What's Faith got to do with it?

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Introduction

"What's faith got to do with it?" In this paper we explore the multi-layered role of faith in two food banks in Toronto. We are drawing on a larger study of five partnerships between faith-based organizations and others for the common good, a study that unpacks the interesting dynamics of collaborations involving at least one faith partner. In the selection we have made for our present paper, the reader can expect to find a description and analysis of those dynamics as they pertain to individuals, groups, religious and secular organizations, new immigrants and long time residents, a rich variety of faith groups—all around the issues of having enough to eat, human dignity and the formation of community.

When we use the word "faith" we are aware of the multiplicity of meanings carried by the term. There is a basic distinction, famously formulated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, between the faith that animates and is held by an individual and 'a faith' in the sense of a world religion, which has a history, traditions, sacred texts, liturgy, normative practices, teachings, creeds, buildings, authorized leaders— in short all the characteristics of a religion established over many centuries. Of course, there is a symbiotic relationship between the personal and the institutional. Each enlarges and enriches the other; neither can exist without the other.

In our paper we will hear of personal faith, often associated with motivation, but also with personal change and growth. Some of our interviewees reflect theologically on their experience of partnership; nearly all find that the food banks are a way of living out their faith. We will hear of how faith is expressed collectively and institutionally through congregations, mosques, relief and community development agencies, and a judicatory office. As we might expect, there is a range of behaviour that people find both supportive and frustrating. This, too, is part of "what faith has to do with it." We will touch on some of the tensions that emerge from conflicting attitudes within larger faith communities, by which we mean groups of people identified by their basic religious affiliations. How these tensions are negotiated by religious leaders form one of the more interesting undercurrents of our study. Finally, the formation of strong relationships between people from a variety of faiths is a feature of both our cases, and we will offer some observations on the unique character and potency of these communities.

We begin with a review of the literature pertaining to partnerships that include at least one faith-based organization and are intended for community betterment. While this review is helpful for identifying issues and existing research, we offer two caveats. The first is that most of the research is U.S.-based and much is driven by the role of the federal government's Compassion Capital Fund. There is no such incentive in Canada; in fact, in our two cases the resources are generated almost entirely by the local partners. The involvement of any level of government in partnership or funding relationships with faith groups is not unknown in Canada, but it is far less common than in the U.S. and other countries such as Britain. Secondly, in the literature review there are descriptions and categorizations of faith-based organizations, often congregations, that are derived from the perspective of secular organizations. Whatever the value of these descriptions, we have to caution that in Canada the religious terrain in general and congregations in particular differ in significant ways from their counterparts in the U.S.

While our study should be seen within the context of international and American research, there are aspects of that research that don't apply to the Canadian context, and unfortunately there is little or no Canadian research to fill in the gaps. Our research method is based on interviews with key informants, and summaries and quotations from these interviews will form the body of the paper.

We offer a table of various categories to give an overview of the five cases we examine in our larger study, followed by a short description of each case. The current paper makes a choice of two cases, based in part on their similarities: both are food banks, both are multi-faith, and both are rich examples of diversity, the theme of the ARNOVA conference. We then give extensive accounts of the multi-layered dimensions of these two partnerships, and finally draw conclusions on how they came to be, the values that underlie them and, most importantly for our purposes, the role of faith in the partnerships that created and sustain them.

The stories of these two partnerships illustrate important lessons for our increasingly diverse society: the benefits of faiths working together for the common good; the motivation that faith provides; the enlargement of personal faith; the importance of faith teaching and values for a successful partnership; the need for sensitivity to traditions, patience and constant interaction amongst partners; and how the formation of a compassionate community, rooted in the faith traditions of its members, can transform food provision into empowerment.

Literature Review Summary

Collaborative relationships between organizations are variously defined as interorganizational collaborations, strategic alliances, social alliances, joint ventures, partnerships, coalitions and networks. Regardless of the name, the principle underlying all these terms is the same, namely, that two or more organizations are working together towards a goal that will yield mutual and/or third-party benefits. First, there appears to be general agreement that collaboration (as opposed to cooperation) goes beyond sharing information; it involves mutual obligations with respect to the use of organizational resources or coordination of services (Snavely & Tracy, 2000). Second, the scope and frequency of collaborations have been observed to be steadily increasing as environmental uncertainty grows (Connor et al., 1999; Mulroy & Shay, 1997; Provan & Milward, 1995; Rapp & Whitfield, 1999). Third, despite the increase in collaborative relationships, almost half of all efforts fail because the conditions necessary for successful collaboration are difficult to achieve (Dyer et al., 2001). These have been identified as: shared vision and values; clear goals; good personal relationships; frequent interaction; expectation of mutual benefit; shared power and risk; and mutual trust (Austin, 2000; Huxham, 1993; Phillips & Graham, 2000; Rapp & Whitfield, 1999; Rein & Stott, 2009; Wilson & Charleton, 1993; Zadek & Radovich, 2006). The difficulties in achieving these synergies are exacerbated in cross-sectoral collaborations (Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Milne et al., 1996).

There has been increasing focus on the role of faith-based organizations in providing social services, particularly in the wake of the Compassion Capital Fund in the U.S. Despite the fact that community organizing in churches is the fastest growing form of organizing in the U.S.,

and that churches often collaborate with secular groups (CPN, accessed March 2011), there has been but limited research on the influence of faith in cross-sectoral or interfaith partnerships.

Methods

Searches were conducted in a number of electronic databases, mainly ABI/Inform Global, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scholars Portal, PsycArticles, Sage full-text collections, Web of Science, and Web of Knowledge. Article searches on journal databases were also conducted, mainly in the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. Key search terms that were employed included partnerships, faith-based partnerships, cross-sector, public-private. A total of approximately 50 articles were reviewed and 33 were included in this literature review.

The primary goal of this literature review was to obtain an overview of the existing literature on partnerships between faith-based organizations or between secular and faith-based organizations. Articles were included if they contained information relevant to the definitions of faith-based organizations, types of partnerships with faith-based organizations, benefits and challenges of partnering with faith-based organizations, as well as gaps in the existing literature on partnerships with faith-based organizations.

Scope and type of Faith Based Organizations

In order to understand some of the dynamics that might occur in partnerships with faith-based organizations, it is helpful to grasp the wide variety of organizations that exist within this category. The Compassion Capital Fund has increased attention towards government and faith-based partnerships. This attention has given rise to a number of considerations with regard to faith-based organizations, including the types of faith-based organizations. The Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives produced a report intended to inform public debate on government support of faith-based organizations. One of the recommendations from this report focused on the need for better understanding of the variety of faith-based and other non-profit organizations, and for greater attention from participants in public discussions to the confusion in the current vocabulary regarding faith-based organizations.

In relation to this recommendation, the Working Group drew upon a typology in an attempt for clarity. The organizational typology includes the following: faith-saturated (where religious faith is important at all levels and most staff share the organization's faith commitments); faith-centred (organizations founded for a religious purpose, in which the governing board and almost all staff are required to share the organization's faith commitments; however, program participants may opt out of explicitly religious programming and still expect positive outcomes); faith-related (founded by religious people, but which do not require staff to affirm any religious belief or practice except, perhaps, the executive leadership; programming may have no explicitly religious messages or activities although religious dialogue may be available for participants who request it); faith-background organizations (look and act secular, and may not have a historical tie to a faith tradition: programs have no explicit religious content or materials); and faith-secular partnerships (no explicit reference to religious content; religious change is not necessary for outcomes but it is expected that the faith of participants from

religious partners will add value to the program).

This typology built upon work that Sider and Unruh developed and continued to develop after the report from the Working Group was published. Some typologies that have been developed focus on the institutional and behavioural manifestations of religion, others focus on organizational attributes and still others examine the inclusion of religious practices in program methods. The typology developed by Sider and Unruh (2004) looks at characteristics of organizations as well as characteristics of programs. Sider and Unruh (2004) used case studies of 15 congregations with active community-serving programs and interviews at another 21 churches identified by faith leaders and social service providers as being actively involved in community outreach. One of the findings they present is that whether or not an organization is faith-based(an FBO) cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Sider and Unruh (2004) also developed a typology of the basic ways that a social ministry can incorporate a religious dimension, from passive to integrated-mandatory.

Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology has a number of drawbacks, including that the methods used examined only Protestant Christian traditions; that the separation between the internal (personal) and corporate (expressive) is too facile and that congregations should not be described as FBOs in all circumstances (Jeavons, 2004). Furthermore, Sider and Unruh themselves point out a number of limitations, including that the typology focuses mostly on explicitly religious characteristics because they are more observable and verifiable as well as more controversial (Sider & Unruh, 2004).

It has also been noted that the type of congregation influences the tendency of members to get involved in volunteer activities, either within or externally to the church. Becker and Dhingra (2001) studied four types of local congregations: family congregations (which concentrate on providing members with close and supportive interpersonal relationships), houses of worship (which do not foster interpersonal intimacy or draw members into activities outside of main worship), community congregations (which foster a great deal of lay involvement and create a space for debate about political/social issues) and leader congregations (which tend to play an active role in local civic life and social activism). These authors' study of 165 congregations in the U.S. examined the role that congregations play in generating civic engagement and social capital. They concluded that social ties to congregation members encourage volunteering in the congregation as opposed to the secular organization and congregations that create networks both inside and outside the church, fostering strong connections that directly encourage volunteering.

Extent of Social Service Provision

The reviewed literature varied in estimating the extent of congregational social involvement. Estimates vary from 9/10 congregations in the U.S. providing social services (Hodgkinson et al., 1993) to a little more than half (Chaves, 1999). A survey that took place in Philadelphia estimated that 88% of congregations provided at least one social service; most were focused on emergency assistance (shelter, food, clothing) and youth programming (Tangenburg,

2005). There are a few studies from the U.S. that attempt to understand the nature and extent of partnerships, in particular between health organizations and faith-based organizations. Barnes & Curtis (2009) reported that 83.1% of the local health departments studied (434 local health departments were included in this study) were engaged in at least one partnership activity with an FBO, and information exchange was the most common collaborative activity.

What's faith got to do with it?

There is some literature examining the role of faith in social services provided by faith-based organizations as they create partnerships.

In 2001, faith-based organizations were one of the primary recipients of $30 million allocated through the Department of Health and Human Services to expand services to vulnerable populations (Barnes and Curtis, 2009). Barnes and Curtis note that faith-based organizations may not be aware of the latitude permitted them nor may they want to compromise their beliefs or mission by creating these partnerships with the government. However, partnerships are not limited to relationships of funding.

