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A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of Evangelical Christians Leading in Public Schools During Culture War Skirmishes

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A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of Evangelical Christians

Leading in Public Schools During Culture War Skirmishes

by
Gary F. Sehorn

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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Approved by:

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Abstract

The intent of this exploratory, descriptive narrative inquiry was to understand the experiences of selected evangelicals serving as public school administrators who lead in the midst of skirmishes involving evangelical Christians and the local public schools where they serve. These conflicts are part of the larger cultural conflict between evangelical Christianity and public education. The narratives of five leaders were captured through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The purposeful sample of participants included administrators from Texas, Southern California, and the South, the Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. Each participant shared a skirmish story and its cultural and geographic context. In the process, work-faith relationships and the inner world of each administrator were also illuminated. Re-storied narratives were crafted and themes that emerged both within and across the stories were identified. The narratives were viewed through the lenses of culture war theory, role conflict theory, faith-work models, moral narratives theory, and wounding in leadership theory. Based upon that analysis, other theories are suggested as potentially useful. Dominant factors in the conflicts, such as the significance of geographic and cultural location, the role of fear in evangelical culture, and tension between the work of service and proselytizing among Christians in public schools are discussed. Further research is suggested to uncover other narratives of leadership in culture war conflicts, explore the role of faith in decision-making by school administrators, consider the role of faith in community development approaches to school improvement, and specific issues such as homosexuality, women in leadership, and the interplay of faith and race.

Acknowledgements

This project has been a long time coming. My interest in how the cultural wars are played out in public education began in the 1970's during my college years and has not abated. When my 30-year career in K-12 education came to a close, I determined to move on to another phase of service in higher education. Simultaneously, I finally committed to a doctoral program and was given a chance to explore this area of interest in a more formal manner.

Several people have had important roles in this project, beginning with my program director, Craig Paulson. The phone interview portion of the doctoral application process at Bethel came as I was submitting my retirement papers as a public school administrator. I admitted to Craig that I had no job lined up for the following year, and finding a school district to complete course assignments might be a challenge. Only half-joking, I told him I might even be driving a school bus. He responded, "Won't it be exciting to see what God has in store for you!" Craig's constant positivity, encouragement, and personal interest in me have been deeply appreciated by this West-Coaster.

My dissertation committee chair, John Greupner, has been an advocate with key insights into the world of Christians who serve as public school administrators. Committee member David Sikkink was gracious to take part in my project. His work on evangelicals in American culture has been an inspiration to me for years. My third committee member, Mark McMinn, is a highly esteemed colleague who has been a model of servanthood and integrity throughout my time at George Fox. When I grow up, I want to be like Mark. Thank you all for getting me to the finish line.

To my participants, whose names I cannot list, I owe an enormous debt. In meeting each of my participants, I was given a gift. Each of their lives is full of complexity and surprises. Each reminded me how narrowly I see the world. And even when I heard viewpoints with which I profoundly disagreed, I saw hearts of faith deeply committed to doing good in the world in the name of Jesus.

One of my favorite sages, Fredrick Buechner, has written, “My assumption is that the story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all” (1982, p. 6). This truth drew me to narrative inquiry and each of my participants’ stories offers some insight and wisdom to everyone. They gave me their time, their trust, and their stories. For some, there remain scars from the experiences narrated, and it was very difficult for them to relive those moments. I hope I have been a faithful steward.

At George Fox University I have had the good fortune to be surrounded by encouragement and support. Linda Samek, my dean when I joined the George Fox faculty, and my current dean, Scot Headley, have done all they can to help me in this undertaking. My faculty colleagues and the support staff in the College of Education have all added to my progress in various ways. Five in particular agreed to collaborate with me to add to the quality of this work. Ken Badley, Ginny Birky, Terry Huffman, Marc Shelton, and Susanna Steeg each partnered with me on one of the participants in this study, and I cannot begin to explain how vital their wisdom and affirmations have been for this old dog as I had to learn new tricks.

My triad brothers, Mike Kellar and Sam Tai, have walked with me through most of my adult life and shared the joys and sorrows, and this project has had plenty of both. Another friend, who has also been a colleague for many years, merits special mention.

Mark Carlton offered sage advice to me when I was a young administrator and father. I asked him if I should pursue a doctorate at that time of life as he had done. He said no. He said the price paid by his family was too high and I should wait. Then, when the time was right and I began this research project, he took great interest and was an encourager all along the way.

If the world was a just and fair place, Gail Sehorn's name would appear next to mine on my diploma. My lovely, wise, long-suffering wife has been my research assistant, editor, critical friend, travelling secretary, and cheerleader throughout this adventure. I simply could not have done any of this without her by my side, which applies to all of the really important things I have attempted in my life. I love you, Gail Jean.

I am also blessed with children who, along with their spouses, inspire me to do good work in the world. John, Sarah, Jennica, Terry, Brianna, Will, and Hannah, thank you for your unqualified love and support. It has been special to be a doctoral student at the same time as my eldest child, but "Dr. John" beat me to the finish line, and I'm quite proud of his accomplishments as a scholar and the work God has called him to in the academy and the Church. Of course, our grandchildren light up the world whenever we have the great joy of being with them, and I must mention these children who are practically perfect in every way. Gus, Mimi, Cap'n Asher, Mick, Argy, and Queenie, you keep Grandma and Papa young.

