“I’M SORRY, I’M ONLY ALLOWED TO SPEAK ENGLISH HERE?”

AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY OF A CATHOLIC CHURCH’S SEARCH FOR
UNITY WITHIN DIVERSITY

by

EMMA MARGARITA FLACK

(Under the Direction of Dr. Robert Hill)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to create conditions, through active interventions, that help St. Rita Catholic Church become a more unified community within its diversity. The following questions guided this research:

- What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?
- How does leadership participate in change related to intercultural relations?

The qualitative study, which took place from March 2011 through June 2013, included four interventions led by a collaborative action research team members. This group of change agents sought to understand the cultural barriers hampering the progress toward parish goals, while discovering the competencies necessary to create effective and long-term change agents within the organization.

The work of three particular theorists influenced the approach and understanding of cultural issues within organizations experiencing change. These include Hofstede’s (1984) views on cultural dimensions, Schein’s (1984) culture and organizational development model, and Torbert’s (2004) approach to adult learning.
The study presented several findings from the perspective of the aforementioned research questions. Cultural and nationality differences have contributed to the way various groups participate in collective vs. individual activities and initiatives. These cultural origins also impact how people from different cultures perceive and respond to those in power or positions of authority. Further, the data analysis showed the emergence of a majority-minority culture as the parish’s demographic makeup has shifted throughout the past decade.

Leadership competencies also surfaced as a common theme. As the parish demographics have evolved, the requisite for intercultural leadership competencies have become more prevalent within this multicultural organization. The needs for training, collaboration, improved communication, and transparency from leaders were frequent and consistent themes within the data. In addition, the study assessed the impact of social conditions on participation within parish life. Compounding issues such as immigration status, language barriers, and experiences of racial profiling shed further insights on social issues affecting sects of the parish body.

Conclusions from the action research study have provided a roadmap for the change agent community at St. Rita Catholic Church.

*Keywords*: action research, diversity, Catholic church, unity, organizational culture, multicultural organization, leadership
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May 2014
DEDICATION

To my parents, who have shown me that love knows no color.

I honor my precious father, Conrange V. Flack, Jr., who, since the first day of kindergarten,

has always encouraged me to strive for my highest potential in life, regardless of ethnicity,

social status, or pedigree.

I especially dedicate this work to my beloved mother, Leonor Flack, who bestowed upon me the

virtues of discernment, gentleness, patience and long-suffering; and who, despite her lack of

formal education and opportunities, always celebrated every single one of my achievements and

recognized in me my God-given talent of and love for the written word.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first and foremost acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has guided me along this doctoral journey and helped me to persevere through the “mountain-highs” and “valley-lows” of the past four years. I also honor my patron saint, Saint Rita of Cascia (d. 1487), the saint of impossible causes, marriage and fertility. I acknowledge her intercessions in my life during this period of development, discomfort, and discovery. This dissertation is named in her honor. I especially thank the action research team without whom any of this would be possible, and the members of St. Rita Catholic Church.

Special gratitude goes to my major professor and mentor, Dr. Robert Hill, who has provided such rich and invaluable academic guidance during my foray into higher academia, and who has also been such a motivating spiritual influence in my life through his exemplary daily works and ongoing research. Thank you for always praising my writing abilities, even when other areas of my research needed improvement. Your vested and personal interests in my research, our lengthy and invigorating conversations, and meaningful scholarly and theological interactions have kept me motivated and encouraged along the way.

I also hold deep gratitude for my committee members, Dr. Laura Bierema, who also served as an interim advisor during a critical portion of this journey, as well as an ongoing role model for me as an aspiring HRD scholar-practitioner; and Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, who has truly transformed the way I think about everything I have ever learned and known. Every scholar should be so fortunate to have an “Aliki” in their life. I am a more reflective researcher and practitioner because of you, and your teachings have already impacted my work within my client
systems and the people with whom I interact. Dr. Wendy Ruona, thank you for recognizing my initial passion for this action research topic, even when I was unsure of my direction. You were right. Thank you all for challenging me to redefine who I am. I am proud to have worked with such a renowned and recognized faculty at the University of Georgia. My path as a researcher already holds a degree of respect from the field for having worked with legends like each of you.

I would also like to thank a special fellow in academia, Rubina Malik. Through a destined lunch meeting four years ago, you saw in me the yearning and unfulfilled desire to re-enter the academic realm and subsequently invited me to apply for the first Ed.D. Cohort at the University of Georgia. My deepest appreciation goes to the fellow members of my Ed.D. Cohort. Words cannot describe our journey and the special place you each hold in my heart. You have truly been a family to me, and I consider you lifelong friends.

I thank an amazing and special woman I call my sister, Livvy, for walking this walk with me, literally and figuratively picking me up whenever I stumbled or fell. “Through the good times and the bad ones, whether I lose or if I win. I know one thing that never changes and that's you as my best friend.” Your constant encouragement and cheerleading have helped me to cross the finish line. I also acknowledge my little sisters, Anna and Carla, who eagerly await the moment I walk across the stage, and who have always pushed me to be a role model in their lives. Only the two of you truly know where we come from and who we are. To my childhood friend, Alta; to the Meder family; to my dearest friends and relatives, and to my sisters of Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority, Incorporated: I appreciate your spiritual and moral support, and for welcoming me into your families and checking on me when you suspected I was neglecting basic needs.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men [sic] of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world.”

— Dom Hélder Pessoa Cámara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil, *Spiral of Violence*

Diversity and multiculturalism are values that are often touted proudly by organizations and companies seeking to represent themselves as inclusive, global, and accepting of that which is different. As these organizations seek to operate efficiently while being multicultural, they sometimes encounter challenges. In this action research study, a multicultural Roman Catholic parish struggles to find unity within a diversity of languages, cultures, nationalities, and various differences embodied by its members.

My religious experience in the United States has encompassed several Christian denominations—Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and in the past six years, Roman Catholic. My earliest memories of religious experience are diverse in nature. The diversity in my religious experiences extends beyond racial demographics. I have been privileged to have been exposed to African-American traditions through the singing of Negro spirituals; mixed race churches with a blend of hymns sung in multiple languages; Pentecostal churches with their charismatic and spontaneous nature of praise and worship; and even Native American Catholic churches which inject their own symbolism and traditions into the standard Roman Catholic liturgy.
Growing up in Puerto Rico—a daughter of a Black father and Puerto Rican mother—I appreciated the multiculturalism represented at the church we attended for many years until our relocation to the United States mainland. Once in the United States I encountered a shocking culture change not only racially, culturally and linguistically, but also religiously. When I moved to the U.S. mainland in 1985 from Puerto Rico, the churches that my family and I visited lacked integration and multicultural harmony. For nearly 15 years, my family and I attended a predominantly Black Methodist church, and while that experience brought many riches, I yearned for a place of worship where I could interact with individuals of many cultures and backgrounds, and a place where my non-Black mother could truly feel welcome and culturally appreciated.

This cultural discomfort within spiritual settings often made me question the racial self-segregation of churches, but also why multicultural churches at times still exhibit cultural segregation within what is defined as an integrated organization.

**Roman Catholicism: A Faith of Diversity**

The Roman Catholic Church is considered the oldest institution in the Western world, able to trace its history back more than 2000 years (“The Roman Catholic Church,” 2011). During my research of the Roman Catholic Church and its history of multiculturalism, the church has been documented as a diverse institution by its vast population of 1.2 billion members, and its global reach (“With pope pick, an embrace of multiculturalism, global reach,” 2013). In fact, the Jesuit Post calls the Catholic Church the “most global and multicultural institution on earth” (“What pope Francis wants to change,” 2013). According to the BBC, the Catholic Church faithful is “spread across all five continents with particular concentrations in southern Europe, the United States, the Philippines and the countries of Central and South
America. What binds this diverse group of people together is their faith in Jesus Christ and their obedience to the papacy” (“Roman Catholic Church,” 2011).

And now, the Roman Catholic Church stands at the vanguard of a new multiculturalism. The election of a new pontiff—Pope Francis—in early 2013, has heralded a new era of multiculturalism. Hailing from Argentina, he is the first pope from Latin America and the first non-European pope in nearly 1,300 years. A trilingual pope speaking Latin, Italian, and Spanish, Pope Francis has advocated the embrace of multiculturalism not only within the Catholic Church, but has also extended his charity to those beyond the religious lines. “Pope Francis brings the broader sensitivities needed in building bridges with Jews, Muslims and others to promote peace and reduce global conflict,” (“With pope pick, an embrace of multiculturalism, global reach,” 2013).

**Introduction of Research Problem**

In 2009, I became a member of the Roman Catholic Church after two years of reflection, research and visiting several churches in Atlanta, GA. My new parish—St. Rita Catholic Church—offered the diversity and multiculturalism that I sought for many years. The mission of St. Rita Catholic Church is: “We, the People of St. Rita Parish, have the loving, reconciling presence of Jesus Christ as the center of our life, especially in the Eucharist. Through the ministry of [St. Rita’s religious order], Christ calls us to: grow in our experience and understanding of God’s grace; build strong bonds of mutual support within our community; and serve the cause of mercy, justice and evangelization in our world.”

At St. Rita’s, many ethnic groups are represented, including non-Hispanic Whites, African-Americans, Caribbean-Americans, Hispanics, East Asians, and various African nationalities. Of significance, nearly 45% of the parish’s approximately 6,600 registered families are comprised of Central Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics. The next largest non-
Euro-American ethnic group is the African national community, followed by a blended U.S.-born community comprised of many races and ethnicities.

Despite the vibrant representation of cultures and nationalities within the St. Rita community, there has been tension long-acknowledged by various leaders of both English and non-English speaking ministry groups. While the specific causes of the tension had not been deeply investigated or identified prior to this action research study, informal inquiries revealed that the nature of the complaints in the parish stemmed from cultural and ethnic roots. These anecdotal reports had been gathered through observations of resistance in participation in cross-cultural activities, continued lack of consensus in planning and coordination of programs and initiatives, and slow momentum in stewardship, fundraising, and important building Capital Campaigns.

**Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this action research was to create conditions, through active interventions, that help St. Rita Catholic Church become a more unified community within its diversity. The following questions guided this research:

- What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?
- How does leadership participate in change related to intercultural relations?

The project eventually resulted in three action research cycles, consisting of four interventions:

1. Mediation of African Parishioners Organization
2. Bilingual ministry leader retreat
3. Institution of bilingual Masses
4. Capital Campaign fundraising
The action research problem formation, design, implementation, and evaluation of the interventions were conducted by the action research team comprised of the Parish Council and myself as an inside researcher.

Due to the growth in church membership at St. Rita’s, there was a need to uncover methods to operate more efficiently through collaborative program planning and fundraising, and more importantly bridge gaps between various ethnic group leaders in an attempt to create harmony within the church culture. The goal of creating unity within diversity at St. Rita through action research interventions was aimed to create change agents within the lay leadership. This empowering framework would create a strong foundation for long-term growth, program success, and operational efficiency.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of intercultural integration in churches—and organizational settings at large—is relevant and important because organizations experience various degrees and natures of cultural change. In my career, I have worked with organizations experiencing change in corporate culture that encompassed various countries, ethnic groups, and geographies. By their multi-national nature, these types of change require an organization-wide understanding of awareness and sensitivity among races, cultures, and lifestyles.

In the non-corporate setting, I have been a member of large private and non-profit organizations that embrace and promote multiculturalism and diversity. Despite the official mottos and stated core values of these organizations, the goals of cultural harmony and racial understanding were not easily attained. Within the religious setting, those goals are increasingly challenging to achieve when culture compounded with religious beliefs and customs vary based on cultural groups’ various nationalities, countries of origin, and geographical norms within their region of the U.S.

Although multiculturalism affects denominations outside of the Catholic faith, the research and literature review focuses on issues facing the Roman Catholic Church, within a parish based in the metropolitan Atlanta area. One of the goals of this research has been to make the findings applicable not only to churches in other denominations, but also other organizations facing issues related to intercultural competency and its impact on organizational effectiveness. Another overriding goal was to help create a community of change agents through the action
research study by cultivating the experiences, tools, and interventions to foster long-term success.

**Literature Review Process**

This comprehensive literature review is an ongoing product that has been updated and enhanced since December of 2011. It includes related and influential literature gleaned from more than 50 peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and presentations from databases from the University of Georgia library system including EBSCO Complete, Business Source Complete, PsychInfo and ERIC. The review also includes books recommended during my action research interviews, dialogue with fellow scholars, conversations with clergy and lay leaders, and works referenced during lectures presented at the 2013 and 2014 Academy of Human Resource Development Conference for the Americas and the University of Georgia Adult Education Research Consortium.

An unexpected and delightful source of literary inspiration arose by way of a Qualitative Writing Retreat I attended in May 2013. During this intensive one-week retreat course in the remote north Georgia mountains, I spent time outlining and writing early versions of dissertation chapters, reviewing interview transcripts, and searching for additional literature as gaps arose during my writing and data review processes. Nightly group meetings with my fellow 11 writers also revealed authors and concepts I should have been considering for my research topic.

As a developing researcher, this retreat taught me about my habits as a writer and helped me to recognize important environmental settings that help me to thrive in my reflection and writing processes. For example, I learned that libraries help me to ease into challenging writing topics. As a lifelong lover of books, this setting helps me to feel that I am “among friends.” Additionally, I learned that while I find music and television distracting, I am motivated by listening to Gregorian chants due to the repetition and at times incomprehensible cadence of the
wording of the songs, mostly chanted in Latin. While these are personal preferences, I believe they are qualities I have uncovered about myself throughout the reflective action research process.

The following table introduces concepts, literature and authors and how these inputs related to the research questions.

**Table 1: Research Questions and Literature Review Concepts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Literature Review Concepts</th>
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<tr>
<td>What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?</td>
<td>• Cultural dimensions</td>
<td>• Organizational culture (Schein, 1984)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organizational culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Adult learning (individual, organizational and systemic)</td>
<td>• Single and double loop learning (Torbert, 2004; Argyris and Schön, 1978)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does leadership (clergy and lay) participate in change related to intercultural relations?</td>
<td>• Adult learning (individual, organizational and systemic)</td>
<td>• Cultural habitus (Bordieu, 1977)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organizational culture</td>
<td>• Culture and participation (Appleby, 1996)</td>
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<td>• Church segregation (Garces-Foley, 2007, 2008; Evans et al., 2002)</td>
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<td>• Power as relational and negotiated</td>
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<td>(Cervero and Wilson, 1998, 2006)</td>
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<td>• Single and double loop learning (Torbert, 2004; Argyris and Schön, 1978)</td>
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<td>• Organizational culture (Schein, 1984)</td>
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<td>• Integration without assimilation (Christerson and Emerson, 2003)</td>
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The chapter begins with a review of theoretical frameworks related to culture and unity, and then an exploration of organizational development as it relates to culture. The literature review continues with a deep analysis of literature related to the action research process, the foundational concerns at the inception of the process, and the themes and issues that arose during the course of the research.
Theoretical Framework

The work of three particular theorists influenced the approach and understanding of cultural issues within organizations experiencing change. These include Hofstede’s views on cultural dimensions, Schein’s culture and organizational development model, and Torbert’s approach to adult learning. These three influences create a trinity of models that apply to the religious, cultural, organizational, and learning aspects of this action research study.

Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede offers a well-known five-dimensional measure of cultural values, which for more than 20 years has been the dominant metric of culture among organizations of all scopes (Yoo, B., Donthu, N., and Lenartowicz, T., 2011). While the measure needs to factor into contextual organizational information, the model cites important cultural values for leaders as well as individuals within or affected by an organization.

According to Hofstede, culture is defined as the collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another. This programming influences patterns of thinking which are reflected in the meaning people attach to various aspects of life and which become crystallized in the institutions of a society. This does not imply that everyone in a given society is programmed in the same way. In fact, Hofstede recognizes that there are considerable differences between individuals.

These society members include consumers, members, and other stakeholders. Hofstede’s measure of culture includes 1) power distance, 2) indulgence versus restraint, 3) long-term versus short-term orientation, 4) masculinity versus femininity, 5) tolerance of uncertainty, and 6) individuality versus collectivism. This model offers a baseline for understanding attributes of various nationalities to gain a comparative understanding between different cultures.
**Figure 1: Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1984)**

*Power distance* is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011, p. 194). Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy (2009) explain that power distance (PDI) differs depending on a country’s power norms, and how citizens behave towards different types of authority. The larger the power distance, the larger the privileges afforded to individuals in their behavior and communication (p. 254). *Uncertainty avoidance* is “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations” (p. 194).

*Individualism* “pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family” (p. 194). This dimension describes the power of the group over the individual. *Masculinity (MAS)* represents “the dominant male sex role pattern in the vast majority of both traditional and
modern societies” (p. 194). Countries with higher MAS scores will represent gender roles that are very distinct, while countries with lower MAS scores will see more blended gender roles.

**Long-term orientation** refers to long-term versus short-term orientation toward the future (p. 194), while **Indulgence vs. Restraint**, the latest parameter, is related to how people view the relative importance of happiness and freedom of expression and how much control they feel they have on their own life. Within a religious organization comprised of many nationalities, using Hofstede’s model can provide a baseline understanding about certain cultural norms at an aggregate level.

**Schein and Organizational Culture**

Throughout and organization’s lifecycle, its cultural identity undergoes change due to shifts in leadership, corporate activity, organizational initiatives, population growth, and the economic climate. Schein offers a warning that culture issues can cause lack of participation and overall failure if organizations do not factor culture into its change management approaches.

To begin analyzing the participation of cultural groups within a multicultural church, one must first understand how organizational culture forms in an organization. Schein, a highly respected scholar in organizational design, defines culture as, “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 2).

In *Globalizing the Sacred*, Bourdieu provides another viewpoint of cultural identity in what he calls *habitus*: “embodied perceptual and motivating schemes that produce and reproduce the social structures in which individuals are located and that explain not only creative activity but regularities in social practices” (p. 24). Christian Smith’s subcultural identity theory also
discusses culture in the religious sense. Smith argues that “the most persistent religions…embed themselves in subcultures that construct a collective identity and give members unequivocal moral meaning and a powerful sense of group belonging” (p. 24). When analyzing the religious faith groups, Smith comments that “the strongest religious groups are ‘genuinely countercultural’” meaning that their structures set them apart from other subcultural groups and require a high level of commitment from their members. Smith counts both Catholics and Evangelicals as strong religious group in this assertion.

Regardless of one’s definition of culture, it is important to understand how culture forms. Schein (2011) states that organizational culture occurs at three levels (p.11).

![Figure 2: Schein’s Views on Organizational Culture](image)

Additional factors influence the organization’s culture. Schein explains that the impact of the founder or leader is the first, and Schein argues, most important contributor to an organization’s culture. In addition, the learning experiences of group members compound the
building of the culture, supplemented by new members, who bring new beliefs, values, and assumptions (Schein, 2011, p. 11).

Not only does the external environment affect the formation of an organization’s culture, but also the following internal issues:

- Common language: how members understand each other through categories of action, gesture, and speech
- Group boundaries for inclusion or exclusion: consensus of “who is in and who is out,” usually established by the leader and validated by the group
- Distributing power and status: how power and authority are distributed
- Developing rules and norms: how to deal with authority and peers
- Rewards and punishments: a system of “sanctions for obeying and disobeying rules”
- Explaining the unexplainable: how a group faces issues out of their control; ideology and religion sometimes support this

Schein goes on to state the importance of integrating subcultures, maintaining a sensitive to cultural norms, and encouraging the evolution of common goals, language and procedures to solve common problems (p. 18). During periods of change, failure to address culture as part of change may result in the participation levels of an organization’s members.

**Torbert and Adult Learning**

In order to facilitate change in an organization, one must determine how organization members create meaning. In respect for the unique conditions of adult learners, Torbert’s adult learning theory was studied to help understand the level of transformational change St. Rita’s sought and would be able to accomplish. The reflective nature of action research lends itself to Torbert’s framework of single, double, and ultimately triple loop learning (2004, p. 18). In single loop learning, one considers their individual actions in response to a problem or challenge,
within a particular time and space. Double loop learning takes the individual to a more insightful mode of learning, where one considers a broader framework than their own limited scope of thinking. When approaching triple loop learning, individuals begin to understand how problems are related, and make collaborative meaning of how they learned what they know.

Figure 3: Adult Learning Theory

Argyris and Schön (1978) support Torbert’s model of action learning. They explain that “learning involves the detection and correction of error” (p. 2). “Where something goes wrong, it is suggested, an initial port of call for many people is to look for another strategy that will address and work within the governing variables. In other words, given or chosen goals, values, plans and rules are operationalized rather than questioned.” Argyris and Schön call this single-loop learning. They explain that an alternative response is to question and analyze the governing variables, which they describe as double-loop learning. Such learning may then lead to an alteration in the governing variables and, thus, a shift in the way in which strategies and consequences are framed.

Because St. Rita’s, the action research site, is an adult-led and adult-driven learning organization, this approach of analyzing a set of initial reactions, and then the altering of
governing variables, was viewed as one approach to create learning and meaning making. Within St. Rita, where some ethnic communities operate and organize in silos, there were opportunities to consider Torbert’s action inquiry theory in the analysis of the methods of learning and meaning making from the historical norms. When groups and individuals can consider solutions beyond the limits of their cultural groups, they can consider an expansive environment and set of solutions involving those outside of their current circles of social trust.

**Themes in the Literature**

From the lens of diversity impact within Catholicism, the following themes developed during the continual review of the literature. These scholarly works either support the need to build competencies to create unity within diverse organizations, or provide insights that indicate the need for further methods and research.

**Balance Between Religious and Ethnic Identity**

Marti believes that accomplishing multicultural congregations can be achieved best when people adopt a religious identity that overrides their ethnic identity. Although overriding ethnic identity has not been the goal or purpose of this action research, it was important to consider alternative points of view in assessing effective ways to achieve unity (Marti, 2008, p. 13). For the purpose of this action research, maintaining and respecting ethnic identity has been instrumental in avoiding the alienation of any particular ethnic group. But as Disalvo, (2008); Chatters, et al. (2009); Appleby (1996) and others note, a gap exists between rhetoric and reality. Although conferences, workshops, and large-scale meetings have been held to discuss the state of integration of races in religious settings, this notion is not necessarily supported at the parish level. This is where the writers feel that these efforts lose momentum.
Embracing Multiculturalism in the Catholic Church

The Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta proudly claims the diversity of its congregations. In a report of major cultural groups in the archdiocese, it lists more than 30 nationalities. From a weekly Mass language assessment, the archdiocese cited 121 Masses held in Spanish; 2 in Portuguese, 20 in Igbo (Nigerian dialect); 53 in Creole (Haitian); 15 in French; and various Masses in a mixture of languages (“Diversity in the catholic archdiocese of Atlanta”, n.d.).

Among the writers reviewed for this action research within the past decade and prior decades, there is a continued acknowledgment that the need to embrace multiculturalism remains an important issue. Membership numbers have been a major concern of any denomination, but specifically, within Catholic churches, there is also the need to create more unified, multicultural parish communities (Appleby, 1996, p. 370). In recent years, the Catholic News Agency issued a press release indicating that there are approximately 68.1 million Catholics in the United States (“Catholic Church Shows,” 2010).

