Bucknell University

Bucknell Digital Commons

Faculty Journal Articles

Faculty Scholarship

3-2016

Re-Building Coal Country: A Church/University Partnership

Carl Milofsky
Bucknell University, milofsky@bucknell.edu

Brandn Green

Recommended Citation

Re-Building Coal Country:
A Church/University Partnership

Carl Milofsky [1],* and Brandn Green [2]

[1] Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837, USA
[2] Independent Scholar, Washington DC 20011, USA; brandng@gmail.com
*   Correspondence: milofsky@bucknell.edu

Abstract: This paper describes a developing partnership between a church-based service learning center and a university initiative to build a field station in a low-income community in the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania. It is a case study of how secular and religious institutions have been collaborating to achieve the shared goal of improving social conditions in specific communities. The theoretical focus of the paper is on how a change from a "glass is half empty" to a "glass is half full" perception of the community opens new possibilities for change. This paper concentrates on the story of one partnership as a case study demonstrating current trends in service learning both within universities and within the Catholic Church in America. Analysis centers on the basic question of why the project had symbolic power for both partners and on the institutional processes within both organizations that helped the partnership grow. We use the framework of Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD), also known as the "strengths perspective", to conceptualize the contrast.

Keywords: community-based research; service-learning; community development; interinstitutional relations; organizational case studies

---

1. Introduction/Background

The Mother Maria Kaupas Center for Service Learning is a parish ministry of the Divine Redeemer Catholic Church in Mount Carmel, PA. It is also a teaching, service, and research center anchored at Bucknell University 35 miles from Mount Carmel. In a period of eighteen months the collaboration expanded from a phase of informal conversations and informal research by the different parties to a formalized partnership with significant resource support and a number of dynamic projects sponsored and supported by the different parties. There is value in simply documenting the development of this church/university/community partnership.

But the deeper question is why the project worked. All of the parties have expressed frank surprise at the speed and ease with which the enterprise developed. There was a perception that the community was too poor, too old, and too passive to support the project well. The university, with its secular orientation, was not expected to put in the energy, expertise, and resources to give the project vitality and permanence. The local Catholic Church was emerging from a period of crisis related to population decline, the child abuse scandal involving priests, and a perception by local residents that the Diocese office, located in the state capital 75 miles away, was not interested in supporting small, poor, rural communities in the anthracite coal region.

The argument of this paper is that negative community self-image blocks local improvement and development projects, where a more positive community-self image would allow projects to be successful and make dramatic community change possible. We have experience with other towns in central Pennsylvania where very negative community self-images threatened real economic development opportunities. Necessary community infra-structure changes would not be made as a

consequence. Derogatory comments by residents and people in surrounding towns might encourage agents of economic change to by-pass the town rather than settle, invest there, and revitalize the place. They might pass over the town, even though community development projects could be effective. We demonstrated this in another community/university partnership targeted at a highly stigmatized neighborhood that dramatically changed the area over a five-year period [1]. Similarly, we worked in Derry/Londonderry where over a ten-year period a community initiative dramatically changed the city from one with disastrous levels of conflict to a place where peace and economic growth remade the central city [2].

The concept of community self-image is part of a general discussion about the social construction of community and the notion that community is a symbolic construct shared in slightly different ways by the residents of a locale [3,4] Communities do not automatically exist in a local area. Social and economic history foster relationships and shape local culture [5]. These give some residents a strong sense of shared identity, just as it may exclude others who do not share this history and the relationships it produces [6,7]. Self-interested efforts by local institutions like churches, YMCAs, school districts, and real estate agents encourage residents to see themselves as part of a local community, to develop self-images as community members, and to act to build and support the community [8–10]. On a larger scale, efforts to develop community self-image can lead to a sense of regional identity for a place like "Chicagoland" [11], or can be linked to the attraction of professional sports teams to urban areas [12] and a subsequent improvement in community self-image.

There is an interaction between community self-image and personal well-being [13]. Part of this has to do with feelings of optimism about the place [14]. Alternatively, residents may come to feel that their neighborhood is a dangerous place. Fear of crime, which may be exaggerated, is documented to have negative effects on the health of senior citizens [15,16]. Contrariwise, residents who have positive feelings about their community are more likely to participate in positive community action [17].

This paper proposes that symbols can motivate a shift from negative self-images of places to positive self-images where effective community action can be taken. This is an argument made by Kretzman and McKnight [18,19] and activated by their community organizing methodology, Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD). Kretzman and McKnight argue that a simple change in framework, from a deficit perspective to one that emphasizes the abundance of local assets, can make dynamic local change projects possible. Their perspective is best known in urban planning circles, but it is congruent with a growing and widely respected perspective in social work, called the strengths approach, used both in individual psychotherapy and community interventions. In social work, the strengths perspective is contrasted with one that emphasizes pathology as the starting point for therapy and treatment [20–23].

Implicit in their approach, is the observation that progressive, effective changes could have been possible in communities if they had not held themselves back because of their deficit frame of reference. We argue that the church/university/community partnership described in the present case is an illustration of the effect a shift in frame from deficit to assets has for communities. Participants were surprised at the success of the project because they shared deficit perspectives. However, nothing magical happened in the project. The resources to build an effective project and the possibility of success were always there. Once the guiding perspective changed to one that focused on identifying and using assets that were in place, the project quickly grew through these strengths.