Concerning vocation, Buechner has famously written, "Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (p. 119). I believe this research project has been that kind of experience for me. It has also been tremendously humbling. I am deeply grateful for a

good and gracious Heavenly Father who has provided for me so that I might receive the gifts of these stories and share them.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Michael Metarko was a successful principal at Hanover Elementary School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. As a Christian who shifted careers from the business world to public education, he was making a difference, being “salt and light” in a school recognized for excellence. In 2010 he abruptly left. In his resignation letter he wrote, “I am now aware that not only have I not been working for God, I have been working in complete opposition to Him. I mistakenly thought I was on neutral ground: there is no neutral territory” (Metarko, 2010a). Metarko is now an advocate of homeschooling who views the public schools as a “Trojan horse” in American culture, warning parents, “if you send your child to public school, you WILL most likely lose your child to the secular humanistic worldview” (Metarko, 2010b). Metarko’s shift from public school leader to public school antagonist may be extreme, yet his story of personal conflict highlights the lived experience of Christians who find themselves as leaders in public schools in the midst of cultural conflict between conservative Christianity and public education.

The public school has been, and continues to be, a place of conflict in American culture. In a media-saturated society, it retains a unique role as one of the few places where citizens have the opportunity to meet face-to-face to sort out difficult questions of unity and diversity. These contentious questions have been present at every stage in the history of American public education (Tyack & Hansot, 1982), and religion has been a central theme in this social and political struggle (Delfattore, 2004). In recent times, the Religious Right has been a prominent force in that conflict (Detwiler, 1999), maintaining a high profile national campaign targeting many school-related issues and emphasizing the active role of individual citizens at the local level. School battles are a significant front in the larger culture war in America (Hunter, 1991)

and school administrators operate in the “no-man’s land” between forces in support of public education and conservative Christians who are opposed to many practices inside the schoolhouse. What is the experience of public school leaders who are Christians and find themselves caught in the middle of a school conflict between their professional community and their faith community? This study sought to better understand that experience.

Problem Statement

Conflict is an expected feature of public education in a pluralist society since schools are a vital vehicle for enculturation. With competing visions of what the “good life” entails, schools become contested ground where demands are articulated and compromise is sought. Historian Lawrence Cremin (1989) referenced Aristotle’s argument on this point, proving that the challenge is not unique to our era:

...it is impossible to talk about education apart from some conception of the good life: people will inevitably differ in their conceptions of the good life, and hence they will inevitably disagree on matters of education; therefore the discussion of education falls squarely within the domain of politics. (p. 85)

Cremin asserted, “when people differ in their views of education, they are really debating alternative views of the good life, of the kind of America they would prefer to live in and what it might mean to be an American” (p. 104). The political conflicts that result are intensified by the American public’s faith in schools to sustain the republic and solve social ills.

Viewing this conflict through the lens of the “culture war” thesis (Hunter, 1991), schools regularly provide a forum for culture warriors (Zimmerman, 2002). In the last three decades of the twentieth century, the Christian Right emerged as a national force and contended for cultural status lost during post-World War II America and especially during the social upheaval of the

1960s (Martin, 1996). Specific issues linked to public education (science curriculum, sex education, Bible reading and religious expression of various forms, etc.) figured prominently in that struggle and continue to rumble, often providing the spark for conflicts at both the national and local levels.

Though religious conflict has been part of the story of American education from the earliest years of the republic (Fraser, 1999), the recent past creates a unique context for today's school leaders. With the ascendancy of the Religious Right, an effort to gain victories in public education was the goal for many national advocacy groups beginning in the 1980s (Provenzo, 1990). National organizations such as Focus on the Family, the Eagle Forum, and Concerned Citizens for America worked to keep conservative Christians informed during that time concerning educational initiatives and reforms viewed as threats to core Christian values, both fueling and guiding local efforts (Green, Rozell, & Wilcox, 2003). Attempts to "take over" local school boards through local elections, often using tactics that masked the Christian motivations of candidates, was a common strategy (Deckman, 2004).

As Detwiler (1999) has pointed out, public school leaders were generally uninformed concerning the motivations and beliefs of the Christians hurling vehement objections (pp. 27-53). Ammerman (1987) suggested "Fundamentalism is most likely to be found at the points where tradition is meeting modernity" (p. 8), and often this meant that suburban schools and urban schools were most likely to experience these cultural conflicts. Responses from attacked school leaders were typically reactive and often reflected the view that the critics were ultraconservative extremists out to destroy public education (Jones, 1993).

Some attempts were made to find common ground during the 1990s. For example, *Educational Leadership*—a key practitioner publication for school leaders—produced a themed

issue with the cover title, “Can Public Schools Accommodate Christian Fundamentalists?” (Brandt, Scherer, Jones, Walker, & O’Neil, December 1993/January 1994). Robert Simonds, a leading Christian critic of public education, authored one of the articles in the issue and was invited to join a group that sought to address concerns about Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which had become a marquee issue for many national advocacy groups at the time. As Detwiler (1999) explained, this effort “failed because neither (OBE leaders) nor Simonds was genuinely interested in compromise. (OBE leaders) and others in the educational establishment naively thought that dialogue could bring an end to the conflicts” (p. 171).

The specific topics have shifted over the years, but conflict endures to the present time in a number of categories, including: curriculum; multiculturalism; science, religion, and cosmology; assessment practices; and sex education (Dill & Hunter, 2010). Little is known about evangelical Christian public school leaders who are participants in these conflicts. The gap in research means that public school leaders who are part of the evangelical Christian community and have allegiances to both communities and find themselves in similar culture clashes are with little wisdom concerning this dilemma. Additionally, their unique experiences and perspectives are not part of the analysis of these conflicts.