According to Appleby, although 63% of the 10 million Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. were born on the U.S. mainland, they have failed to fully adapt to the ways of American Catholic life. He claims that there is virtually little difference between U.S.-born Hispanics and immigrants from Central and Latin America. Appleby states that “individual pastoral success stories abound, but a common Hispanic-American identity has yet to be forged. The greatest obstacles to unity may exist within the multicultural Hispanic community itself” (Appleby, p. 370). Appleby, who also worked with a Catholic parish with a large Hispanic population, believes that ministry to second- and third-generation Hispanics requires a specialized approach, since the English-speaking, younger generations still want to express their faith via Latino cultural norms.
The evangelical nature of the Hispanic community, in particular, complicates the struggle for integration and cross-cultural acceptance. This evangelical movement of the Catholic Church is analyzed by Le Bruyns (2004), who provides another view into the battle between evangelical Catholics and traditional Western Catholics. As cultures provide blended styles of worship in a multicultural church setting, a clash often arises that either results in segregated worship times within a particular parish, or the alienation of one or more ethnic groups that either assimilate, or fade from the church membership (p. 344). Le Bruyns refers to the struggle for unity between evangelicals and traditional Catholics as “reconciled diversity.”

“The notion of ‘reconciled diversity’ acknowledges and affirms diversity. It repudiates any trivialisation or invalidation of a particular faith tradition’s distinctiveness, choosing rather to grapple with the inevitable tensions between unity and diversity. However, the vision does not promote diversity at any cost as if diversity was an end in itself. Diversity fulfills a broader role of contributing to the greater good of different religious traditions and society at large. Otherwise, if unchecked or merely tolerated, religious diversity is employed to justify evil, as discussed by Kimball. This vision, on the contrary, is dynamic and transformative in orientation. It wants to encourage interaction, accountability, and complementarity (Le Bruyns, 2004, p. 346).”

This balance, or “reconciled diversity,” resonated with the research problem at St. Rita’s action research study. With a church so demographically diverse, the tensions between unity and diversity had risen to a visible and recognizable level for many lay and clergy leaders. Finding the right balance by fostering opportunities for interaction and collaboration would be key in this study, as would be maintaining the right to cultural distinctiveness.
Integration without Assimilation

According to two research-based articles found in a review of the literature (Becker, 1998; Garces-Foley, 2007), Catholic leadership has been supportive of integration of various styles of worship, in order to accommodate a blending of cultures. In the mid-1990s, a summit was held in San Antonio—Convocation ’95—in which 500 clergy and laypersons from 110 dioceses gathered to discuss the progress and state of Hispanic ministry in the United States. The U.S. bishops issued a statement responding enthusiastically to the meeting and celebrating the virtues of the Hispanic ethos, “the fruit of the enculturation of the Catholic faith through the tremendous encounter with Iberian, Native American and African spiritualities.” The bishops called Hispanics to lead the church in recalling its mission “to preserve and foster a Catholic identity in the midst of an often hostile culture” (Appleby, 1996, p. 370).

The action research team at St. Rita’s believed that cultural harmony and cooperation could occur among cultural groups, while allowing those groups to maintain and preserve their ethnic identities. Christerson and Emerson (2003) say that for multiracial congregations to maintain multiple racial groups, they have to be populated by people who are more integrated across race than the general population. Otherwise, they will fall victim to the niche edge and overlap effect. They explain that “in order to build and/or maintain a multiracial congregation, attention and effort needs to be focused on cross-race social ties and interactions as groups on the edge struggle to find belonging and feeling” (p. 36). Those individuals who are not part of a dominant social group may feel a lack of belonging and a sacrifice of their social and worship styles. Such people may have more racially diverse social networks before they arrive in such congregations. Thus, in order to thrive, multiethnic congregations must devote much effort to developing cross-ethnic networks among its congregants.
Some thought leaders believe that cultural division is expected and even considered successful in promoting multicultural parishes. When seen in this light, the persistence of cultural divisions within the multicultural parish can be considered successful. The important point is to find ways for these groups to work together for common goals and find ways to support each others’ efforts and programming. To force groups to assimilate or lose their identities would defeat the purpose of having a parish that welcomes all cultures and ethnicities.

Having visited and belonged to several denominations, I know that cultural groups more strongly support the efforts of their own cultural group. That is why some churches with one strong identifying race tend to support causes as a unified front and participate actively in programs—because they are culture specific. This signifies that while cultural harmony should be a goal of multicultural parishes, some members of parishes and churches feel more comfortable worshipping with those that mirror their own racial identity. And, within those multicultural churches, similarly, members of particular ethnic groups favor activities that appeal to their own race. The goal of this research is not to change the mindsets of ethnicity-specific parishes, but to research issues among churches and organizations that are already multicultural.

A strength of this option is that there are clear divisions within the cultural groups that would make it easier to analyze trends and cultural styles within those groups. This option could result in opportunities for new programming and multicultural events. However, it would be difficult to quantify the success of this effort because success cannot be determined by integration. The avoidance of assimilation requires the acceptance that not all groups of individuals will want to participate in multicultural programming.
Local Church Growth

The face of Catholicism in Atlanta has changed in recent decades. While some of this change arose through the influx of immigrants to the area, some authors suggest recent growth is attributed to other factors. In a 2013 article in the National Catholic Register, Beale states that Atlanta is the third fastest developing archdiocese in the United States, “which saw the number of registered parishioners explode from nearly 322,000 in 2002 to one million in 2012—an increase of more than twofold, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (p. 1).

Factors in this growth and renewal include the ongoing stream of converts from other faith traditions, and people relocating to the Southeast. According to Beale, while immigration was a large factor in prior decades and continues to be a factor in regional growth, it is now considered more of a “secondary contributor than as the leading cause” of growth in new Catholic membership (p. 2). Keeping these growth statistics in mind would be imperative to understanding the socioeconomic changes impacting local parishes.

Religious Participation

In an example of religious organization participation, Chatters, Taylor, Bullard & Jackson (2009) researched the participatory nature of various ethnic groups, although this study was not limited to Catholics, but rather extended its focus cross-denominationally. This study examined race and ethnicity differences in levels of organizational, non-organizational and religious activity among various ethnic groups in religious groups. Their research analyzed measures of organizational, nonorganizational, and subjective religious participation. They types of participation are defined as follows:

- Organizational: Frequency of religious service attendance, church membership, and frequency of participation in church activities
• Nonorganizational: Reading religious books or other religious materials, praying, and asking someone to pray for you

• Subjective: Importance of religion growing up, importance of parents taking or sending their children to religious services, overall importance of religion in the respondent’s life, and respondents’ self-rating of religiosity

The analysis found that for all twelve measures of religious participation, African-Americans reported higher levels of religious participation than non-Hispanic whites. Their finding is “consistent with historical and ethnographic research on the centrality of religion and religious institutions in the lives of African-Americans (and that it was also consistent with previous survey research indicating uniformly higher levels of organizational, non-organizational and subjective religious involvement among African Americans in comparison to whites” [p. 1158]).

Disalvo (2008) illustrates the importance of parish-level execution in her overview of how parish culture forms a highly participatory Catholic church. During her own study and review of other researchers, she concluded that Catholics spend less time in parish activities because Catholic culture “lacks the mechanisms of deep congregational interaction and extensive participation that channel larger number of Protestants into formal and informal networks of service” (p. 439). Specifically, she compares the activity levels of Hispanic Catholics compared to non-Hispanic Catholics, citing that non-Hispanic Catholics participate less in organized church activities. This piece of literature was significant and relevant because Disalvo studied a large parish in the Lower East Side of Manhattan with a large Hispanic population, similar to the cultural identity of the parish in this action research study. She conducted primary research through staff interviews and surveys, and also observed the Masses and numerous church activities and programs.
Disalvo explains that there are four key elements that reveal parish culture: parish activity is fundamentally social, the parish expends extensive energy on religious formation and preparation for sacraments, the majority of formation programs at St. Mary's—the church where she worked—are developed and continually modified by teams within the parish, and the parish particularly invests in service and social justice work (p. 444).

In 2007, Dent Davis (pp. 48-62) published the results of another study in participatory action research. The goal of the study was to determine how to boost participation of among all ethnic cultures in the church’s educational programs, which had been on the decline. The article provides an overview of the two-year research process involving 178 leaders and more than 1,000 congregational members. While the study did not focus on one particular ethnic group’s participation, it did study the cultural norms of the congregation in a quest to understand the lack of lay participation. There were findings that could be leveraged across various Christian denominations seeking to increase laity participation and engagement. These findings include the importance of:

- Clergy sponsorship of the change initiative
- A laity-led “steering committee” to participate and facilitate in the action research study
- Change management and the important role of lay leadership in implementing long-lasting change
- The mechanics of documentation, dissemination, reflection, and feedback
- Collaboration among team members, which deepened relationships with each other and commitment to their goals (p. 55)

Davis’ findings suggest that heuristic educational models, such as participatory action research, have potential for individual and congregational transformation. Since the author’s
conclusion of the project, overall education attendance rose by 6%, lay leadership increased by more than 20%; and an emergence of leaders had begun.

**Approaching Intercultural Competency**

As the St. Rita action research team sought ways to achieve intercultural competency, I initially presented methodologies created and employed by subject matter experts in the topic. There are many models on intercultural competency, including structuration theory, critical race theory, and ethnorelativism. Becker states that there are two stages of cultural competency, or cultural innovation. The first stage is the process of interpreting and applying the religious tradition by mining it for the elements that solve the particular problem (Becker, 1998, p. 455). The second stage is described as “when logic or style of reasoning developed explicitly to meet the exigencies of a particular crisis becomes institutionalized and has an implicit shaping influence on future decisions” (p. 456). This means that researcher must first discover what is important in a religious setting in order to first understand the issues, and then use those findings to find a solution that fits the specific needs of that religious setting.

Leonard (1986), in his study of multi-ethnic congregations, promotes the understanding of environment and community when working in diverse congregations. He reviews the sociological factors at work, including economics, housing, government, and people movement. He states that “the people who are members in the multi-ethnic situations are proud of the fact that they are members of such congregations.” He explains that while they cherish relationships with other races and cultures, many people feel uncomfortable talking about racial and culture differences when analyzing organizational issues (p. 128). As a viable option for ministry, Leonard believes multi-ethnic congregations can be successful, but concludes that “pastors of such congregations handle a large amount of conflict and tensions among members until the bond of trust is formed” (p. 206).
Pastoral Change Leadership Skills

While several leadership traits can build an effective leader, the literature search revealed four key topics when seeking best practices for effective spiritual leadership in multicultural settings: dialogue, cross-cultural communication, spiritual formation, and power and privilege.

Creating dialogue.

The first skill is being able to create dialogue. Dialogue is the ability to confront one’s own and others’ assumptions, revealing feelings, and building common ground with others through the process (Schein, 1993, p. 32). Dialogue is essential because organizations tend to break down into sub-groups or in a church’s case, ministry groups or social groups. These sub-groups have their own sub-culture based on the experiences of those group members. Because one organization can host many sub-groups, dialogue among and across those groups becomes critical for the sake of organizational effectiveness.

As administrative and ministry leaders within a church seek to integrate multicultural groups across various ministries and social groups, there must first be an acknowledgement and attention to the “otherness” of other sub-groups, and avoid the use of defensive routines, which Argyris defines as how “we operate by cultural rules that undermine valid communication” (p. 4). In dialogue, Schein explains, “we explore all the complexities of thinking and language” (p. 30). Schein’s rationale is that if we become more conscious about how our thought processes work, we will think better collectively and communicate better. This leads to the second skill a leader must develop to build a culturally competent organization.

Applying cross-cultural communication.

“Communication is key to the ability to empathize, and communicating effectively relies on understanding the clients’ culture, language, and planning literacy skills. It involves understanding how the professional’s perceptions of the client affect the situation” (Reeves,
In the quest to understand how leaders could or should develop cross-cultural communication competencies, Bryant and Peters’ model of cultural competence emerged in several articles.

Bryant and Peters’ model (2001) includes five habits one should exhibit when trying to achieve cross-cultural effectiveness:

1. List and diagram differences and similarities between yourself and your audience/client
2. Identify and analyze the possible effects of similarities and differences on your interaction with the client, the decision-maker, and yourself (called the Three Rings)
3. Explore alternative explanations for your client’s behavior to gain cross-cultural consciousness (called the Parallel Universe)
4. Be aware of barriers, potential issues and remedies while focusing on being cross-culturally sensitive.
5. Be self-reflective as you explore yourself as a cultural being (called the Camel’s Back)

While their approach was initially created for attorneys to learn how to overcome cross-cultural obstacles with their clients, practitioners and researchers in other fields have adopted and recognized their model as a cross-disciplinary tool for cross-cultural communication effectiveness.

Reeves believes that “as a competence, cross-cultural communication draws on the concept of the reflective practitioner and can be learned” (p. 598) As Reeves explains, cultural competence was originally developed by Bryant and Peters for the education and training of legal professionals. Their five-step methodology aided professionals to reflect on and question
the assumptions underlying their personal approach. These “habits” address how people perceive, analyze, and respond to issues and challenges. The habits are (p. 602):

- Differences and similarities
- Effect of differences and similarities
- Exploring alternative explanations
- Communication
- Reflection

According to Reeves, “when planners do not reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of client groups, the competence of cross-cultural communication becomes critical to a planner’s effectiveness. Equally, where planners see themselves as very similar to their client group(s), over-identification can also raise issues” (p. 598). For a leader in a multicultural setting to become effective, cross-cultural communication should be a required part of the formation or training.

As part of effective cross-cultural communication, leaders must also learn what Mackenzie and Wallace (2011) call a communication of respect. They explain that “the communication of respect has been established as a significant dimension of cross-cultural communication competence (p. 10). When working with different cultures from various nationalities, it is important to understand what verbal and non-verbal communication is acceptable within their cultural norms. “It can be communicated verbally (i.e., appropriate word choice), nonverbally (i.e., appropriate use of touch during a greeting), and paralinguistically (i.e., appropriate use of intonation during question-asking)” (p. 10). They also caution that many times, there is not one single instance of offensive communication that impacts a relationship, but a series of practices that communicate respect.
**Spiritual formation.**

A result of the United States’ growing diversity is the resulting impact on congregations. Gushiken, in his study of spiritual formation and multiethnic congregations, proclaims that “this population shift will necessitate evaluating approaches to spiritual formation in light of these ethnic dynamics” (p. 185). Gushiken defines spirituality as “the lifelong process of allowing the Lord to indwell in our lives through his Spirit” and explains that “this union transcends ethnic and cultural differences” (p. 187). The danger in multiethnic churches, Gushiken asserts, is when spirituality becomes attached to diversity rather than defined by a congregational union in their religious beliefs.

Gushiken also advises that in multi-ethnic churches, leaders must consider the theologies that align with the representative cultural groups. “For example, the congregation should be legitimately introduced to African theology if the church contains African-Americans, or liberation theology if populated by Latinos. This multitude of perspectives gives rise to the opportunity to highlight the core beliefs that unify believers regardless of ethnicity” (p. 201). These approaches are particularly necessary in multiethnic congregations where racial discrimination, immigrant hardships, and social injustices may occur within minority groups (p. 200).

**Power and Privilege**

When seeking to bridge multicultural gaps within organizations, tension often accompanies that long-term change. When a majority culture has been dominant for many decades, such as the action research site for this study, and then becomes a majority-minority culture, power struggles arise as cultural groups strive to create an identity among or within an existing culture. In the book *Living “Illegal”: The Human Face of Unauthorized Immigration*, Marquardt, Steigenga Williams & Vasquez (2011), describe a majority-minority in the church
context as what occurs when a church transitions from being a minority White church or parish to being a church when non-White groups become a majority. Over the past 13 years, St. Rita’s has transformed from being a majority European-American parish to being a majority-minority parish with an expanding non-European-American population.

When assessing power relations, some adult educators factor in the concept of white privilege when speaking of a majority culture. Manglitz (2003), in an analysis of white privilege within adult education, describes the term as “the ways that White and all other racial identities have been historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced over time and do not refer in an essential or biological way to human bodies” (p. 122). Based on Manglitz’s own review of the literature, relations of domination have been developed over time as a way to justify disparate treatment for those who have been “judged to stand outside of or be in conflict with the White norm” (p. 122).

Flecha (1999) delves into the issue of power within postmodernist racism, when he highlights “two versions of racism, an older form based on a claim of the superiority of one group over another and a more contemporary form based on postmodern relativism, which accepts diversity and difference but accords different groups a place in their own, distinctive contexts” (p. 153). Within the action research site, the demographic data of the parish reflected that the historically dominant culture is no longer statistically a majority. Despite the statistical diversity that exists, integration among the cultural groups remains lacking.

**Immigration-Related Tension**

Gallagher and Pritchard (2007), state there has always been a fundamental tension in multiculturalism between the promotion of diversity and the promotion of unity, i.e., between finding a balance between policies and practices which allow for the recognition of ethnic diversity, while at the same time providing a basis for common political values, trust and
solidarity (p. 569). Within communities including immigrants or migrant workers, these tensions and needs for trust further increase.

Kymlicka (2004) concurs with Gallagher and Pritchard, offering that “the issue of migration pushes discussions on multiculturalism beyond the boundaries of the state as recognizing the position of immigrant communities may involve, at least in part, ‘respecting the desire of immigrants to maintain strong links with their country of origin … [and] … may involve accepting the idea of dual citizenship’ (Kymlicka, p. 195). Kymlicka raises the risks of cultural and economic marginalization, and offers that these risks can be diminished by focusing on a balance of recognition and equality of immigrant groups seeking to integrate into a dominant culture.

In their book, Marquart, et al., offer various portraits of the lives of undocumented and documented immigrants and their testimonies of trying to immigrate into the Atlanta social and religious culture. In one of their case studies, they tell the story of St. Anthony, another Catholic church in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The incident took place on Ash Wednesday, 2007. The authors explain that on the Christian liturgical calendar, Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, the forty-day period of fasting and repentance that leads to Easter. At St. Anthony’s, the Ash Wednesday service in February 2007 was a bilingual Mass. It offered a rare opportunity at this parish for Spanish-speaking and English-speaking members of the church to worship together, and the sanctuary was filled far beyond capacity.

A disgruntled member of the English-speaking congregation, fed up with the overcrowding of his own church, called the local fire marshal to report the program, and very soon fire trucks had arrived outside the sanctuary to disperse the crowds. The parish was put under strict orders not to exceed the capacity of church facilities for any event, and the staff
began the delicate process of rearranging the church’s very busy schedule to comply with the regulations imposed on them.

**Assimilation and Multiculturalism**

Many churches use the description of “multi-ethnic” to indicate an environment where many cultures worship. However, the term multi-ethnic generates different meanings depending on the church’s identity. Gushiken explains that there are two general types of multi-ethnic churches, each revolving around the dynamics between the majority race and those in the minority (p. 185).

“First, there are racially diverse congregations with one ethnic group determining the organization and methodology of the church” (p. 186). Gushiken calls this the “color-blind” approach where ethnic minorities are assimilated into the church based on a “faulty premise that every church operates in a similar way.” This structure is attractive because it provides the appearance of multiethnicity without the discomfort of cultural blending. Randy Woodley states, “System ethnocentrism is perpetuated in governing policies (official or unofficial) that maintain an unhealthy ethnic or culturally biased status quo” (p. 186). Gushiken claims this structure protects the power of the majority ethnic group, pressuring the minority groups to embrace the dominant culture in order to belong to that worship community.

Shared community is the second form of multiethnic church offered by Gushiken, who describes it as “embracing the perspectives and traditions of each ethnic group by inclusion in leadership, celebrating traditions, and respecting racial differences” (p.187). This structure is nurtured by creating “color-conscious” dialogue acknowledging the specific cultural perspectives represented. It promotes the interaction of ethnic groups with one another, while protecting their ethnic identity in a safe environment.
Conflicting Views in the Literature

In a speech at West Michigan University (1963), Martin Luther King, Jr., stated that, “We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sign and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic” (“Dr. Martin Luther King’s 1963 WMU Speech Found”). While most of the authors in the literature support the notion of unity within diversity, there are some who felt there are reasons that segregated churches function more efficiently. Evans, Forsyth & Bernard (2002) researched one Catholic diocese in Lafayette, Louisiana. They found that in this Southern diocese, some churches were not friendly to integration, even in current times. These culturally and racially segregated Catholic churches, like most American churches of other denominations, perform well in terms of parish giving and program participation and support.

Garces-Foley (2008) has also studied the continued segregation of U.S. churches since the Civil Rights Movement. She discusses the need for organizational change and racial reconciliation starting at the theological level, and trickling down to the church membership. She also believes in maintaining ethnic identity and that cultural division is expected and even considered successful in promoting multicultural parishes. According to Garces-Foley:

“Catholic integration efforts start and end with the assumption that new immigrants must be allowed to retain their religiocultural traditions and worship in their own language. When seen in this light, the persistence of cultural divisions within the multicultural parish is evidence of success rather than failure. In contrast, evangelical multiethnic churches largely rely on English as the common language. Though creating a formidable language barrier to most new immigrants, this common language has enabled these churches to avoid the
division into linguistic groups that greatly deters cross-cultural interaction in the Catholic multicultural parish. It has also facilitated the creation of a common culture within multiethnic churches that enables integration to occur to a much greater degree than in the multicultural parish. At the same time, because the concept of culture is not well developed in the evangelical tradition, the pressure for minority members to assimilate to this common culture is opaque” (p. 20).

While the literature shows that multicultural churches with various ethnic groups experience active levels of participation within those groups, Chatters’ article, which studied the participatory nature of these ethnic groups in religious life, stated that African-Americans and Caribbean Blacks had similar religious involvement, while non-Hispanic Whites had slightly lower levels of involvement. One of the questions in the research was to further research this perception or misperception of participatory levels.

My own personal experience in racially segregated churches also echoes the findings of Evans, et al., in that churches with one strong identifying race tend to support causes as a unified front and participate actively in programs because they are culture-specific. This signifies to me that while cultural harmony should be a goal of multicultural parishes, some members of parishes and churches feel more comfortable worshipping with those who mirror their own racial identity. And, within those multicultural churches, similarly, members of particular ethnic groups favor activities that appeal to their own race.

**Literature Summary**

Fortunately, there is a preponderance of literature that supports the cause and the challenge of finding unity with diversity within the Catholic Church, a global organization whose leaders promote multiculturalism. This literature focuses on U.S.-based religious organizations, and many of the articles are specific to the Catholic Church. In particular, several pieces of
literature focus on the Hispanic population, which is a large representation of the action research location. This literature provides support that this topic has been historically researched, yet not saturated. The problem of racial and cultural conflict has not been adequately solved, which signifies further areas of research opportunities. With an ever-evolving population in the United States, the opportunity for research and new literature on the topic may never reach maturity.