Much of the literature on partnerships with faith-based organizations comes from the health literature. The focus of this literature is on the instrumental benefits of partnering with faith-based organizations. Some of the cited benefits to partnering with faith-based organizations include: the trust that faith communities establish with their members; the programming that facilitates health education or other such programs; skills that that leadership have that may also facilitate behavioural change, such as listening skills (Kegler, Hall and Kisler, 2010; Fosarelli, 2009; Jones & Fowler, 2009; Poole et al., 2009; Bailey et al., 2007; Otterness et al., 2005; Small, 2001). Furthermore, ministers have been cited as being a first line of awareness and this may help raise early awareness of community issues (Bailey et al., 2007); partnerships with faith communities may increase the visibility of the other partners in those communities (Otterness, Gehrke & Sener, 2005) and faith communities represent considerable capital and may have easily leverageable resources (Boddie, 2002).

The literature also documents several examples of challenges in these partnerships. One of the most important themes emerging from these challenges are limited resources, including financial, human and time. Two additional challenges are a sense of competition between the participating organizations in some of the faith-health teams, and internal team conflict due to either personality or disagreements about the vision or direction of the team (Kegler, Kisler & Hall, 2010). From the health sector perspective, there was some discomfort with faith-based organizations, particularly the concern about underlying agenda of the faith-based organization, discomfort with spirituality, and a perceived lack of credibility of the faith-based organizations. Other barriers that were identified include the diversity within the faith community (leading the authors to state that "there is no such thing as a faith community"), and the seemingly divergent approaches to the same issue, such as using prayer to address health problems (Kegler, Kisler & Hall, 2010).

Not by Faith Alone: Social Services, Social Justice and Faith-Based Organizations in the

United States (Adkins, Occhipinti, Hefferan, editors, Lexington Books, 2010) "provides an in-depth ethnographic study of faith-based development organizations" through a critical analysis of various cases. One of these cases is a partnership between a school and a small multi-denominational intentional community. In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (Putnam and Campbell, Simon & Shuster, 2010) the authors devote one chapter to the influence of religion on community life, which includes participation in initiatives for the common good ("Religion and Good Neighborliness").

Conclusions

Much of the literature on faith-based organizations and their partnerships is from the United States, particularly in response to the Compassion Capital Fund, which formalized the partnership possibilities between the government and faith-based organizations. Furthermore, the majority of articles, which examined faith-based organizations or their partnerships, focused on Christian organizations. Lastly, the majority of articles that were written about partnerships with faith-based organizations were written from the secular organization's perspective.

The Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives report notes that detailed case studies are needed to contribute towards the development of best practices, in particular studies that detail the specific ways in which organizations manage their programs especially where "faith-saturated" or "faith-centred" program elements operate side-by-side with "secular" or "faith-background" components.

Research method

We have used a qualitative method of research, interviewing key informants from five case studies. Using existing networks and contacts we identified a number of potential cases for study. From this list we chose five partnerships that offered the best opportunities for learning, using these criteria:

- Wide variety of organizations, both secular and religious
- History, stability and length of partnership
- Wide variety of types of programs emerging from the partnership
- Diverse geographical placement, with attention to Toronto's priority neighbourhoods (Toronto has 13priority neighbourhoods designated as such by their low income levels and general lack of social services.)
- Partnerships that were deemed to be successful by key informants

In some of our cases a faith-based organization is partnering with secular agencies; in other cases all the partners are faith-based organizations, but represent a variety of faiths and traditions. These latter cases include faith-based partners who are from many Christian denominations, Muslim charitable organizations and a Buddhist foundation. Secular agencies include a police force, a town recreation department, a cancer care charitable organization and a school board. The programs operated by the partnerships are a youth drop-in, two food banks

with ancillary services, outpatient cancer support and care, and specialized classroom learning for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) youth.

Fifteen questions formed the basis of our interviews. They covered the founding and history of the partnership, key events and leaders, resources, objectives, and outcomes. Relationships, trust, and accountability were explored. We asked about how the partnership contributed to the health of the larger community. A final section dealt with motivation, belief, and assumptions about life in the various partners. We asked what participants had learned from their partnerships. These questions and the entire interview process were approved by the Ryerson University Ethics Review Board.

The interviews were conducted by one of the principal investigators, mostly in person, with a few done by phone. They were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed by the research team, and this analysis forms the basis for our presentation. The interviews are a rich resource for many themes to do with partnerships involving a faith-based element. However, for the purposes of this presentation we will focus on the unique or significant factors in such a partnership.

Table 1: Overview of 5 cases

CASE	PROGRAM	PARTNERS	INTERFAITH	SECULAR	STAFF	LOCATION	HISTORY
Case #1	Drop-in for youth at risk	Church, police, town recreation	No	Yes	Professional (non-paid) & volunteers	Growing town, outer suburbs	Four years of operation
Case #2	Food bank	Churches, Muslim charitable organizations	Yes	No (local businesses contribute)	Volunteers with professional paid support	Priority neighbourhood, high immigration	In 2010 moves from church-run to independent operation
Case #3	Food bank, meal & other services	Churches, mosques, Buddhist charitable organization	Yes	No (local businesses contribute)	Volunteers with professional support	Mostly affluent, inner suburb	About four years of development & operation
Case #4	Fund raising & outpatient cancer care	Church, foundation, cancer care agency	No	Yes	Professional & volunteers	New town, outer suburb, high growth	2005-2008: Fund raising. 2008 services begin.
Case #5	School for LGBT youth	Church, school board	No	Yes	Professional teachers, church volunteers	Serves dispersed, gay community	Begun 1995. Program grows & develops to present.

Five cases: differences and commonalities

As can be seen from the accompanying table, the five cases we have chosen have both similarities and diversity under the seven headings that comprise their basic description. We will briefly summarize these similarities and differences, then move to consider some generalizations that are common to all of them.

Similarities and differences

Beginning with the partnerships, we see that three cases (1, 4 & 5) involve secular organizations partnering with religious ones. In two of these three instances (1 & 5) the secular organizations have clear boundaries and policy that guide their relationships. In one of these two cases (5), partnering with a church was unprecedented. A further connection between these two cases is that they both are programs focused on youth at risk (although the programs themselves are very different). Case #4 involves an organization that recognizes the important supportive role of spirituality and religion in their work of cancer care, and so the partnership is building upon a value internal to the secular agency. Cases 4 & 5 have strong secular partners that are in complete control of the program, although in both cases the faith partners played the primary role in significant fund raising efforts.

The remaining two cases (2 & 3) have a number of things in common. First, both are primarily interfaith partnerships and, secondly, both are food banks with ancillary services. Although they rely heavily on the generosity of businesses, these secular organizations are not partners to the same extent as the religious ones. We will find from our analysis that both see their work as far more than providing food to the hungry; they operate from a culture of empowerment. This culture is very important to the interfaith collaboration. The key difference between the two, which we will explore, is that one operates in a priority neighbourhood where most people are poor, while the other serves a pocket of poverty, invisible to the politicians, within an affluent community. The two dramatically different settings contribute to the distinct dynamics at work in these two food banks.

There is an important distinction to be made between two types of faith partners. The first two cases involve church social service agencies with professional staff, while the latter three are congregationally based. Apart from having paid professionals from the faith side engaged in the partnership, the relations with an agency are significantly different from those with a congregation. An agency and its staff are usually responsible to a parent body, while a congregation is more autonomous (depending upon the faith or denomination). Also, a congregation has the potential of providing volunteers, considerable networking, financial resources and a building, all of which may not be within the capacity of an agency. On the other hand, an agency has a clear focus on service, which a congregation does not. It should be noted that the agency in case 1 consists of staff within a team based in a congregation, who have a mandate to work with youth in the community; they are able to draw on volunteers from the congregation for the program.

We can also note that a geographical sense of community is important to four of the five cases, while case 5 serves youth drawn from a dispersed group identified by sexual orientation. The first four cases are all in communities that need social and health services, even though their indicators of poverty and stability vary considerably. In some cases the need is obvious and initiatives are supported by organizations from all sectors, but in case 3 the relative affluence and stability of the neighbourhood meant that certain attitudes of denial were present. These are important factors for determining obstacles and support for the partnerships from the wider community.

We shall find many differences with regard to the levels of formality in these partnerships, so much so that comparisons are not particularly fruitful. However, we know that formality is an important factor for the development and survival of an organization. Also, we shall find in these cases that our informants discuss formality, or the lack of it, in terms of trust.

Finally, our cases represent a spectrum of organizational life cycle: one has been in existence for over fifteen years; another whose program has been running for many years, became a very recent partnership as a result of a crisis; three, with some variation, track their existence over a period of four or five years.

Generalizations

There are some generalizations that hold true for all the cases. The first is that faith plays an important role in all the partnerships. It would not be possible to simply substitute a secular partner for a religious one, and end up with more or less the same partnership and the same program. Faith makes a significant difference at the personal level of motivation and at the corporate level of the resources a faith organization brings to the partnership.

In their recent book, *American Grace,* Putnam and Campbell argue that social networks (whether of family, friends or small groups) rooted in congregational life "are extremely powerful predictors of the entire range of generosity, good neighborliness, and civic engagement …" (p. 472) Putnam and Campbell claim that these social behaviours are considerably higher for religious than for secular Americans. Whether their research and conclusions would hold true for Canada, we are not in a position to say; however, all our cases show a very high, even sacrificial, level of generosity, good neighbourliness and civic engagement from the religious partners. Again, we are not arguing that it is only people who participate in organized religion who bring these qualities to a partnership: far from it, as can be seen from an analysis of the three religious-secular partnerships. The idea of these and other qualities finding their origin in congregationally-based social networks is intriguing, and is worth reflecting on as we come across the role of networks in our interviews.

Further, it is true in all cases that faith is an element valued by all partners. Adherents of one faith or denomination benefit from working with those of another. Secular partners with little or no adherence to organized religion, or with varying degrees of personal spirituality, attest to the benefits of working with their more religious and spiritual partners. And in some instances benefits flow the other way as well: religious partners speak of being profoundly affected by the

commitment of their secular counterparts. The faith element we are identifying here is usually described by our interviewees in terms of motivation, commitment and trust.

This same motivation provided by faith also carries with it an obstacle or danger. In all our cases people are wary of motive. Do faith partners have an ulterior or unacknowledged motive of seeking converts or promoting their religious brand? Sometimes this fear is discussed openly; other times, the focus and demands of the project crowd out any religious discussion. "We're too busy feeding people to discuss theology.")