Purpose

This study sought to understand the experience of cultural conflict by a small sampling of evangelical leaders in public schools. Specifically, the intent of this exploratory, descriptive narrative inquiry was to gather the stories of selected evangelicals serving as public school administrators who led in the midst of skirmishes involving evangelical Christians and the local public schools where they served, conflicts that are part of the larger cultural conflict between evangelical Christianity and public education. The expectation was that the stories of these

leaders would make a useful contribution to filling the research gap that exists concerning this phenomenon.

Nature of the Study

This project falls within what Merriam (2009) termed “basic qualitative research,” which has as its essential goal “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). Within the basic qualitative framework, a narrative inquiry was utilized. As Kramp (2004) noted “narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation. The object of narrative inquiry is understanding—the outcome of interpretation—rather than explanation” (p. 104). At the center of this study are stories, and as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) asserted, “Stories are a powerful means of making sense of our social reality and our own lives” (p. 55). The stories of five leaders were captured through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the intent of honoring their unique, individual experiences.

This study explored how cultural conflict is played out in the specific contexts of public schools with specific actors who are both school administrators and evangelical Christians. In order to do this well, the richness and complexity of each unique story had to have priority, the respondent’s point of view and voice had to take center stage, and each story had to be given appropriate consideration. The complexity of the cultural conflict situations explored made narrative inquiry the most appropriate methodological choice. Narrative inquiry provides the methodology to study personal experience and meaning making in a systematic manner through individual stories and through analysis across the stories in search of emerging themes. This approach yielded the rich data needed to successfully address the focus of the inquiry that other forms of data—such as questionnaires and field observations—simply could not provide.

Narrative Inquiry methodology requires different approaches to quality than methodologies founded on positivist approaches to research. Reliability as commonly understood in quantitative studies must give way to different conceptions when each story is expected to offer a unique contribution to the study. Validity also shifts from a focus on measurement to “a conception of validity as quality of craftsmanship, as communication, and as pragmatic action” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 247).

Research Questions

Several aspects of the experience of selected evangelical Christians who are public school administrators were explored:

1. How do these evangelicals who serve as public school administrators experience the culture wars, specifically when caught in a high profile conflict in their school or district?
2. In the context of this conflict, what assumptions are present in each participant about their purpose at work and the relationship of that purpose to their faith commitments? What is their understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and loyalties involved?
3. How do members of their work and faith communities respond to them personally in times of intense, local cultural conflict? What are the key moments in such situations?
4. What preliminary themes emerged from such experiences and what theories relate to those themes?

Conceptual Framework

Tension between familiarity with theory and an open approach to inquiry is a particular challenge for narrative researchers. As Josselson (2010) detailed, “Narrative research avoids

having a predetermined theory” and instead, researchers:

try to come to their narrators as listeners open to the surprising variation on their social world and private lives. Although narrative researchers try to be as knowledgeable as possible about the themes that they are studying to be maximally sensitive to nuances of meaning, they are on guard against inflicting meaning in the service of their own ends. (pp. 872-873)

Several theories were identified as likely to provide the sensitivity needed to discern the subtle and complex crosscurrents participants narrated. The theoretical frameworks discussed below, then, provided lenses for this project, but were not intended to limit or filter what the interviewees said concerning their experiences.

The culture war theory (Hunter, 1991) frames the dynamic of cultural conflict in American society between socially conservative and socially progressive cultural warriors that is expressed in local public school settings in predictable ways, and thus experienced by school administrators. Hunter’s theory has been extensively critiqued and even dismissed by some (Demerath, 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011; Wolfe, 1998). Many of the criticisms relate to the different role high profile cultural elites and advocacy organizations play in the conflict as compared to the lives of average Americans. The clash of national voices often involves militaristic, hyperbolic exchanges that are designed at least in part to generate and maintain financial and political support for the advocacy organization as an entity. The vast majority of citizens do not engage in such conflict nor do they identify with such extremes. Nevertheless, Hunter’s culture war thesis endures as a useful tool for analyzing the dynamics of public life (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Barker, Hurwitz, & Nelson, 2008; Campbell, 2006; Himmelfarb, 1999; Layman & Green, 2005).

For the purposes of this inquiry, a specific type of culture war conflict was investigated, and this type was identified using the term *skirmish*. In order for an incident to be considered a culture war skirmish, the conflict must have been:

1. Sparked by a topic that is common to public school experiences of the culture war in the United States
2. Addressed by a school leader (principal or superintendent) who was expected to deal with the conflict in part or in whole
3. Reported in the mass media
4. Joined by individuals from beyond the local school community, whether virtually (online and/or in the media), through the affiliation of local participants with national advocacy organizations, or in person

Theories that address leaders and their social roles were likely to provide helpful lenses. For example, the theory of role conflict (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and specifically person-role conflict nested within it (Latack, 1981)—perhaps better described as “soul conflict” (Driscoll & McKee, 2008) given the focus on issues of faith in role conflict—provides an analytical perspective to guide exploration of the perceptions of evangelical administrators. This approach has been useful in other studies with similar cultural conflict dynamics, such as a study of Christian doctors who were personally opposed to abortion but were expected to provide abortion services (daCosta & Donald, 2003).