Because the action research topic is Catholic specific, there is room for additional thought leadership on the state of multiculturalism within the Catholic Church, and how to promote a thriving, effective, and diverse Catholic parish. Further, opportunities exist to focus on the fundraising and giving aspect of Catholic life within multicultural parishes. Because the literary research lacks fundraising and giving-specific information, additional research must be conducted to understand how culture can enhance or impede the success of giving or fundraising efforts.

Moreover, with new and evolving leadership within the Catholic Church, there is room for discourse among the literary community on the meaning of multiculturalism, the proper approaches for integration, and what it means to become integrated without making populations feel alienated or assimilated.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology of an action research case study based at St. Rita Catholic Church in the metropolitan Atlanta area. At this diverse parish, while it was important for ethnic groups to maintain individuality, pride and cultural kinship, this segregated ideology made it difficult for the church, as a place of worship and a business, to accomplish important spiritual, financial and administrative goals. Due to the continued growth in church membership, there was a need for a larger church edifice and facilities to house the numerous liturgical activities and programs. In the midst of a $5 million Capital Campaign, parish administrators were concerned about rallying enthusiasm among all cultural groups in order to ensure that each parish family took ownership in the stewardship and fundraising required to meet the financial goals.

The purpose of this action research study was to create conditions, through active interventions, that help St. Rita Catholic Church become a unified community within its diversity. In this chapter, I will review the action research methodology, and then detail the rationale for utilizing this approach for the study. Then, I will survey data collection methods and the qualitative analysis that transpired during the action research process.

Action Research Defined

Stringer (2007) outlines an action research framework that includes research planning, information gathering, data analysis, communication, and actions (p. 211). Coghlan & Brannick (2010, p. 4) support this definition and elaborate by providing the following characteristics about action research:
- Research *in* action, rather than research *about* action
- A collaborative democratic partnership
- Research concurrent with action
- A sequence of events and an approach to problem solving

The construct of an action research project includes cycles of looking, thinking, and acting (Stringer, 2007, p. 8). In other words, collecting information through various data sources and understanding the problem (looking); making sense of the data (thinking); and implementing solutions with an evaluation of the process (acting). These cycles repeat through various stages of an action research process, each round of interventions informing and impacting the subsequent rounds of interventions.

Figure 4: Action Research Cycles
While this research study was qualitative in measurement, it is important to create a distinction by defining it as an action research study. Action research differs from other types of research because of its focus on “specific problems within a specific setting” (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). Further, action research seeks to create change and form change agents within an organization. There is a collaborative team of researchers within the organization helping to plan, take action, evaluate the action, and lead to further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, p. 5). Stringer (2007) also notes that, “change is an intended outcome of action research…subtle transformations brought about by the development of new programs or modifications to existing procedures” (p. 208).

**Research Plan Design**

At the beginning of qualitative research design, Maxwell (2005), states that the researcher must explain why he or she is conducting a particular study. The same notion is true in action research. Understanding the reason for the study helps determine design decisions, and the worth of one’s study (p. 15). As a member of this parish body and the past Chair of the Parish Council, my personal values reflected those of the parish lay and clergy leadership in terms of creating an interculturally competent parish body in terms of programming, objectives, and organizational vision. Maxwell helps to assess this problem when discussing researcher bias and reactivity, which potentially impede validity in the research.

Due to my established inclusion within the client system, I experienced a low barrier to entry during the engagement phase of the action research study. Since 2008, I have attended St. Rita Catholic Church and joined as a full member in April of 2009 when I received the sacrament of confirmation, following a nine-month period of confirmation classes and immersion into the Catholic faith.
Table 2: Implemented Research Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 0</td>
<td>Joined organization Parish Council</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Conducted preliminary research related to Catholic diversity</td>
<td>September-December 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Contracting interview with site sponsor (pastor)</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
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<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Recruitment and engagement of action research team members</td>
<td>April-May 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Event observations and document reviews</td>
<td>May 2011-December 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>Formation of research problem and questions; additional event observation and journaling</td>
<td>January 2012-March 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6</td>
<td>Intervention #1: African Parishioners Organization Mediation Sessions</td>
<td>April 2012-July 2012</td>
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<td>Phase 7</td>
<td>Reflective interviews with action research team members</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
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<td>Phase 8</td>
<td>Intervention #2: Ministry Head Retreat</td>
<td>September 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 9</td>
<td>Reflective interviews with action research team members</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 10</td>
<td>Intervention #3: Capital Campaign Marketing</td>
<td>October 2012-April 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 11</td>
<td>Reflective interview with parish administrator and new pastor</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 12</td>
<td>Continued monthly Parish Council/action research team meetings</td>
<td>Monthly and ongoing</td>
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</table>

Creating a Change Agent Community

While an action research study may focus on an initial set of intervention cycles, one of the goals within action research’s collaborative structure is to create a system of long-term change agents. Bierema & Hill (2005) provide a definition of change agents, describing them as “tempered radicals who operate on a fault line and as organizational insiders with career success who mitigate desire to advance their change agenda with simultaneously fitting into the dominant corporate culture” (p. 558). Action research at a church, especially at a site such as St.
Rita’s, typically includes a group of voluntary leaders who willingly participate in the organization at a high level of commitment.

Action research is both emergent and ever-changing, which emphasizes the importance of change management skills within a group of sustainable change leaders. This is especially important in an organization of long-term members or participants, such as religious organizations. Stringer (2007, p. 9), states that in action research “people find themselves working backward through the routines, repeating processes, revising procedures, rethinking interpretations, leapfrogging steps or stages, and sometimes making radical changes in direction” (p. 9). Throughout these experiences, change agents are born.

**Action Research Team Process**

The action research team, which was comprised of the 10 members of the Parish Council (including me), approached intervention planning through the facilitation of monthly meetings and the co-creation of interventions. Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) explain that in action research, co-creation is about process thinking and collaborative meaning making among the action research team (p. 540). During these team meetings, we discussed recent events and programs at the parish, strategized on ideas for interventions, and analyzed how the interventions aligned with our action research goals. The initial ideas for interventions emerged from critical incidents reported by Pastoral Council members (action research team) from their own experiences, the reported experiences of other parishioners, and observations of parish events and activities.

**Intervention planning.**

During intervention planning, the action research team considered critical incidents that were made aware through personal experience or observation by council members, reports of
incidents from ministry groups, conversations with ministry heads, and other anecdotal feedback provided to the council and parish administration.

**Table 3: Critical Incidents Impacting Intervention Considerations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Intervention Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reported tension within the African Parishioners Organization (APO). This tension included reported incidents in which African parishioners complained that the APO was catering to the Nigerian population and not being inclusive of other African national cultures or languages.</td>
<td>• Helping the APO to restructure and find ways to collaborate among the African national community within the parish (Intervention #1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports from the Hispanic evangelization team to the pastoral council that expressed frustration in their recruitment efforts of English speakers to attend retreats and small faith communities, and the lack of sponsorship and understanding of their goals within the English-speaking community.</td>
<td>• Bilingual ministry head retreat (Intervention #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed participation at monthly Ignite! Program, annual Parish Mission (revival), and the perceived lack of Hispanic attendance at these marketed events.</td>
<td>• Bilingual ministry head retreat (Intervention #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality ministry report to the pastoral council that revealed the lack of collaboration between English and Spanish speaking hospitality ministers during the special bilingual events and Masses.</td>
<td>• Bilingual ministry head retreat (Intervention #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Religious Education Department expressed concerns over</td>
<td>• Bilingual ministry head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual Masses (Intervention #3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual ministry head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40
Sample Critical Incidents | Intervention Considerations
---|---
redundant events being planned by English and Spanish speaking ministry leaders, and the missed opportunity for collaboration. These concerns included incidents in which event leaders from English-speaking and Spanish-speaking leaders attempted to reach out to each other, but experienced a lack of interest in collaboration from the other party. | retreat (Intervention #2)
The Capital Campaign Committee reported stagnancy in the number of pledges being made to the campaign, and the slowness of contributions being paid. | • Capital campaign marketing (Intervention #4)

In order to ensure effectiveness within the timeframe of this action research process, the action research team planned four key interventions that took place across three action research cycles by October 2012. These four interventions included:

1) African Parishioners Organization Mediation Sessions
2) Bilingual Ministry Head Retreat
3) Bilingual Masses, and
4) Capital Campaign Marketing

Details of data collection and analysis are included later in this Methodology chapter.

**Action research team profiles and protocols.**
The following profile of the action research team details the diversity represented by nationality, race, age and gender, as well as a sample list of activities each action team member has been involved in within the parish. Full descriptions of parish activities are included in Appendix F: Participatory Activities.
Table 4: Action Research Team Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AR Team Member</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity/Nationality (self-defined)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parish Involvement (representative sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| F01            | African-American                         | Female | 39  | • Capital Campaign Committee
|                |                                          |        |     | • Financial Peace University
|                |                                          |        |     | • Supper Club
|                |                                          |        |     | • Small Faith Community
| F02            | Caucasian/Mexican                        | Male   | 42  | • Just Faith (a reflective group dedicated to spirituality and social justice)
|                |                                          |        |     | • Education Council
|                |                                          |        |     | • Holy Week Pilgrimage for Immigration Reform
|                |                                          |        |     | • Summerfest/Kermesse
| F03            | Caucasian                                | Female | 68  | • Women’s Auxiliary
|                |                                          |        |     | • Over 50’s Group
|                |                                          |        |     | • Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)
| F04            | Cameroonian                              | Female | 40  | • African Parishioners Organization
|                |                                          |        |     | • Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)/ Small Faith Community
|                |                                          |        |     | • Legion of Mary (a weekly prayer group focused on Marian Devotion)
| F05            | Italian/American                         | Female | 29  | • Young Adult Ministry
|                |                                          |        |     | • Capital Campaign Committee
|                |                                          |        |     | • Just Faith
|                |                                          |        |     | • Good News People Bible Study
| F06            | Peruvian/American                        | Female | 41  | • Parish School of Religion
|                |                                          |        |     | • Pre-School
| F07            | Irish/American                           | Male   | 42  | • Parish School of Religion
|                |                                          |        |     | • Supper Club
|                |                                          |        |     | • Marriage Encounter
|                |                                          |        |     | • Holy Week Pilgrimage for Immigration Reform
| F08            | Mexican                                  | Male   | 43  | • Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)/Small Faith Community
|                |                                          |        |     | • Holy Week Pilgrimage for Immigration Reform
|                |                                          |        |     | • Summerfest/Kermesse
| F09            | Kenyan                                   | Male   | 30  | • Adult Faith Formation
|                |                                          |        |     | • Just Faith
|                |                                          |        |     | • African Parishioners Organization
| F10            | African-American/Puerto Rican           | Female | 36  | • Adult Faith Formation
|                |                                          |        |     | • Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)/Small Faith Community Young Adult Ministry
Each member of the action research team cooperated through:

- Reflective post-intervention interview participation
- Monthly action research team meetings
- Event observation and journaling
- Attendance at Bilingual Ministry Head Retreat
- Attendance at Capital Campaign meetings or African Parishioner Organization Mediation Sessions (as assigned)

Team members were responsible for attending the monthly action research team meetings and their assigned interventions. The action research team agreed and voted on a requirement that team members may not miss more than two action research team meetings during the duration of the study in order to ensure consistent data collection and feedback. Action research team members were also to send journal entries to the lead researcher three days before each meeting so that the journal entries and memos could be compiled prior to the upcoming meeting for the month. In addition, any observations from an intervention were to be submitted five days prior to the upcoming team meeting. Transcripts from post-intervention reflective interviews were compiled by the lead researcher and provided for review within four weeks after each intervention. Action research team members had the opportunity to review transcripts, and then come to the action research team meetings to discuss their reflections and identify potential themes arising from each intervention.

**Intervention Execution**

With the coordination among the action research team and ministry leaders, the following interventions took place during the study. More details on each intervention can be found in Chapter 4.
• **African Parishioners Organization Mediation Sessions:** This intervention involved facilitated meetings and dialogue to uncover the sources of tension and issues within the African community, and create collaborative solutions.

• **Ministry Head Retreat:** “Draw Me Close: Building a Parish of Your Dreams” was a day-long retreat to help bring together lay ministry leaders, both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking community leaders.

• **Capital Campaign Marketing:** This $5 million campaign would raise funds to build an expanded church building to house ministries, programs, educational activities, and parish administration.
  o **Individual and Family Pledges:** Church members were encouraged to pledge a fixed donation amount over four years’ time.
  o **St. Rita Café:** Groups of volunteers prepared meals each weekend from August through October 2012 for the St. Rita Café food sale, an effort to increase donations to the Capital Campaign.
  o **Walking for a Dream Walk-a-Thon:** A walk-a-thon — “Walking for a Dream”— took place in late October 2012, on a local nature trail, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. to further benefit the Capital Campaign.
  o **Campaign Prayer and Newsletter:** To keep the Capital Campaign at the top of parishioners’ minds, the Capital Campaign Committee wrote a prayer, which is now recited at the beginning of each Mass.

• **Bilingual Masses:** The idea of including more bilingual Masses was approached as a way of bridging the various cultural groups within the parish community.
**Data Collection**

Within this qualitative action research study, a variety of data collection measures were used throughout the action research cycles. Following each intervention, data was collected from action research team interviews about their experience in the interventions, and their perceptions of program/intervention success. The action research team, during our monthly meetings, also provided anecdotal and collective observations on events. The individual observations were provided in the form of written journal entries while the collective observations were reflected through verbal recollections of events. This data has been included in the qualitative coding process that was used to analyze the research in this study.

**Data collection process.**

The following data collection methods were employed by the action research team. The reflective action research team post-intervention interviews were conducted by me, the lead researcher. Action research team members submitted journal entries during the monthly action research team meetings, and observations notes following each intervention. These journal entries and observation notes were provided to me either electronically, or in a hand-written journal, depending on the action research team member’s preference. Minutes from the action research team meetings and Capital Campaign meetings were taken by a member of the action research team, while notes from parish administrative staff meetings were provided by the parish secretary.
Figure 5: Data Collection Methods

**Informed consent.**

As part of the action research study’s approval by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), it was important to protect the research participants by complying with IRB protocol. One of these safeguards is informed consent. See Appendix E to view the informed consent form signed by participants. To ensure informed consent, participants in action research interviews and documented action research team meetings were guided through the following steps. When they were first contacted via phone or email, they were informed that they would be participating in a confidential qualitative research study in the area of unity within diversity at the parish. They were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary, and that they were under no obligation to participate.
They were also required to sign the consent form and receive a copy of the document for their records. Those participating interviews were asked, on record, if they consented to having the session recorded for transcription purposes, with the understanding that the recording would be accessible only by the interviewer and destroyed at the conclusion of the research study.

**Reflective Interviews**

Following my oral examination in March 2012 with my major professor and committee members, I revised my perception about my purpose statement and the action research process as a whole. Initially, I planned to conduct qualitative data collection through church leader interviews, ministry head focus groups, and parishioner surveys. While this qualitative research design might be appropriate for a traditional doctoral study, my research design was not reflective of the action research process.

One way that I adjusted my methodology was to more strongly demonstrate my role as a participant in the process (and not as an observer), and be truly co-constructive of the action research process. While the interventions were planned and designed by the action research team, I had not considered the fact that I needed to interview the action research team itself so that we could better understand the process and assess change leadership team dynamics. Following the recommendations of my advisory committee, I refocused my data collection on the action research team and its evaluation of the interventions. Because we co-defined the action research focus together, this team was better able to analyze its ability to address the action research problems and purpose.

**Journaling and Observations**

Maxwell states that “observation often provides a direct and powerful way of learning about people’s behavior and the context in which it occurs” (p. 94). Because action research team members represent both English- and Spanish-speaking communities within the parish,
they were able to observe key meetings and parish celebrations and feast days, such as Easter, the Feast of the Ascension, and Pentecost. In addition, they analyzed the organization of the parish-wide events, attended planning meetings for these major functions and observed the interaction of attendees.

Following each intervention, the action research team provided their observations through journal entries and memos. Merriam (2009) states that “observations take place in the setting where the phenomena of interest naturally occurs” (p. 117) and that they provide a “firsthand encounter with the phenomena of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (p. 117). During the subsequent action research team meeting held after each intervention, we categorized themes that emerged from the group’s discussions. The qualitative interviews I conducted with the action research team members triangulated their experience as co-organizers of the retreat, as well as the success of the retreat in achieving the goals of the action research purpose and research questions.

Documents/Meeting Notes

Meeting notes were also collected as data sources, in order to help triangulate the data gathered from action research team interviews and observations. Examples include meetings notes from each action research team monthly meeting, Capital Campaign committee meetings, and African Parishioner Organization meetings. In addition, I was provided access to parish administrative staff meeting minutes. The highest attended action research team meeting had all 10 members present, while the lowest attended meeting had seven members present.

During the action research meetings, our group had a note taker who was elected based on her attention to detail and past experience capturing thorough meeting discussions, outcomes, and action items. This note taker was present at all but one action research team meeting. In the one absence, an alternate note taker took meeting notes. While these were not the primary
sources of data, each set of meeting notes was used in the data analysis to triangulate any themes that emerged from primary data sources such as interviews, observations, and memos.

**Historical Data**

Sources of historical data included annual census information from the administrative offices, which identified the number of families registered at the parish as well as giving levels, which included tithes and offerings, and other financial campaigns. The parish office also maintains financial records from church fundraising events and attendance records. In addition, I secured the findings of a feasibility study conducted by a third-party fundraising firm that the parish contracted to spearhead our current Capital Campaign. This feasibility study included focus groups and surveys in English and in Spanish and assessed the ability of the parish to raise the necessary funds to construct new church facilities.

**Data Analysis**

Following each intervention and series of reflective interviews, data analysis commenced. Because of the iterative nature of action research, it was important to gather the data throughout the study, so that future interventions could be planned or adjusted. Below are the steps of the data analysis process that took place:
Within qualitative research, there are several options for data analysis, from which I selected memo writing and coding. I chose these methods because they proved to be the best analysis options for my data, which included action research interviews and observations. Because I would be conducting a qualitative study, reflections and transcripts from interviews would enable me to identify common themes during the coding process.

Maxwell explains that the “first step in qualitative analysis is reading the interview transcripts, observational notes, or documents to be analyzed (p. 96). The action research team and I journaled our research experiences throughout the data collection process, which helped us to capture or “memo” our observations and learnings into a written format. Because part of our research included observations, recording memos was especially important in capturing data quickly and effectively.
Coding of data.

Coding was also a method that was employed during data analysis. More than 400 pages of interview transcripts, journal entries, memos, minutes from action research meetings, and data from qualitative interviews were analyzed through the Ruona Method for Analyzing Qualitative Research (2005). Ruona explains that before you begin analysis, “you must gel the collected data into a form that is easy to work with” (p. 240). Sources of data include interview transcripts, research journals, and other records of observation. Ruona encourages the researcher to clean the data through minor editing and ensuring that participant identities are properly protected through anonymity. A filing method of transcripts is also necessary to ensure the organization of research files and data (p. 240).

A popular method in qualitative research, coding “consists of applying a pre-established set of categories to the data according to explicit, unambiguous rules, with the primary goal being to generate frequency counts of the items in each category” (p. 96). Maxwell identifies the categories of data analysis as organizational, substantive and theoretical. This organization of categories, themes and issues helped me to identify recurring issues and better recognize the causes and possible interventions to address the problem being studied.

Prior to the readings in one of my qualitative research courses, the action research team and I believed that data analysis followed data collection. Contrary to our beliefs, scholars such as Merriam suggest that data analysis should begin during the actual data collection. Merriam (2009) cites the following concurrent data collection and analysis instructions based on Bodgan and Biklen’s research (pp. 171-172):

1. Force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study.

2. Force yourself to make decisions concerning the type of study you want to accomplish.
3. Develop analytic questions.

4. Plan data collection sessions according to what you find in previous observations.

5. Write many observer’s comments as you go.

6. Write memos to yourself about what you are learning.

7. Try out ideas and themes on participants.

8. Begin exploring literature while you are in the field.

9. Play with metaphors, analogies, and concepts.

10. Use visual devices.

By following Merriam’s wisdom to analyze while collecting, we were able to employ this newfound knowledge to ensure we addressed our specific research questions while making sure that we informed the data analysis.

**Maintaining data confidentiality.**

Prior to data collection, I wanted to ensure the confidentiality of the action research team members, who participated in reflective interviews following each intervention, provided journal entries and event observations, and participated in monthly action research team meetings. Due to this environment of trust, action research team members felt comfortable in their candor and willingness to divulge their genuine reflections and input. Prior to each recorded interview, the action research team member was reminded of the purpose for the interview, and asked permission to record. During action research team meetings, members were aware that the discussions were considered data collection for the action research process.

During data analysis, each action research team member was assigned a coded number (i.e., F01, F02), to designate their qualitative input. Their true identities have been kept confidential and have remained the property of the primary researcher. Following the action research study, the recordings and identifying information will be destroyed in compliance with
the research design, approved by IRB. Action research team members were welcome to depart the study if they chose to do so. All of the action research team members remained throughout the study.

**Trustworthiness of the data.**

Trustworthiness can be protected and safeguarded by ensuring that measurements for validity of data are in place. Maxwell defines validity as “a fairly straightforward, commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). He further explains that in qualitative research, the researcher strives to eliminate specific threats to their analyses or conclusions (p. 107).

As a researcher, I was aware that my subjectivity and positionality could create bias from the inception of the research ideas, to the ways that I suggested we gather data, my personal analysis of the data, and ultimately, my beliefs of the findings. Maxwell names researcher bias as one of two major threats to the validity of research (p. 108). The second threat, reactivity, creates a threat if and when a researcher tries to “control for” an outcome based on their experience in being part of the environment in which they study (p. 109).

Maxwell suggests the following checklist to rule out threats of validity (pp. 110-113):

- Intensive, long-term involvement
- “Rich” data
- Respondent validation
- Intervention
- Searching for discrepant evident and negative cases
- Triangulation
- Quasi-statistics
- Comparison
Due to the timeline for completion of this action research study, some of these items were not feasible for this particular study, such as intensive, long-term involvement, although such a step could be taken as a continuation in the study of beyond the timeline of this degree. Of the guidelines provided, the action research team chose to focus on gathering “rich” data through the multiple forms of primary and secondary data that were gathered. Triangulation of data, or the awareness of bias created by self-reported data, was important in recognizing sources of error (p. 112).

**Role as an Inside Researcher**

From a positionality perspective, I feel that being an insider within the organization helped me to gain the trust of those within the organization. In fact, during the course of the action research project, I served one term as chairperson of the Parish Council, the lay leadership group that guides and informs the decisions of the pastor. I believe that my relationship with ministry leaders, Parish Council members, and my objective position in decision making helped those around me to feel that I was trustworthy and safe, and opened the door to collaboration with my fellow action research team members. I am also active in various ministries and community service opportunities at the parish. I feel this helped people to view me as a truly active member of the parish, and not someone who was involved strictly for research purposes.