2. Data

As active members in the creation of the Mother Maria Kaupas Center collaboration with Bucknell University, we do not present our case study free from our own personal biases. To mitigate misrepresentation, we completed interviews with key actors in all of the coordinating institutions. In total, eight interviews were completed, field notes were taken, and they were used to support the grounded theory approach presented here. Participatory analysis developed the interpretation we

offer about creating an inter-institutional collaboration between a secular university and a Catholic Church to address gaps in social welfare in a post-industrial mining community in Pennsylvania.

3. Mount Carmel in the Context of Post-Industrialism

Mount Carmel is a town of about 7000 people situated in a narrow valley that sits astride the anthracite coal deposits in Pennsylvania. The coal industry mostly closed down in the 1960s, leading to a 50-year period continuing to the present in which the isolated towns that drew their wealth and livelihood from the industry for nearly a century lost their economic base [24,25]. The population aged and young people moved away. Today, nearly 70% of the schoolchildren are eligible for free and reduced cost school lunches, which is an indicator of the extent of poverty in the town. Census data tell us that out of five hundred school districts in Pennsylvania, Mount Carmel is the twenty-second poorest [26].

The Catholic Church has been a core institution in the coal region since the mid-1800s. The discovery and exploitation of anthracite coal in the small towns of Pennsylvania was a central force that drove the Industrial Revolution in America. Hot-burning, clean anthracite coal, coupled with the availability of iron ore in the local hills, led to the invention of steelmaking in towns like Bethlehem While Bethlehem produced rails, the train engines and cars were built in coal region towns like Scranton. During the last half of the 19th century, large industrial cities—Pittsburgh, for example—grew from small towns to industrial centers. But industrial production continued to depend on the coal that was being mined in the small number of counties that made up the anthracite coal region, because this was the only place anthracite coal existed [24].

Labor demands in the coal region meshed with the immigration waves of the last half of the 19th century and the social worlds of coal towns grew up around complex mixes of ethnic groups. Many of these groups were Catholic and they were forced to develop defensive, self-sustaining institutions built around their language groups and their distinctive styles of faith [5]. Economic oppression was common and led to the invention and development of the labor movement in these small mountain towns [27]. Dominant economic groups usually were Protestant. Catholic ethnic, religious, educational, and mutual aid groups grew up with a fierce sense of pride and autonomy. Social reform and resistance were central to the philosophical basis and political orientation of these groups (manifested in movements local to Mount Carmel, like the Molly Maguires [28]).

The church retained its dynamic core position and leadership role well after the coal industry began its decline in the 1950s. The church continued as a venue for enacting community. It did this partly by preserving language, rituals, and specific traditions that community members would enact each year. From this, they not only socialized each other and their children but also built strong social capital and created a sense that their ethnicity had a human reality that was fundamental to their health and vitality [29].

However, in the 1990s these systems all collapsed. Economic and population decline meant that more and more often churches had many empty pews. With increasingly impoverished communities, parishes could not generate enough income to pay the costs of having priests or keeping their buildings open and in good repair. In 2002, the Diocese in Harrisburg combined parishes, and in the case of Mount Carmel, twelve churches were consolidated into two, one of them being Divine Redeemer. The action was economically necessary and debated for nearly a decade. Members of the Holy Cross congregation argued particularly hard, claiming that the home congregation of Mother Maria Kaupas, a person in the process of beatification, should not be closed, but to no avail.

In some towns, the first step towards unification was that different services were held in one building for each of the constituent congregations. To combat this duplication, the priest who took over Divine Redeemer had the feeling that his primary responsibility was to help congregation members feel that they were part of a single congregation. To achieve this unification he removed all of the historical records and icons of the former local churches. This created a lot of anger and the majority of

members stopped going to church. All of this created a local feeling that the Diocese in Harrisburg was uninterested in the coal region and unwilling to invest in its congregations.

4. The Recent History of Divine Redeemer Church

This history is important to know, partly to understand why the Sisters of St. Casimir would recognize a tie to Mount Carmel and have a desire to honor their foundress, Mother Maria Kaupas. It also is important for seeing that the Catholic Church was a core institution of the community in a town like Mount Carmel. It is not quite right to say that the church "served" the community. More accurately it *was* the community. In important ways, the church buildings, its associations, and its processes of ritual and worship were the means by which local residents developed a sense of place [25], a strong sense of culture and meaning, and an action framework in which to identify and act upon community issues and concerns.

For Divine Redeemer Church the Mother Maria Kaupas Center project had its beginning when, in 2013, the newly assigned priest of the church, Father Marty sought ways to follow the Pope's directive that each Parish should seek ways to celebrate the work of "people religious" from the local area. Father Marty, new to the parish, began research on local history and discovered that a large and successful order of nuns had their beginning in Mount Carmel when Mother Maria Kaupas and two other nuns began teaching in Holy Cross School in 1908. The success of Mother Maria's project reached the archbishop in Chicago who worked to have Mother Maria Kaupas and her community transferred to that city so that she and her partners could form a foundation to provide educational opportunities and pastoral care to the large Lithuanian community there. Over the following 40 years, the Sisters of St. Casimir grew significantly and started hospitals and schools. Upon her death the archbishop of Chicago began proceedings to look at the exemplary life of Mother Maria Kaupas. This ultimately led her to be nominated for beatification as an American Saint [30].