Theories that address the ways people of faith, and especially evangelical Christians, relate their faith to their work provide insights into the very center of the stories told by school leaders. One such theory is David Miller’s (2007) Integration Box, which describes four broad approaches to integrating faith at work, each having a range of expressions from inward to

outward behaviors and practices. Another framework was developed by Lindsay (2007) through his study of national evangelical leaders. He identified strategies of expressive symbolism, networking, convening power, and elastic orthodoxy used by high-powered evangelical leaders in secular contexts who also embraced a cosmopolitan version of evangelical faith. Finally, Detwiler (1999) suggested that most educators are “modified religionists” who have an “understanding of religion (that) leads to the acceptance of a basic congruity between religious and more secularized expressions of truth” (p.19). These educators see a congruence between the core values embraced in democracy and public schooling and their faith, and “Since these values are highly promoted in the public schools, they see no basic conflict between religion and the schools” (p. 20).

The stories narrated in this study were also expected to be profitably analyzed using Christian Smith’s (2003) understanding of moral order in culture, specifically considering the multiple layers of moral narratives at work, causing individuals to negotiate among them, “compromising here, synthesizing there, compartmentalizing elsewhere” (p. 106).

Finally, theories that describe the wounds inflicted on leaders that may result from culture war skirmishes were expected to be both informing and insightful. The formative potential of wounding has been explored by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002), and others have investigated the need for collegial reflection (Drago-Severson, 2012). Flintham’s (2010) research looked more closely at school leaders’ spiritual reservoirs that are emptied in challenging leadership situations, and his work included a large number of Christians.

This theoretical sensitivity, however, was not intended to taint the narratives. The intent was to make explicit the inner world of participants by crafting narratives of their experiences with cultural conflict in their role as public school leaders. Narrative inquiry is uniquely suited

to achieve this end: “One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through the verbal accounts and stories presented by the individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality” (Liebich, Tuval-Maschiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7). However, molding stories to fit theories had to be guarded against throughout the process.

Significance for the Field of Education

Research concerning the unique experience of evangelical Christian administrators serving in public schools is minimal. What little has been done has typically addressed important questions related to the experience of specific populations or leaders in specific contexts, such as investigations of female administrators (Gibson, 2011; Smith, 2011; Stiernberg, 2003; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). These studies captured insights concerning role conflicts and points of contention between the mission of public schools and the leader’s faith community. However, a broader exploration of all evangelical Christian administrators with a more focused investigation of the experience of culture war conflict promotes the emergence of a larger story. That wider perspective provides a better understanding of common experiential themes and also illuminates aspects that vary based upon demographic and geographic factors.

In addition, this study offers at least four other areas of potential significance for the field. First, there is a need to explore the potential role of those who are Christian administrators as cultural bridges linking public schools and the evangelical community in order to re-establish trust and commitment in an era of eroding public confidence. Second, day-to-day interaction in face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, and emails is the venue for much of the decision-making of school leaders. This study examined those informal communications linked to culture war skirmishes, leading to decision-making practices that typically remain invisible. Third, the role of the personal faith of leaders in their ability to sustain the grueling demands of school

leadership has implications both for the individual and the system. Finally, the interaction between the personal faith commitments of school leaders and the productivity and commitment of teachers and other staff is of vital importance at a time when teacher attrition is a persistent problem exacerbated by increasing accountability linked to testing and value-added systems (Ingle, 2009). Each of these areas will now be discussed in turn.

Bridging work between public education and evangelicals

Public education continues to be a lightning rod for divisive political issues in America. Education historian David Tyack (2003) invited us to “take a long view of how Americans in this diverse society have sought to use public education to build and preserve what the founders called a republic, and what we call a democracy” (p. 6). He then asserted, “That task is ongoing today, and will never be easy or tension-free” (p. 6). Tyack (2003) pointed out that many reformers today are pushing for market-driven models that would change the nature of public education: “No longer would people need to negotiate a sense of unified purposes or find ways to accommodate differences” (p. 6). The current climate of accountability coincides with calls for market-driven reforms that reflect a focus on education as a service provided to individual students rather than a civic activity to strengthen and grow the local community. If public education is shifting from a common endeavor to a market-driven service, as Apple (2006) and Boyd (2007) contended, this fundamentally changes the concept of public schooling in America.

Over 15 years ago, the Kettering Foundation published *Is There a Public for Public Schools?* (Matthews, 1996). The book took an unflinching look at research indicating erosion in public commitment to schooling as a common civic enterprise. A number of recommendations flowed from that assessment. Primary among them was a call to rebuild the publics served by schools. The claim was made that “Community development has to precede school reform” (p.

27). A clear distinction was drawn between an *engaged* and a *persuaded* populace, and the difference was explained as follows: “Public relations efforts can persuade people to gather support for good causes, but they can’t create genuine publics” (p. 39). It would be hard to make the case that public confidence in schools has rebounded since these observations were made. Rather, these insights emphasize the challenge to public schools to genuinely engage all members of the community to foster a true sense of community, creating a public that has the social capital necessary to invest successfully in the local public school.

Conservative Christians are often a particularly challenging segment of the local public school community to engage. They are often portrayed by the media as enemies of public education. Indeed, it is not difficult to find Christian leaders overtly committed to privatizing public education. As Detwiler (1999) explained, for the purists in the movement, dismantling the public school system is the ultimate objective (pp. 157-184). Those extreme voices are attractive to the mass media for entertainment value, but they do not represent the opinions of the vast majority of evangelical Christians. Most evangelicals have their children in the public schools and “The dominant evangelical voice...is very uncomfortable with the idea of imposing religious perspective on public schools through official policy, and is ill at ease with the notion of turning public schools into Christian schools in disguise” (Smith, 2000, p. 135). That quiet majority of evangelicals should be the focus of public school leaders who are committed to education as a common civic enterprise. If those leaders seek to strengthen local communities, the concerns of evangelicals must be taken seriously.