While I consider myself to be well educated, I made a conscious decision during the course of action research to “downplay” my educational pedigree. My parish community is comprised of working-class families and individuals, many of whom are not college educated. By not focusing on my educational status, I hoped participants would view me not for my status, but as a parishioner who cared about the life and future of the parish. Similarly, I chose to wear more casual clothing when attending meetings and events at church. My professional career often requires business attire which I felt would be not be conducive to creating trust in the
parish setting. As an inside researcher, I believed I was likely to gain access to the information and people that I needed, and that the participants would be open and receptive to my questions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). I also held a reputation of maintaining an objective stance on sensitive issues within the parish.

**Conclusion**

In community-oriented organizations such as churches, the role of the lay leader is critical in the organization’s success and ability to function. By creating change agents through the action research team, the organization can create an equipped and sustainable team of leaders to ensure the ongoing implementation of the organization’s vision.
CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT AND CASE

In August 2007, I made my first pilgrimage to the Vatican. For my entire life, I had felt compelled to make a trip to Rome and visit the place related to Jesus’ command to his beloved apostle Peter when he said in Matthew 16:18 “and I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” For some reason, that scripture always moved me, and when I finally stood inside of St. Peter’s Basilica, I became overwhelmed by the sense of history, holiness, and respect for the place in which I was standing. In fact, I could have stayed all day. At that time, I was not yet a member of the Roman Catholic Church, but held a deep respect for the faith considering that my mother and a substantial portion of my family held deep roots in Catholicism.

During this part of my faith journey, I sought answers on life direction and the state of my spiritual life. On the first Sunday of the New Year in 2008, I submitted to the gravitational pull to visit a Catholic parish in the Atlanta area. During my first visit with a Catholic friend, my fears of a “big, scary cathedral” quickly dissipated as I entered the semi-circular sanctuary with visibly worn carpets, simple pews, and casually-dressed parishioners. I instantly felt warmed by the feeling of inclusion and the observation of this place filled with so many ethnicities, I could not even fathom attempting to identify them. While my friend was not able to return to the church due to travel conflicts and relocation, I continued visiting St. Rita Catholic Church week after week, and the following fall, I enrolled in confirmation classes to begin my path to spiritual conversion.
This process of conversion, called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), involved an eight-month period of Catholic education, reflection, prayer, discernment, and spiritual formation with a group of approximately 15 other adults. We participated in the various rites within the RCIA process, including the Rite of Acceptance (proclaiming our desire to become part of the Catholic faith), Rite of Sending (the parish community’s acknowledgement and blessing of the candidates), and Rite of Election (a special ceremony in which the Archbishop of Atlanta approved of our names being entered into the “Book of the Elect”).

Because I had been baptized as an infant in the Methodist tradition, I did not have to be re-baptized, as the Roman Catholic Church recognizes baptism from other Christian traditions. In preparation for the sacrament of confirmation, the person being confirmed adopts a new name, typically the name of a saint to be their protector and guide. I chose St. Rita of Cascia as my confirmation saint. The confirmation sacrament, during which the candidates receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through a blessing with anointed oils, took place during the Easter parish celebrations. I have continued to remain active in the RCIA program by sponsoring other adults converting to Catholicism, and as an instructor and catechist for the weekly formation classes.

**Study Purpose**

The purpose of this action research was to create conditions, through active interventions, that would help St. Rita Catholic Church become a unified community within its diversity. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?

2. How does leadership participate in change related to intercultural relations?
This chapter will detail the events during the case and the action research process of looking, thinking, and acting over the course of a 16-month period of four interventions across three action research cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting.

**Context**

At St. Rita Catholic Church, the varying methods of worship, evangelization, outreach and programming created a divided feeling of ownership and harbored distrust, and as a result, a segregated attitude towards stewardship and collaboration. At this multicultural parish, while racial diversity is represented, there yet lies a sense of segregation and cultural insensitivity among and between ethnic groups. Prior to 1999, a small number of minorities attended the parish, according to action research interviews and parish demographic data. Aware of the changing community around the church, the parish hired a Spanish-speaking priest from Mexico to evangelize to the growing Hispanic community. In recent years, the church had experienced a rise of diversity in parishioners, also noting an increase in Vietnamese, South Asian, and Nigerian Catholics.

The introduction of the new Spanish-speaking priest revolutionized the face of the parish community. The parish demographic changed extraordinarily fast, and by 2007, the parish had increased to “2.5 times its 2000 size,” with almost 6,000 registered families, 43% of whom were Hispanic. Non-Hispanic Whites, who made up 39% of the population in 2007, were no longer the majority. African nationals and African-Americans represented 13% of the parishioners, while the Asian population decreased to 5%. The parish had always prided itself on being multiethnic, but for some long-time parishioners, the change seemed exponentially fast. “Somehow they found Fr. Antonio and…then it exploded. It was like, that was the beginning of the end,” said a participant in one action research event observation.
While there were efforts to combine programming and events, the majority of the ethnic group members rejected attempts for united programming in favor of their own cultural groups’ activities. Segregation also took place in the methods for approaching Christian outreach and evangelization. Charismatic groups, such as those within the Spanish-speaking community, employed more aggressive methods of evangelization such as in-person solicitations and verbal announcements to participate in retreats and evangelization immersions, while the non-Spanish speaking community relied on reactive approaches, such as written announcements in the parish bulletins. These differences in cultural leadership, communication, outreach, and planning created an atmosphere of tension and debate within the church leadership and church community at large.

This action research project studied existing factors creating diminished intercultural competency within the parish, while leveraging research and literature related to religious multiculturalism, leadership, cultural sensitivity. More specifically, methods employed by other Catholic churches with large, culturally-diverse populations were sought in order to determine best practices. Finally, the research also sought to create new theories and practices where gaps existed in past methodologies.

**Stakeholders**

Stakeholders included leadership and parishioners representing a cross-section of ministry interests and ethnic identities. They also included the pastor and other clergy; the Parish Council (the action research team), a parishioner group that advises the pastor; a group of 36 ministry leaders; and the parish body, of which seven ethnic groups identified for the purposes of this study. This criterion was established by review of church demographic records showing the seven largest represented ethnic groups.
Additional stakeholders included small faith communities that parishioners attend on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. These small faith communities are established in many ways, including participation at retreats and workshops, and involvement in parish programs (i.e., Bible studies, community service groups). These small faith communities allow members of the parish community to identify with a smaller group of 15-20 people so that they have an ongoing opportunity to fellowship in a smaller setting. The parish community at large benefited and will continue to benefit as stakeholders, as they will be impacted by interventions that are created from data collection outcomes.
Story and Outcomes

Because of my inclusion within the client system, I experienced a low barrier to entry during the engagement phase. After the identification of my topic with my major professor in late 2010, I began planning the formal entry of the action research study within St. Rita Catholic Church.

System Entry

In July of 2010, I was encouraged by the pastor to serve on the church’s Parish Council, which advises the pastor on matters affecting the parish and congregation. We met monthly, where the pastor and church administrator updated the group on organizational and financial issues, upcoming initiatives, and other matters of concern to the pastor and church administration. Being part of the group and its candid dialogue made me aware of cultural disharmony taking place within our parish life. For example, in planning parish feasts and other large events, event organizers experienced resistance of participation from some of the cultural groups within the parish, despite their repeated attempts to engage these groups. In another event planned for parish leadership and ministry heads, it was noted that the Hispanic leadership was conspicuously absent and disinterested in planning or participating.

Client Engagement

According to Anderson (2009) the client can be categorized as a contact client, intermediate client, primary client, unwitting client, indirect client, or ultimate client (p. 104). In the setting of St. Rita, I considered the pastor to be the primary client, as he held ultimate responsibility for the church’s affairs as well as the power to make decisions at the parish level. Indirect clients consisted of parishioners who may not have come into personal contact with me, but who would be affected by interventions that the action research team would introduce. Finally, ultimate clients in this action research process would be the organization’s members as a
whole. Burke (1994) as cited in Anderson (2009, p. 105) “argues that the client is not always a single individual or the larger system, but that the client should be thought of as the relationships between individuals, groups, and the larger organization.” As such, the clients—primary, indirect, and ultimate—were approached by considering the relationships and the impacts of the interventions by and through these relationships.

**Contracting Process**

In late November 2010, I informally approached the pastor of the church, my primary client, who had served in his role at St. Rita for seven years. I explained to him my current academic journey, and he was delighted that I might be able to help the parish, in light of his ongoing concerns. This was my first step within the contracting process.

In most Catholic churches throughout the world, pastors establish what are called Parish Councils. Parish Councils arose after the Second Vatican Council in response to the magisterial recognition that the laity had a role to play in the life of the church ("Pastoral Councils," n.d.). During this formal contracting interview, the pastor of St. Rita Catholic Church explained the development of the council at this particular church since 2004, the year that he was appointed pastor. In the beginning, he assembled a team of active parishioners representing various sects of parish life. The Parish Council held a retreat with ministry leaders and even went away on a Visioning Weekend. During this experience, he these representative parishioners about their dreams, ideas, and concerns about the parish, and the council was able to establish its agenda.

For several years, the Parish Council had been involved in brainstorming sessions and also researched the actions steps adopted by other parishes with similar demographics. “We felt that it was important to learn from other parishes with similar challenges and experiences; that way we could leverage their outcomes to help shape our strategy moving forward. And although we look at what other churches are doing, our task is to look at where we are now and to take
into account the uniqueness of our parishioners” (J. Morris [pseudonym], personal communication, March 17, 2011).

The pastor also differentiated pastoral planning and administration planning, explaining that a pastoral plan is different because it focuses on the spiritual development of the people, not the operations of the church, although the operations can help or hinder the pastoral planning process. “The pastoral plan is intended to ensure that the needs of all parishioners are identified, resources and opportunities for growth and service are available, and that our parishioners receive feedback about their progress” (J. Morris, personal communication, March 17, 2011).

During this contracting conversation, I was careful to listen to the pastor’s explanation of the problem, and asked follow up questions that were directly reflective of his commentary and answers. While I had an idea of the intercultural competency issues prior to the interview, I wanted to ensure that the pastor was able to frame the issue for me based on his own experience and perceptions.

As suggested by Anderson (2009), I asked questions about the cause of the problem, stakeholders involved in the problem, and what he would like to me to do as the lead internal researcher (p. 108). Aside from the Parish Council, I asked who else could be involved in this process. Because of my active role within this system, I did not ask questions related to the organization’s services, executive team, size or culture, because of my intimate awareness of those details.

**Ongoing Interaction**

At the end of the contracting session, I provided the pastor with a package consisting of my topic focus and presentation. Two weeks following this meeting, I sent an email to the pastor following up on our conversation and asking permission to present my topic overview to the Parish Council at its April 2011 meeting. He granted me permission to proceed, and stated that
he was looking forward to working together to implement some effective solutions. Once this presentation to the Parish Council was completed, we agreed that I would create an initial statement clearly outlining the problem, develop a timeline for the engagement with key milestones, clarify roles and responsibilities, and specify the data to be gathered. They later provided their input to refine the research problem. As of September 2012, I had 16 opportunities to meet with the pastor and Parish Council since the initial contracting interview. The council allotted part of the agenda each month for action research input on parish issues and action research planning.

**Problem Identification**

In action research, the action research team collectively forms the research problem and research questions. Prior to that process, I entered a stage of contracting and engagement with the pastor to ensure his sponsorship of the action research study. During the contracting interview, the pastor stated that “people often tell me that it feels like we are two churches within one church” (J. Morris, personal communication, March 17, 2011). By this, he meant that people feel that we have an English-speaking church comprised of many ethnicities, and a separate, Spanish-speaking church, comprised of U.S.-born Hispanics and immigrants from Mexico and Central American countries. During this conversation, he acknowledged the growth in the Hispanic population during the past 10 years after the addition of a priest from Mexico. The purpose of bringing this priest into the parish was to have someone that could evangelize to the Spanish-speaking community and help to grow the parish, which is positioned in a county with a growing Hispanic population. As such, the church leadership was interested in appealing to and meeting the spiritual needs of that population by welcoming them into the church. In order to successfully meet those needs, they needed the presence of a Hispanic leader with whom the Spanish-speaking parishioners could relate.
This strategy was deemed successful by the growth of the Hispanic community within the parish. The Hispanic population represents nearly 45% of the church’s parishioner base. According to the pastor, the Spanish Masses are “bursting at the seams so much so that we are in danger of violating fire code” (J. Morris, personal communication, March 17, 2011). In my observation as a fluent speaker of both Spanish and English and an attendee of both Spanish and English Masses, it was required to arrive earlier to Spanish Masses in order to gain a seat within the main sanctuary (congregational worship setting) or risk having to sit in the overflow section in the church social hall. By contrast, the English speaking Masses, while well attended, did not experience the seating overflow issues.

During the aforementioned entry and contracting interview, the pastor acknowledged the tension he felt from English-speaking parishioners about the growth of the Hispanic population and the sense that the English-speaking parishioners are more financially supportive of the church’s operations. He also stated that some English-speaking parishioners felt that the “Hispanics are taking over” and that they had their own agenda.

Despite these sentiments, the pastor’s personal belief was that all of the parish’s cultural communities were “here to stay; they are not going anywhere, and we must learn to find ways to integrate” (J. Morris, personal communication, March 17, 2011). He sought further opportunities for unity within diversity in all areas of parish life, while respecting parishioners’ rights to identify within their own cultural groups.

The real problem, according to the pastor and others on the action research team, was the perception that St. Rita had two churches operating under one umbrella. While it had been a goal of the leadership to provide multicultural worship and programming opportunities, the parish community’s involvement in multicultural programming remained self-segregating.
The pastor felt that the church had made great strides in communicating the messaging of being “one body in Christ,” but that the messaging was not resonating within the various ethnic communities and that they continued to operate in silos. This had affected not only programmatic success, but had also impeded the success of financial campaigns and year-round stewardship efforts. He desired to solve this internal multicultural branding problem through more effective communication and better programming opportunities.

Change in Action Research Approach

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I revised my initial perception about my purpose statement and the action research process as a whole. Initially, I planned to conduct qualitative data collection through church leader interviews, ministry head focus groups, and parishioner surveys. Following the recommendations of my advisory committee, I refocused my data collection to the action research team and its evaluation of the interventions. Because we co-defined the action research focus together, this team was better able to analyze its ability to address the action research problems and purpose and oriented the study more toward change leadership processes.

Another major theme and reflection in the action research approach was the use of terminology around diversity and unity. Originally, my study was entitled “Intercultural Competency at St. Rita Catholic Church.” This title was reworded to “Unity within Diversity at St. Rita Catholic Church” to more accurately reflect the action research committee’s goal to create unity among the many ethnic groups that represent a diverse background. I adjusted the title once again during the dissertation writing process to better reflect the themes and findings that emerged during data analysis. The current title is “‘I’m Sorry, I’m Only Allowed to Speak English Here?’ An Action Research Case Study of a Catholic Church’s Search for Unity within Diversity.” During this process of planning, acting, and reflecting, our goal was to find a way to
integrate these groups while avoiding assimilation in respect of their culture-specific traditions and needs.

**Intervention Planning**

The action research team, which is comprised of the Pastoral Council, approached intervention planning through the facilitation of monthly meetings and the co-creation of interventions. During these meetings, we discussed recent events and programs in the parish, strategized on ideas for interventions, and analyzed how they aligned with our action research goals.

In order to be effective within the timeframe of this action research process, we planned four key interventions that took place by October 2012. These four interventions included the African Parishioners Organization, Bilingual Ministry Head Retreat, Bilingual Masses, and Capital Campaign Marketing.

Following each intervention, the action research team collected data by interviewing the action research team about their experience in the interventions, and their perceptions of program/intervention success. The action research team, during our monthly meetings, also provided individual and collective observations on events. The individual observations were provided in the form of written journal entries while the collective observations were reflected through verbal recollections of events. This data has been included in the qualitative coding process being used to analyze the research in this study. The following profile of the action research team details the diversity represented, as well as the activities each action team member has been involved within the parish. Full descriptions of parish activities are included in Appendix F: Participatory Activities.
Intervention #1: African Parishioner’s Organization Mediation Sessions

The African Parishioners Organization (APO) represents all of the African national groups in the parish. Examples of the countries represented by these parishioners included Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, Angola, and Nigeria. The parish websites states the mission of the APO: “With Our Lord Jesus Christ as the Center of our lives, especially in the Holy Eucharist, this Ministry calls all participants to answer Christ’s call to grow in faith, hope, love and understanding of God’s grace while building cohesive and concrete support among its members and the entire parish community.” This organization held bi-monthly meetings and socials following the 11:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays. The majority population of this Mass is of Nigerian descent, although there are other African nationals and non-African ethnic groups represented.

In late 2011 and early 2012, there was reported friction communicated by non-Nigerian members, who felt a lack of inclusion of non-Nigerian members in programming and musical selections during Masses. For example, most of the songs performed by the African choir were being sung in Igbo, the Nigerian national language. Several reported arguments among APO members and associated gossip left other African national group members feeling alienated, resulting in the resignation of the choir director and a decrease of participation in APO programs. The consequences of this friction included reduced attendance at APO events, and complaints from non-Nigerians to the parish clergy and pastoral council members.

As a result of this turmoil, the pastor placed the African choir on hiatus in February 2012 until further discussions with African leadership. At the subsequent Parish Council (action research) meeting, the action research team recommended the recruitment of new choir members through an announcement in the bulletin. The announcement would positively describe that the African choir seeks members of all nationalities to promote the culture and music of the various African nations. A second recommendation was made to schedule four mediation sessions
between the leaders of the African community and the alienated members, and to ask of one of our Angolan priests to serve as the mediator of the discussion, along with a Kenyan priest of a neighboring parish. The pastor would also be present in these mediation sessions, which took place from March through September of 2012. The APO leadership and membership was supportive of the intervention, which was demonstrated by an increase in choir participation by mixed African nationalities.

Initially, some of the participants attending the mediated sessions were hesitant to voice their feelings, according to action research team member observations. As a way to stimulate discussion, the African priests told stories of their experiences at their native parishes from their respective African nations. These stories helped to put participants at ease and begin to join the dialogue. After the second mediated session, observation notes indicated that the group began having more productive and problem-solving conversations. After the formal intervention sessions concluded, some action research team members of African descent continued to attend the monthly APO meetings, and noted a more inclusive environment which higher attendance levels. They also reported efforts to diversify the APO leadership through the recruitment of board members who were of non-Nigerian descent as an effort to have more fair representation of the African population in the parish. While the observers acknowledge that there are some tensions that still need to be resolved, the major concerns about inclusion seem to have subsided.

Beyond our recommendations, the intervention by the action research team was to help facilitate these discussions among leaders of the APO to determine any additional sources of friction within this large group within the parish, and to help identify the goals of this group. These discussions took place through four scheduled meetings during which the APO leadership team, the pastor, a two priests of African national descent, and three action research team members who were in attendance. The presence of the pastor, who is not of African descent,
helped to stress the importance of the friction and his prioritization of the matter as the leader of parish affairs. By including an Angolan priest and a visiting Kenyan priest as part of the intervention, the APO leaders accepted and respected that a leader from a related culture was involved in the dialogue. The fact that he was also a parish clergy leader also created a level of respect for those leading the intervention, while his nationality as a non-Nigerian provided a sense of objectivity. The action research team also attended additional APO general member meetings to evaluate the discussions, participation, attendance, and engagement levels of those meetings.

As part of the action research study, interviews were conducted with the action research team to analyze their knowledge of this intervention, and their opinions about the success of the intervention. The outcome of this data would determine any additional support the action research team could provide to the APO.

**Intervention #2: Ministry Head Retreat**

Each ministry group within the parish has a leader or team of leaders. In October of 2012, the action research team and the parish’s Director of Adult Faith Formation co-hosted a day of reflection on the purpose of this action research, creating conditions that would help St. Rita Catholic Church become a unified community within its diversity. This bilingual retreat was attended by ministry heads, action research team members and the pastor, and was facilitated by an external, trained facilitator. The first half of the day included cycles of teaching on various topics, including collaboration, leadership skills, communication, and planning. These sessions were segmented by periods of small group discussions and private reflection. The small group discussions were organized so that individuals were pre-assigned to a particular discussion group. By pre-selecting the groups, we intended to bring together individuals of different cultural, economic, and family backgrounds who may otherwise not interact with one another.
We concluded the retreat experience with a Eucharistic celebration focused on the participation of retreat attendees, followed by a dinner, where the discussion on the day’s topics continued.

Following this intervention, the action research team provided their observations through journal entries and memos. During the subsequent action research team meeting, we categorized themes that emerged from the day’s discussions. The qualitative interviews I conducted with the action research team members evaluated their experience as co-organizers of the retreat, as well as the success of the retreat in achieving the goals of the action research purpose and research questions. The journal entries, memos, themes discussed at the action research meeting, and data from qualitative interviews were analyzed using the Ruona Method for Analyzing Qualitative Research (2005).

**Intervention #3: Bilingual Masses**

Historically, the parish has either celebrated Mass in English or Spanish. Only during special occasions were bilingual Masses celebrated. In my and the action research team’s past observations during bilingual Masses such as Holy Thursday and All Saints Day, parishioners appeared to enjoy these rare moments when they can worship in two languages. As a research team, we observed higher levels of engagement within the Mass, more jubilant singing and clapping during the Mass, and longer greeting times during the sign of peace offered during the Mass—a period during which parishioners greet each other with a hand shake, embrace, or kiss. The “standing room only” attendance numbers at these bilingual Masses are greater than the non-bilingual Masses, as well as the offertory levels. One obstacle is that these Masses last longer than single-language Masses due to the need for dual-language translation.

Following these Masses, the action research team observed that people tend to linger outside of the sanctuary and talk with other parishioners, instead of quickly departing the church grounds which typically happens during English- or Spanish-speaking only Masses.
Observations of single-language Masses showed that the church parking lot empties 10 to 15 minutes following the Mass. During bilingual Masses, the parking lot would take longer to clear, ranging from 20 to 25 minutes after the Mass.

Leading up to the time of the action research study, St. Rita celebrated four English Masses and three Spanish Masses on Sunday. On Saturday, the church celebrated one English and one Spanish Mass. The proposed intervention was to schedule one bilingual Mass each weekend, to assist in better culture sharing. In order to avoid disruption of the already hectic Sunday Mass schedule, a bilingual Mass could be held each Saturday afternoon. This would also help to alleviate the already crowded Spanish Masses by offering an alternate Mass time. At this bilingual Mass, there would be an opportunity for parishioners to hear from priests that they otherwise have not experienced at single-language Masses. Additionally, clergy could cross over to different audiences and create a personal brand within another part of the community.

**Intervention #4: Capital Campaign Marketing**

In early 2012, the parish’s Capital Campaign reignited its marketing efforts though video and social media marketing. The committee produced and issued a series of video testimonials to persuade parishioners to pledge monetary support to the campaign. This campaign was inclusive of various ethnic groups within the parish, and materials were produced in English and Spanish. Videos were shown at the end of all Masses, as well as posted on social media sites YouTube© and Facebook©.

