed by both the participant/contributor and the investigator acknowledging the agreement for multiple interviews/conversation. The participant/contributor's information will be anonymous and remain confidential by encrypting all data collected.

The proposed location for the conversation/interview between participant/contributor and the primary researcher is on parish/church property, a pre-designated room reserved by the researcher or an agreed-to location on the parish/church premises by both participant/contributor and researcher.

Those having access to the collected data will be the primary researcher, her advisor and two other committee chairpersons from the University.

Risks and benefits

As a participant, you may experience some discomfort in reliving what occurred, but be assured that ethical measures have been taken to protect your privacy, assure your anonymity, and mediate any risk or potential for risk that may arise.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be identified in publications resulting from this research. A pseudonym will be used for any identifiable information. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to stop at any time you wish or deem necessary. Any personal items presented as part of this study by the participant will be scanned and identified by the participant's pseudonym and immediately returned to the participant. Any and all identification of the archives/material/documents that may break confidentiality will be reviewed together by participant and research, and marked for anonymity or non-disclosure.

Contact information

For questions about this research study and your participation, contact Ana Maria De La Portilla at delaport@student.uiwtx.edu or 210-722-1060. The IRB (Institutional Review Board) of the

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University of the Incarnate Word reviews research on human subjects and will answer any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. Their contact number is 210-805-3036.

Statement of consent

You signature indicates 1) your consent to take part in this research study, 2) that you have read and understand the information given above, and 3) that the above information was explained to you.

____ I want my name as a study participant/contributor to remain confidential (thus, use of a pseudonym).

____ I give permission for my voice to be audio recorded and archived in a data set and used for this research study only.

____ I give permission for my voice to be audio recorded and archived in a data set and used for this research study and for further analysis. (You may be called to provide further information or to provide clarification regarding the interview subject matter. In order to ensure you and your story is represented well, the contact information requested of you is highly important to the research.)

____ I give permission for my documents/material/archives to be photographed or video recorded and used only after review with the researcher to ensure anonymity.

Participant name _____

Participant contact information: _____

Participant signature _____ Date _____

Participant signature _____ Date _____

Participant signature _____ Date _____

Principal investigator signature _____ Date _____

Principal investigator signature _____ Date _____

Principal investigator signature _____ Date _____

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