At the same time, as Detwiler (1999) pointed out, “Educational professionals...particularly at the district level, are often unaware of the nature of the presuppositions that guide their educational philosophy and pedagogy” (p. 37) which makes communication about foundational

beliefs nearly impossible. Christians from the evangelical community have insider understanding of the evangelical worldview and can help facilitate productive communication.

Criticisms from the Christian Right, generally aligned to the Republican Party, have often promoted vouchers and other choice options that would redefine the historic concept of the neighborhood school. Conservative Christian voices have continued to challenge programmatic and curricular aspects of public schools viewed as contrary to their values and beliefs. If public education is to regain trust in the culture, and if the common good functions as something other than a cumulative effect of individual goods, schools will need to engage everyone in a pluralistic culture, honoring the diversity present without dismissing or minimizing the differences.

Though the conservative Christian community includes many who resist efforts to restore a common vision for public education, schools and districts that take the findings of the Kettering study seriously must engage the majority of conservative Christians who are predisposed to support public schooling but harbor numerous concerns and reservations. Public school administrators who are part of the evangelical Christian subculture have the potential to help bridge the canyons of mistrust and misunderstanding that often separate schools from the conservative Christian families they seek to serve and connect with evangelical constituents who do not have children in school. This study was expected to shed light on the dynamics of this kind of bridging work.

The micropolitics of cultural conflict

Day-to-day informal interactions involving face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, emails, and the like constitute the venue for much of the decision-making of school leaders. These informal interactions are also the heart of micropolitics in educational settings, yet these

exchanges have not been closely studied (Flessa, 2009). Since the cultural conflicts school leaders experience feature powerful political and social forces from beyond the schoolhouse walls, the importance of understanding the role of power via micropolitics in local communities is essential (Sharp, 1999). This study explored how school leaders experienced the micropolitical world behind the headlines in culture war skirmishes in public schools, and noted how these typically invisible processes led to decisions that guided school responses during such conflicts.

Personal faith in the midst of conflict

The role of personal faith in sustaining the grueling demands of school leadership has implications both for the administrator and the system. Though faith is the core identity for many and guides daily work practices, the topic of religion is often avoided in the workplace and is especially touchy in public schools. Though the freedom to express religious identity in the workplace is correlated to reduced stress levels and increased behaviors that benefit others (Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010), the degree to which school leaders experience such freedom is not well documented. As the literature reviewed below details, it is likely that evangelical Christians are less likely to express their religious identity than adherents to most other faiths. However, research indicates that sustainable school leadership practices often intentionally engage spiritual and religious aspects of leaders (Drago-Severson, Gill, Boote, Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012; Flintham, 2010).

Probing the ways the religious identity of an evangelical Christian school leader functions in the midst of cultural conflict when the conflict is associated with the very faith the leader personally claims helps illuminate this web of interactions. What was learned may have helped the interviewees gain a deeper self-understanding of their approach to integrating their faith at

work, and, in the process, insights can be gained concerning other religious subcultures in the school community and the school leaders from those subcultures who may also conceal their faith commitments.

Leader faith and school leadership

Finally, exploration of how the personal faith of school leaders relates to the productivity and commitment of teachers and other staff is of vital importance. Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2008) found that “workers desire workplaces perceived as exuding spiritual values, even if the workers themselves are not personally spiritual” (p.475), and this leads to benefits for both the workers and the organization. Spiritual values in the workplace are evidenced through “openness, connection, truth, personal development and growth, serving and sharing, and finding meaning and purpose through one’s work” (p. 467).

Administrators create a context that can offset other factors that push teachers out of the classroom, especially in schools with the neediest students (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011), and the spiritual elements of an organization reflect many of those work culture factors. The unique history of public schooling suggests that finding appropriate strategies for promoting spirituality is challenging. For an evangelical Christian whose faith community prioritizes proselytizing through personal relationships, it should be particularly challenging. The culture of public schools often ignores religious issues in order to avoid the potential conflicts (Nord, 1995). This study sought to determine how, or if, evangelical Christian administrators responded to this facet of school leadership, especially in the context of intense cultural conflicts.

Conclusion

Diversity is an important area of focus for public educators, but religion, faith, and spirituality are often overlooked aspects of diversity (King, Bell, & Lawrence, 2009). By better understanding the conflicts unique to this group of leaders from the evangelical subculture, research can continue to develop deeper understandings that will guide school districts to better serve their communities, support public school leaders who are evangelical Christians, and help those leaders better understand the dynamics of their own situations. Further, the understanding generated from this study may be useful to administrators, professors, and clergy who support and equip evangelicals who serve in public schools since “narratives are understood as cultural scaffolds or thinking tools that can be used to develop the profession and the field of practice” (Moen, 2006, p. 65). Of course, it was also anticipated that this study would provide insights that offer guidance to further study of this phenomenon, including the experiences of public school leaders from other faith traditions not aligned to the dominant moral culture in education.

Chapter II: Literature Review

When conducting in-depth interviews, Seidman (2006) asserted “No prior reading is likely to match the individual stories of participants’ experiences, but reading before and after the interviews can help make those stories more understandable by providing a context for them” (p. 32). This review of the literature aspires to provide the contextual understanding Seidman recommends.