Initially, the campaign requested that each family consider a pledge of $4,000 or more, payable over three years (or longer, if needed). The campaign committee also demonstrated the different payment plans available. The action research committee collaborated with the Capital Campaign committee to create greater awareness through sharing stories of campaign successes.
By the amount raised in pledges and other fundraising efforts, we were able to determine the effectiveness of these awareness efforts and the goal of this action research study.

**Post-Intervention: Arrival of a New Pastor**

In late winter 2013, St. Rita welcomed a new pastor, Father Xavier. As part of administrative changes within his religious order, the former pastor was assigned to a parish in another state, while the new pastor was welcomed into the parish. Three weeks into his arrival, I met with the pastor and reviewed the action research study that had been taking place. He expressed his interest in the topic and the desire to continue sponsorship of the research at St. Rita’s. This sponsorship was further documented as an email approving the continuation of the action research study. In addition, an interview with the pastor to discuss his observations, vision, and direction for the parish was scheduled for late Spring 2013.

Of importance were Father Xavier’s bilingual skills in English and Spanish, and the fact that the Caucasian, U.S.-born pastor lived and served as a pastor in Argentina for more than 10 years. The St. Rita church bulletin included an introductory biography of Father Xavier, which included the following excerpt: “He has served in a number of parishes, including St. Augustine in Marietta, GA. Following the call to serve the foreign missions he was sent to Argentina where he served in Clodomira, Santiago del Estero.” He also served as pastor to three bilingual, multicultural parishes in Orlando, FL, Altamont, NY, and Hartford, CT, before his arrival at St. Rita’s.

During this first of two interviews, Father Xavier stated: “The most important thing for me is to continue to meet and greet, and to come to know who is here serving the parish. I’m coming to know the missions and the mission heads. I want to listen, listen, listen; watch, watch, watch; learn, learn, learn,” he said. “My first impression is that it’s a beautiful place to serve.” Further, Father Xavier expressed the importance of bridging gaps among the different cultural
groups, and how to create awareness of the riches in working collaboratively. As such, he was supportive of the action research taking place, as it would influence his pastoral plan and provide him insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and issues affecting St. Rita parishioners.

**Emergent Intervention: Town Hall Meeting**

While the arrival of the new pastor was an intervention in and of itself, his presence provided an extra burst of motivation to the action research team. Due to the success of three of the four planned action research interventions, the action research team and the pastor planned their next intervention, which came in the form of a series of Town Hall meetings. They organized six meetings over the course of a two-week period in May and June of 2013. Three sessions were held in Spanish, and three in English. The participation from the parish community exceeded both the pastor’s and the action research team’s expectations. More than 1200 parishioners attended the series of meetings.

During the sessions, the pastor sat at the front of the social hall, and each parishioner present had an opportunity to provide input on any concerns or issues related to parish life. Ground rules were established at the beginning of the meeting to ensure that each parishioner had two minutes of uninterrupted time. In addition, people were only allowed to state their concerns, and not address or provide a rebuttal to any concerns they heard earlier in the session. The pastor did not provide feedback, but attentively took notes as each person walked to the microphone and provided their “two cents.” He explained that, “right now, I want to hear what you all have to say. I will take notes, reflect on what you have said, with the Council. And then, you will hear what I have to say.”

**Conclusion**

As a cavalry of change leaders within the action research site, the action research team desired to create interventions related to long-term goals of the parish related to cultural
harmony, while trying to achieve unity within diversity. Through these cycles of looking, thinking, and acting, the action research team not only learned about the emergent and unpredictable process of action research, but also gained the skills and start planning interventions beyond the original four slated interventions. Together, we learned the skills necessary to properly address the problems facing the parish, plan interventions, determine their successes and pitfalls, and evaluate for further planning. Findings and outcomes from each intervention and post-intervention activity will be detailed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research was to create conditions, through active interventions, that help St. Rita Catholic Church become a unified community within its diversity. The following questions guided this research:

- What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?
- How does leadership participate in change related to intercultural relations?

Summary of Chapter 4 (Case and Context)

The action research study at St. Rita Catholic Church was conducted by an action research team of 10 parishioners. This team created four interventions that took place within three action research cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting. After each intervention, action research reflective interviews took place. The following action research meeting would be dedicated to reflection of the process for the prior intervention, and dialogue for improvements to the subsequent intervention.

Data and Findings Process

The action research team completed all of its interventions in late 2012, and collected nearly all of the data it sought to gain from the action research project. The data sources were analyzed, themed and coded based on the Ruona Method for Analyzing Qualitative Data. From the data collected, the following sources were used:

- Qualitative data gained from interviews with the action research team following each intervention.
- Qualitative data gathered from interviews with new pastor and parish administrator.
• Event observation notes and journaled memos recorded by action research team members.

• Meeting minutes from action research team meetings, Capital Campaign committee meetings, and APO meetings.

• Post ministry head retreat survey data, which was gathered by the adult faith formation direction and will be provided to the action research team.

Following each intervention, data were collected from action research team interviews about their experience in the interventions, and their perceptions of program/intervention success. The action research team, during our monthly meetings, also provided individual and collective observations on events. The individual observations were provided in the form of written journal entries while the collective observations were reflected through verbal recollections of events. As the lead researcher, I also kept a journal of reflections and observations throughout the study.

This data were included in the qualitative coding process used to analyze the action research study. Findings were organized into large themes or categories, and then segmented into sub-categories. The following table illustrates an overview of the research findings:

Table 5: Summary of Findings

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<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<td>RQ1: What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?</td>
<td>Theme 1. Shifts in Demographics Have Created a Majority-Minority Culture</td>
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<td>Theme 2: Impact of Immigration Status</td>
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<td>• Role of Fear and Shame</td>
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<td>• Experiences of Racism and Profiling</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Different Cultural Norms Contribute to Nature of Participation</td>
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<td>Theme 4: Perception of Power and Privilege Differs Among Cultural Groups</td>
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<td>Theme 5: Identity and Labels: Impact on Cross-Cultural</td>
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<td>Theme 6: Effect of Language Barriers</td>
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<td><strong>RQ2: How do leadership behaviors impact change related to intercultural relations?</strong></td>
<td>Theme 1: Lack of Transparency Harbors a Culture of Mistrust</td>
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<td>Theme 2: Differing Leader Communication Styles and Messaging</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Perceived Lack of Collaboration from Leaders Impacts</td>
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<td>Cross-Cultural Participation</td>
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<td>Theme 4: Leaders Need Training on Critical Leadership Competencies to Create a Thriving Multicultural Parish</td>
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<td>• Visionary Leadership</td>
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<td>• Financial Planning</td>
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**Research Question One: Current Barriers to Intercultural Integration**

The following themes materialized in reflection of Research Question One. These include six major themes related to shifts in demographics, immigration concerns, cultural norms and their impact on participation, perceptions of power, the impacts of identity and labels, and language barriers.

**Theme One: Shifts in Demographics Have Created a Majority-Minority Culture**

In the early 1970s, St. Rita Catholic Church was founded by a community of U.S.-born residents of the Atlanta area. The majority of these residents, according to parish records, were Euro-American or Caucasian. Over the past three decades, the parish grew demographically with the attendance of other cultural groups and nationalities. In the past decade, the parish has changed even more significantly with the addition of Spanish-speaking clergy and Masses. As referenced by Marquardt, Steigenga, Williams & Vasquez in Chapter 2, a majority-minority culture emerges when a minority group grows into a majority, and power struggles arise as the former majority group strives to adjust to its new identity within the organization.
St. Rita hired Fr. Antonio 12 years ago to meet the needs of a growing Hispanic population in the community surrounding the church. Through Fr. Antonio’s evangelical efforts, Spanish-speakers began attending St. Rita’s from locations near and far from the church location. The data showed that this evangelical community has grown so much that they are no longer viewed as a majority.

- **F01:** “At some critical percentage, and I don’t know what that is, the minority group becomes problematic and tensions arise. I think when the minority group is significantly smaller, people like the novelty of having the minority, because the minority is non-threatening”, said an action research team member in an interview following the bilingual ministry head retreat.

- **F08:** “I think it’s interesting because basically there was an individual or small group making an positive effort to bring people into the church. I think this boom in the Hispanic population came from a good place of trying to serve an underserved community. Unfortunately, the growth explains a lot of the demonization of Fr. Antonio. He’s responsible for the cultural shift.”

- **F02:** Another action research team member echoed these sentiments, but also notes the importance of inclusiveness from the beginning of a minority presence: “At the beginning, it’s like a badge of honor and people think ‘let’s congratulate ourselves on how diverse we are’, but then they become fearful that they are losing ‘their church’. We need to embrace the idea that even ‘my church’ is now ‘our church.’” While research team members felt that the bilingual ministry head retreat provided a strong foundation for changing those perceptions, they knew they had a long journey ahead in creating a long-term culture shift.
• **F07:** When probed during an action research team meeting about the African nationals becoming a majority-minority group, one team member stated, “I don’t think they are considered a threat. It might be because they are a minority under that ‘magic number’, but if they become 40% of the population and start competing, I suspect there would be concerns.”

In an example of majority-minority changes and white privilege at the action research site, St. Rita’s, Mass times have fluctuated since the changing demographic of the parish population. Currently, the Spanish-speaking Masses are scheduled at “non-peak” times of the day: 7:30 p.m. on Saturday night, 6 a.m. on Sunday, 2 p.m. on Sunday, and 7 p.m. on Sunday. Despite requests from Spanish-speaking community leaders to gain one of the prime Sunday morning Mass times, these efforts have not been accepted.

• **F03:** “The process entailed working out a balance of power inside the parish that often seemed less than fair. For instance, there was a Spanish Mass each Sunday at 7:00 a.m. in the parish hall, across from the large sanctuary. The Mass consistency filled the hall beyond capacity, and something needed to change. At 7:30 a.m. on Sundays, a sparsely attended English Mass occurred in the large sanctuary, and the 150 or so attendees comfortably could have fit into the parish hall for their Mass (dubbed the “Frozen Chosen”).

The solution that emerged, however, was to move the Spanish Mass to 6:00 a.m. on Sundays, so that the English Mass time and place would not be disturbed. Remarkably, more than four hundred people attend this Mass, one of four Spanish Masses (and nine total Masses) offered at the parish each weekend. While it was acknowledged that something needed to change due to the shifts in the new “majority,” parish administrators were not willing to disturb the former majority group.
Theme Two: Impact of Immigration Status

With such a diverse parish community heralding different life experiences, the impact of social issues was considered a guiding and important question within this action research experience. One of these prevalent social issues was immigration status. St. Rita’s administration cites and acknowledges that much of the overall parish population growth has been a direct result of expanding its services to the Spanish-speaking population. The action research study uncovered some powerful feelings and experiences related to immigration as a social issue impacting intercultural participation.

Role of fear and shame.

As the action research interviews were conducted, other action research team members often broached the topic of immigration concerns as a barrier to participation. One of the action research team members is an immigration attorney specializing indigent cases. In a lengthy post-intervention interview, he stated bluntly and passionately:

- F06: “I think there’s an assumption within the Hispanic community that the English community judges them because they’re here illegally. And people that are here illegally, there’s a great shame associated with that. I mean it’s something that people live with, but there’s always the shame. And men have been in my office and cried speaking about it, simply the fear of going to work every day and not knowing if they’re going to get picked up or if they’re going to be able to come home that night. And just it’s a drummed in, deep-seeded shame about their own status.”

Some Spanish-speaking action research team members substantiated these claims, stating that sometimes the children of undocumented immigrants do not even know their parents’ status, only finding out when they begin filling out college applications and a social security number is needed. Other observations noted by the team included the fact that Spanish-speakers only go to
Hispanic stores and avoid English-speaking establishments for fear of exposing themselves or undocumented family members.

- **F04:** “And when they see the faces of the English speaking community as judging, I think it taps into that shame that they just want nothing to do, it’s a fearfulness of that group. I don’t know if it’s a fearfulness that they would call immigration on them.”

- **F02:** “I’ve seen situations where someone needs a document notarized, and they’ll go to one of these Hispanic, back-door services that’s just a catch-all for anything legal and they’ll pay $60 to $70 for a notary. I’ll tell them, just go to Wells Fargo down here, it’s $6. But their fear of their immigration status makes them take extreme measures.”

Reports of domestic violence among women in immigrant community have become more frequent at St. Rita’s. While the women can report their abuser, many of them will not report them for fear of being deported (if undocumented), or exposing a family member to the risk of deportation. Another source of fear and disengagement within the Spanish-speaking immigrant community is the need for mobility and the fear for their relatives in their native country.

- **F02:** “They still send a lot of money back home, and a lot of them live in the trailer parks here. And part of that is due to the sentiment ‘Well I’m undocumented, I’m not going to…’. The other part of them is thinking if they need to leave right away, they can’t take the house, but they can drive their car or mobile home away,” said another action research observer.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, this need to be mobile hinders some parishioners to pledge long-lasting support to church financial campaigns as well. Speaking on the topic of immigrant mobility, Bordieu (2011), states that the social field of immigration movement “is
composed of a growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders” (p. 42). He further insists that Latinos strategically live transnationally in response to “persistent discrimination and segregation, growing nativism, and a subordinate insertion in the new economy” (p. 42).

**Experiences of racism and profiling.**

At an action research team meeting, one guest speaker from the Hispanic Evangelization ministry reported accusations that the local county police had been seen driving up and down the street in front of the church after the Sunday night Mass and after the Friday evening praise and worship service. These are both times when majority Spanish-speakers are in attendance at the parish.

One action research team member hosts a small faith group in her home every week. An African-American female, she became part of this group after having attended the Hispanic Evangelization Retreat. Her small faith group is a blend of adults and teenagers, both English- and Spanish-speaking. She explained an experience during one of these group meetings:

- **F02:** “We watched a religious movie in my theater room, and afterwards one of the teens starting doing jokes about black man and Mexican man. And so at first I laughed but then the mother in me came out and after an hour. I said ok, you can’t tell those kinds of jokes. You have to be careful about that, even though they were jokes about stereotypes.”

The action research team member, who was aware of the concept of double loop learning from our action research discussions, used this scenario as an opportunity to bond, but also to teach these Spanish-speaking teenagers a lesson about why their joking was considered racist not only to African-Americans, but also to Mexicans, who were a target of the joke. She also tried to
remain sensitive about the socio-economic status and environments that some of these teenagers lived in.

- **F02:** “I realized, this is how they talk about each other. I felt blessed they were comfortable enough and didn’t want to take that away from them. For them, it’s like the black kids and white kids don’t talk to us. So they are very sensitive about it too, so I feel like we have a long way to go. To them, all black people are ghetto. They were surprised. They said you live in a house like the one I clean.”

Sentiments of racism or racial insensitivity had also been reported in the church’s Parish School of Religion (PSR), a program consisting of weekly class attended by children who are learning about the church and preparing to receive the church’s sacraments. An interview with the parish administrator revealed that PSR participation had shifted in recent years, being more highly attended by Spanish-speaking children and youth.

- **F01:** “And you know, I noticed it only because someone told me that people are pulling their kids out.”

**Theme Three: Different Cultural Norms Contribute to Nature of Participation**

During contracting and engagement discussions with the pastor, the sentiment of a divided church was prevalent. He stated the belief that people in the parish felt there was an English-speaking church and a Spanish-speaking church. This notion was supported through action research study interviews. The theme of a divided or separate church under one umbrella was repeated through interviews during all four action research interventions.

- **F09:** “Some people say it feel like we have two churches. I say it feels like we have three.” This comment was reflected in one journal entry from action research team member, who further explained their referral to the English-speaking, African, and
Spanish-speaking communities. “I would have liked to see more unity; maybe it can’t be accomplished. I don’t know. Our church is so unique in what we’re dealing with here.”

- F08: “It really has to be a personal decision. People cannot be sitting in their corner and say ‘Oh, I want to be involved.’ When was the last time the Spanish people were doing something and you came in? When was the last time the Africans were doing something and I came in? If you wanted to be involved, you got involved.”

Many of the interviews attributed this divisiveness and participation tendency to cultural norms. Others agreed, but stressed that while those cultural structures exist, the decision to get involved in parish life remains and individual one.

**Understanding of collectivist vs. individualist cultures.**

While assessing Research Question 1, it was important to gain a baseline understanding on how diverse nationality groups participate in their given culture. This information would provide a parameter for approaching potential solutions to improve cross-cultural participation. When analyzing an environment in which various cultures and ethnicities are represented, it is imperative to study how those cultures behave in group environments. While Hofstede’s cultural dimensions do not provide scores for all potential nationalities, the action research team did note differences in how the different groups arrived to decisions, and how they worked both individually and collectively.

Action research interviews provided insights into varying parish activities, including fundraising styles related to the Capital Campaign. While many of the differences were attributed to cultural participation styles, some were linked to immigration status and the resulting inability to make long-term commitments.
• **F07:** “People like to say, there’s a cultural difference. Mexicans like to do group fundraisers. There’s socio-economic pressure that’s enhanced in the Mexican community. When something terrible happens to a member of their ethnic community, they all rally together to raise $10,000 or $20,000 in cash, just like that. When someone needs an immigration bond, they come up with $7,500 within days of the person being arrested.”

• **F02:** Another action team member said of the Spanish-speaking community, “You see, they’re trying so hard to help. They’re trying in their own way. They don’t have a lot of money, and the money comes in differently with them.”

• **F06:** In comparing the differences between the differing styles of collaboration, a different team member stated, “Fr. Antonio (the Spanish-speaking priest) explained in a Capital Campaign meeting that this type of campaign with pledges might work for English-speaking people, but he said Hispanics won’t do pledges. That concept is almost foreign, plus you have a lot of immigrants who are not here long term, and they don’t have the kind of jobs that allow them to pledge ongoing support.”

As evidenced by these and other qualitative data points, some ethnic groups at St. Rita’s such as Spanish-speaking societies and African nationalities tend to prefer collaborative group planning and execution. Hofstede explains the ideas of collectivist and individualist cultures by nationality. As an example, Both Mexico and Nigeria (an African nation), with a score of 30 (on a scale of 0 to 100), are considered collectivistic societies. “This is manifest in a close long-term commitment to the member ’group’, be that a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and over-rides most other societal rules and regulations” (Hofstede Centre, n.d.). In these societies, individuals protect and provide for members of their group. They build strong and close relationships, and provide or receive
opportunities and promotions based on family links, or their inter-personal relationships and skills within groups or teams. The feelings of pride, loss, or shame are also felt more deeply in collectivist societies.

The United States, with a score of 91 on this dimension, is a highly individualistic culture. “This translates into a loosely-knit society in which the expectation is that people look after themselves and their immediate families. There is also a high degree of geographical mobility in the United States and most U.S.-born citizens are accustomed to doing business with, or interacting, with strangers (Hofstede Centre, n.d.). Thus, those who are U.S.-born tend to be proactive or bold in their quest for information. This also applies to the business environment, in which employees or organization members take initiative and are self-directed. Within work environments, the employment or promotion of an organization member is tied to their performance and aptitude.

In an environment, such as a church, when different cultural and nationality groups are striving to survive and contribute to the organization, these differences can become barriers to intercultural integration, as has been demonstrated in the case of St. Rita. While this measure is not the only indicator of integration or participation, it provides a cultural guideline for understanding the issue.

**Theme Four: Perception of Power and Privilege Differs Among Cultural Groups**

As a multicultural parish having experienced drastic demographic changes, the role power and privilege presented itself through several of the post-intervention interviews. As a former majority group (English-speaking) that has gradually started becoming a minority, there are perceived threats to social capital and decision-making power, resulting in some of the behavior witnessed and reported throughout the action research study.
Financially strong losing social power.

In light of the Capital Campaigns and the struggles to raise adequate funds, the action research team analyzed how the intercultural tensions impacted financial effectiveness. In one interview, the parish administrator, in his interview, described some of the messaging he had heard around reluctance of participation within parish fundraising efforts.

- **F05:** “I’ve heard that the ‘white’ community is not going to pay to build a church for the Hispanic speaking community. They’re not going to pay for a church that that they’re not going to exist in or recognize.”

- **F07:** Another action research team member stated, “the Hispanic community is not going to pay the bill to feel unwelcome. They don’t feel at home, it’s not their parish, they feel like guests. They’re not going to pay for a new church. Why are they going to pay a bill for a church for people that hate them?”

Despite the joint efforts of the Capital Campaign committee and the action research team, the parish still fell short of its goal of $5 million in pledges. In order to break ground and begin building the church, the parish needed to receive at least half of the amount in payments, not just pledges. According to discussions and minutes from the Capital Campaign committee meetings, there was a perceived economic disparity between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking groups at the parish. This data emerged from dialogue within the campaign meeting, which includes both English and Spanish speaking members.

Members participating in this dialogue gained these insights from conversations with parishioners during campaign drives. During these drives, campaign committee members would stand outside of the sanctuary after Mass and attempt to distribute literature to parishioners after Mass in order to recruit their campaign pledges. This perception of economic disparity, according to the committee discussion, led to a belief by some that they were not financially
supporting the building of the new church, while they are the group that utilizes many of the church’s resources. Contrary to these opinions, the Spanish-speaking population has contributed to the campaign by hosting large fundraising events and donating the proceeds to the campaign. While individuals from this community may not be able to make large donations individually, they participate in group fundraising efforts in large numbers.

Another one of Hofstede’s views relates to power distance within different nationalities and societies. Power distance, as explained in Chapter 2, is the degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards and the acceptance of inequality in distribution of power in society (Hofstede, 1984). Power distance can also be explained as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011, p. 194). Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy (2009) explain that power distance (PDI) differs depending on a country’s power norms, and how citizens behave towards different types of authority.

**Why power distance matters.**

The larger the power distance, the larger the privileges afforded to individuals in their behavior and communication (p. 254). In Spanish-speaking cultures, as well as African cultures, people tend to accept directions from leaders without questioning their rationale. In an attempt to comprehend the differences in power distance between cultures, the following analysis compares the same nationalities that were compared in the previous section. According to the Hofstede Centre, the United States “scores low on this dimension (40) which underscores the American premise of ‘liberty and justice for all.’ This is also evidenced by the focus on equal rights in all aspects of American society and government.” Hofstede explains that within American organizations, people have easier access to leadership, and leadership tiers are established more for convenience. Leadership also holds a consultative relationship with
organization members and teams, depending on them for expertise and information. The flow of information is frequent and flows in reciprocally, and is oftentimes informal. This perhaps explains why U.S. natives at the parish are more likely to challenge or question leadership decisions, while those not born in the U.S. take suggestions from leaders as a directive.

To understand a sampling of St. Rita’s nationality groups, Mexico, Nigeria, and the United States were again analyzed by power distance. With a score of 81, Mexico is a hierarchical society, as well as Nigeria, which scores 80. In hierarchical societies such as Mexico and Nigeria, individuals feel that they have a specific place within that hierarchical order. They accept their place and do not seek rationale or justification. “Hierarchy in an organization is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat.” (Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

In observation of power and authority at St. Rita’s, an action research team member relayed their observations during the planning of the St. Rita Café to raise funds for the Capital Campaign.