In the fall of 2014, discovering the historic role of Mother Maria Kaupas in Mt. Carmel Father Marty asked permission of Bishop Ronald Gainer, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg, to explore the creation of a service-learning center in the former St. Peter's Convent that once housed the Felician Sisters. At the same time, he asked Bishop Gainer's permission to contact the Sisters of Saint Casimir, which Mother Maria Kaupas had founded, to see if they would be interested in having an association with the new center. They were pleased to support the creation of the new center in Mount Carmel, in part because it would honor their foundress and her community. This support was also financial, as the Sisters provided the capital necessary for renovating the convent to serve the daily operations of the center.

In addition to his identification of a key symbol and community asset in Mother Maria Kaupas, Father Marty had social networks in, and strong and weak ties to, the Bucknell academic community, upon which he could draw as he sought to find partners for the community-based work of the parish. At Bucknell, he had been part of a dynamic partnership between the Protestant Chaplain, the Jewish Chaplain, and himself. Together, they had energized and reconceptualized the religious presence at this strongly secular private university. Their work around the September 11, 2001 tragedy had become an important part of campus life. Subsequent to his time at Bucknell, Father Marty was director of service learning programs at all Catholic Colleges in the United States, being based in Cincinnati.

When Father Marty arrived in Mount Carmel in July 2013, he inherited a situation where there was distrust of the church, low church attendance, and an aging town that no longer seemed economically viable. Father Marty had the energy, vision, and many of the skill sets necessary to engage with, and begin to remedy these problems. He followed a strategy whereby building the community that surrounds a church can be an effective vehicle for building the internal organization of a congregation [9,31].

Much of what he had to confront was anger that came from specific events and also a civic belief that the town lacked the kind of effective leadership that could reverse the negative economic trend. Upon arrival, Fr. Marty began an assets-based approach, following the model of Asset-Based

Community Development (ABCD) [18,19] for overcoming anger from congregants by generating a more positive town orientation. His hope was that, by first changing perceptions and attitudes through the Mother *Maria Kaupas* project, he could lay a foundation for the community to work together to creatively remake the economic foundation of the town.

In addition to the economic hardships and historical trends away from congregational participation, the international crisis of Catholic priests sexually abusing children had a strong impact on dioceses within the United States, and even the community of Mount Carmel. Local residents have told Father Marty that abuse occurred with several priests. There were two highly public incidents. One priest was relieved of his duties for child sexual abuse. In another case, a local priest had invited a friend to live in his house and work in the local church. When he discovered that this individual was sexually abusing children he removed all of the former friend's possessions out of his house and threw them in the front yard. The fact that this abuse was coincident with the merger of local parishes heightened the distrust and anger felt towards the church by Mount Carmel residents.

Important as these events were personally for those affected, and in terms of the overall distrust of the church by town residents, child sexual abuse by priests was also important in terms of the way it shaped Father Marty's early religious leadership experiences. He arrived at Bucknell as a new priest at the height of the child abuse crisis and he felt during his time at the University that there was always distrust, since his role involved working with young people. Part of his pride about the time he spent at Bucknell was in the way his clergy colleagues and he were able to make these concerns irrelevant, demonstrating as they did meaningful, strong ties with students and playing such a positive, important role in campus life.

For Father Marty, the child abuse scandal was made more difficult because it was conflated with what he perceived as distrust and perhaps prejudice against Catholics. He said, for example, that he was not allowed to wear a collar on campus during his time at *Bucknell.* There was long-standing frustration that the Protestant and Jewish chaplains were paid as university staff but the Diocese had to pay the Catholic chaplain. This meant that he was not eligible for some benefits the other chaplains received as university employees. It also set him up for criticism by some administrators who said he worked for an outside organization and was not really part of the University program.

It is perhaps always puzzling for an outsider to hear about accounts of prejudice (a Protestant person listening to a Jewish friend talk about perceived anti-Semitic slights in campus programming is similarly hard to interpret). However, in Lewisburg (where Bucknell is located), and in Central Pennsylvania generally, anti-Catholic prejudice is historically real (for a review of anti-Catholic sentiment in Protestant communities see [32]). The largest church congregation in Lewisburg is the Catholic one, but the church building was only built in the 1950s, while most of the other local congregation buildings date to the late 19th century. There is a sign downtown marking the spot where the first Catholic meeting was held in town in the late 1700s. The Catholic building took 200 years to build because none of the local landowners, all Protestants, would sell land to the Catholics for a church.

Father Marty's formative years as a priest were colored by the two negative experiences of distrust because of child abuse and resistance from Protestants. One might take this as an idiosyncratic personal story, except that, when we were interviewing the Sisters of St. Casimir in Chicago, their leader told of her own experience of prejudice against Catholics when, in the 1990s, she was involved in her PsyD training to become a clinical psychologist at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She encountered situations where people made prejudiced comments about the Catholic religion even though she was right there in the room. Clearly, it hurt and offended her on one hand, but on the other hand it pushed her to develop a resolve to confront the situation openly in seminar settings. This was a school that prided itself in its openness to diversity, yet there was clearly a bias toward Catholicism (for further discussion of prejudice against Catholics in professional circles see the discussions of priest and former University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Greeley [33,34]).