Finally, all our cases exhibit considerable development of the initial partnership, well beyond the original mandate: many additional services are added to food provision; food provision is added to teaching; events to impact the larger community are held; new partners and allies are brought in; fund raising projects are planned. Can we trace this phenomenon of partnership development to the faith-based social networks described by Putnam and Campbell? Whatever the explanation, it remains a striking feature common to all of our investigations.

Two cases

For presentation at the ARNOVA conference, knowing that five cases represent too much material, we have chosen to focus on the two food banks (2 & 3). These two cases have enough similarities to warrant comparison; yet their differences are also instructive. Both similarities and differences lead us into fruitful analysis and conclusions on faith and partnerships.

First of all, the two cases fit well into the ARNOVA theme of diversity. They are both interfaith partnerships with the primary goal of feeding people; both serve very diverse communities, including a large number of recent immigrants. Both are in Toronto. Both have experienced conflict with a parent body, although their methods of managing their conflicts have been radically different. Both are largely volunteer efforts, although one does have the support of paid, professional staff. Both serve very large numbers of people, one being the largest food bank in the city.

Looking at the differences in these two cases, we note that one is in a priority neighbourhood. The second food bank exists in a relatively affluent inner suburb, with a few isolated pockets of poverty. The two are at very different stages in their life cycle: one has existed for years, but recently has had to reinvent itself as a result of a crisis; the other is relatively new, having started about four years ago. Another significant difference lies in the formality of their organizational structure and the identity of the participating religious partners. The first is highly structured, with a constitution and legal charitable status; the partners are para-religious organizations or agencies; it is housed in rented space in the basement of a residential highrise tower. The second is not a legal entity of its own: although it has many partners, its legal status is as a project of the congregation from whose building it operates, free of charge.

These two food banks have enough in common that a solid basis for comparison can be established. Their differences are simply illustrative of the wide variety of food bank operations in Toronto, a city in which, it has been remarked by a provincial politician, there are more food banks than Tim Hortons' (an omnipresent coffee and doughnut chain). Further to that comment,

as all our interviewees pointed out, the very existence of food banks in our society is a disgrace, a fact that we keep in mind as we talk about the 'success' of these partnerships. We begin, therefore, with a brief description and history of each case.

Food Bank One (Case 2)

This is the story of how a community of people in a priority neighbourhood rallied to save and restructure a vital community asset. The food bank in question moved from being the project of a single church agency to become a partnership involving two Christian and four Muslim organizations. In the process historic tensions and solitudes were overcome and a new collaboration emerged that the leaders hope will be a model for a multi-cultural and multi-faith city. Faith had a lot to do with this transformation. However, as we shall see, in this case the boundaries of what we normally mean by faith are challenged and expanded. "By the community, for the community" became the motto for the food bank, the partnership that sustains it, and the other community services that are connected to it; the motto also applies to the role of faith.

Program

This is one of the busiest food banks in the city. It operates four days a week in the basement of a high rise tower, serving well over 2000 clients in a month and feeding at least 1000 children. Estimating from the amount of Halal food that is distributed, approximately 60% of the clients are Muslim. There are at least 50 volunteers who assist with running the food bank, and a further 20 who organize special events such as a fund-raising walk or food collections during Ramadan.

Although her role is intended to diminish, an energetic Anglican priest serves as coordinator for the food bank, along with her main duties as executive director of the diocesan social service agency in the neighbourhood. This agency, Flemindon Park Ministries (FPM) has two staff who provide some administrative assistance to the food bank. Going further behind the scenes we find that six partner organizations fund the food bank: Anglican, Presbyterian, and four Muslim relief and development agencies or foundations. All of these partners are represented on the board, along with some community representatives.

There is a general impression of great energy and commitment at all levels. People talk excitedly about the service to the community and what it means for their lives. Even board attendance is impressively high.

What we see now at the food bank represents both continuity and radical change in comparison to its previous incarnation. Until a crisis in early 2010 the food bank had been a project of the Anglican ministry (FPM), funded and staffed by the Anglican diocese. This crisis precipitated the formation of the new partnership and some significant changes in the actual operation of the food bank. This case study is mostly the story of how the new partnership came into being.

A Priority Neighbourhood

Flemingdon Park-Victoria Village is designated one of 13 priority neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto, which means that it has a high degree of poverty or low- income households and few social and community services. Although it is poor and under-serviced by comparison with the rest of the city, the neighbourhood is known to be very resourceful, with many community leaders and networks.

These are some of the demographics of Flemingdon Park-Victoria Village from the 2001 census:
- Population 40,000
- Immigrant population 65% (49% for City)
- Visible minority population 66% (43% for City)
- Average household income $43,876 ($69,125 for City)
- Low income persons 32.8% (22.6% for City)
- 80% of population live in apartments, 63% in towers of over five stories
- Arrival of immigrants: -> 1980 26%; 1981 -> 1990 20%; 1991 -> 2000 55%

In addition to low income levels and lack of services, the neighbourhood demographics show a very high immigrant population with largest numbers coming from Sri Lanka, Philippines, China, and India (top 4). As can be seen from "arrival of immigrants" above, there is a very high proportion of recent immigrants. Also, the age profile of the neighbourhood is younger than the city as a whole.

Partnership and food bank history

Flemingdon Park Ministries (FPM) was established in the 1960s by the Anglican Diocese of Toronto as a social outreach and community development agency. It is not expected to have a worshipping congregation or a church building and has operated from a variety of rented spaces. The Flemingdon Park Food Bank (FPFB) was started and run by the Red Cross, but about ten years ago the Red Cross pulled out. As the result of fierce advocacy by the executive director of FPM, the food bank was taken on as a project of the Anglican organization and continued as such until the retirement of this executive director (ED) three years ago.

The food bank had very strong community support and participation. Well and efficiently run, it was seen to be an essential service by the community, responsive to the diverse needs of community members by supplying Halal food for example. In the opinion of the present ED of FPM, the Anglican ministry and its former ED developed a strong reputation for selfless community development and service, partly due to the operation of the food bank.

However, tensions and issues developed. The Diocese of Toronto decided it did not want to operate a food bank as part of its ministry: the Diocese questioned the use of staff time and financial resources for this purpose, and was very concerned about liability. Furthermore, the Diocese felt that it was carrying the full responsibility for what should be a community based service. (This opinion was shared by other interviewees, who agreed that the situation was

unjust.) These tensions coincided with the retirement of the ED and subsequent search for her replacement. In fact, when the new ED for FPM was hired, there was no mention of a food bank in her job description, despite its continuing existence and community expectations that it would be business as usual for the new arrival. The Diocese gave clear instructions to the new ED that she should divest herself of operational responsibilities for the food bank.

A seemingly minor, but nevertheless important shift had occurred under the aegis of the now retired ED. The board of directors of FPM had been drawn from the Anglican community, and none of these members lived in Flemingdon Park. Similarly, the staff person for the food bank came from outside the neighbourhood. While these were all competent and committed people, they had little contact or identification with the diverse neighbourhood and clients served by FPM. The board realized this lack and invited a young Ismaili community leader to join them with the intention of having community voices represented. This move proved prescient.

There was, present within the board of FPM, a further significant factor in dealing successfully with the tensions mentioned above. The chair of the board became an important advocate and interpreter at the Diocesan level for the food bank and its emerging partnership. This took some of the pressure off the new ED in dealing with her employer and bishop.

Crisis

Early in 2010 the lease on the space in which the food bank was situated expired, and the new rent was well beyond the capacity of the food bank. The Diocese took this as an opportunity to precipitate the removal of the food bank from FPM. On the other hand the new ED had come to the conclusion, along with other leaders, that the food bank was an essential community service. However, she obviously had no support from her employer for sustaining its operation.

She called an open community meeting to inform people of the crisis. About 60 people from the neighbourhood showed up, comprised mostly of volunteers and users, and they expressed many ideas for saving the food bank. It was, according to the ED, a surprisingly hopeful and energetic meeting.

From the community meeting contacts were made and a coalition of the future partners emerged, determined to save the food bank. They formed a corporation that assumed responsibility for the food bank, thereby addressing the concerns of the Anglican Diocese by removing the food bank from the Anglican program and accompanying financial liability. Additional and crucial help for setting up the new organization was given by the executive director of Flemingdon Park Legal Services. The elected representatives from all three levels of government participated in the transition and were seen as being very supportive.

There were several remarkable features of this rush of activity. First, it was clearly initiated and sustained by an outpouring of concern from the community who used and volunteered at the food bank. Secondly, the four Muslim organizations drawn into the fray had not previously cooperated with one another, even though several imams had friendly relations. In fact, the food bank represents the first time that Sunnis, Shias and Ismailis (a Shia sect) in the area have worked together in an organized partnership. Thirdly, the facilitative role of the female

Anglican priest in creating this partnership deserves further examination. We shall look at all these features in more detail shortly.

The creation of FPFB is a dramatic story of a diverse religious community coming together to avert a crisis and was featured in a Toronto Star article and a CBC interview. After some initial growing pains, the food bank appears to be a viable operation that attracts strong community support. At the time of the interviews, it had been operating in its new incarnation for less than a year. A sponsored walk had much higher than expected participation and raised $20,000. The new, much reduced budget meant that the staff person had to be let go. Her place was taken by volunteers; however, the FPM ED observed that the operation was smoother under this arrangement. Rather than hiring an outsider to manage the food bank, it was now "by the community, for the community." Plans are being made to apply for a grant that will employ and train community volunteers on a part-time basis.

Intertwined relationships and community capacity

Although the story of the community rallying to reinvent its food bank is inspiring by itself, further investigation reveals that this story is built upon some very important infrastructure, which comes under the heading of community capacity. A prime example of this capacity is that the food bank and FPM are still intertwined, sharing staff and integrating services, although, as noted earlier, the ED is in process of removing herself from her coordinating role. However, the food bank is the first port of call for many of the people who eventually use the services of FPM. People will come seeking food, and this becomes an opportunity to establish trust and introduce them to the services offered by FPM. The two staff of FPM are Sunni Muslim women, from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. They had previously been volunteers with FPM, and their language skills are an important asset that helps FPM connect with a wide constituency. Being able to communicate in their home language is seen as the most important issue for women who come seeking help.

Dealing with a wide range of social and behavioural issues (addiction, family abuse, mental disability and disease) is part of the daily routine: "some people, they are very sick and most of the people, they are addicted, and we have to be careful … but we know how to deal with this kind of people because we are working in this community for a long time." The capacity of the staff team to maintain connection, confidentiality and professional standards is very important for trust in the community – both for FPM and FPFB.