- **F09:** “Fr. Antonio called a meeting with his lay ministry leaders on a Thursday for us to start an event on Sunday. I promise you over 200 people showed up for that meeting. I could not believe it. But our English-speaking pastor can’t do that, he doesn’t have that kind of authority.”

- **F01:** As another example of respect or adherence of power, another team member observed in a journal entry, “I know Fr. Antonio has told the Hispanic community during Mass ‘if you do speak English, go to the English-speaking Mass’, and then I started to see more and more people who appeared to be Hispanic at the English Masses.” This request from Fr. Antonio came as a response to the overcrowding of the Spanish Masses, and an attempt to alleviate the problem.
Conversely, observation notes from other action research team members observed that when requests were made by English-speaking priests during Capital Campaign meetings or program planning discussions, English-speaking community members were more likely to challenge the requests and decisions of the priest, albeit respectfully. They also noted that English-speakers did not turn out for events or meetings in as high numbers as Spanish-speakers did when their clergy leaders made similar requests.

**Theme Five: Identity and Labels: Impact on Cross-Cultural Dynamics**

The data showed interesting trends in the identification and labeling across and within the parish’s cultural groups. As Schein (2011) stated, organizational culture forms through cultural artifacts, including visible processes and observable rituals; espoused beliefs and values through formal and informal practices; and underlying assumptions through unconscious thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and theories. These cultures form whether or not the elements are appropriate or politically correct.

One example mentioned earlier in this chapter is the use of the term “Anglo” to refer to anyone in the English-speaking community, regardless of their ethnic background. Another example arose in the descriptions of the 11:30 a.m. Mass, during which the African choir performs. While being interviewed, several action research team members referred to this Mass as the “African Mass” or “Nigerian Mass.” When it comes to identity, the data revealed that people seemed to understand the need to identify or preserve cultural heritage. Said action research team member **F05**: “In the case of the African community, they are trying to preserve a culture that they’re physically far from now.”

However, a dialogue during one meeting revealed that too much emphasis on a culture might not be accepted by the former majority community.
• **F08:** “Could you imagine a painting in the social hall of a Black Madonna? How would that fly?” Observations captured the shaking of heads around the room.

• **F04:** Another team member quipped, “You know, Our Lady of Guadalupe is strongly honored by the Hispanic community. In fact, she appeared as an Indian. She’s supposed to be the Patron of the Americas too, but obviously it’s like only a certain culture of America.” Laughter ensued.

• **F07:** Once the laughter subsided, a different team member stated pensively, “In the U.S., people understand the idea of Immaculate Conception and Mary, the Virgin Mary, but our culture doesn’t really perceive her to be our patron saint. For me, there’s just no connection, where for our Spanish-speaking community, there’s a strong devotion and celebration.”

In further support for adult learning theory, Argyris and Schön’s claim that “learning involves the detection and correction of error” rings true in some of these examples (1978, p. 57). While the action research team is now aware of the dangers and misperceived identities and labels, broader systemic education and change will required in order to help parishioners and leaders acknowledge themselves and each other in ways that are socially perceived as respectful.

**Theme Six: Effect of Language Barriers**

“Buenas tardes, Padre. Mi nombre es Pedro Garcia…Oh, I’m sorry, I’m only allowed to speak English here,” the parishioner sarcastically said at a town hall meeting the new pastor held in late May 2013. The parishioner’s jest was a rebuttal to a prior statement made by an English-speaking parishioner that “in the U.S., we speak English.” Pedro went on to explain that when he and his wife joined the church 12 years ago, they felt very welcome. But he stated that at St. Rita’s he sometimes feels like “when you receive somebody at home, you welcome them at the beginning, but then after a couple hours, it’s time for them to go.”
Another observation of power is the role of youth in the life of a parent who does not speak English. This has reportedly caused frustrations on behalf of the non-English-speaking parent, especially when they suspect rude or derogatory comments might be made in their presence. They then rely on their second-generation English-speaking children to translate and assume the role of the adult during important conversations.

- **F08:** “We hear all the time that teachers or administrators speak ill of parents who can’t understand English. It’s denigrating for them to not be able to understand, and then ask their child, ‘what did they say?’”

- **F02:** A research team member who is a psychologist observed that in the child’s mind, they might think “Wow, this is power!” to know and understand something their parent does not, and the parent loses power by becoming reliant on the child for translation.

While many Spanish-speaking parishioners also speak English, there are some who are not comfortable in their limited ability to speak English. As such, St. Rita has begun offering additional bilingual programming and services to help parishioners feel more comfortable. As quoted in Chapter 2, Gushiken implores multi-ethnic churches to promote shared experiences, incorporating language and ethnic elements into the worship experience to make those of various ethnic groups feel welcome and comfortable (p. 198).

**Summary of RQ1: Barriers to Intercultural Integration**

Throughout the action research interventions and analysis, the action research team members participated in post-intervention interviews, gathered their observations in journals and memorandums, and participated in monthly group meetings to discuss outcomes and emerging themes. Post-intervention evaluation questions included those related to how the intervention
helped to build an integrated parish community, and liabilities or values that may have been detrimental to creating an integrated parish community.

The first research question ties directly to these post-intervention interview questions, addressing the barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s. From this research question, four themes emerged which includes organizational and learning styles among parishioner groups, cultural norms, cross-cultural collaboration, and mixed feedback related to the church’s environment. It is impossible to ignore social issues in such a diverse parish setting. While the action research team did not predict the specific social issues that would arise from the interventions and data collection, they were not surprised to learn that immigration was a leading social issue. What was surprising to the action research team were the common instances of racial profiling and tolerance of racially inappropriate comments within parish groups. In addition, some action research members found the instances of fear and domestic violence among the Spanish-speaking community upsetting and shocking, considering the church’s general role in offering protection and support to those in need

**Research Question Two: Impact of Leadership on Intercultural Relations**

A resounding and leading theme emerging from the action research process was the role of leadership in addressing and resolving the parish’s cultural issues. Subthemes include leadership communication effectiveness, leadership competencies, and visible sponsorship of the church’s vision. The following table summarizes the themes and subthemes related to Research Question 2.
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**Theme One: Lack of Transparency Harbors a Culture of Mistrust**

“If leadership could communicate more, maybe we as parishioners could communicate more”. This quote was captured during the bilingual ministry head retreat as participants shared their ideas for improved leadership. A common theme across all of the post-intervention interviews was the transparency and accessibility of the clergy. These concerns arise from different sources. The availability of the three English-speaking priests consists of an on-call priest being responsible on a rotating schedule. That means, in some parishioners’ views, that they do not have an opportunity to form a connection with one particular priest during times of need. This may lead individuals to avoid the help of a priest entirely. Conversely, The Spanish-speaking community has a much greater propensity to seek the help of a priest.

- **F01:** “While they (the Spanish-speaking community) respect Father Morris, he’s not the person they feel comfortable going to.”

- **F03:** “Father Antonio has evening office hours to make himself accessible. When there are events going on, the church lobby is full of people just waiting for an opportunity to get two minutes with him.”

Another concern expressed at the retreat was the availability and transparency of Parish Council members. One suggestion from a retreat attendee was to create a newsletter, with a
keynote message from the pastor and updates from the council. Not to duplicate the weekly bulletin, the newsletter would allow the pastor and lay leaders to highlight special initiatives or efforts, and inform parishioners of things they would not read elsewhere. From the lay leadership and Parish Council, people felt like they did not know whom to approach for concerns or complaints. “I come here at least four nights a week, and I don’t know who a single person on the Parish Council is.” As a result of this feedback, the action research team (also the Parish Council), instituted a tradition during which at each Mass, a member of the council would stand in the commons area at a special table and be available to receive and address parishioner concerns. They wear a special badge for identification purposes.

While there were concerns about the incumbent pastor’s communication style, there were some behaviors parishioners appreciated. In addressing the new pastor, one action research member reflected:

- **F09:** “One of the things I loved about Father Morris when he was here was that when he wasn’t celebrating Mass, he would meet the parishioners at the door. He would shake our hands on the way inside and welcome us into the church. It was a very nice touch, and part of our hospitality here at St. Rita’s.”

After having heard this feedback, the new pastor took the action research team member’s advice and whenever possible, tried to welcome parishioners to Mass if he was not the celebrant.

**Theme Two: Differing Leader Communication Styles and Messaging Exist**

The data showed that participants felt the style and delivery of the English homilies were at times lackluster and disconnected from reality. When receiving information from English-speaking clergy, attendees of the retreat felt the letters, classified as “cookie cutter”, and other deliverables lacked inspiration.
• **F04:** “Our English homilies are not as effective. They don’t address everyday life. They don’t talk about people raising their children, or family morals.”

• **F06:** One action team member reflection revealed the following characterization. “Father Morris has a hard time connecting with people. He connects well individually, but as a whole...he doesn’t inspire. That’s just not a talent God gave him. I think God gave him some real talent for administration.”

• **F08:** “There’s a void of inspiration and getting everyone on board. In any other denomination, this void could cause the church to go under. But in the Catholic church, people remain faithful to the church as an institution, so they will keep coming.”

When soliciting feedback from parishioners through engagement surveys or other historical forms of measurement, parishioners feel that they do not receive follow up or communication related to their feedback. “I feel like it was a waste of money to have a company come in and administer the survey if we don’t see or hear any results,” said one retreat attendee.

**Theme Three: Perceived Lack of Collaboration from Leaders Impacts**

**Cross-Cultural Participation**

Finally, action research team members noted the lack of collaboration among the clergy leadership. While Father Antonio had been invited by Father Morris to attend the monthly Parish Council meetings, Father Antonio had not shown up to a meeting in more than three years. Father Antonio not coming to Parish Council meetings, even though he is technically invited. This trend began to shift in early 2013 with the arrival of a new pastor.

Below are observations of Fr. Xavier collected and reported by the action research team related to communication between clergy and towards the congregation:
• **F08:** “I have noticed that all of the priests across different cultures seem to be more connected; in the past, they did not seem to interact when attending parish-wide events. Now we see and hear them refer to one another while giving homilies or speeches, and even joking with one another publicly.”

• **F09:** “Even during English Masses, Father Xavier has been observed spontaneously switching to Spanish at times. Since he started pastoring at St. Rita, there have been more observations by the action research team of Spanish speakers attending English Masses.”

• **F03:** “During Holy Thursday, we held a bilingual Mass. The [new] pastor allowed our Spanish-speaking priest to give a brief Spanish homily. During this Spanish homily, the priest asked everyone in the sanctuary to stand up and face a person who did not look like them, and hold their hands. He asked them ‘What skin color is the person you are looking at? Do they speak Spanish of English? More importantly, when you look at this person, do you see Jesus?’ He then asked each person to kiss the hand of the person they were holding. Observations showed that the majority of the congregation in the church was on their feet and participating in this gesture. Many people embraced the person they faced, and some even had tears in their eyes.”

• Also on Holy Thursday, the parish sponsored its annual Holy Thursday Pilgrimage for Immigrants. Nearly 400 parishioners attended, approximately 70% of them Hispanic. Father Xavier and Father Antonio, our Spanish-speaking priest, co-led the eight-mile procession from the church to the final destination. The pastor played a vocal and visible role in this event in a gesture of solidarity with Father Antonio. In fact, all five of the parish priests participated, either walking or serving water at the water stations.
Theme Four: Leaders Need Training on Critical Leadership Competencies to Create a Thriving Multicultural Parish

One strong theme revealed by the data collection and analysis was the lack of confidence that leadership had the skills to support a multicultural parish. While the clergy and administrative staff represented various cultures and nationality groups, the lack of faith in their intercultural abilities was often one of the first and more commonly repeated reflections within the action research interviews. They felt a strong need for leadership that could provide and model a consistent vision or the parish, as well as manage the operations and finances of a large parish with varying giving philosophies.

Visionary leadership.

The research showed that there were varying beliefs about the church’s leadership philosophy. One action research team member stated:

- **F07:** “I think St. Rita is pretty good at being open to parishioners taking initiative and starting things on their own. And so, I guess the idea is that St. Rita is very accepting and open to parishioners taking charge, I guess you would say.”

Others found this flexible leadership style uncomfortable and risky for a church, especially one with such a growing and diverse population.

- **F09:** “There should be an unequivocal voice from the pastor or a unified presence of all the priests saying through a presentation of some sort saying to the English speaking community, just laying it out. Okay, there are different languages now, there are different voices, and how this plays into the church’s vision.”

- **F03:** “There should be that clear voice to the Hispanic community that this is not rented space, this is your church. Your situation may be dismal and precarious; they
might disappear in a day. But today this is your family’s church, you have roots here.”

Data from the interviews and intervention observations revealed that this lack of leadership vision and sponsorship has left many confused on the church’s purpose and direction. As detailed in Chapter 2, Schein (2011) strongly suggests that the impact of an organization’s founder or leader is the most important factor in forming an organization’s culture (p.11). Moreover, this leadership foundation will influence the learning experiences of group members and their espoused beliefs. At St. Rita’s, there was no clear direction of the leader’s vision for the church, particularly as it related to its cultural issues.

**Financial planning.**

Throughout every intervention that was conducted, concerns about financial planning and the role of leadership were prevalent among the data. This theme was most prevalent during discussions and analysis of the Capital Campaign intervention.

The goal for St. Rita’s Capital Campaign was to raise at least $5 million, and as much as possible toward the overall estimated construction costs of $7.1 million for the new church facility. Upon the completion of the fundraising campaign, raising $5 million or more, the parish could continue discussions with the Archdiocese of Atlanta regarding funding the remainder of the necessary construction project. A loan from the Archdiocese of Atlanta for the remainder of the construction costs would allow the parish to build the new Church building soon over the next two years. After the pledge fulfillment period for the Capital Campaign, St. Rita will begin planning for the second campaign to pay off the loan on these new facilities.

To date, the pledged amount is a gross of $3,043,340. The net amount collected, minus campaign expenses, is $1,814,041. With the national and local economies still suffering a downturn, there remain approximately 4,200 of 6,600 families who have not pledged to the
campaign. In the future, the Capital Campaign Committee will continue to contact those families to get them all engaged in this critical endeavor.

Revisions to building plan.

Because of the campaign budget shortfall and other parish financial commitments, the Capital Campaign Committee, along with the pastor and representative from the Archdiocese, decided a different course of action with the building plan. Instead of the original $7.1 million structure which would have been constructed as a new building, they decided to refurbish and expand the existing church structure, which would solve the church’s need for a larger and more modern facility, while easing the burden of raising more funds than the membership is willing to raise. Further details on this revised building structure are being discussed.

The following fundraising progress was made toward the Capital Campaign within the last six months of the action research team’s intervention. While the individual pledges and payments continue to be a source of finance, other group-oriented fundraising ideas were also implemented:

Group fundraisers.

As part of the Capital Campaign marketing intervention, action research team members worked with the Capital Campaign committee to determine other successful methods of raising funds. Spanish-speaking members of the campaign stated that in Hispanic communities, group fundraisers are the preferred and most successful methods of fundraising. This observation aligns with Hofstede’s theories around collectivism in Spanish-speaking countries. In fact, the action research team learned that the concept of pledges or payments is a foreign one to cultural groups with ethnic backgrounds outside of the United States. Another barrier to pledges, according to the data collected by the action research team, is the uncertain immigration status of some of our parishioners. This data and feedback led to a wave of fundraising based on the group
fundraising concept, in order to better engage the Spanish-speaking community. These included the St. Rita Café and the Walking for a Dream Walk-a-Thon.

From August through October, groups of volunteers prepared meals each weekend for the St. Rita Café food sale, an effort to increase donations to the Capital Campaign. The St. Rita Café (Café Santa Rita) generated approximately $4,000 each weekend that it was open. In some cases the café has brought in between $7,000 and $8,000. The café was open after the weekend Masses. The Spanish-speaking community led the efforts on this project and contributed a great deal towards its success: buying the food, preparing, cooking, serving and cleaning up. While the Spanish-speaking community was largely represented, they sought the support of the English-speaking community to volunteer for the café, and solicited café sales after each weekend Mass, both Spanish and English.

Additionally, a walk-a-thon — “Walking for a Dream”— took place in October of 2012, on the Silver Comet Trail from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. to further benefit the Capital Campaign. The family-friendly event was promoted during Mass announcements, with registration taking place following each Mass. Individuals and families could choose how far and how long they wished to walk, and collected pledges from family, friends and co-workers. More than 400 individuals participated in the walk-a-thon, which raised almost $101,000. Walkers sought sponsors to make financial donations towards the construction of our new church. Although the walk was slated for 24 miles (12 miles each way), walkers were not expected to walk the entire length, based on their physical ability. Walkers were required to sign liability forms. The organizers promoted the messaging and purpose of raising donations for the new church, and to be together as a parish community. Members of the multicultural planning committee also promoted the event by speaking to parishioners as they left both Spanish- and English-speaking Masses.
Campaign prayer and newsletter.

To keep the Capital Campaign prevalent in parishioners’ minds, the Capital Campaign Committee wrote a prayer, which is now recited at the beginning of each Mass. The Committee also decided to publish a campaign news insert into the weekly bulletin. This one page insert is produced in English and Spanish, and communicates the current campaign pledge total, the number of parishioners who have pledged, and a testimonial from a parishioner on why they have pledge to the campaign. The Capital Campaign Committee continues to meet monthly with the architect, Catholic Construction of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, and building committee representatives to constantly seek out the best alternative for our final construction phase when that occurs.

Logistics and coordination.

With the limitations on building space due to population growth over the past decade, parishioners have experienced challenges when trying to schedule ministry meetings, plan events, or even attend weekend Masses. These frustrations became evident during the data collection and analysis. Action research team members, and the individuals and groups they observed, felt strongly that the pastor should have had a more visible and prominent role in the logistics and scheduling guidelines for parish activities. Currently, the weekend Mass schedule is as follows:

Table 6: Weekend Mass Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of Week</th>
<th>Mass Time</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>6:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of Week</td>
<td>Mass Time</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>7:30 a.m.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation notes indicated that while the 6:00 a.m. Sunday Spanish Mass yielded a crowded sanctuary and overflowing parking lot, the 7:30 a.m. English Mass had the fewest attendees of all the Masses. Further observation showed that the 7:30 a.m. attendees consisted of what appeared to be Caucasian, elderly parishioners.

- **F02:** One action research member reported, “I asked Fr. Morris, why can’t we give that 7:30 a.m. Mass to the Spanish speakers if the existing 7:30 a.m. English Mass is mostly empty?”

- **F08:** Another action research team member further elaborated Fr. Morris’ that if he “took the Mass away” from the existing attendees, he would lose a large contingent of financial and moral support from long-time parishioners.

Another major frustration for parishioners is the amount of traffic during the day on Saturday, and that traffic interrupting the flow of the 5:00 p.m. English Mass.

- **F05:** “Sometimes they (Spanish-speakers) don’t leave their event until a quarter til 5, and the English Mass starts at 5. We have some elderly people who cannot park in the overflow parking in the back of the church, so they just end up going home.”
Other observations and journal entries indicated that the church really need to hear from leadership what they plan to do to improve the timing of church events to prevent these frustrating experiences, but had yet to hear an explanation or plan for improvement. During Good Friday, action research team members observed that while the English and Spanish back-to-back services were well attended, the traffic situation was chaotic. They suggested that by making adjustments to the service times, or perhaps consolidating the service into a bilingual service, these issues would be alleviated.

**Summary of RQ2: Leadership**

This second research question analyzed the role of leadership in fostering or inhibiting intercultural participation at St. Rita’s. Very strong reflections around leadership transparency, communication effectiveness, program planning and financial acumen revealed many areas for leadership improvement to garner parishioner confidence and support. Specific recommendations to improve leadership competencies are located in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

“To (have a) dialogue means to believe that the `other' has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective. Engaging in dialogue does not mean renouncing our own ideas and traditions, but the pretense that they alone are valid and absolute.”

Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome

This action research case study details the processes, finding, and outcomes of a study situated in St. Rita Catholic Church based in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The purpose of this action research was to create conditions, through active interventions, that help St. Rita Catholic Church become a unified community within its diversity. The research was guided by the following questions:

(1) What are the current barriers to intercultural integration at St. Rita’s?

(2) How does leadership participate in change related to intercultural relations?

This chapter presents conclusions and implications drawn from a collaborative action research study conducted and completed by a team of lay leaders at St. Rita’s. The chapter will summarize the conclusions impacting St. Rita’s, followed by implications for practice. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Action Research Conclusions at St. Rita’s

The following topics reflect conclusions gleaned from the data analysis during the action research study at St. Rita Catholic Church.
Conclusion 1: Clergy leadership need additional management competencies to supplement their vocational training.

When priests become pastors, they have undergone the vocational training required for them to work within the priesthood. However, this study showed that clergy leaders need substantial training in management competencies in order to manage the business objectives of their church while providing the expected spiritual guidance to their congregations.

Underdeveloped leadership competencies.

The literature shows that there are many leadership competencies one could develop as a leader, such as financial planning, spiritual formation, and cross-cultural communication. This study exposed three key areas of improvement for organization leaders. These included, (a) visionary leadership, (b) financial planning, and (c) logistics and schedule planning. The research showed that there were varying beliefs about the church’s leadership philosophy, or lack thereof. These concerns arose from inconsistent messaging about the Capital Campaign from different clergy leaders, misinformation about the planning of parish-wide events, and a general feeling that the clergy was not “on the same page.” Concerns about financial planning and the role of leadership were prevalent among the data, as it related to the Capital Campaign. Finally, the frustrations related to Mass and program schedules signified an important issue that needs leadership sponsorship or decision making. The mass schedule has not changed during the course of the action research study due to lack of leadership consensus on the new mass times. Leadership has decided to table the discussion of mass times until the new liturgical year, which begins during the season of Advent.
Communication and transparency are critical leadership skills in multicultural organizations.

George Bernard Shaw, Nobel Prize laureate and playwright, once stated, “The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that is has occurred” (Shaw, n.d.). For me, being a subject matter expert in human resources communication has allowed me to translate my passion for communication, marketing and writing into the human resources arena. I believe that being a specialist has afforded me many opportunities to help companies and employees due to my tailored skillset. A recent Communication and Change Management ROI Study conducted by Towers Watson (2014), a human resources consulting firm, stresses the importance of understanding culture and behavior to improve organizational effectiveness. “Segmenting and understanding employee groups help communication and change professionals created the relevant programs needed to drive the right behaviors and deliver results” (p. 3).