There is a toughness of personality that she manifests that we also see in Father Marty. He is definite and positive about the strong leadership and socializing role he can play with parishioners, including children. He has also said with pride that the Diocese has around 10 young priests. It has been successful in attracting young people to the vocation and he says it has been recognized by residents in town that the Diocese supports the region because it has been sending dynamic young priests to serve the area. For years, people thought the Diocese just sent old retreads to serve as priests in the area, but that perception is changing now.

5. The Recent History of Bucknell University

The partnership developed in a different way on the Bucknell University side. The Coal Region Field Station was an important development, formalizing an initiative by faculty that has slowly been developing over a decade or more. What is important is that the University for the first time has recognized and given formal support to a community research and action center. This has been possible primarily because the need and symbolic importance of the coal region has made this a project that people could visualize and its worth as a social action project was clear. Where our work in the past had struggled because it lacked a metaphor or a symbolic anchor, the Mount Carmel project had immediate broad appeal that made support institutionally possible.

Bucknell is a private liberal arts university located in rural Central Pennsylvania. It tends to be somewhat inwardly focused as an institution. Historically, it had a limited mission basis for serving or relating to the surrounding community. When a new strategic plan was created shortly after the year 2000, "building bridges" to the community was added as a strategic goal, but the University has struggled to find programmatic ways to achieve this goal. At the same time, it has a number of faculty whose research and teaching are oriented to being involved in the local community. Some of this orientation has to do with fields like sociology, psychology, and environmental studies, where internships in the community and student research projects that identify and explore community problems are an important part of the curriculum. These faculty members have also been committed to using the resources of their university to help and serve people in the communities that populate the region.

For more than thirty years, a small group of senior faculty had been working with community professionals using research skills, university resources, and the labor of student interns to support a variety of community projects. While many of these efforts were private projects of the faculty involved, these individuals also were mindful that being involved in one project often created opportunities to come back to do a second project with the same partners, or to start projects with other community actors who were tangentially involved previously [35]. We became aware that "chaining" [10] allowed one project to lead to another. As we moved from one project to the next, our opportunities to work and be involved became richer, more complex, and capable of involving a larger number of university people.

Projects tend to be concentrated in specific geographical areas and, as time passed, faculty began to use the terminology of "field stations" to describe concentrations of work in different places. One of those places was the coal towns of Shamokin, Mount Carmel, and Mahanoy City, which, together, have made up our Coal Region Field Station. We work in a rural region of small towns that are separated by ten to fifteen miles of farmland, geographic features like rivers and mountain ranges, and the political boundaries of county lines. While the concept of field stations had begun to coalesce in our thinking, and our teaching and research projects corresponded to the distinctive problems of different communities and local areas, the concept remained informal at Bucknell.

Our faculty group began to gain institutional traction about three years before Father Marty began his efforts to develop the Mother Maria Kaupas Center. As part of *Bucknell's* Center for *Sustainability and the Environment*, a research group was formed to focus on humanities and the social sciences. The humanities group was particularly effective, focusing on the history of the Susquehanna River basin and on indigenous stories related to the region and its towns. Membership in the group gave

the two social scientists a reason to join together. They recognized that they had used similar research strategies over their decades of work at Bucknell but had never worked together. Comparing notes and developing mutually supportive teaching and research projects, it became clear that each had long-standing involvements and commitments to specific towns. Further, the two were able to use contacts developed over years to support each other when they wanted to develop new projects [36].

The idea that we had enduring commitments to specific places, that we could help new participants avoid the difficulty of having to develop rapport and network contacts with local residents, and that projects could chain together, gave form to the idea that we had developed field stations. We knew about the field station concept from other disciplines like anthropology, where professors and students would build a long-term involvement in a place. New and different projects could develop in that place. The history of involvement and the commitment to integrating newcomers, whose work focus might be imperfectly developed upon their arrival, gave the field stations institutional endurance.

Two years into the humanities/social sciences partnership at the Center for Sustainability and the Environment, we were able to hire an advanced graduate student, Brandn Green, as a part-time employee. With a background in rural sociology, he quickly understood the logic of the field station idea and he felt comfortable traveling around the region meeting local people, helping to set up new projects, and providing an operational center students could use as a staging platform. The pace at which one project chained into another project picked up. Green also had the inclination, the time, and the institutional resources to advertise our work to other Bucknell faculty, and he began building a larger group of interested and involved people.

In the fall of 2014, Green and Father Marty began talking about our interest in creating formal field stations in different communities around the region. It is lost in the mists of history which of the two ideas—the Mother Maria Kaupas Service Learning Center sponsored by Divine Redeemer Catholic Church and the Coal Region Field Station sponsored by what is now was called the Place Studies Program at the Center for Sustainability and the Environment—came first. Both groups had a lot of internal organizing work to do at the beginning and the development of the organizational machinery was separate.