Backdrop: The Culture War

James Davidson Hunter (1991) depicted current social battles as part of a culture war between cultural conservatives and cultural progressives. Hunter’s thesis is built upon the work of Robert Wuthnow (1989) who saw a parallel in the divide between liberals and conservatives that replaced historic denominational distinctions among Christians and the liberal-conservative divide in the larger culture. Hunter further described this phenomenon as “two different civilizational ideals in conflict” that pointed to “a deeper struggle over the first principles of how we will order our lives together; a struggle to define the purpose of our major institutions, and in all of this, a struggle to shape the identity of the nation as a whole” (1994, p. 4). Clearly schools are one of these major social institutions. Hunter observed, “Actors on both sides of the cultural divide have placed the battle over public education at the center of the larger conflict” (1991, p. 201).

Hunter’s contention has not gone unchallenged (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011; Hunter & Wolfe, 2006; Williams, 1997; Wolfe, 1998), but analysis and research continue to find the thesis a useful tool. While there are varied views of the truth of the cultural dynamics at work, there is a consensus that a cultural fault line does run through the country and Hunter’s thesis offers a helpful framework for analysis and understanding. As Williams (1997) clarified in his criticism,

though he found the culture war model to be “overly simplistic and masks as much variance as it illuminates” (p. 3), he agreed that there are deep cultural conflicts at play. While Americans are not fighting in any sort of manner that warrants the label “culture war,” he conceded that it is a “myth” that has great power in the culture and explanatory potential (p. 12). Other critics have offered similar qualifications. For example, even as she brushed aside the culture war concept, Crowley (2006), a rhetorician, analyzed the challenges of bridging the discourses of liberalism and Christian fundamentalism. She made an effort to find those connections in order to address the needs of the culture, and she suggested that “rhetorical invention may be able to negotiate the deliberative impasse that seems to have locked American public discourse into repetition and vituperation” (p. 3). Similarly, Haidt (2012), a moral psychologist, approached cultural conflict through the lens of narratives at the core of moral communities in order to evaluate the deep sources of cultural conflict and suggested paths towards a more productive engagement. These scholars illustrate that even with cautions concerning the scope of the culture war theory, the divisions within American culture are generally recognized as real and as having deep consequences for civic life.

The application of Hunter’s theory to what Green (2012) referred to as the “school question” (p. 225) illuminates the conflicts attending to instilling moral and civic values in the next generation, a vexing question that continues to challenge the culture today.

As warriors for the culturally conservative worldview, the Christian Right battled over many school issues through the 1980s and 1990s, including prayer, science curriculum, sex education, and Bible reading (Gaddy, Hall, & Marzano, 1996; Provenzo, 1990), but the roots of this conflict go deep into American history (DeFattore, 2004). For most Americans, the Scopes “Monkey Trial” is a potent symbol of that history. Laats (2010), another scholar who views the

culture war thesis as exaggerated, nevertheless recognizes “significant cultural trenches, many of which were dug during the school controversies of the 1920s, (and) have divided Americans throughout the twentieth century” (p. 3). Laats’ study of the Scopes era yielded the assertion that the essential dynamics of the current culture war were formed in the early twentieth century:

Across this cultural divide, each side had a difficult time understanding the arguments of the other. Both sides often shook their heads and concluded that their opponents’ views were absurd....committed fundamentalists and liberals confronted each other over a profound cultural divide, one that made the others’ views incomprehensible. (p. 21)

The notion that the conflicts and cultural battles involving public schooling ended in the 1920s was swept away by Laats (2010), who detailed efforts after the Scopes trial to promote or maintain schooling where a Protestant worldview was protected or even promoted. He concluded with the observation that during the decades after the trial, “fundamentalists pushed successfully for local laws promoting their vision of religiously, culturally, and politically appropriate public education” (p. 190).

While these local efforts rolled forward, often beyond the attention of national media and urban centers, there were clashes that captured national attention and engaged conservative Christians, though often linked to fears related to racial segregation or “Godless Communism.” Two such incidents from the middle of the century were the removal of Willard Goslin as superintendent of schools in Pasadena, California (Hulburd, 1951), and the harrying out of town of George Ebey in Houston, Texas (Carleton, 1985).

Both incidents featured national organizations and instigators, local activists, an active media, and narratives of fear and moral imperative, all elements evident during the controversies of the Scopes era. Referring specifically to the Pasadena incident, Cremin (1989) observed that

the “crisis dramatized the struggle between traditionalists and modernists in education and the related issues of political and religious conservatism and liberalism that swirled around that struggle during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s” (p. 88), a swirl that continues in modified forms today.

Conflicts continued as the post-World War II era flowed into the Vietnam War Era and beyond. In spite of the conflicts, the more active cultural engagement that distinguished evangelicals from fundamentalists during this time kept most evangelical families in the public schools (Sikkink, 1999; Smith, 2000). The conflicts intensified with the emergence of the Religious Right (Wilcox & Robinson, 2011) since several of the national triggers that helped launch the political movement were issues linked to schools. The “textbook war” in Hawkins County, Tennessee in the early 1980’s was one of the more intense skirmishes as school-centered cultural conflicts heated up (Bates, 1993). Bivins (2008) described a “declension narrative” grounded in fear gaining traction among conservative Christians through these decades, fueled by the view that the 1960s were the “moment when a previously safe and stable ‘Christian America’ came under siege from the forces of secularism and moral permissiveness” (p. 10) and public school was a key element in that narrative.