During my years as a human resources consultant and strategist, I have discovered how communication, or the lack thereof, can cause a company’s initiatives to either flourish or to fail epically. In the same study conducted and published by Towers Watson, they raise the importance of communication effectiveness and its relation to financial performance. The study rated the communications methods of companies to its employees, and linked a company’s financial success to its communication effectiveness. Among many other findings, the study also revealed that less than 20% of companies customize their communication for its multinational locations, ignoring cultural and geographic sensitivities. With this research in hand, the firm was able to arm its consultants around the world with valuable data to utilize in client meetings and presentations to trade organizations and publications. While the study focused mostly on privately held entities and publicly traded corporations, the findings certainly apply to religious organizations and the way they communicate to their members.
As it relates to culture, Samovar, Porter & Jain (1981), state:

Culture and communication are inseparable, because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. In fact, our entire repertory of communicative behaviors is dependent largely on the culture in which we have been raised. Culture, consequently, is the foundation of communication. And when cultures vary, communication practices also vary. (p. 24)

Schein offers some a helpful process in guiding leaders in creating communication effectiveness and understanding the current state of their organization. Through a facilitated session with a leadership group or other appropriate stakeholder group (i.e., ministry leaders), St. Rita action team members have started using the following facilitation process during meetings. They will present these recommendations at this year’s bilingual ministry head retreat to train leaders on effective facilitation. Schein recommends that the facilitator:

- Organize the physical space to be as nearly a circle as possible. Whether or not people are seated at a table or tables is not as important as the sense of equality that comes from sitting in a circle.

- Introduce the general concept, then ask everyone to think about an experience of dialogue in the sense of “good communication” in their past.

- Ask people to share with their neighbor what the experience was and to think about the characteristics of that experience (this works because people are relating very concrete experiences, not abstract concepts). Ask group members to share what it
was in such past experiences that made for good communication and write these characteristics on a flip chart.

- Ask the group to reflect on these characteristics by having each person in turn talk about his or her reactions.
- Let the conversation how naturally once everyone has commented (this requires one and half to two hours or more).
- Intervene as necessary to clarify or elucidate, using concepts and data that illustrate the problems of communication (some of these concepts are spelled out below).
- Close the session.

**Clergy leaders need to understand the impact of diversity creates awareness of approaches, benefits, and risks of this diversity.**

“Teaching diversity can be daunting because it often addresses sensitive issues that relate to our identities and worldview” (Bierema, 2010, p. 313). Leadership commitment is critical for a company to be successful in its organizational goals, especially those related to diversity and inclusion efforts. For an organization to gain be successful in its diversity initiatives, leaders and organization members must be trained and educated in order to communicate effectively and facilitate change. Cañas & Sondak (2011), emphasize that with required leadership support, diversity efforts can become an integrated part of an organization’s business model, instead of an added task. Bierema (2010), explains that “diversity education takes many forms in its goals, outcomes, and types” (p. 314). She references Davidman and Davidman’s (1994) six goals for multicultural education which entail: educational equity, empowerment of learners, cultural pluralism in society, intercultural/ interethnic/intergroup understanding and harmony in classrooms and communities, an expanded knowledge of various cultural and ethnic groups, and
the development of learners and stakeholders whose thoughts and actions are guided by an informed and inquisitive multicultural perspective (p. 314).

While Bierema’s article targeted those teaching diversity in higher education, her findings and recommendations are also suitable for other types of organizations, including churches. Bierema suggests the following competencies for creating teaching diversity within an organization:

- **Recognizing positionality, privilege, and oppression**—Bierema states that “Positionality may bring one privilege or oppression depending on the individual and setting. Privilege is unearned power based on race, gender, class, or another positionality. Oppression, on the other hand, is the marginalization of a nondominant person or group by the privileged group” (p. 318).

- **Experiencing marginalization**—For a member of a majority group, the experience of marginalization may seem like a foreign one. In order to truly understand the experiences of marginalized groups, Bierema suggests that members of dominant groups can gain this experience through travel or immersion in a minority group’s culture and activities. “The experience of not fitting into the dominant race, class, national origin, or language is important for understanding multiculturalism and globalization and the lived experience of marginal and oppressed groups heightens awareness of discrimination and injustice and how the dominant group rationalizes inequities to maintain privilege and power” (p. 319).

- **Viewing diversity education as a developmental process**—Just as learning is a lifelong process, diversity education is also an ongoing process that adult learners should strive for throughout their lives. “Taking a developmental approach to
diversity literacy is compatible with HRD’s focus on learning and roots in humanism, so it is a natural stance for diversity education” (p. 321).

- **Possessing theoretical grounding and pedagogical skill for teaching diversity**—In order to teach diversity effectively, one must have the proper grounding in research and theory before teaching others how to practice. In addition, “we have to be flexible and adaptable in our teaching to accommodate unanticipated issues, emotions, and learning” (p. 321).

- **Assuming appropriate tone and demeanor**—Finally, teaching diversity requires interpersonal skills in order to facilitate efficiently. Bierema explains that image and presence are important in ensuring a “non-threatening, yet strong, presence” in order to create an atmosphere of trust among learners.

Reeves (2011), a scholar in cross-cultural communication, offers five habits that a diverse organization, its planners, and its leaders should employ as a critical cultural competence. Reeves explains that “many planners do not undertake any kind of cross-cultural communication training to develop the skill and competencies of looking at issues from different perspectives and challenging one’s own beliefs and attitudes towards people with which one is dealing. Often programmes require an awareness of these skills but not the competence” (p. 599). These five habits will also be presented at the upcoming bilingual ministry head retreat, and customized for use in the church environment:

a) **Differences and similarities**—In Habit 1, the planner observes the similarities between themselves and the person whom they are serving or with whom they are collaborating. This habit involves the planner or leader positioning himself or herself as the other individual and listing the differences and similarities in a way that is honest and non-
judgmental. The second part of this process involves diagramming these differences and similarities to illustrate the overlap and significance of the shared similarities (p. 602).

b) **Effect of differences and similarities**—The next step is for planner or leader to study the possible impacts of the similarities and differences. “In doing this, the planner identifies the cultural differences that could lead them to judge an applicant, or an objector or a community in a negative way” (p. 603). Reeves cautions planners and leaders to be wary of viewing people with differences as “outsiders”. She offers the following kinds of questions can help in the analysis of the similarities and differences that exist: Do I think the case for supporting this community initiative is weak or strong? In what ways does the planning culture have sympathy with the values and assumptions of the applicant or objector’s case? Am I probing for clarity by using three frames of reference—the client’s, the planning systems and mine—or am I focused mostly on my own frame?

c) **Exploring alternative explanations**—Exploring alternative explanations for particular behaviours provides a framework for analysing the judgments. Reeves explains that by engaging in, what Bryant terms, “parallel universe thinking”, professionals can teach themselves not to make assumptions about a client’s behaviour (Bryant, 2001, p. 72). As Reeves analyzes Bryant’s work (2011, p. 603), she gives examples of scenarios that might require exploring alternative explanations: If someone does not turn up at an agreed time, what is your reaction? If your client talks in a very loud voice, how do you react? The tool of “shifting” or “reframing” allows the professional to assign a different cultural trait, and then to think through whether and how you would view the situation differently (Gunning, 1995) and cited by Bryant (2001, p. 50).
d) **Communication**—This habit includes protocols or “rules” that organizers, planners, or leaders might use for scheduling or organizing meetings, the interaction and format during the meetings, and the follow up after the meetings. “It also includes the way planners test whether a client understands what the professional is saying. A client may decide not to ask for clarification because they do not want to look foolish, or because to ask a question looks rude in their culture” (p. 604). Reeves also explains that listening or observing is imperative in determining what understanding has taken place and where the gaps exist in information transfer. Bryant recommends using “structured conversations to gather culture-specific information: (2001, p. 86) such as: What is the issue? What are your main concerns? What is the most important result for you? Why is this important? What would you like to see happen?

e) **Reflection**—Habit 5 involves planners analyzing themselves cultural beings and asking how they can become more sensitive to the effects of difference, diversity and similarities. “The practitioner is in reflective mode to acknowledging every thought including the ugly ones” (p. 604).

**Conclusion 2: Effective Communication and Transparency Are Critical Across the Entire Organization**

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  the problems of communication (some of these concepts are spelled out below).

• Close the session.

**Improvements to communication effectiveness.**

A lack of communication effectiveness arose as a key theme during the post-intervention
data collection and analysis. The data showed that transparency and accessibility to clergy, lay
leaders, and church administrators would be key to bolstering the congregation’s confidence and
ability to participate in leader-led change. Having a visible pastor who proactively made himself
available to parishioners would be a critical part of the ongoing change process. The first pastor,
the original sponsor of the action research study, made plans to incorporate these communication
effectiveness goals into his personal performance plan. After his unexpected departure, this
recommendation was presented to the new pastor, who would become the new project sponsor.
He listened to a summary of the findings to understand the source of the issue, and agreed with
the recommendation. Within the first six months of his leadership role at St. Rita’s, event
observations and journal entries revealed the optimism felt by parishioners due to the new
pastor’s approach to transparency in his communication approach.

In addition, the communication from lay leaders and church administration were key
targets of discussion during data collection. When distributing communication or soliciting
feedback from parishioners, parishioners felt frustrated that they did not receive follow up or
communication related to their feedback. Among the lay leaders, collaboration between English-
and Spanish-speaking clergy began to see improvements with the arrival of the new pastor with
immersion experience living in Hispanic cultures. He implemented a continual feedback loop
from the town hall meetings, making sure to address the issues he heard through his weekly
address in the parish bulletin and by incorporating the topics into his homilies. In addition, he
visibly participated in events with Spanish-speaking clergy to demonstrate his advocacy and support. These include the Immigration Walk during Holy Thursday, the daily Africa Day celebration, the Summer festival, and other parish-wide events. In addition, he has purposely invited Spanish-speaking clergy to speak at English-speaking masses. He has continued that tradition by having a Spanish-speaking priest celebrate the English masses at least one weekend per month.

**Conclusion 3: Traditional power roles and influences can be negotiated via cultural practices.**

Among a community or group of individuals, there are those who are more powerful and have more access to resources than others. Within the St. Rita community in particular, financial security and the ability to speak English present a power role among parishioner groups and relationships. Those financially able can provide and supply much needed funding and resources to church initiatives. Similarly, those who understand the local language have an easier time adjusting to the local culture and norms.

Ultimately the issue is not about finances or how to raise money, but rather the key is negotiating power through cultural practices. Andersen and Hill-Collins (2004) explain that the intersection of multiple identities create intersecting systems that they identify as the matrix of domination. “A matrix of domination posits multiple, interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of [identities]. This structural pattern affects individual consciousness, group interaction, and group access to institutional power and privileges” (p. 5). Studies by Cervero and Wilson (1998) “indicate that negotiations always occur at two levels: substantive negotiations in which people act in the web of power relations to construct programs and meta-negotiations in which people act on the power relations themselves to either change or maintain them (p. 5). Cervero and Wilson (2006) point out that [relationships] become a central
terrain where power and politics operate out of a lived culture of individuals and groups situated in asymmetrical social…positions (p. 19)….Planners operate at the intersection of…struggles and structural forces in their practice, seeking to provide programs that simultaneously produce educational outcomes and social and political outcomes for multiple stakeholders” (p. 20).

The aforementioned findings have created conclusions drawn from the study. The subsequent section will introduce each conclusion and describe the meaning made through the research combined with literature that supports each conclusion.

**Impact of cross-cultural dynamics.**

The notion of divided leadership among the clergy was prevalent among the research findings. While the intervention for a weekly bilingual Mass was not feasible during the time of this study, other bilingual and multicultural activities were successfully and collaboratively implemented, such as the Summer festival, the addition of bilingual masses during more holy days of obligation, and a recent cultural celebration where the parish held an evening of international cuisine, international dance presentations, and song selections in different languages.

The results of a well-attended bilingual ministry retreat were also analyzed during the study. During the bilingual retreat, attendees participated in group discussions, purposely organized so that various ethnic groups would interact with other ethnic groups. When a minority culture outgrows other cultures in a church, leaders must pay attention to the shifts in the environment so that one group does not feel alienated or ignored over another. By understanding the impacts of a majority-minority culture, a leadership group can prepare a change management plan or approach to facilitate the change occurring in the organization.
Conclusion 4: The action research methodology provided a successful process for the organization to understand the causes and solutions for its unique challenges.

Understanding how to achieve unity within diversity was not a new concern for St. Rita’s. The parish leaders seemed to understand what their issues were, but lacked a framework to successfully uncover and diagnose the roots of those issues. Through an action research methodology, the action research team was able to provide a structure to not only understand the issues and their causes, but also create interventions to create long-lasting change. This conclusion not only addressed what was discovered in this particular action research site, but also broader implications for action research as a conduit to effective change management.

Organizational learning styles needed to be understood.

Of the organizational and cultural models considered to analyze this study, Hofstede’s cultural framework model was applied as a baseline to understand the differences between collectivist and individualist cultures, which are organized by nationality. Because both types of cultures are present within St. Rita’s Hofstede’s scoring system provided an introductory understanding of how groups arrive at decision making and produce work within their societies. In a multicultural church environment these differences can become barriers to intercultural integration. Examples of these differences include fundraising styles (group events versus individual pledges) and program planning, where some groups prefer to hold open discussions as opposed to following explicit instructions from a leader.

A supplement to the aforementioned characteristics lies in the measurement of power distance. Power distance is the degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards and the acceptance of inequality in distribution of power in society (Hofstede, 1984) and “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011, p. 194). The
higher the power distance, the less likely a culture will be to challenge or question decisions from those in power roles. A high power distance denotes a hierarchical society in which subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat.” (Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

While Hofstede’s model has been long recognized as a dominant metric of cultural values, its results may not always apply to every individual within a culture. Yoo, Honthu & Lenartowicz (2011) have leveraged Hofstede’s model and provided guidance on how to use it at the individual level. Their process, called the Individual Cultural Values Scale (CVSCALE), strives to make possible the link between individual attitudes to individual-level cultural orientations. This 26-item scale was tested in sample groups across 12 different countries. The researchers found that the CVSCALE, backed by Hofstede’s five dimensions, showed adequate reliability, validity, and across-sample and across-national generalizability.

In order to supplement the knowledge gleaned through Hofstede’s model and further understand the meaning-making occurring during the action research processes, adult learning theory was also applied to determine the effectiveness of interventions. According to Argyris (2002), single loop learning addresses learned behaviors and what people have always done, while double loop learning helps individuals and groups to reconsider their beliefs and consider the alternatives to meaning making. Simply a few of many examples of double loop learning in action included the success of the bilingual and collaborative ministry head retreat, the activities and resolutions of the African Parishioners Organization and their newfound understanding on how to create engagement in their activities. These examples were addressed in Research Question 1.
Social issues must not be underestimated in assessing organizational effectiveness.

Social issues were a large component of the friction within the St. Rita Catholic Church community. Ignoring these social issues and failing to understand them can be detrimental to the engagement of the organization’s members as well as the success of the organization in meeting its objectives.

The immigration factor.

Immigration is a serious and prevailing issue among the St. Rita community. Due to the large numbers of documented and undocumented immigrants who attend the parish, the behaviors of fear and shame often arise during immigration discussions. In addition, concerns about potentially racist behavior have caused concern among both clergy and lay ministers. The awareness of these social issues not only creates learning opportunities, but a channel for relationship building and collaboration. For example, some of the English-speaking action research team members were dismayed upon hearing of specific examples of racial profiling and the fear felt by Spanish-speaking parishioners. By understanding the issues, fears and concerns, they can better understand the lack of participation and find ways empathize with these affected Spanish-speakers. Some have even participated in immigration reform discussions and demonstrations due to their new understand of a topic they knew little about before the action research study.

Misuse of identity and labels was prevalent.

Understanding the identity and labels that one group may impose on another group provides another opportunity for double loop learning. As (2011) stated, organizational culture forms through cultural artifacts, including visible processes and observable rituals; espoused beliefs and values through formal and informal practices; and underlying assumptions through
unconscious thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and theories. These cultures form whether or not the elements are appropriate or politically correct.

At St. Rita’s, examples of double loop learning included the recognition and discussion of cultural labels such as “Anglo” being used by Spanish-speaker and Hispanic leaders to describe members of the English-speaking community. Some individuals at the bilingual ministry head retreat did not realize this term had been perceived as offensive by English speakers. Through a mediated discussion group at the retreat, these individuals were able to understand the origin of the use of the term at St. Rita’s and the impact that this misnomer had on the offended cultural group.

Another example was given by a Spanish-speaker who was invited to participate in a meeting by an English-speaker who wanted to ensure he had cross-cultural representation while planning a parish event. The English-speaking parishioner was disappointed that the Spanish-speakers did not speak or offer ideas during the meeting, but later learned that they felt it was culturally unacceptable to “interrupt” a presentation. From this occurrence, the action research team developed a list of ground rules that would be used at parish meetings to make sure everyone felt welcome and understood the norms of meetings at the church.

**Action research and change management.**

The St. Rita Catholic Church action research team consisted of a diverse group of 10 lay ministry leaders, including myself. These leaders represented a cross-ministry and intercultural group of individuals. The action research case study revealed findings from key intervention strategies employed by the action research team over the course of two years.

**Understanding the intervention process.**

Through a series of four interventions across three action research cycles, the study produced insights on organizational learning styles at St. Rita’s as well as cross-cultural
dynamics, leadership competencies and communication effectiveness, the impact of immigration status on participation, and the role of power and privilege. While the action research team had been aware of cultural tensions and social issues the past, we did not attempt to predict the outcomes or findings of the interventions. In fact, the parish leadership had struggled for many years to understand the root problems to these issues, to no avail. As a research team, we discussed the importance data validity, bias, and trustworthiness in early action research team meetings to set the expectations for the duration of the interventions, data collection, and ultimately the data analysis.

*The importance of collaboration.*

Interventions were collaboratively developed among the action research team. In the early stages of the study, the action research team had a tendency to depend on me as the lead researcher in recommending actions or ideas for interventions. As a protector of the integrity of action research, it was important for me to explain and reinforce the collaborative and co-constructed intent of action research as a tool for long-term change implementation. The action research team was cooperative with the intervention approaches once they understood the participatory nature of the process.

*Arriving at consensus.*

Conflicts arose regarding logistics issues and the prioritization of interventions. By reviewing action research team members’ capacity, church commitments and outside work schedules, we were able to schedule the interventions based on the current church liturgical season and schedule action team members for intervention participation accordingly.

Consensus on action research findings did not always occur automatically. While the entire team participated in the post-intervention interviews, some team members did not always believe or agree on the major themes that were identified. As a solution to this issue, we held
post-intervention meetings where action research team members had the opportunity to review their own interview transcripts and the action research team was collectively able to discuss the findings based on their recorded observations, transcripts and journal entries. We found that these review cycles fostered an attitude of trust in the action research process, and eventually led to easier identification and consensus of themes that arose from data analysis.

*Change is a process, not an event.*

As devoted members of the church, the action research team members were consistently supportive of action research, which I positioned to them as change management. One observation that arose through team dynamics was the impatience to find solutions. In my work as a change agent, I understand the importance of demonstrating results to leadership by starting with “low hanging fruit.” This helps individuals to see momentum and continue to sponsor the process. However, I had to remind the team that some changes will take years to fully implement before they see notable results. By explaining change as a long-term process, and not a singular event, team members understood that bringing about cultural change would require long-term commitment beyond the scope of this stage of the action research study.

*Community-based settings are ripe for action research to create long-lasting change.*

As stated by Stringer (2007), “community-based action research seeks to change the social and personal dynamics of the research situation so that the research process enhances the lives of all those who participate” (p. 20). There is a collaborative team of researchers within the organization helping to plan, take action, evaluate the action, and lead to further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, p. 5). Because action research seeks to create change and form change agents within an organization, churches and other community-led organizations are the ideal organizational types to benefit from such a methodology and approach due to their long-term participant commitment. Action research at a church, especially at a site such as St. Rita’s,
typically includes a group of voluntary leaders who willingly participate in the organization at a
high level of commitment.

**Implications for Practice and Future Studies**

While this research focused on a focused set of research questions related to one
particular organization, opportunities for future studies and practice have emerged through the
analysis and reflection of the action research process.

**Creating a Broader HRD Focus and Application**

The HRD community and its literature tend to focus predominantly on corporate
development and higher education. While this community has made great strides and
contributions to the body of research, there are areas of development in the non-profit and non-
educational environments. Bierema & Callahan (2014) recently introduced a new framework for
critical HRD practice. In their framework, they explain the categories of relating, learning,
changing and organizing as the lenses through which HRD operates. Opportunities for critical
HRD abound when these four categories overlap. This framework, while still in development,
may offer new opportunities to broaden HRD academic practices beyond the traditional
corporate and higher education organizations.

**Connecting Academia to Practice**

During a recent session at the International Conference for the Academy of Human
Resource Development in the Americas, the dialogue emphasized the strong need to discover
ways to apply academic works to the practice of HRD. During the discussion, one participant
noted that practitioners rely too heavily on best practices. These practices are sometimes repeated
because a best-in-class organization found success using a particular practice, without thought
for the needs of one’s own organization. While not all academic solutions may apply to the body
of practitioners, there are missed opportunities to create new and appropriate solutions to current

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and specific organizational issues. Action research is one approach that would help practitioners adopt research-based approaches to solutions. The focus, cyclical process, and collaborative nature of action research would shape a specific change management approach to a specific organization’s problems.

Unique Approaches to Member-Based Organizations

For the purpose of future research, maintaining and respecting racial and cultural identity was instrumental in avoiding the alienation of any particular ethnic group. To impact future research, it would be beneficial to study how non-profit cultural groups, educational institutions, associations, and other “member-driven” groups handle diversity initiatives and see how those initiatives would theoretically apply to the religious setting.

Applying Sociological Theories to the Research

In future work, Giddens’ “structuration theory” would be interesting to apply in considering the outcomes of this action research study. In this sociological theory, Giddens links the essential relationship between agency and structure, and explores the creation and reproduction of social systems. When trying to understand culture in a social setting, Giddens’ work may shed additional understanding on the causes of the problems within and solutions to cultural problems within diverse organizations.

Understanding How Globalization Applies to the Non-Corporate Setting

Many industries have experienced the effects of globalization through corporate mergers and acquisitions, foreign trade opportunities, and other business reasons for multicultural activity. Awareness of this globalization and its resulting social issues affect an organization’s members builds opportunities for improved services and programming. Now, as the religious sector, particularly the Catholic Church, become more multiculturally focused in its mission, opportunities arise for scholars and practitioners to study the impacts of globalization, create
frameworks for success, and analyze the future of the field. The findings and recommendation from this action research study are intended not only for Catholic-based entities, but also for other religious organization and non-profit associations led by community-based participants.

**Final Reflection**

My overarching goal as a researcher is to become a “connector” between research and practice, which is also one of the overarching goals of this academic program. Throughout the last four years, I have helped one organization to address the sets of issues reflected in the research questions. While this action research study was taking place and we created opportunities for learning at St. Rita Catholic Church, I also participated in an additional action research study through my role as a student in the first Ed.D. Cohort at the University of Georgia.

This experience has taught me the importance of reflective practice as both a budding researcher and an experienced practitioner in the fields of communication and change management. Merriam & Bierema (2014) define transformative learning as a “form of learning very much embedded in life experience” (p. 107). I believe I have gained the foundational skills to accomplish this goal through my own transformative learning, which cause me to constantly examine, reflect, and attempt to understand how I make meaning. This transformative learning started within the program curriculum and gradually expanded to my action research site, within my professional career, and even in my personal pursuits and relationships.