6. The Structure of the Partnership

What we have described so far is a partnership project that grew out of a happy accident, that initiatives within two institutions dovetailed with each other so that the whole initiative could move forward quickly and smoothly. The result is an innovation that is dramatic for both institutions. From the church side, the willingness of a secular liberal arts institution to partner with a religious organization in a respectful and energetic way represents an opportunity that other dioceses are likely to want to reproduce. It comes in the wake of decades of distrust expressed by secular social scientists, that goals, values, and projects originating within church contexts should be taken seriously as valid social change efforts. On the university side, the understanding and sophistication of the church partners allows community research, community-based learning, and social service opportunities to be shared among a wider group of faculty and staff than was possible in the past.

While these developments make for a nice story, they do not point out a puzzle or a problem that could motivate an academic paper. The puzzle comes because partners on the Catholic Church side of the equation were surprised that members of a secular liberal arts university would want to partner with a Catholic Church project. We, on the Bucknell side, did not expect to find a low-income community whose members would embrace and support university people working in their midst. Making sense of these reciprocal feelings of disbelief is the focus of the next section of this paper.

Understanding surprise on the part of one partner might not seem like the kind of robust issue or problem that could drive a sociological analysis. In this case, it helps us to recognize and interpret some complex changes, both in the Catholic Church and in the community experience of Catholics who live in isolated, low-income coal region towns. We might understand the word "surprise" just to mean pleasure that this venture worked out so well. It is better to understand the term as, "Wow,

we had this wild idea that we never thought would work out and all of our speculative ideas turned out to be right! This is working better than we even imagined it could."

When Father Marty did a survey of the congregation shortly after he arrived, he learned about anger that the archives and icons of the historic local churches had been given away. He also learned about discouragement with the economic fortunes in the town. Bringing in grant money to support the Mother Maria Kaupas Center, using the funds to renovate buildings, and then being able to bring Bucknell and its resources in to help with town projects seems to have made town residents feel that the church was bringing positive change. Part of the reason town residents support the Mother Maria Kaupas Center, and welcome Bucknell students and staff (they might be rejecting since the town can be seen as insular), is that they seem to feel that the Diocese in Harrisburg is investing in the town and that the church is back.

While the Sisters of St Casimir have played a crucial role in bringing the Mother Maria Kaupas Center into existence, equally important are the personal historic ties Father Marty has to Bucknell University. Perhaps the most important thing, is that he understands how the university works and how community-based learning and service learning operates. Early in the process of his creation of the service learning center, several people from Bucknell approached him and asked for his support in creating a university-based "field station". It was striking to the university people that, from the beginning, Father Marty understood exactly what they were talking about. Since many colleagues at the university could not really understand what they were trying to do, it was a surprise to encounter Father Marty with his sophisticated understanding of how such a project might work.

Because of his long and successful tenure at Bucknell, Father Marty also had many ties to people at the university. He could imagine how the university might act to support his project and when he had the opportunity to meet with university people he could explain fully the relationship between his church and its service learning center and the university.

Development and progress at the Mother Maria Kaupas Center happened very quickly, and as the whole project was constituted and new, dynamic projects were launched over a period of eighteen months. It seems fast and unusually successful. However, from an ABCD framework, all that had to change was the perspective. The talents and raw materials had always been there. What had to change was that participants had to see the resources and use them. That is what happened when the Mother Maria Kaupas Center came into existence.

The establishment of the Mother Maria Kaupas Center was under serious consideration in November 2014. The Divine Redeemer Parish members had to agree to make this a formal ministry of the congregation and the Diocese of Harrisburg had to approve the project. Father Marty quickly moved to create a board, inviting individuals from the community, from among his Bucknell alumni friends, from the regional Catholic community, and from Bucknell staff members. Early on, there were efforts to produce documents like a policy manual, a business plan, and understandings about insurance liability, which were difficult to produce since the center and its programs were mostly theoretical at that stage. However, the project came together and gained enough official structure so that the Mother Maria Kaupas Center was formally dedicated in April 2015. A group of the Sisters of St. Casimir came out from Chicago to join sisters from one of their original sponsoring organizations at Marywood University.

Once the center was formally created, a next step was to create an explicit relationship with Bucknell University. In June 2015, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Bucknell and the Diocese of Harrisburg and Bucknell agreed to make a $6000 payment to compensate for space used and for staff support. In a six-month period, the center had progressed from an idea to a formal organization with partnership programs

On the Bucknell side, two related centers had developed and efforts were made to widen the faculty governance group. The group had secured some funding that allowed us to give summer grants (for summer 2015) to two junior faculty members and three students to do research centered on

the coal region. There also was one class and an independent student initiative that spent the spring term working in the coal region, producing videotapes on local themes.

Despite some administrative turmoil internal to the University, student and faculty interest and involvement in the region still evolved. Research projects developed and grew and classes continued to be focused on the coal region towns of Mount Carmel and Shamokin. In spring 2016, there were four classes working on different projects in the coal region and Bucknell students and staff were involved in planning and development of a Kaupas Camp for summer, 2016. Field Station leaders also sought permanent university funding for operational expenses of the program along with a more programmatic university financial contribution to the administrative costs of the Center.