The programs offered by FPM are for individual and community empowerment, and include personal planning, groups for seniors and women and a children's after school program designed for self-esteem and relationship building. In addition to help with homework and other activities, there is a summer camp attracting about 60 children. These children's programs are done in partnership with the local Presbyterian church. These programs all require the development of trust and religious sensitivity, since most of the participants are Muslim. This is especially true of the children's program. For example, parents trust that the leaders will not require female children to remove articles of clothing when taken on a swimming trip.

Although the FPM programs are not within the partnership being studied, they provide important contextual information about community capacity for the food bank partnership. The values that drove the Anglican agency are evident in the new partnership:

- There is a culture of "by the community, for the community" in FPM. This culture encourages strong ownership of programs and projects on the part of both service providers and users. Users often become volunteers and sometimes paid staff.
- The desired outcome of programming is interdependency: that is, people (including children) who are individually well developed and in community building relationships with one another.
- A bank of trust over many years has been built up. People know that they will be treated respectfully. Muslims are comfortable in the programs sponsored by a Christian organization. The Anglicans have been in the community since the 1960's; they have focused on community development without religious discrimination and have not used their position for proselytizing.
- The culture of FPM is to focus on people's needs, not their religion. "When you get into a position, you don't think about that first (a person's religion). You think about humility." "We are here to serve." (Muslim staff person at FPM)
- Well-established, strong, female leadership is evident in staff and volunteers. Surprisingly, this leadership was accepted by the exclusively male leaders of the Muslim organizations.
- Relationships have been established; people are used to working together; programs emerge organically.

Community capacity: additional strengths and obstacles

We have already mentioned that the four partnering Muslim organizations have had a history of not working together. The reasons are not difficult to understand. The Muslims in this community are very diverse: they come from many countries and cultures; they speak many languages; religiously they comprise Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis. They are Afghan, Bangladeshi, Palestinian, Somalian, Malaysian, Moroccan and from many other cultures. There is an understandable desire to "help our own". Barriers and rivalries have grown up within the Muslim community.

One of the remarkable features of this story is that the catalyst for Muslim cooperation was the female Anglican priest. She brought strong facilitative skills to the table and was enthusiastic in her engagement with Muslim people and their faith—careful, for example, to observe Muslim rules for women in prayer spaces. Nonetheless, it is unusual that a woman was able to bring the male Muslim leaders together around the same table. In addition to her personal skills and inter-faith sensitivities, she was probably helped in her mission by her relatively powerless position. (As noted earlier, her employer wanted the food bank removed from its obligations.) On the other hand, she was an authorized religious leader supported by a long

tradition of credibility in the community. She also spoke on behalf of the female leadership in FPM and the larger community.

As an example of the strong loyalty that has developed, one of the Muslim leaders advocated in person on her behalf to her bishop in regard to the food bank issue. She has been invited to many Muslim gatherings and events, and (remarkably) is occasionally asked to lead in prayer. All this speaks to the credibility of the Anglican priest as an interfaith leader, and also the way in which norms have been challenged or at least have developed flexibility in the Muslim community.

These tensions have also been explicitly addressed by imams. This is one of the most important factors in the success of the partnership. Against the idea of "looking after our own" several imams and other Muslim leaders have been very clear that the food bank is for everyone, no matter what their faith. They have argued that the Muslim obligation is to care for one's neighbour in need, and there are no restrictions on who is one's "neighbour". "It's a compulsory act that we must give to the poor." As a result the food bank is promoted as a service organization by and for the whole community. It builds upon the practice established by the Anglican FPM. This approach has built a strong following and resulted in much support. However, it has also raised conflict.

One area of conflict is that mosques wish to raise money for their own outreach efforts within their Muslim constituency; it is very easy to see the food bank as a competitor for funds and influence. To counter this attitude imams have therefore encouraged giving to both the local mosque and the food bank. A Sunni group from a nearby city decided to set up a Muslim-only food bank in a neighbouring community, despite entreaties to join their efforts with the FPFB. The Muslim (Shia/Ismaili) leaders of FPFB chose to give assistance in the form of equipment to this rival food bank, and are working to establish relations with the new food bank that, they hope, will lead to its becoming a satellite of FPFB. (As predicted, the two food banks are serving many of the same people.) As one Ismaili board member noted, "It is a big issue for Sunnis to work with Shias." The imam of the Sunni mosque in this community has encouraged his members to work with the Shias.

Tensions are also evident in the day-to-day interchanges experienced by the two Muslim staff of FPM. The women frequently are challenged by people who come to FPM or the food bank as to why they, as Muslims, are working for a Christian organization. These people are usually recent arrivals to Canada, and bring religious hostility and conflict from their home countries with them. The two staff reiterate the policy of FPM, which is to help people regardless of their religion. They avoid debate on the subject, but note that with time people often come to accept this stance. "We have to be very soft and kind and take it easy, knowing that they are trying to have a target."

FPM staff often participate in daily prayers together, and the ED leads bible study sessions attended by people from a range of faiths. The culture of the organization has an inclusive religious or spiritual dimension, probably made possible by the inter-faith attitudes of the ED and the dominance of women in the organization.

Constitution

In contrast to three of our five cases, the food bank has a formal constitution, and, according to several interviewees, its creation was essential for the stability of the organization. The context we described above of community and religious tensions goes a long way to explaining why. The process of incorporation and the development of a written, legal agreement on governance with bylaws were described as a "painful process." This was attributed to a variety of factors:

- Recent immigrants who have not been exposed to civil society have not developed an understanding of governance practices in Canada.
- People of diverse cultures and faiths come with very different ideas of governance. Some attribute these differences to generational attitudes.
- There existed the view that the board of the food bank would be a political organization and that it could be the object of political rivalries, open to domination or takeover by an outside group.

One board member said that they had to be very clear that the food bank was a community service, and that the board was there solely to support the service. Incorporation and the development of by-laws were intended to guard against the possibility of the food bank being taken over by an outside group with a political agenda. The context for these fears was a highly politicized environment in which various Muslim groups vied for influence. As one Muslim informant observed, the present situation for Muslims in the neighbourhood and the city is not dissimilar to the religious landscape of Toronto in an earlier time, when Christian denominations competed with one another.

In addition to protecting the food bank as a community-based organization, the constitution ensures that relationships are organization-to-organization, with all the organizations represented on the board being registered charities. Furthermore, with this type of board, commitments are longer term and not dependent upon individuals. We can see in this early emphasis on legal constitution a desire to protect the new partnership and not rely solely on good will.

Foundational elements of the partnership

At this point we shall leave the story of the food bank and of the context from which it emerged, and move into a more reflective mode, allowing our interviewees to speak of some of the foundational elements such as obstacles, motivation, trust, unique resources, making a difference in the community, and the role of faith.

Each interviewee was asked to provide three words or phrases to describe the partnership:

- Historic collaboration, awesome, privilege, really making a difference in the community – amazing that it works
- Bridge-building, interfaith, cooperation
- Poverty, dignity, commitment, self-esteem, confidentiality, respect
- Inspiring, creative, pragmatic

The partnership, of course, cannot be completely separated from the project for which it exists, and so these phrases reflect key aspects both of the food bank and the collaboration that enables it:

- Barriers, especially religious, that had to be overcome to create the partnership;
- The value of the partnership project to the community;
- The core values of the project that are the heart of its contribution to individual and community development.

Obstacles

We have already described some of the obstacles faced by the partners. Probing a bit deeper into the process of getting faith-based organizations to work together, we hear that although each partner assumed an equal share of costs, it is still difficult raising funds. Furthermore, it was hard work getting faith groups to make a legal commitment to work together. Process issues added to these difficulties: people work very differently and have differing norms of discipline about time and agenda. "The price of partnership is to put up with frustration." We have mentioned the need for faith groups (Muslims in this case) to show that they are helping their own, and also the implicit suspicion that social services may have an ulterior motive related to conversion. However, there was parallel obstacle experienced by the church partners in their own constituencies, and this was the jealousy that could develop from having a successful food bank overshadow other local efforts at mission, particularly when fund raising was at stake. Finally, as our earlier story makes clear, the partners had to deal with the higher levels of a hierarchical organization, which had financial responsibility and decision-making power, but did not have knowledge of the grass-roots vision.

These obstacles may not all be unique to faith-based organizations; however, in this short summary we can imagine the concerted determination of partners necessary to overcome them.

Motivation and strengths

If partnerships involving faith-based organizations produce obstacles that are directly related to faith or religion, then they also have some countervailing motivations and benefits. After all, even though there are a number of secular agencies in the community, it was six faith-based ones that came together in response to the crisis. When asked about the role of faith in this partnership, respondents replied that faith is part of the solution: "each one of us has an ethical

imperative to help those in need; that's the glue that brought us together." Furthermore, the partnership is not just a utilitarian means to the end of helping those in need. For many the partnership is just as important as the food bank, and the two cannot be separated: although "we were all strangers to each other … the more we work together the more we realize how common and fundamental our values are;" and, the focus on a common practical project helps to sustain the partnership, fostering patience and tolerance for one another. People spoke of the "humanitarian gesture", rooted in their faith, as being the primary motivation to work together, and how they were "driven by faith".

There is also more at stake than a single food bank: "the bigger picture is the broader commitment to this coming together of the different faiths, to work together, to be an example to the rest of the city, to the province, to other countries." Respondents felt that "people are watching us, to see how we nurture and sustain pluralistic co-existence."

How were they measuring success apart from sustaining a reliable core service? Interviewees spoke of media attention, the capacity to develop the partnership and its services further and to "reach out to the unknown and uncomfortable". They took pride in the successful community food drives connected to Ramadan and noted the involvement of young people under the age of 30 in awareness and fund raising efforts. They felt that working together in an interfaith partnership had created a ripple effect in the community and encouraged other volunteers.

Not surprisingly, there are strengths that came with these faith-based organizations that directly contributed to the success of their partnership. First is the goodwill of their constituencies. Each could draw on many connections – "a chain of support" – for acquiring donations of all kinds. For example businesses provided sponsorships from all parts of the city for the fund-raising walk. These connections were also between religious leaders, politicians and community leaders, which led to credibility, "an instant reputation", and media coverage.

Making a difference in the community

One of the reasons for choosing this case was the impact on the larger community. We have seen that there is strong local ownership of the food bank as an important community resource. The food bank instills a feeling of dignity in volunteers and users, because it is "for the community, by the community." However, the board wishes to move from simply providing food to studying and acting on questions of food access and food security, and they have received a grant for this initiative. Similarly, while they have accommodated religious needs, the next step is to consider needs that are dietary and health related.