As I broaden my understanding of the theories and apply them to practice, I understand that my role as a researcher has only just begun. I close this important work with a final quote from the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, which reflects on the connection between past experiences and new opportunities to create meaning.
“The young Catholic churches, as they grow, develop a synthesis of faith, culture and life, and so it is a synthesis different from the one developed by the ancient churches. For me, the relationship between the ancient Catholic churches and the young ones is similar to the relationship between young and elderly people in a society. They build the future, the young ones with their strength and the others with their wisdom. You always run some risks, of course. The younger churches are likely to feel self-sufficient; the ancient ones are likely to want to impose on the younger churches their cultural models. But we build the future together.”

– Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome
REFERENCES


### Appendix A: Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic/Collectivistic</td>
<td>How personal needs and goals are prioritized vs. the needs and goals of the group/organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine/Feminine</td>
<td>Masculine societies have different rules for men and women, less so in feminine cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>How comfortable are people with changing the way they work or live (low UA) or prefer the known systems (high UA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>The degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards. Acceptance of inequality in distribution of power in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term orientation</td>
<td>Long-term perspective, planning for future, perseverance values vs. short time past and present oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence/Restraint</td>
<td>Allowing gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun vs. regulating it through strict social norms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Initial Action Research Logic Model

Program: Church Diversity

Logic Model

Situation: Church Diversity—A Study in Cultural Competency: While many organizations sufficiently attract individuals of multiple ethnic groups, this does not always translate to cultural integration or the values of having common organizational goals. The division between the larger ethnic groups is evident not only by the self-segregation of the parishioners, but also the lack of cultural interaction and programming between ministry leaders and clergy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from church leadership</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Attendance of events by parishioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection through interviews, focus groups, and surveys</td>
<td>Determine marketing strategies and messaging</td>
<td>Create a shared belief of cultural unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical data and documentation</td>
<td>Provide training to administrators and ministry leaders</td>
<td>Motivated ministry leaders who promote mission of unity and integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time, Money</td>
<td>Offer pastoral guidance</td>
<td>Engage church pastors with Christian leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of efforts to be more culturally inclusive</td>
<td>Higher attendance at multicultural events and programs</td>
<td>Parish community experiences effectiveness in meeting cultural, programming and financial goals due to a unified sense of community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of messaging through communication vehicles</td>
<td>Attitudes reflect respect of and willing to participate with other cultures</td>
<td>Practices reflect the needs for a culturally inclusive environment and programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of inclusive programming and messaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assumptions: Some parishioners may not be comfortable to structured multicultural programs and choose to identify with their own ethnic group. It is important to not force parishioners to assimilate nor feel a sense of losing their cultural identity.

External Factors: Church activities are voluntary, and there is no incentive or motivation for parishioners to participate in events.
Appendix C: Revised Evaluation Questions

Audience: Action Research Team

1. Please state your current role within the parish (i.e., ministry groups, activities).

2. How long have you been involved in the parish?

3. Please state your ethnicity.

4. Can you tell me a time when you experienced the importance of a culturally integrated parish?

5. Tell me about a time when the goal of cultural inclusiveness has shaped our organization.

6. Describe some times when the goal of cultural inclusiveness has shaped our organization.

7. Tell me about a time when you felt ethnic integration was happening in the parish. What factors or conditions promoted this?

8. Tell me about a time when the parish body was least engaged as an ethnically diverse body.

9. Why did you feel that these instances were not engaging?

10. In X intervention, what could have improved the levels of engagement, during the times you felt least engaged with other ethnic communities?

11. List the values that you feel helped X intervention to build an integrated parish community. Why did you find these values to be helpful?

12. List the liabilities you feel occurred in X intervention from preventing an integrated parish community. Why did you find these values to be detrimental?

13. Do you feel the action research team was well-prepared and equipped to lead this intervention?
Appendix D: IRB Application Approval

APPROVAL FORM

Date Proposal Received: 2011-09-27

Project Number: 2012-10284-0

Name | Title | Dept/Phone | Address | Email
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Dr. Robert J. Hill | PI | LEAP | 322 Rivers Crossing 4811 | 678-468-0636 | bobhill@uga.edu
Ms. Emma Flack | CO | Education | 404-331-0339 | 1935 Bay Beauty Lane | emflack@uga.edu

Title of Study: Catholic Multiculturalism: A Study in Cultural Competency

45 CFR 46 Category: Administrative 2

Parameters: None;


NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end date collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.

Number Assigned by Sponsored Programs: 

Funding Agency:

Your human subjects study has been approved.

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to inform the IRB:

... of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to the subjects or others within 24 to 72 hours;

... of any significant changes or additions to your study and obtain approval of them before they are put into effect;

... that you need to extend the approval period beyond the expiration date shown above;

... that you have completed your data collection as approved, within the approval period shown above, so that your file may be closed.

For additional information regarding your responsibilities as an investigator refer to the IRB Guidelines.

Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.

Keep this original approval form for your records.

Chairperson or Designee,
Institutional Review Board

[Signature]

Institutional Review Board
Human Subjects Office
612 Boyd GSRC
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411
(706) 542-3199
Fax: (706) 542-3360
www.ovpr.uga.edu/hsoc

[Logo]
**RESEARCHER REQUEST FORM**

**Request Date:** 2011-09-27  
**Project Number:** 2012-10264-0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Dept/Phone</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Robert J. Hill</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>LEAP 322 Rivers Crossing +4811 (706) 542-4016</td>
<td>678-468-0636</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bhill@uga.edu">bhill@uga.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Emma Flack</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Education 404-831-0339</td>
<td>1935 Bay Beauty Lane Austell, GA 30106</td>
<td><a href="mailto:emflack@uga.edu">emflack@uga.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Title of Study:** Catholic Multiculturalism: A Study in Cultural Competency

**45 CFR 46 Category:** Administrative  
**Renew:** No  
**Change(s):** Revised Consent Document(s);

**Approved:** 2011-10-24  
**Begin date:** 2011-10-24  
**Expiration date:** 2016-10-23

**NOTE:** Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end date collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.

---

**Attention, Principal Investigator!**

You must complete and return this form before the expiration date shown above. Failure to receive a notification that it is time to renew does not relieve you of your responsibility to provide our office with a request to renew in a timely manner.

1. **Changes**  
   For approval of changes you must complete and sign the back of this form. (Also attach a copy of any revised instruments or consent forms, with changes highlighted, where applicable.)

2. **Renewals**  
   For an extension of the approval period you must complete and sign the back of this form.

3. **Closure**  
   Data collection has been completed as approved by the IRB, and this file can now be closed. Federal laws & UGA policies require notification of completion of data collection.
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**
**Human Subjects Office**
**University of Georgia**

**IRB CONTINUING REVIEW/AMENDMENT FORM**

**Principal Investigator (PI):**

**Co-Principal Investigator (Required, if co-PI is a student):**

**Project #:**

**Title of Study:**

---

**PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS**

(Use the text boxes for explanation/additional information or attach a separate cover letter.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you started data collection for this research project?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How many total participants have been accrued since the beginning of the research project? (Note: This corresponds to the number of individuals who gave consent; this number should include withdrawals but actual number of withdrawals is reported in #7 below.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you plan to continue to recruit participants for this research project? (If you answered YES, please skip to Question #6.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. If you answered NO to question #3, do you plan to continue to collect data with previously recruited participants?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If you answered NO to questions #3 and #4 above, do you plan to continue to analyze previously collected data that is individually-identifiable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Have there been any complaints about the research since the protocol was approved by the IRB? If YES, please provide complete information on the complaints made.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Have any participants withdrawn, dropped out, or were lost to follow-up from participation since the protocol was last approved by the IRB? If YES, please indicate the number and provide detailed information/reason(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Have there been any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others since the protocol was last approved by the IRB? If YES, please contact the IRB office immediately to request an adverse event/incident report form.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Have there been any changes to the study population? If YES, please explain changes.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Have the procedures changed in any way since the protocol was last approved by the IRB? If YES, please explain.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have any materials or instruments changed in any way since the protocol was last approved by the IRB? If YES, please explain.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Have changes in the scientific literature, or interim experience with this or related studies, changed your assessment of potential risks or benefits to study participants? If YES, please explain and attach any relevant literature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Have the consent documents changed in any way since the protocol was last approved by the IRB? If YES, please explain and attach copy of the revised document(s).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. A <em>clean</em> copy of the current version of the consent document(s) must be submitted with the request to continue if you plan to recruit new participants, or if a revised consent document is necessary as a result of an amendment. Have you attached a clean copy of your current consent document(s)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Have there been any changes to the members of the research team (e.g., change in PI; addition/deletion of co-investigators)? If YES, please describe personnel change(s). Note: All new personnel must complete the CITI training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Principal Investigator’s Signature:**

**Date:**

---

**Important:** If research activities involving human participants will continue five years after the original IRB approval, please submit a new IRB Application or Initial Review. **Exceptions:** If the research is permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects, all participants have completed all research-related interventions, and the research will remain active only for long-term follow-up of subjects; or if the remaining research activities are limited to analysis of individually-identifiable private information.
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

I, __________________________________, agree to take part in An Action Research Study entitled “Catholic Multiculturalism: A Study in Cultural Competency,” conducted by Emma Flack, a doctoral student in the University of Georgia’s Adult Education Program under the direction of Dr. Robert Hill, Associate Professor in the University of Georgia’s Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, Adult Education Program (706-542-4016).

I understand my participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without providing any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

**Purpose of the Study:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to foster integration among the diverse communities in the parish. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will have a positive influence on the church’s programming and organizational goals. The researcher hopes to add to the body of knowledge on multicultural inclusiveness in organizations with the intent of helping this parish and similar organizations to flourish in their diversity initiatives.

**Procedures:** If I choose to participate, I will be asked to do the following:

- Meet with interviewer, individually or in a focus group to openly and honestly answer questions about my views and opinions. The interview may take approximately 1-2 hours of my time. I will be provided advanced notice of the date and time of the interview. The interview or focus group will be in person with one or more researchers.
- Allow researchers to observe my participation in meeting settings. Such settings may include ministry meetings, parish events, conferences, or other settings deemed appropriate through data collected via interviews and focus groups.
- Complete surveys and questionnaires related to my experience along with information to include but not limited to my ethnicity, age range, length of time as a parishioner, and other anonymous member-related information.
- Review a summary of my interview or focus group to verify that the investigators understood my intended meaning. Dates and times of interviews will be provided in advance.
- Understand interviews/focus groups will be recorded for transcription purposes, in order to maintain accuracy and clarity in the conversation.
- Understand that I will not experience any risks or discomforts beyond those normally encountered in routine daily interactions in an ethnically diverse setting.

**Benefits to me:** As a participant, I will experience a potentially more integrated parish, and a faith-based community that does not diminish my individuality, but promotes that gifts that we all have throughout our cultural communities. We will have more full and enriched parish life by leveraging our diversity, celebrating our differences.

**Benefits to larger community:** I understand this research will contribute to the understanding of how other churches and also non-religious organizations will leverage findings from this research to improve their own organizations’ cultural competency and diversity initiatives.
Confidentiality: I understand that participant’s name and the name of their organization will not be used on documents related to the research. Only criteria for the selection of participants will be published and it will not be made clear who participated and who did not. Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to the tapes or other data that have the potential for disclosure of identity. A code number will identify each piece of data resulting from interviews/focus groups. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of the study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to me or other participants of this research study by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant or the organization.

I understand the researcher, Ms. Emma Flack, will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of this project, I can contact her by calling 404-831-0339 or through email at emflack@uga.edu. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________________________  __________________________
Name of Researcher                                      Signature            Date

Telephone: __________________________
Email: __________________________

________________________________________  __________________________  ____________
Name of Participant                                      Signature            Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411: Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
## Appendix F: Participatory Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical Ministries</td>
<td>Altar Servers</td>
<td>Lay assistants to a member of the clergy during a Christian religious service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s Liturgy of the Word</td>
<td>The practice of children leaving the Sunday assembly during the Liturgy of the Word and gathering elsewhere to celebrate a separate Liturgy of the Word that is more appropriate to their level of understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion</td>
<td>Lay people who distribute Holy Communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lectors</td>
<td>Lay people who read Biblical scripture passages during Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgical Environment Committee</td>
<td>Group that creates a welcoming and attractive atmosphere in and around the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ministers of Hospitality</td>
<td>Lay people who serve as ushers during the Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ministers to the Sick and Homebound</td>
<td>Lay people who visit the sick and homebound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music Ministry</td>
<td>Lay people who provide music during Mass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and other parish events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Ministries</th>
<th>Pro Life Ministry</th>
<th>Lay people who promote pro-life initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Vincent de Paul Society</td>
<td>Ministry dedicated to assisting those in need and seeking charity and justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House of Dreams</td>
<td>Ministry that provides transitional housing to women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thrift Store</td>
<td>A store that provides free or low-cost clothing and food items to the lower-income population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday Morning Work Project</td>
<td>A ministry that feeds the homeless on Saturday mornings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome Ministry</td>
<td>Ministry that provides welcome materials to new members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s Auxiliary</td>
<td>An women’s affinity organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Ministries</th>
<th>Dinner Committee</th>
<th>Ministry that organizes dinners by affinity group (i.e., young families, young adults)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 50’s</td>
<td>Ministry that provides monthly activities to members over 50 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Adult Ministry</td>
<td>Ministry that provides monthly activities to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Support Ministries          | young adults ages 22 to 40
|----------------------------|-----------------------------
| Summerfest/Kermesse        | A yearly festival that takes place during the Summer. While it is organized primarily by the Hispanic ministry, involvement and participation by other ethnic groups has grown in recent years.
| African Parishioners       | Ministry group that offers programming to African nationals
| Cursillo/Ultreya           | Short courses designed to stimulate persons to engage in evangelizing their everyday environments
| Homeschoolers              | Ministry to provide a community of support to parents who homeschool
| Legion of Mary             | Volunteer service and prayer group who work under the banner of the Virgin Mary
| Marriage Encounter         | Marriage preparation retreat
| Mercy Meal                 | Service that provides meals to families following a funeral service
| Prayer Line                | Telephonic prayer support line
| Praise and Prayer Group    | Ministry that gathers for weekly praise and worship in a small-group setting
Appendix G: Sponsor Consent Letter

September 15, 2011

Research Consent

I am pleased to provide consent for Emma Flack to conduct a doctoral research study at Catholic Church. This study, entitled “Catholic Multiculturalism: A Study in Intercultural Competency,” aligns with the mission and objectives that our Parish Council and leadership has established for our diverse parish.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to foster integration among the diverse communities in the parish. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will have a positive influence on the church’s programming and organizational goals among all of our ethnic communities.

I understand the participation of our parish and its members is voluntary, and that participant names and the name of Catholic Church will not be used on any documents related to the research.

Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to any data collected for the purpose of this research. I understand the researcher, Emma Flack, will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of this project. I can contact her by calling 404-831-0339 or through email at emflack@uga.edu.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to her research at Catholic Church.

__________________________
Pastor
Catholic Church

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.
Appendix H: Bilingual Retreat: Clifton Strengths Finder Assessment

1. You believe most people have a short attention span *
2. You are interested in people’s histories
3. You always root for the underdog *
4. You like to figure out the best way to get things done *
5. You like to talk about things everyone can agree on *
6. No one can tell you what to think – you decide *
7. You rack up points for your daily score *
8. You find a wide variety of things very interesting *
9. Your faith sustains you *
10. You intuitively see the perspectives of others *
11. You feel being a focused expert is better than a broad generalist *
12. You are energized by mental activity *
13. You dislike the sight of someone on the outside looking in *
14. Acquiring and compiling info keeps your mind fresh and active *
15. You enjoy analyzing the symptoms of a problem *
16. You firmly believe that life is not a popularity contest *
17. You want to include people and make them feel part of the group *
18. You are logical and rigorous *
19. You dream of what could be *
20. Unforeseen detours are expected and welcomed *
21. You tend to adjust things to their most useful states *
22. You hear the unvoiced concerns and questions *
23. You actively avoid groups that exclude others *
24. You are at your best in dynamic situations *
25. You feel more pulled to people you know already *
26. You believe favoritism is unfair and must be avoided *
27. You have great faith in your strengths *
28. You ask “When can we start?” *
29. You are not frightened with confrontation *
30. You believe we shouldn’t harm others lest we harm ourselves *
31. You tread your path with great care *
32. You are confident in your judgments *
33. You want to help people experience success *
34. You always look for the positive side of things *
35. You feel everyone should have a chance to show their worth *
36. You enjoy winning others over to your side *
37. You are a keen observer of other people’s needs *
38. You find ideas thrilling and invigorating *
39. You believe success is more than money and prestige *
40. You are detail oriented and expect the same from others *
41. You anticipate the needs of others *
42. You keep everyone on task and on point *
43. At any given time, there are tons of thoughts floating in your head *
44. You like to hunt for the perfect phrase *
45. You feel no one person should be ignored *
46. Excellence is your goal – not being average *
47. You keep a look out for the signs of growth in people *
48. You like to explain, describe, speak, and / or write *
49. You need a clear destination and goals *
50. You feel only action matters at the end of the day *
51. You are a private person *
52. You learn to learn or out of interest, not just to be the best *
53. You celebrate every achievement *
54. You believe that performance is the ultimate yardstick *
55. You are normally very careful and vigilant *
56. You feel any studying is useful as long as you get to learn *
57. You get a jolt of energy when a new idea comes to you *
58. You like to take charge *
59. You are drawn to the process of learning *
60. You find a strength and feel the need to super-charge it *
61. You take mental ownership of anything you commit to *
62. You can sort through life’s clutter and find the best route *
63. You are energized by living in the moment *
64. One success helps but the itch to do more returns soon *
65. You believe the earlier times were better and more simple *
66. You help people give voice to their emotional being *
67. You feel it is very important to be efficient *
68. You give off an aura of certainty *
69. You set up routines, goals, timelines, and deadlines *

70. You love seeing the world from other angles to see what comes up *

71. You are very willing to volunteer to help other people out *

72. You actively overcome resistance and confusion *

73. You don’t praise too much for fear of being misunderstood *

74. You collect data or things because they interest you *

75. You enjoy bringing things, subjects, and topics back to life *

76. You challenge people to be clear and honest *

77. You greatly enjoy thinking *

78. You tend to look to the past to understand the present *

79. You want to understand others’ feelings and desire reciprocation *

80. You are energized by the growth from newbie to knowledgeable *

81. You feel the need to bring ideas and events to life *

82. You enjoy the challenge of meeting new people *

83. You want to be very important in the eyes of others *

84. You are family oriented, altruistic, and/or spiritual *

85. You think people waste time trying to impose their views on others *

86. You try to find the common ground *

87. You see yourself as a guardian against an unfair advantage *

88. You are perpetually in pursuit of challenge *

89. You look for areas of agreement *

90. You tailor your teaching style to match the learner *

91. You want to be seen as credible and successful *

92. You want the leeway to do things your own way *
96. People look to you to describe vision of what is to come *
97. You are attracted to the “go-getters” in life and social situations *
98. You believe that talk is cheap – actions speak *
99. You enjoy identifying what is wrong with stuff *
100. You enjoy managing life’s variables *
101. You feel the need to back up your own claims *
102. You discard the paths of life that lead nowhere *
103. You value responsibility and high ethics *
104. You believe that no individual is as of yet fully formed *
105. You are compelled to learn *
106. You have an inner fire to do *
107. You think we are all part of something larger *
108. You can easily evaluate situations and decisions *
109. You read a lot in order to add more info to your mental archives *
110. You feel you are judged by what you get done *
111. You feel today’s answers are rooted in the past *
112. You usually want to feel in control *
113. You are okay imposing your views on others *
114. You have a burning desire to be heard *
115. You are quick to smile and for no other reason than being alive *
116. You don’t normally resist sudden, unscheduled requests *
117. You constantly search for patterns and connections *
118. You believe a relationship only has value if it is genuine *
119. You feel your good name depends on following through *
120. You are willing to accept the risk of being close to others *
121. You like to constantly ask “what if?” *
122. You are impatient with errors or ambiguity *
123. You use detailed future pictures of goals to motivate you *
124. You tend to ask people to prove their points of view *
125. You are sure things happen for a reason *
126. You feel like work without clear direction is very frustrating *
127. You feel that excuses and rationalizations are totally unacceptable *
128. You can sense the emotion of those around you *
129. You enjoy time alone for musing and reflection *
130. You are always looking for an edge above others *
131. You feel a constant need to keep your mind busy *
132. You are impatient with use of generalizations or ‘types’ *
133. You are highly inquisitive *
134. You modify your objectives to meet others’ plans *
135. You are energized by complex and unfamiliar problems *
136. You can draw out the best in others *
137. You can see past a problem and mentally move on *
138. The possibilities of the future fascinate you *
139. You consider yourself a confident person *
140. You do things just to experience it for yourself *
141. You believe we are all equally important *
142. You like to use stories to make a point *
143. You are a master at small talk *
144. You believe the present is unstable *
145. You can work long hours without burning out *
146. There are no strangers, just friends you haven’t met, yet *
147. You tend to be rooted in comparison *
148. You enjoy restoring something back to its original glory *
149. You are intrigued by the unique qualities of each person *
150. You feel the future is decided one choice at a time *
151. You are fascinated by ideas *
152. You play to win *
153. You are a bridge builder for different cultures *
154. People see you as genuinely helpful and interested *
155. You are comfortable with intimacy *
156. You are energized by challenging other people *
157. You ask “what if?”, select a path, and then do it without hesitation *
158. You feel the need to share your opinions *
159. You ignore actions that don’t bring you closer to your goal *
160. You love finding a simple ‘hidden’ truth behind a complex subject *
161. You want rules to be clear and applied to everyone equally *
162. You normally dislike surprises *
163. You feel the need to compare *
164. You are very generous with praise *
165. You feel your work must be meaningful *
166. You enjoy breaking the ice and making a connection with people *
167. You have a reputation for being utterly reliable *
168. You always see the potential in others *

169. You have enduring core values *

170. Others say your enthusiasm is contagious *
## Appendix I: Action Research Team Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AR Team Member</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity/Nationality (self-defined)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parish Involvement (representative sample)</th>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>• Capital Campaign Committee</td>
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<td>• Financial Peace University</td>
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<td>• Supper Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Small Faith Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>F02</td>
<td>Caucasian/Mexican</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>• Just Faith</td>
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<td>• Education Council</td>
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<td>• Holy Week Pilgrimage for Immigration</td>
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<td>• Summerfest/Kermesse</td>
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<td>• Women’s Auxiliary</td>
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<td>• Over 50’s Group</td>
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<td>• Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)/Small Faith Community</td>
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<td>• Legion of Mary</td>
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<td>• Just Faith</td>
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<td>• Supper Club</td>
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<td>• Marriage Encounter</td>
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<td>• Evangelization Ministry (Spanish-led)/Small Faith Community</td>
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<td>• Adult Faith Formation</td>
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