National advocacy organizations central to the Religious Right such as Focus on the Family and the Eagle Forum kept conservative Christian parents informed concerning educational initiatives and reforms viewed as threats to core Christian values. These organizations supported local action (Gaddy, Hall, & Marzano, 1996) and though generous media attention reported on efforts by Christians to take control of local schools through school board elections, those efforts failed to sustain energy or produce much of the desired effect (Deckman, 2004).

Accounts of clashes at the local school level, both early in the last century and at the height of the Religious Right's ascendancy, generally included reference to school leaders, but rarely offered insights into their experience of the conflict, their personal affiliation with the local Christians leading the charge, or their alignment to the national advocacy organizations. Those unknown story elements are made more mysterious by the unique nature of this kind of conflict in local government contexts. Sharp (1999), exploring cultural conflict at the local level, paid particular attention to the ways these conflicts differ from the typical dynamics of local politics and observed that "activists in culture war issues are typically galvanized in ways that make compromise, coalition formation, and other elements of normal politics difficult" (p. 3).

Several leaders of national advocacy organizations who had been working to change public schools shifted course in the 1990s and called for Christians to abandon public schools. This has not led to a mass exodus. The overwhelming majority of evangelical children continue to attend neighborhood public schools (Sikkink, 1999; Smith, 2000). Though their children are enrolled in public schools, conservative Christian parents are best described as wary (Smith, 2000).

Research continues to explore the forces at work that tend to perpetuate that wariness. Putnam and Campbell (2010), using extensive survey data from 2006, found a "coalition of the religious" (p. 376) deeply devoted to conservative social views, especially regarding the issues of gay marriage and abortion. Though the coalition draws from many religious traditions, conservative Christians are a significant portion. Putnam and Campbell presented the coalition as an expression of the polarization that pits the extremely religious against the extremely secular (p. 3). Though most Americans are not extreme, the influence of these opposing groups is significant and is amplified by the "echo chambers" created by like-minded friendship networks (p. 419), a phenomenon quite common in conservative churches. The result is that "each sees

the other as both intolerant and selfish, but their own kind of tolerant and unselfish” (p. 499).

The implications for educators are linked to the related political hot topics:

Religious polarization has consequences beyond the religious realm, because being at one pole or the other correlates strongly with one's worldview, especially attitudes relating to such intimate matters as sex and the family. Given that American politics often centers on sex and family issues, this religious polarization has been especially visible in partisan politics. A “coalition of the religious” tends to vote one way while Americans who are not religious vote another. (p. 3)

Conservative Christians who are at the far end of this polarized spectrum have a specific goal, according to Detwiler (1999), a goal that casts public school leaders who are working for the flourishing of public education as obstacles:

The overall purpose...is not to improve the quality of public education. At the micro level it is to serve the ideological ends of the privatization of American education and the extension of federal and state funding of education to religious and parochial schools. At the macro level it is designed to bring a key social institution into further conformity with biblical principles. (p. 20)

Within the evangelical world, another layer of the culture war is often played out. Worthen (2014) quoted John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Church, an evangelical denomination, who was adamant that Christians were not attending to the most fundamental conflict in the culture: “The difficulty in the Western Church is that most people don’t know that there is a war going on.” He asserted,

They do not see the relationship between God and Satan that the Bible sees. They are only minimally aware of the conflict between the two kingdoms, and, due to their

secularized, empirical perception of the Christian experience, they believe that they are living in a world unaffected by the two kingdoms and their existences....This world view gap has led to the erroneous assumption that the spirit world is somehow less real than the tangible, materialistic one in which we live. (p. 146)

Battles within the evangelical subculture often pit fundamentalists against their fellow believers. Fundamentalists who heed Wimber's warning and are fixated on spiritual warfare are fearful of accommodation and compromise with "the world." They are prone to battle with other evangelicals who engage a culture viewed as fallen but full of God's goodness. Just such a battle within the Southern Baptist Convention was described by Ammerman (1990), who also pointed out that there is a long history of intra-faith battles that view "brother" as the most dangerous "enemy," a history that is well-illustrated within the Baptist world by the Landmarker movement (p. 33).

Polarizing issues serve the agenda of national advocacy organizations seeking the attention of constituencies. The specific issues have shifted over the years, but the battles endure, with flames fanned by these national groups as they both represent and promote the polarized extremes. Putnam and Campbell (2010) noted that the intensity has not abated. "At the heart of the Christian Right criticism of American education," explained Wilcox and Robinson (2011), "is the charge that it promotes anti-Christian values and threatens the ability of conservative Christians to inculcate their values in their own children" (pp.159-160).

Dill and Hunter (2010) pointed out that current school-based "fronts" in the culture war include issues related to multiculturalism, science, cosmology, assessment, and sex education. Issues that can ignite at the local level include religious expression (Green, 2009), sex education (Luker, 2006), Bible curriculum (Chancey, 2009), evolution and intelligent design (Slack, 2007;

Berkman & Plutzer, 2010), and gay rights (Macgillivray, 2008).

Most advocacy groups associated with the Religious Right are still operative and continue to promote political efforts to gain victories in public education. These advocacy groups are the objects of long-standing concern by teachers' unions (Jones, 1993). However, as Myers (2010) discovered, lack of consensus on educational issues among state level Christian advocacy organization leaders indicates that evangelicals today are unlikely to present a unified front on most political issues related to schooling.