7. The Importance of Mother Kaupas as a Symbol

Mother Kaupas was born in Lithuania, lived in a country that did not allow education for Catholics or for women, and had the opportunity to leave this situation when her brother, a priest in Scranton, PA invited her to serve as his housekeeper. She expressed her sense of calling to serve religiously. Her brother helped her return to Europe to complete her education. He then was able to link her with the sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Scranton, PA (who were Irish) and who prepared her to found a religious order of women serving immigrant Lithuanians, and to a priest in Mount Carmel who helped her establish a teaching religious order whose first school, Holy Cross, was in Mount Carmel. Mother Kaupas then was asked to establish the center of her religious community in Chicago so she could serve its much larger Lithuanian community. This led to the development of the mission of the Sisters of St. Casimir and, its network of almost 500 sisters, to a number of Catholic elementary and high schools and a number of hospitals [30,37].

Discovering Mother *Kaupas* certainly made a successful venture out of Father Marty's dutiful exploration of local people who were not formally appointed as church officials (as are priests), but who created or became part of philosophical and service initiatives (as is the case with an order of nuns). His discovery was not exactly a happy accident, however. It brought to the surface a simmering anger among members of the local Catholic population. The discovery gave him, as a new priest, a means to address this anger in a way that could help to heal wounds that had developed over the previous 25 years.

The Mother Maria Kaupas Center project became an action strategy by which the Diocese could serve the needs of the people in the coal region. While the reasons priests are given parish assignments are always somewhat obscure, one reason Father Marty may have been placed in Mount Carmel was to use his considerable entrepreneurial gifts, seeking a way for the Catholic Church to address and perhaps help reverse poverty in this isolated and discouraged town. Following the philosophy of Catholic social teachings, Father Marty wanted to use the church to build the community. In his philosophy, addressing poverty in ways that might have secular connections is a religious act that builds both the church and the town.

8. Discussion

As we said at the beginning of the paper, there is surprise at the rapid development and seeming success of the Mother Maria Kaupas Center. The surprise comes partly because the vision of using a church/university partnership to create development opportunities in the struggling low-income community of Mount Carmel seems to be working. Most apparent to outsiders (like to board members of the center who are not on the local scene), is that both academic projects and local development efforts are being created and are supported by residents and local institutions like the school system.

8.1. Change in Perspective

The more important reason for success has to do with the way historical dysfunctions have been resolved. Local culture and identity are very important features of coal region towns, and the Catholic Church is embedded in the grammatical logic of coal culture [5,24]. Residents may have felt betrayed

by the Diocese as it closed and merged churches, and families may have left the church in anger and pain in the wake of child abuse scandals. However, it seems, in important respects, that with the Mother Maria Kaupas Center for Service Learning, the Church has returned to lead the community.

This is not to say that the participants were blind or unsophisticated at evaluating what was in front of them. There were real historical events related to prejudice and oppression. There were abuses and conflicts. There was a real collapse of the coal economy and an out-migration of talented young people from poor communities. There also was no easy or automatic way to know that the resources or movements of social support that have come into play at the center were there, lying fallow. It is valuable to understand, however, that sometimes the simple change in perspective represented by the ABCD approach, representing as it did the article of faith that Father Marty brought to his work in Mount Carmel and the possibility of this program becoming a reality, can make opportunities that were invisible, apparent, and dynamic.

While these are some contemporary events, it should also be appreciated how important historically the Catholic Church was as it grew in the 19th and early 20th centuries and served as a national, wealthy, anchor institution. It embodied a contrasting view to the perspective of struggle found in the labor movement [27] and the struggle against dominating Protestant institutions (like public schools [38] or institutions of higher education, like Bucknell University). It brought a perspective that was nurturing, that used its human resources so that educated and established immigrants would help newcomers, and where religious people from different ethnic groups supported and assisted each other. The church also brought an internal, formal organizational structure that conferred a style of hierarchy and the authority of office, while also being sponsoring and personally supportive.

The Mother Maria Kaupas Center project provides a vision of what the town might be and what it might achieve when the town has otherwise been discouraged and in decline. It is striking how much authority the Father has with town residents and how willing residents and leaders are to support him and to accept his suggestions. The partnership with Bucknell is important because some real resources, in the form of some material goods, in the form of professional leadership, and in the form of student energy and enthusiasm, have been brought to the town. Father Marty, for his own part, enjoys being welcomed back to an institution where he "grew up" and where he often felt rejected.

8.2. Symbolism of Place

Two symbols have been central to the success of the collaboration. They are of the same concept, *Mount Carmel* as a place. For the church, Mount Carmel is a symbol that elicits nostalgia. By identifying a central figure in Mount Carmel, Father Marty has connected revitalization of the Divine Redeemer Parish to a past that is uncritically accepted by residents as positive. Their town was created through the immigration of individuals like Mother *Kaupas.* For many, their family histories parallel that of the Sisters.

Three or four generations ago, many of the family members of those who attend Divine Redeemer Church arrived in the coal region to take advantage of the economic boom at the advent of the industrial revolution. This was a complicated and difficult lifestyle, but one that produced economic growth for the succeeding generations that benefited from the social infrastructure and wealth. The children of the second generation grew up in both the tail end of the economic growth generated through natural resource extraction in the region and the collapse of an economic system unable to compete in a globalized market. Father Marty has found a symbol that connects the church directly to this story of both growth and decline, and more importantly, to the period of growth. The attachment to the coal region identified by Marsh [25], is now being utilized by Fr. Marty to create hope for the future through reinvestment by the church and by those with ties to the coal region.