The project aims at developing people as well as providing food. Volunteers at the food bank develop self-esteem and language skills; they can go on to other jobs and community leadership on the basis of this experience. And as noted before, the food bank is just the front line in helping people who come with a host of needs: "they burst with pain … everyone has been tortured in some way or another … they thought there were no resources for them, but when we give something to them that they really needed, they appreciate it." (FPM staff)

We can't claim that these effects on the larger community are directly linked to the multi-faith partnership aspect of this project. Rather, they speak to what the faith-based partnership is trying to achieve in terms of broader community health and development. Indeed, this collective aim is congruent with the partners' own goals. For example, the Ismaili community is committed to nurturing a healthy, pluralistic society, and to strengthening civil society. The food bank is a practical way that Muslims of all denominations can realize their mission: "everyone is for it, it's a major focus for us." Supporting practices in community development that seek to counteract dependency (that can often characterize food handouts), Islam teaches that the poor shouldn't remain poor; they should become resourceful. And it has provided an inspirational story for Anglicans, both in terms of social justice and interfaith collaboration.

Trust

"We came together as trustworthy people. Who could better be trusted than a person of faith?" We have seen the implicit role of trust in this partnership, and here we have trust linked to faith. However, there is more to the faith/trust connection. After all, in our discussion of tensions and obstacles we have seen that religious leaders are also capable of sowing distrust and creating divisions.

This case is an interesting conjunction of creating new, trustworthy relationships and a history of trust built up over many decades. We have seen that one of the partners, the Anglican ministry, has served the community for nearly 50 years, and has developed a solid reputation, so much so that conservative Muslims are willing to entrust their children to its programs. We also noted that the current ED has gone out of her way to engage with religious traditions other than her own, and has been rewarded with invitations to lead prayer and be present in public, Muslim settings. The acceptance of her leadership by the male Muslim clergy is a mark of the degree of trust achieved. And perhaps less obvious to the outsider is the long standing relationship of 20 years between two of the leading imams, one Sunni and the other Ismaili. Could the partnership have occurred without this building block in place? But certainly when we come to consider the birth of the partnership itself, the key factor in creating the trust necessary for a successful outcome was the over-riding commitment of all parties to the common cause.

On the one hand we have trust established between religious leaders that is based upon respect, long standing relationships and the willingness to cross over boundaries. On the other hand, when we come to dig further into 'the common cause' we find that trust is founded upon a basic, shared theological belief that God cares for all humanity without distinction and is not limited to "caring for our own." This belief animated the partnership and enabled them to defend their project against corroding, tribal loyalties.

Role of faith, belief, and assumptions about life

There are some very practical considerations that entered into this interfaith partnership. Meetings should not be scheduled at times when one group is obligated to pray. This may sound obvious, but diocesan scheduling that did not take Muslim prayer time into account was a major

irritant. On a more positive note, food drives could be linked to times of religious obligation and fasting: Ramadan and Lent.

The focus for the interfaith partnership was a humanitarian project. Therefore, "we don't need to discuss theology … we are not there for prayers … and we are not concerned with how you practice your faith." However, this brusque response to how the partnership dealt with potential religious conflicts was qualified by the observation that at board meetings "our hearts are always praying." It is always instructive to probe the common language that a group uses to develop its common life and to achieve its goals. In this case, the language was grounded in serving needs rather than theology, although an imam interviewee offered a story of Abraham as a model of the hospitality the partners show to one another and that the food bank shows to its users.

This partnership is a contrast to the next one we will consider in that some of the leaders are clergy, and clergy have professional theological training. So, while the partners stuck to their common, humanitarian goal while meeting as a board, in private some became more theologically reflective about the faith element of the food bank. The Anglican priest saw the interfaith partnership and the food bank it supported as a new, community development model of "engaging in mission and being the church … empowering people to make decisions and transform their own lives." She felt that all faiths shared the incarnational sense of the presence of God: "(We operate from) a conviction that God has already given the gift of transformation and hope and new life. We don't have to create it. We're just there to enliven and empower and to walk alongside."

Advice?

We asked interviewees what advice they would give groups wishing to start up a partnership such as theirs. Their responses apply beyond faith groups, but they reflect their particular interfaith experience. The chief advice is to exercise patience and presence. During the course of creating the partnership, the players were present to one another without an agenda: "we had an agenda inflicted upon us, but we were successful because we were known, present to one another, showed interest in one another's story." Be patient: the proof is not in the pudding, but in the process. At the end you may get pudding, biriyani, or cookies, but don't underestimate the process."

They also advised against complacency or insularity: "push your thinking about who could be brought to the table to help your cause;" "think widely and push beyond the familiar;" and take the attitude that "we don't have to solve this on our own." They knew that faith communities cannot do things alone to serve the city; they should be complementing the efforts of government. And they expressed the hope that future partnerships would see secular agencies collaborating with religious ones for the common good.

Faith has many dimensions from institutional to personal, and in this final question we probed for change at the personal level that may include elements of faith. Thinking of the interfaith experience, people spoke of an increase in tolerance and emotional maturity, of respect for other religions, of a new freedom to pray with those of another faith, and of a deep appreciation of what we have in common, which ultimately is more important than the differences that divide us. All felt their faith had been strengthened in some way.

Those who were front-line service providers, along with board members, found that "the strengthening comes more from practice than it does from reading about it, in the doing." The interfaith project provided a special place to work: "you're closer to being with the client … and you treat the person like a human being." And work is a vocation: "I can feel the people from my community. It is a big goal for me to help my people in this community." "We have a soft heart and try to work better."

The Anglican priest, who began this story in considerable desperation, had emerged a year later with a new sense of God's grace and thankfulness for the unique opportunity she has in a life-giving job: "it's been humbling to see the gifts that people bring together in a situation like this … people really do care about community, transformation, making a difference, changing, being there for the long haul."

Food bank two (Case 3)

The story of how this food bank came to be features energetic and skilled volunteer efforts from people of faith, who were convinced that partnerships are vital to provide needed services. The food bank itself is an ever-expanding service that seeks to address the needs of the whole person. The ecumenical and multi-faith partners bring their unique values and contributions, which increase the health of both individuals and organizations and help to resolve conflict. The intentional creation of an inclusive and non-hierarchical community is key to this project. However, growth has led to tensions with the host church, and there are attitudinal obstacles related to faith that have to be met. Faith issues, both personal and corporate, have a great effect on this collaboration between Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. There is a large amount of detail in this account, but detail is what the leaders pay attention to, and in order to understand this project we need to follow their lead. To distinguish themselves from more traditional food banks, they call this "The Food Basket."

Program and partners

The Food Basket is a multi-service program that operates one day per week from a United Church in Etobicoke, an inner suburb of Toronto. The primary service is a hot or cold meal followed by free groceries, with an emphasis on fresh produce. Child care is provided. Additional services available to clients (many in the form of advice) include a public health nurse, a social worker, legal advice, settlement services, practice in English, connections with the library and ESL services, employment referrals, revolving micro loans to refugees for work

permits and residency status, and assistance with tax returns. A community garden on church property has begun, tended by users of the Food Basket; the garden provides produce for the program. The program serves 200 families and 400 people per week, many of whom are Muslim. Single women with children form a significant proportion of the clients. The main languages spoken, other than English, are Russian, Spanish and Arabic. The goal of the Food Basket is sustainability and empowerment, not just providing emergency food. One measure of success is the number of people who deregister from the Food Basket services, which is about 25 families per year (although there are also returnees). 'Our key goal is to empower the families to be more independent, so that's why there are so many other services that wrap around this Food Basket.'

The program is an informal partnership of 13 local churches, three mosques, and the Tzu Chi foundation (a Buddhist charitable organization), although the mosques and some of the churches can hardly be described as institutional partners. These partners provide volunteers and material resources. Officially, the Food Basket is an outreach program of the United Church in which it is housed. While the Food Basket does its own accounting, the church retains trusteeship of their funds. The Food Basket has its own steering team composed of representatives from partners, volunteers and recipients. However, there is no formal constitution or partnership agreement that binds the participating organizations. The entire operation is voluntary. Some recipients become volunteers in the program. The current coordinator is a retired social worker and one of the three original founders of the Food Basket. She devotes an enormous amount of time, attention and energy to the program. There are 180 volunteers associated with the program, many of whom are committing almost full time hours.

The church provides the facilities for the program, which consist of a very large, open hall/gymnasium, a kitchen and storage space. Although the program is open only one day per week, these facilities are needed by the program for an additional three days to prepare and dismantle. By using a separate phone number for the food bank, the church attempts to direct the many communications away from its administrative staff. The food bank operation makes demands on the janitorial staff of the church, and affects the other programs, such as Meals On Wheels, that use the church space.

Food is provided by Daily Bread Food Bank, Second Harvest and many local merchants. Donations of money are used to purchase produce at the Food Terminal. The church partners also provide food, toiletries, money, etc. The steering team is responsible for soliciting and transporting donations. Home Depot helps with the community garden.

The public health nurse is a major player in the organization, bringing many contacts for resources and fund-raising, and keeping the steering team well informed about conditions and programs. "She's a great font of knowledge, a real organizer, and keeps us on track a lot of the time."

Neighbourhood

With its prosperous looking middle-class houses, this inner suburb does not look like a neighbourhood that needs a food bank. Indeed, the city councilor famously declared that there

was no poverty in the ward. The demographic profile would seem to support this view: levels of income, education, and home ownership are all higher than the city average. The population is older and less diverse than the city (mostly Anglo-Saxon in origin and Canadian born).

However, the public health nurse tells a different story. One of the top priorities she hears about in her community development role for the whole suburb is food security, by which is meant access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food. Most of the children in two sectors of this suburb eat just one meal a day, and gangs use the promise of food to recruit their members. She sees a host of inter-related issues that affect public health: poverty; unemployment; lack of food, adequate housing, access to safe recreational spaces, educational supplements (after school tutoring); crime and gangs. The people associated with these issues live in high-rise towers and townhouses.

As we will see later, the two conflicting views of the neighbourhood are contributors to both attitudinal obstacles and support for the Food Basket.

History

Although the story begins with a request from secular community agencies, in the end these and other community agencies lacked the capacity to partner effectively to address the needs they had identified. Rather it was the initiative and determination of a few church leaders, highly experienced in social work, that led to the creation of the Food Basket and its impressive network of volunteers.

Four years prior to the interviews, two community workers from the Social Planning Council and Toronto Housing Corporation wrote to the church, requesting that it consider opening a food bank, because two food banks in the area had closed. The sizable church building is well situated on a main thoroughfare and has ample parking. The suburb has little public space and few social agencies; the church is close to three complexes of community housing. The congregation, although aging and declining in numbers, is still active and vigorous and is known for its social activism. These factors made the church a natural choice. The public health nurse helped to facilitate a meeting between tenants from public housing, local social service agencies and the church.

The request was taken up by the Justice Working Group of the church. Church leaders consulted Daily Bread, who confirmed that there was a need for a food bank in the area, and promised staff and equipment support. Three volunteers from the church with professional experience in social work agreed to investigate. They did not count on receiving staff and equipment from Daily Bread, and began to explore resources in the community.

Although the majority opinion in the church was that a food bank could be managed by the church membership, one of the key leaders (the current coordinator) knew from her research that they would be inundated with people. She knew that the church was close to three large housing projects, that many immigrants moved to the area and that the church was a short bus ride from the airport. "We can't do it alone. We've got to have help from all of the other churches in the area, or it isn't going to work. We need a boatload of volunteers. And that's got

to come from everywhere. And I won't do it if what we're giving out is Kraft dinner and tuna. We need donation money so we can go to the Food Terminal."

A steering team was set up. Representatives from a variety of social agencies were invited to participate; however, for various reasons, participation from these groups was limited. It was clear that the driving force had to be the church. The church leaders made use of their connections and pool of volunteers to initiate strategic partnerships and bring new members to the steering team who would represent the larger community, including representatives from nearby churches. From the outset the steering team included members who were living in poverty. Others (from the participating churches) had professional experience and first hand knowledge of working with people in poverty in the community, although they were now retired. Their knowledge of poverty was an important motivator for joining the project.

An early conflict arose around the question, "Who is this for?" Community housing representatives wanted it for their tenants, but the church leaders were clear it could not be limited in this way. The steering team created a common goal that articulated an inclusive approach and a common language for discussion. As a result there was very little conflict and few group dynamic issues. The steering team had a dual role: they were responsible for the strategic direction of the food bank, and they were also all volunteers in its operation. They developed a reputation for determination and getting what they wanted.

During six months of exploration and research the three volunteers got 13 local churches on board, who agreed to provide volunteers, money and gifts-in-kind. They received a start-up loan from their national church office to buy equipment and bring the kitchen up to the minimum standard required by the Department of Health. They received the support of Future Bakery (owned by the local MP) in the form of day-old bread and a ticket to the Food Terminal. Second Harvest came on board "after six difficult months." More businesses, charitable organizations and individual volunteers followed. "We've been flying by the seat of our pants ever since."

A developing service

The Food Basket opened about three-and-a-half years ago. When it first opened there were large numbers, but the people who came were "psychologically quite stoic" and unexpressive, not knowing if the service would last and exhibiting the numbing effects of social stress. This was puzzling to the volunteers. However, the Food Basket began to provide food to be consumed on the premises, and this changed the dynamic. People began to open up, there was conversation and even a bit of laughter. The volunteers began to bring music to the program. More people came, and the steering team had to meet more often to discuss how to respond to expanding numbers and increasing awareness of the multiplicity of needs. Crowd control was a huge issue. Fights would break out in queues. "You have to understand that these people are in survival mode … they're trying to get food for their family, and that's what their reality is. They may not be the most polite when they're in line." (This issue was resolved by developing a numbering system.) Recipients do not so much "eat as vacuum the food." "They probably haven't eaten in two or three days."

The Food Basket has continued to evolve. Evolution is largely driven by contact with users and steering team discussions. The researching spirit that characterized the first phase of exploration into needs and resources in the community continues. These are some notable developments:

- There are many Muslim users who require halal food.
- Many of users are single Muslim women with children, abandoned by their husbands. Their existence, seen as shameful, is not acknowledged by their mosques and religious leaders. They have special needs.
- At the outset users came from subsidized housing in the neighbourhood; now users include more refugees and recent immigrants from outside the area.
- In response to various health and social needs, a public health nurse, a social worker, and volunteers with legal and financial skills attend the weekly operation and make themselves available to users.
- A community garden on church property that adjoins a city park has started and is largely tended by users.
- There is an emphasis on fresh produce and healthy foods. The volunteers from the Buddhist organization who sort through the food intake from Daily Bread and other donors on the two days prior to the weekly opening ensure that the food is of high quality and appropriate for the users.
- Providing enough food has become a serious issue and produced tensions.
- The steering team continually seeks new members who will represent the community served by the Food Basket and who will bring new partnerships "that would address the family as a whole."

After operating for nearly four years, and feeling that it has been mostly crisis management, they see the need for more structure in the organization.

They successfully applied for a Trillium grant to renovate the kitchen and to add a structure to the back of the building. Negotiating with the church board and the church groups that feel ownership of the space (especially the kitchen) was very stressful, but ultimately successful. (We shall consider relations with the host church in more detail below.)

Community Capacity Building and Faith Groups

The public health nurse attributes the community capacity that supports the Food Basket to relationship building. She and others are careful to share stories of individuals and families rather than statistics. "It's the facial interaction that you can't say no to." She also credits the clergy of the participating churches with providing vital support by facilitating communications and defusing personality and other conflicts.

Her own contribution to community capacity building is considerable. The following story relates how she engaged a Buddhist organization, and describes the values on which the relationship was established. She had three friends who introduced her to the Tzu Chi

organization. Over dinner the nurse promoted the virtues of the Food Basket and asked for assistance. The friends toured the Food Basket and identified help that Tzu Chi could provide. A request was made to the commissioners and to the Master in Taiwan, who approved the engagement of the organization. Tzu Chi respects the nurse as a reliable and compassionate witness in touch with the needs of the city; however, they had to go and see the Food Basket in operation for themselves. They found hunger (families receiving an insufficient amount of food) and a declining capacity to provide healthy food or respond to special needs (the Food Basket lost its supply of eggs; a child with cystic fibrosis could not be given enough nutritional food).

This careful exploration is typical of Tzu Chi in that the organization wants to ensure a good fit with its own values: compassion, genuine need not being met through government, healthy and culturally appropriate food (Buddhists are vegetarian), emphasis on hands-on involvement rather than giving money, users treated with respect, commitment and competence evident in leadership by an active and problem-solving board.

Once Tzu Chi decided to become a partner, it had a snowball effect. The Buddhists sort through the incoming food on Mondays, and are very effective at salvaging deteriorating food and finding uses for excess quantities. As a result they have attracted more volunteers to their Monday work. "They're teaching the volunteers (a new skill each week), so everybody's always fighting to volunteer to work with the Buddhist Foundation."

Community capacity building has a religious aspect. The partnerships are strengthened through attendance at each other's religious festivals. The host church has made its facilities available to the Muslims for their Eid festivals. Christians and Buddhists are invited to participate. Similarly, the Buddhists extend an invitation to their New Year's ceremonies. Christmas baskets are prepared for everyone, regardless of their religion. "There was a great sharing, and there's an openness to share cultures and religious practices …"

"I think there's a huge growth in terms of the relationship between the churches in this neighbourhood and communication, which is quite advantageous." The public health nurse realizes that the network of churches and mosques established through the Food Basket is a key community resource. "There is an understanding that this is an affluent community and they don't need the social services. It can work to disadvantage for people in need … the churches are recognizing that and stepping up. The reality is that the city services here are very, very limited." Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the official view of this suburb as an affluent community means that the extensive research done by the founders of the Food Basket that belies the perception of affluence has to be kept under the radar.

Community development is not limited to faith groups. Businesses are solicited for donations of food. They also provide volunteers. The number of businesses involved is used as a measure of success. A recent event illustrates how other organizations were engaged in an event of community betterment that began with the Food Basket.

Food Basket families wanted, but could not afford, bicycles for their children. The Food Basket decided to organize a bicycle drive and managed to draw in the Toronto Police. "I don't know if you ever worked with the Toronto Police. It's actually very difficult (to get them

committed and to come to meetings). They were at that meeting every week." The police provided bike storage and tune-ups, instruction in traffic safety and solicited donations. The bicycle drive expanded to become a community fair. About 20 public organizations were involved, including Public Health, Toronto Housing, Parks and Recreation, Toronto Libraries, George Hull Centre, and Women's Habitat. Canadian Tire discounted helmets. "They're all really recognizing the value of an engaged community." (Other interviewees evaluated this event differently, noting the enormous volunteer effort that was required and the relatively small number of bicycles that were donated and reconditioned. "Idiots that we are, we're going to do it again.")

Key phrases to describe partnership

The interviewees described their partnership in the following way:
- Unique partnership, a learning experience for all of us, a joyful experience
- Ecumenical and interfaith; personal connections with clients
- Need that is there and lack of understanding between communities (especially in the Muslim community)
- Open communication, commitment, faith in mankind
- Happy environment, helpful, cooperation
- Necessary (unfortunately), compassion, warmth, reliability, generosity.

Many of their words speak to the quality and strong sense of community that is at the heart of the Food Basket, and to this topic we now turn, beginning with the question of governance.

Community, governance and development in the steering team

There is no written constitution and partners do not always sign agreements. (Ontario Works is an exception.) Governance is provided by a steering committee that meets once a month for two and a half to three hours. It is responsible for policy, procedures and direction. In addition to addressing the usual resource and operational issues, they ask of themselves the strategic question "What additional services can we provide that will boost the families at the Food Basket?"

For the most part members of the steering team are representatives of their churches or organizations. (The churches all wrote letters of support for a Trillium application submitted by the steering team.) However, organization-to-organization relationships are informal, and this is a possible weakness. The mosques and at least one church have members who volunteer and even sit on the steering team, but do so as individuals rather than representatives of their religious organizations. In fact, relations are sometimes strained between these organizations and the Food Basket.

It is a different story within the steering team, which has a strong sense of community. The atmosphere is described as energetic, "beyond co-operative, collegial," and bubbly. Food is always provided at meetings and people care about each other. "It's a first name basis, strictly."

Members will often make personal donations to cover operational needs. They are also expert at soliciting donations ("they won't take no for an answer"). The motivation and commitment of members derives from relationships formed on the steering team and with the volunteers and users of the Food Basket. "The goal isn't 'Let's get the program going.' The goal is making sure that everyone is well along the way."" "The key thing is that they listen and they care. I think the families at the Food Basket know that." The public health nurse speculates that this energy and attitude is based in the "church philosophy" and "practicing what they preach."