Bucknell is, like many universities, actively establishing programs and academic structures to engage undergraduate students in meaningful community-based learning opportunities [10]. The service learning movement during the 1990s expanded the self-conception of the university beyond

the goal of simply providing services for students to include an ideal of being active members of the communities within which they were located. This rise of localism by universities parallels the way alternative, viable, economic drivers have abandoned small and medium sized regional towns and cities [39]. Forces of globalization have been negative for the residents of Mount Carmel. Meanwhile, Bucknell's goal to educate students to work more effectively with people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds is driven by the need to prepare young people to succeed in a globalized environment. One might be concerned that a dynamic like this one has produced university-dependent communities across the country. At the same time, and in a positive way, universities have used their surplus labor toward the end of improving community life.

One can puzzle about why a university would want to do this. As an organization and as a collection of individuals, before beginning its program, there was little personal or emotional attachment to the coal region within prospective participants in the Coal Region Field Station. This lack of attachment requires the identification of separate and complementary value structures to which Bucknell students and faculty could connect. Mount Carmel, rather than being a place the university had a mission-based reason to serve and reinvigorate, is seen as a place in need that exemplifies the national crisis described by Robert Putnam [40] in his recent book, *Our Kids*, and by our colleague and Coal Region Field Station participant, Jennifer Silva [41] in her book, *Coming Up Short*. American society fails to provide viable economic, institutional, and existential resources to residents or working-class towns and neighborhoods across the country.

In the views of Putnam and Silva, this is a national crisis of the first order. Putnam also believes that the only way communities like Mount Carmel can be saved is if middle-class people and large wealthy institutions like the Catholic Church and Bucknell University contribute resources, expertise, and institutional assets to the project of making life more economically viable and personally meaningful for people in these working-class areas.[1]

So far, this effort has been working because there is great symbolic power for both Bucknell people and for leaders of the Catholic Diocese where the task of revitalizing the Mount Carmel community is concerned. This symbolism has drawn members of the two institutions together in what many consider an unlikely partnership. However, neither the University nor the Church can enter the community as saviors, even if this image is part of the symbolism that draws activists into the work. The point of this paper is that the community has valuable, indigenous assets that can be turned to the task of building community resilience. The church and the university, meanwhile, cannot help if they merely bestow their excess wealth on the town. Their presence only has value if they serve as catalysts, allowing residents to achieve successes that already exist in the town as potentialities.

9. Conclusions

While we can understand the surprise felt by parties to the Mother Kaupas Center, this does not change the fact that we are writing about a project that is in its infancy. It faces challenges that beset any new organization. It must become legally and institutionally established. It must develop a resource base that supports its current program and that can be sustainable over time. It must come up with projects that express felt needs in the community and it must assemble partners and resources that allow those projects to move forward to success. Doing these things means that the leaders must be creative about thinking up new ways to access resources and they must develop skills at things like writing grants and reaching out to elected officials, convincing them to support the self-help effort of this indigent community.

Success of the project also relies heavily on the Coal Region Field Station network and its capacity to convince the university to invest in the center and support it with legitimacy. Faculty must find

---

[1]　Robert Putnam stated this position in a speech at Bucknell University on 10 April 2016. The position supplements the argument of his book *Our Kids* [39].

value in the community and the center in terms of producing subjects of research and ways of building class projects around local experiences. The town of Mount Carmel is 35 miles from campus and both students and faculty have to be willing to travel to work in the place.

While there are practical challenges to moving this initiative forward, the upside of the project is symbolic. On the town side, we could say that the community is undervalued and that it has much to gain when participants recognize that there are underutilized assets that can make projects successful and improve the bleak situation of the community. On the university side, there is much to be gained if Bucknell sees its local region as a place with an exciting history. University leadership can play a role in transforming the local area from a discouraging locale with few opportunities into an exciting place where university activities can give meaning and energy in a way that fosters a positive vision of the place and its future.

References

1. Carl Milofsky, and Heather Feldhaus. "Teaching Sociology and Developing Community Assets through Collaborative Community-Based Research." Paper presented at meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society, New York, NY, USA, 23 February 2012.

2. Nick Acheson, and Carl Milofsky. "Derry Exceptionalism and an Organic Model of Sustained Dialog." In *Public Deliberation and Sustained Dialoathergue: Pracademic Perspectives*. Edited by R. Lohmann and J. Van Til. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 167–85.

3. Albert Hunter. *Symbolic Communities. The Persistence and Change of Chicago's Local Communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

4. Gerald D. Suttles. *The Social Construction of Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

5. Harold Aurand. *Coal Cracker Culture. Work and Values in Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1835–1935*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2013.

6. Herbert J. Gans. *The Urban Villagers. Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans*. New York: Free Press, 1962.

7. Vicky Cattell. *Poverty, Community, and Health*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

8. Albert J. Hunter, and Gerald D. Suttles. "The expanding community of limited liability." In *The Social Construction of Communities*. Edited by Gerald D. Suttles. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, chap. 3, pp. 44–81.