The leaders have included tenant representatives from supportive housing on the steering and volunteer teams to ensure that the local expertise of poor people is well used. "They can talk to their peers and not be seen as talking down to them." They can say no to requests. They give insights into the conditions of living in chronic poverty, and provide practical advice relevant to the users. In a similar vein, a food bank user on the steering team is a well-respected community leader. Due to his influence public health brought a vaccine clinic to the food bank, knowing that the users would not go to an immunization clinic.

"The key thing is open communication. We share everything. We share the successes. We share the conflicts. We share the issues." The public health nurse keeps the minutes and maintains formal communications. "As much fun as we have, there is a process of documenting the key decision-making and how money is spent. They're very frugal about the money …" The minutes and financial statements are shared with the all partners in a formal and written manner.

One of the key relationships of the steering team is with the volunteers, who are a mixture of people from the partnering organizations, recipients and unemployed. "If they have a problem, they tend to come to one of us on the board. … by and large they are a very capable bunch." They are encouraged to "sort it out on their own, and then look for help … we treat them like adults."

Steering team members and volunteers are on a first name basis, and are not identified by their organization or status (e.g. member of a particular church, recipient, tenant in public housing etc.). Sometimes steering team members are mistaken for recipients (and are pleased to be so). The sense of equality and lack of distinctions is an important part of the Food Basket culture; however, it can lead to confusion in identification (for some folk who need these status markers), and in operations (knowing who is in charge). Colour-coded name-tags have been introduced to deal with the latter issue. Such confusion, interviewees felt, is a small price to pay for the sense of community that animates the operation and provides one of the key motivations for volunteering: "We treat each other like family, actually better … we support each other socially as well as work-wise. It's very important."

All is not sweetness and light. The steering team has had to deal with some tough issues and decisions, usually to do with difficult behaviour exhibited by some users, such as fighting and stealing. A known pedophile showed up. Strong differences of opinion on how to handle these situations led to the resignation of some members. The steering team seems to be guided through these tricky waters by tough-minded ex-professionals who are aware of protocols and come with a wealth of experience in social services. This professionalism and hand-on

experience is an important element, as we seek to understand more fully the community of the Food Basket. It is reinforced by developing norms for behaviour of the recipient/volunteers, by establishing a non-judgmental attitude toward those in survival mode, and by a confidentiality agreement signed by all volunteers that ensures the anonymity of the users.

It was noted that the empowerment and capacity building model that drives the Food Basket requires a much higher and diverse skill set in the leadership than that of a simple food bank.

One gets the picture of a highly energetic organization at the early stages of its development. It has remarkable achievements and a shared focus for its mission. It has gathered an impressive array of partners and volunteers who create an expanding web of services beyond the provision of food. It is characterized by the building of strong and caring relationships at every level, by a respect for people 'as they are', and by a foundation of shared, inclusive values. A new recruit to the steering team with some knowledge of organizational development observed: "Every organization starts with no rules and regulations, and just charisma and enthusiasm, and after a while you realize you need some kind of structure to deal with things as they come up. I think that's what the organization is going through right now."

Relations with the host church

As we have already observed, the Food Basket is officially a project of the congregation, and it retains the considerable support of the church. In fact, members of other churches are amazed at the level of generosity shown by the host congregation and voiced no criticisms whatsoever. However, the mushrooming size of the program, the demand on facilities, the competing claims on space, improvements to the building, and negative attitudes to the Food Basket users have all created tensions.

While not wishing to make assumptions about the attitudes of various demographic groups or the congregation as a whole, we are reminded that the congregation is largely made up of white, middle-class professional people, many of whom are in their 80s and 90s. There is a great gulf between most of the members and the Food Basket users. Generous outreach has traditionally been part of the congregation's mission, but seldom has it been exercised on the doorsteps of the church.

Because of the large number of partners and outside volunteers some church members have started to see the Food Basket as an external program with no discernible benefit for members, or at least the downsides—wear and tear, dominating the facilities, etc.—outweigh the upsides. One has to remember that the norm for active suburban churches such as this one, has been that church space is used for church sponsored programs, and that community groups, while welcome, fit in with the church programming. By contrast, the Food Basket is a very large presence to cope with, and many members feel they are losing control of their space.

Furthermore, most church members have little exposure to or understanding of living in long-term poverty. Like their city councilor, at least some thought it did not exist in their neighbourhood. For example there was considerable opposition to providing a hot lunch (which

was to be the only cooked meal in the week for many users, and for some, their only social outing of the week). As an interviewee remarked, "I think people in this church much prefer the theory of a food bank than the actuality of it. We are messy, our people are not tidy. They're desperate and they do things like steal the toilet paper in the women's bathroom. … I don't think they understood the impact of it … I think they figured a food bank was going to be 50 families, get their bag of food and leave."

Not surprisingly some church members came to fear that the Food Basket users would contribute to crime and create safety issues on church property.

While many of these tensions remain, some are successfully addressed. To counter the prejudice about crime, the coordinator interviewed the police inspector from the local division and put his comments into the church bulletin, to the effect that crime had gone down in the area due to the Food Basket providing food for families thereby making gang recruitment through food less attractive.

Also, some recipients have attended worship services at several of the churches, either by invitation or on their own initiative. Church members have benefited from these encounters, and also from hearing the stories of the Food Basket. They have come to realize that "these people are just like you and me … but we often brand and stigmatize people who are in need."

We can conclude that a variety of attitudes exist amongst church members towards the Food Basket, especially in the host congregation, and that the Food Basket makes significant formal and informal efforts to build relationships, overcome prejudices and solve problems. We shall further describe one of these efforts, which came about through an initiative of the Buddhists to deal with a garbage crisis.

Buddhists and faith

The Tzu Chi foundation is not a religious organization *per se*, but a charitable organization through which Buddhists do good works. We have already described the process by which they became involved in the Food Basket, noting the values that are important to them and some of the values (such as an emphasis on fresh food) they are adding to the operation of the Food Basket. Understanding the Buddhist's motivation will help us gain a more complete picture of what faith means to the Food Basket.

"Our master says that we have to be more involved locally … we are newcomers … so we have to do something good in our city … that's what we really want to do." In this statement we see an important directive that runs counter to the more common experience of new immigrants concentrating their energies on establishing themselves and then helping members of their own ethnic community. The Buddhists desire to doing something good for the city. Furthermore, "good" means hands-on volunteer time with a charity that is "local", not just funding. At least some of the Buddhist newcomers are not confident in English, and so volunteering is especially challenging.

"We're training ourselves. We do something of course to make people happy, but we're happy too because we help people. We're training our minds. It's why we have to know why we

help people." "The people who accept our help teach us too." "We hope we can share great love with them, and then, maybe one day they have power, then they can help another person. That's why we really want that everybody can share love." The interviewees went on to explain that they did not expect any return, including gratitude, from the sharing of love; rather, their sole objective was that this love would be passed on by those helped to others in need.

The Buddhist philosophy is evident in what one interviewee described as "the Buddhists' strategy to equalize." They would identify people who were left out of a particular program and organize some compensatory service. For example, families with children registered at the Food Basket receive a Christmas hamper with a turkey and toys. However, this excluded singles and couples with no children, and so the Buddhists provided a Christmas luncheon and smaller food baskets for these recipients. One can see this action as contributing to the community as a whole and its value for inclusiveness.

We have noted some of the tensions between the host church and the Food Basket. A particular issue arose around the large amounts of garbage generated by the program, caused in part by the large amounts of food delivered by a central food bank weekly to the church, which were deemed unusable. One would expect that these tensions would be managed 'in house' by church members, i.e., the official board of the congregation negotiating with leaders of the Food Basket who were church members. However, this was not the case.

The Buddhists were aware of the high demands of the program on the church facilities and janitorial staff. They volunteered to attend a church board meeting to listen to complaints and to find solutions. When the amount of garbage generated by the program emerged as a contentious issue, The Buddhists offered to separate the garbage (organics) and to take some garbage to their facility, thereby minimizing the garbage at the church. "They're trying to lower the carbon footprint at the church as well because that's part of (the Buddhists') environmental protection mission." This story illustrates how the Buddhists bring several of their key values into practice in the context of the program—environmental concern, value for harmonious relationships, respect for all parties. Their initiative also shows a high degree of ownership and sense of responsibility for the Food Basket, realizing that an outside party may be more effective in resolving issues that affect the church.

Although the Buddhists took the initiative, discussion of garbage and other issues has become a shared responsibility. "The information (concerns expressed by the church board) was shared with all the partners – all the churches, the Muslim groups, the Buddhist Foundation." The Food Basket steering team has worked on solutions and begun to implement a few. "We're trying to work with the church to make sure that there is ongoing open communication and that we are a partner and that we respect their facilities and we are trying to minimize the wear and tear."

Muslims and faith

There is a significant and complex obstacle that affects both the operation of the Food Basket and the partnership: this is an attitude prevalent in the Muslim community that denies the

existence of poverty, single parent families and spousal abuse, and that wishes to limit help from Muslims to Muslims. From most accounts the Food Basket has been successful in overcoming this obstacle in that Muslims form a significant number of their recipients, and at least a few of their volunteers. The Food Basket is sensitive to Muslim needs in designing their services (e.g., halal food, counseling for women); and from several personal stories, Muslims feel part of the Food Basket community. On the other hand two interviews noted that Muslims tend not to leave the ranks of recipients – one of the markers of success for the program. One account of the attitudinal obstacle is given below from an interview with a Muslim volunteer:

"Basically, I'm coming from the faith side, and … I've noticed from the mosque side … the lack of understanding as to what can be done and how you can reach out to various groups and avoid misunderstanding… From the mosque side, they are in their own sort of cocoon, and they are looking only from the aspect of Islam or Muslims. To them, Muslims going to a church for help, they can't understand that. Why? First of all, Muslims in mosques they do help out, but they help out only to their own. They don't reach out to non-Muslims. … To be honest with you, if I were a needy person, I would not go to a mosque. The reason I wouldn't go is that everyone would know that I am needy. This way I would go to a place where no one knows me. This is one of the factors why people don't go to a mosque if they are Muslims. They would rather go to a church or to the Salvation Army." *"So there's an element of shame?"* "That's right. This is what I would like to explain to the mosques. It is difficult to bridge that gap. There are some mosques, they have told me they have their food banks, but it failed only because of this reason."

Another interview took the view that "helping only our own" would give way to a more inclusive approach as the younger generation came to the fore. "There is a change in the younger generation of Muslims. They are more capable of seeing outside their own community." Muslims do need to be helped, and so there is an argument for developing Muslim only services, but this will eventually change as Muslims integrate more into society. "I would like them (the older men) to understand that their folks also want Christmas presents … it's going to be a learning curve."