9. Carl Milofsky. "Organization from Community. A Case Study of Congregational Renewal." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26 (1997): S139–60.

10. Carl Milofsky, and Brandn Q. Green. "Chaining and Virtual Organization in a Slow Sociological Project: The Brown Ridge School District Health Needs Assessment becomes the Central Susquehanna Affordable Care Act Project." *Applied Sociology* 9 (2015): 170–81.

11. Albert Hunter. "The Symbolic Ecology of Suburbia." In *Neighborhood and Community Environments*. Edited by Irwin Altman and Abraham Wandersman. New York: Plenum, 1987.

12. Rick Eckstein, and Kevin Delaney. "New Sports Stadiums, Community Self-Esteem, and Community Collective Conscience." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26 (2002): 235–47. [CrossRef]

13. Terri Mannarini, Stefano Tartaglia, Angela Fedi, and Katiuscia Greganti. "Image of neighborhood, self-image and sense of community." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 26 (2006): 202–14. [CrossRef]

14. Lee Cuba1, and David M. Hummon. "A Place to Call Home. Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34 (2005): 235–47. [CrossRef]

15. Eric Klinenberg. "Race, place, and vulnerability: Urban neighborhoods and the ecology of support." In *Heat Wave*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, chap. 2, pp. 79–128.

16. Anne F. Young, Anne Russell, and Jennifer R. Powers. "The Sense of Belonging to a Neighbourhood: Can it Be Measured and Is it related to Health and Well Being in Older Women?" *Social Science and Medicine* 59 (2004): 2627–37. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

17. Stefan Stürmefr, and Claudia Kampmeier. "Active Citizenship: The Role of Community Identification in Community Volunteerism and Local Participation." *Psychologica Belgica* 43 (2003): 103–22.

18. John P. Kretzmann, and John L. McKnight. "Introduction." In *Building Communities from the Inside Out. A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Skokie: ACTA Publications, 1993.

19. John P. Kretzmann, and John L. McKnight. "Releasing Individual Capacities." In *Building Communities from the Inside Out. A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Skokie: ACTA Publications, 1993.

20. Amnon Boehm. "Clients and Social Workers' Perceptions of Social Work: An Israeli Case Study." *British Journal of Social Work* 43 (2013): 964–86. [CrossRef]

21. Benzoin Cohen, and Eli Buchbinder, eds. "Intervention Using the Strengths Approach in Social Work." In *Maximizing Capacities: Applications of the Strengths Perspective in Social Work*. Tel Aviv: Ramot, 2005 (cited in Boehm 2013).

22. Carol T. Mowbray, Michael E. Woolley, Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, Larry M. Gant, Megan E. Gilster, and Trina R. Williams Shanks. "Neighborhood Research from a Spatially Oriented Strengths Perspective." *Journal of Community Psychology* 35 (2007): 667–80. [CrossRef]

23. Dennis Saleebey. *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997.

24. Janet MacGaffey. *Coal Dust on Your Feet: The Rise, Decline, and Restoration of an Anthracite Mining Town*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013.

25. Ben Marsh. "Continuity and Decline in the Anthracite Towns of Pennsylvania." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 77 (1987): 337–52. [CrossRef]

26. USA.COM. "State Median Household Income and School District Rank." Available online: http://www.usa.com/rank/Pennsylvania-state--median-household-income--school-district-rank.htm (accessed on 6 June 2016).

27. Philip Taft. *Organized Labor in American History*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

28. Kevin Kenny. *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

29. Stewart Wolf, and John G. Bruhn Medical. *The Power of the Clan. The Influence of Human Relationships on Heart Disease*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998.

30. Sister M. Immaculata Wendt. *Sisters of St. Casimir. A Journey in Faith. 100 Years 1907–2007*. Dublin: Booklink, 2007.

31. Loren B. Mead. *The Once and Future Church*. Durham: Alban Institute, 1991.

32. Wikipedia. "Anti-Catholicism in the United States." 2016. Available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Catholicism_in_the_United_States#Anti-Catholicism_in_the_entertainment_industry (accessed on 26 April 2016).

33. Andrew M. Greeley. *An Ugly Little Secret: Anti-Catholicism in North American*. Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews, and McMeel, 1977.

34. Andrew M. Greeley. "'An Ugly Little Secret' Revisited: An Analytic Reflection." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21 (2003): 79–84.

35. Carl Milofsky. *Smallville. The Institutionalization of Community in Twenty-First Century America*. Hanover: University Presses of New England, 2008.

36. Carl Milofsky, Ben Marsh, and Brandn Green. "Social Assets Mapping as Data Collection and Community Organizing." Lewisburg: Place Studies Center, Center for Sustainability and the Environment, 2012. unpublished paper.

37. Sister Margaret Petcavage, SSC, and Sister Regina Dubickas, SSC, eds. *Loving You, Mother Maria*. Dublin: Booklink, 2012.

38. Abigail McCarthy. "Out of Small Town America." *Atlantic* 229 (1972): 74–84.

39. Ira Harkavy, and Matthew Hartley. "Pursuing Franklin's Dream: Philosophical and Historical Context of Service Learning." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 46 (2010): 418–27. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

40. Robert Putnam. *Our Kids*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

41. Jennifer M. Silva. *Coming up Short. Working Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.