However, Muslims do come to the Food Basket in large numbers, and they also contribute as volunteers and steering team members. As noted, Eid celebrations have been held in the church hall and the Muslim volunteers have opened these festivals to the Christians and Buddhists. There are many individual stories of Muslim contributions to the inclusive community life of the Food Basket. One of the most affecting had to do with the faith of a Christian steering team member.

She and her husband were keen volunteers at the Food Basket, members of one of the partner churches and well known and liked by all. The husband developed cancer and eventually entered a hospice. One of the members of the steering team, a Muslim, asked if he could come to pray by the man's bed. She assented, and afterwards told how deeply she had been affected by the silent presence of this Muslim man, praying with her husband, at a time of great personal vulnerability. Although she had always respected other faiths, this act changed and deepened her own faith. "It was a beautiful moment."

Her husband's illness and the concern of the Food Basket community led to occasions of prayer, both corporate and private, by Christians, Buddhists and Muslims, something that the steering team had earlier shied away from so as not to offend any religious sensibilities.

Reflections on the role of faith and belief

Several interviewees thought that the interfaith aspect of the partnership had deepened the mission of their own congregation by exposing them to the faith and practices of others. And as a result of the relationships formed, all the various faith-based organizations have been very generous; people have had their horizons expanded and have responded with generosity.

Asked about the role of faith in this partnership, one person reflected that faith produces consistency and long term commitment. "I think everyone … is part of this … because of their faith, because of their commitment to help their fellow man, woman and child, to give something back, to try to make the world a better place. … I think you do it because you have a commitment to helping, and I don't think people help on a consistent, day in and day out basis without a fairly strong faith to keep it going." In a similar vein others spoke of "an outlet for compassion" and developing a respect for life and a sense of community. And faith also was given credit for the tenacity necessary to deal with the hassles that were part of the ongoing relationship with the host congregation.

Although there is a clear understanding amongst everyone that the Food Basket is not a place for proselytizing or discussing faith, a lot of people come for advice, and it is in these occasions that "the faith basis we come from plays a large role in what we talk about." One person remarked that faith was the "respect for everyone who's there … the value of each person … is a logical outcome of being a Christian." "The atmosphere of acceptance is one of the big things that led to the success of the Food Basket … regardless of race, creed, religion, living standards, employment, the whole thing."

Nearly all the interviewees have experienced a change in their faith as a result of their involvement, and they spoke of this change in terms of increasing tolerance, appreciation and acceptance of people and their faith. The following reflection captures the effects on a participant of the multi-layered dimensions of faith groups working together to make a difference in the community: "For a while I lost my faith and that commitment and the Food Basket brought it back. Because to see so many faith groups, of various denominations, work together on a voluntary basis, committed to their community, what's a better way to improve your faith in people? … It's about appreciation of humanity and people, and not necessarily just for the one religious faith. … When you see that you're actually affecting the community in a very positive way, it makes you more committed."

Finally, although it is not strictly a matter of faith, the Food Basket has enabled building special relationships between affluent and poor people, relationships that wouldn't have otherwise happened. From what we have heard, we can surmise that these relationships are an outcome of the strong emphasis on inclusive community and respect that is at the heart of the Food Basket.

Conclusions

Two cases, of course, do not provide us with a quantitative basis for making sweeping generalizations or drawing irrefutable conclusions. Furthermore, all five cases were chosen because they were deemed to be 'successful'; therefore, we don't have the failures to learn from and compare. Another caveat is that we can't speak authoritatively about all the influences at play because our research is limited to the perceptions of our interviewees. That being said, we do have enough variety in the interviews to give us a nuanced picture of these two food banks, how they came to be, the values that underlie them and, most importantly for our purposes, the role of faith in the partnerships that created and sustain them. This latter area is the focus of our conclusions.

Our cases are both examples of different faiths successfully working together for the good of the community. In the first case rivalries between Muslim organizations were put aside in response to a strong outcry from the community and with the facilitative role of a Christian priest who had to negotiate the retreat of her own agency. Collaboration in the second case originates from the organizing power and skills of some key leaders from within a church sponsored group. The basic decision to involve as many partners as possible in the program led to the engagement of many other churches and a Buddhist relief organization; also, as many of the users of the services were Muslim, Muslims became engaged as important volunteers.

Both programs maintained a clear focus on the good of the larger community and this focus was a primary factor in their successful collaboration, helping them to overcome rivalries and to develop services. The clear focus is reflected in shared objectives and values, and a tacit agreement to be completely respectful of the variety of religious beliefs and practices.

Faith is an important motivator in a variety of ways. For some, these partnerships were an opportunity to put their faith into action through service to those less fortunate. However, there was also the strong feeling with many that they received more than they gave, so that while faith may have led them to get involved initially, through the process of engagement the horizons of their faith were expanded. It's also true that the commitment of some of the leaders involved in these two cases is heroic: they give extraordinary amounts of time and energy, and do not give up when faced with considerable obstacles. It is fair to say that the ecumenical and inter-faith nature of these partnerships increased motivation. Seeing a religiously varied group of people work together in a common cause was an inspiration.

Turning to a more institutional meaning of faith, we see the importance of a faith's teachings to these partnerships. The declaration that the Qu'ran teaches generosity to all people, not just Muslims, was foundational to the mission of the first food bank. Again, the over-riding mission to help people in the best way possible was the justification for hiring local Muslim women to work in an Anglican agency. The passion for helping people without distinction, either through the food bank or the agency, created an atmosphere of trust that gave rise to invitations from Muslims to the Anglican priest to participate in religious gatherings and events. Added into the mix are the priest's convictions and well-developed interfaith theology. It is interesting that

this cluster of events, founded on the teachings of two faiths, occur in a setting in which one imam board member declared, "we're too busy feeding people to talk theology."

In the second case there wasn't as much theological talk, perhaps because no clergy were amongst those interviewed (and the project was lay led). However, people were clearly motivated by their faith and felt they received surprising benefits that came from engagement with people of other faiths, such as support at a time of personal crisis, the celebration of Eid in the church hall and the Buddhist emphasis on sustainability. These were all part of the value-added aspects of interfaith collaboration. Perhaps the creation of a tough-minded, caring, inclusive and egalitarian community was the most important way in which faith was expressed in this case.

There is another dimension to our conclusions about the importance of faith, and that is the sensitivity shown in both these projects to religious differences and traditions. It can be as simple as scheduling meetings at times that do not conflict with festivals or weekly and daily prayer. However, it took some attention for the Christians to realize this basic courtesy. As remarked, interfaith collaboration is not really about the world religions in an abstract form: there are a myriad of traditions, beliefs and customs within each religion, usually determined by ethnicity and the country of origin. This diversity was particularly true for the Muslim immigrants who could hardly be lumped together in any meaningful way as one religious group. We heard frequently about the need for caution, patience and sensitivity while working in an interfaith setting.

There is a classic distinction in community development work made between 'a hand-out and a hand-up'. Hand-outs are thought to encourage a systemic dependency, while hand-ups encourage self-sufficiency. Furthermore, many would argue that self-sufficiency is best achieved through a collaborative process of identifying and engaging all the assets of a community. It's clear that both of these food banks have begun in the'hand-out camp, providing free food for needy people. However, this beginning is by no means the whole story. In different ways, both have developed a strong sense of community ownership, and so, they have elements of the second approach.

The first food bank is a story of how the larger community rallied to save a food bank that had been funded largely by an outside agency. There is strong community ownership shown through the volunteer corps and fund raising events; the motto is "by the community, for the community". The second food bank has worked to create a sense of inclusive community amongst its volunteers, board members, and users, so that there is a sense of equality and dignity that animates its operation. The provision of a meal before "shopping" not only gives participants much needed nutrition, it also is a time to build relationships and share more complex and personal challenges. Not least, the sense of dignity is shown through the provision of healthy food and the practice of keeping intake information to an absolute minimum.

We can link all of this to faith and partnership. All those who became partners in the two food banks did so because their faith traditions are clear about the obligation to help those in need. This is one area on which the different denominations and faiths agree. It so happened that

the partners in these two enterprises were all convinced that hand-outs were not enough, and that the programs should aim at self-sufficiency and dignity. This aim is not unique to people of faith; but the way in which it happens in these two cases is very much influenced by the religious faith of the partners. We can see that the two food banks try to realize their goals of moving beyond a feeding program through creating community in which people are treated as equals and with compassion.

We should note two further things about these community elements. First, the leaders in both food banks are clear that a key measure of success is that people leave the ranks of users, able to fend for themselves. Secondly, the very existence of a food bank within a larger community is an indictment of the capacity of society to provide food security for its citizens. So, the "community" of the food bank wants to get rid of its members, and the "wider community" should move beyond the need for the food bank. "Community" has a provisional sense to it.

An interesting element is that both have developed times or occasions of prayer, very different from the outmoded practice of the providers of food leading prayer or grace before a meal for the poor. In the case of the second food bank, the steering team had rejected the idea of praying before the meal, but the desire to do so publicly arose from the wish of users and volunteers to pray for a volunteer who was seriously ill. So, it was prayer from the community, rather than something imposed by the haves on the have-nots. The situation in the Anglican agency is a little different in that prayer is a part of the daily routine of the ED and open to any who wish to participate, and the Muslim staff feel moved to do so from time to time. In both cases a spiritual practice has emerged that gives the two communities greater depth. These two cases would differ in this regard from our other three, all of which involved a secular partner.

The experience of working in partnership to improve the lives of people in need has profoundly affected the partners. Nearly all interviewees attested that they have grown in their understanding and appreciation of others. ("I've increased my knowledge of the beauty of people. I've learned to be increasingly accepting and tolerant.") They have developed skills and confidence. Their faith has been changed, and some are able to talk more openly about their faith, simply by way of sharing "the things that have helped to keep me going." This level of learning is made possible by participating in a community in which a high trust level has been developed.

In both cases we find the key leaders in conflict with their parent bodies, the institutional church. They are sustained in their struggles by their personal faith and by the new communities of diverse and committed people formed through the partnerships.

In writing about social capital Robert Putnam has made the distinction between "bonding capital" and "bridging capital". Groups such as congregations may develop strong bonds within their membership and thereby create communities; however, these same bonds may also lead to distrust of those who are not part of the membership. Trust is an essential element for the social fabric to flourish. Therefore, there needs to be bridges between bonded communities, in other words, cooperation and collaboration. It's very clear that these two cases have bonding and

bridging in abundance. They are charismatic examples of new communities of people forming from the diversity of Toronto's population, bonded by a common purpose of increasing love and justice in the city.

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