One such issue where consensus is lacking is public policy concerning school choice, especially as it involves public funds being redirected to private schools. And, of course, as Hunter (1994) described using the phrase "politics of ambivalence," a large majority of Americans, including Christians, may be aligned to one pole or the other, but live day-to-day in a moderate middle, generally exasperated with the shrill extremist voices from all quarters. The emphasis of political engagement by religious conservatives has shifted to local and state efforts, where the most success has been achieved when Christians find a hearing among the broader electorate (Cleary & Hertzke, 2006). Taking a strident, uncompromising approach typically does not succeed.

The other side of the current culture war, identified as progressives by Hunter (1991), is far from a unified force, but shares a common worry concerning the goals of conservative Christians in all public spheres, especially education (Apple, 2006). In their study of social progressives, Yancey and Williamson (2012) asserted that "much of [social progressives'] justification is built on the idea that they have a rational basis for understanding cultural questions as opposed to the supernaturalism of their conservative opponents," (p. 3) and a significant subgroup consider religion a "poison" for individuals and society. More dire

predictions concerning the influence of conservative Christians have receded in recent years (Lugg & Robinson, 2009).

Some in the progressive camp have expressed hope that a working consensus is possible between conservative Christians and public schools (Gaddy, Hall & Marzano, 1996), but many others have asserted otherwise (Berliner, 1997; Lugg, 2000). Berliner, for example, was adamant that there is no common ground and contended that the extreme voices in the Christian Right hold views of human behavior and goals for education that are incompatible with public schooling. He warned, “we need to keep in mind that [the Christian Right’s] goals are subjugation of our schools to theological purity, or their outright destruction” (p. 413). Echoes of the extreme polarization documented by Putnam and Campbell (2010) are found in Bivins’ (2008) observation: “there remains an enduring feeling of bitterness and disbelief among not only cultural leftists but academics too (...as much as they may deny it) that the United States is becoming ‘Jesusland’ (to note only one of the less crude terms in circulation)” (p. 214).

The efforts of Christian organizations to gain access to schools through legal means (e.g., student clubs, character education, Bible classes) that mask the true intent (proselytizing) is a particular area of concern to social progressives. Strategies deemed to be part of this agenda are the subject of a number of recent works. Stewart’s (2012) investigation into Good News Clubs is one prominent example. She asserted that the clubs, which use open public forum rulings to root in schools as an after school activity, are part of a well-orchestrated “religious assault on public education” (p. 257) with national masterminds using unwitting Christian foot soldiers, who are portrayed as generally affable, but also naive, gullible, and dangerously misguided.

Specific concerns about Christians in public schools have been investigated by scholars. Howell (2006) and Rosenblith (2006), pursuing a line of inquiry consistent with Berliner,

considered the question of whether conservative Christian parents' beliefs in free will and sin can accommodate classroom discipline practices guided by educational theories not aligned with Christian theology. Though the study assumed a "secular" teacher, both Howell (2006) and Rosenblith (2006) illuminated a common point of friction between conservative Christians and typical school practices. Using multiple cases from her work with conservative Christian teacher candidates, James (2012) questioned the ability of students who hold to theological certainty and are uncomfortable with inquiry as an instructional approach to teach for democratic outcomes. Kahn (2006) suggested there are conscious and unconscious ways conservative Christian teachers who have religiously-based objections to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students may negatively effect the school experience of these students, and strategies for helping Christians in counseling programs overcome such biases has been detailed (Whitman & Bidell, 2014). Similar concerns were highlighted by Reed and Johnson (2010) based upon a case study of an African-American female high school assistant principal with traditional conservative Christian beliefs about homosexuality. Her religious beliefs were identified as a barrier to her care for LGBT students.

Blumenfeld (2006) pointed to the religious privilege of Christians in schools, paralleling and generally overlapping with White privilege. He contended that Christian teachers experience this privileged status whether they claim their religious identity or not. Though this provides an important perspective, it ignores the significant distinctions among varieties of Christians and the differentiated concerns raised about conservative Christian teachers in a number of research projects and analyses.

Blumenfeld's (2006) concern with the power of Christian teachers in classrooms included a direct look at the issue of religious conversion, which is a priority for evangelicals. Since

teachers are in a power position over students, this concern applies to all classroom settings, but has unique importance when teaching non-native English speakers since English language instruction and missionary work have been historical partners. Varghese and Johnston (2007) interviewed pre-service evangelical teachers in TESOL programs to explore this and related issues. The authors noted, “we respected the strength of evangelical teachers’ religious beliefs, but at the same time, we felt that these beliefs pose a challenge to the prevailing values of the profession” (p. 13).

There are perspectives from other countries as well. For example, an Australian study of pre-service health and physical education teachers who identified as Christian (Macdonald & Kirk, 1999) documented the tensions faith commitments created when encountering the kind of teaching they were expected to do. Wariness concerning the intentions of evangelicals and the view that their motivations and practices may be at odds with standards of professionalism is a common theme among cultural progressives.

Doubts of professional competence combined with concerns over intentions regarding religious conversion create a strong negative presumption concerning evangelicals among cultural elites (Bolge & DeMaio, 1999; Bolge & DeMaio, 2008; Gross & Simmons, 2007; Tobin & Weinberg, 2007). Nevertheless, on an interpersonal level, evangelicals are often well liked, leading some to assume there is no significant cultural animus (Wright, 2010). This view minimizes the political conflict that fosters what Pildes (2011) termed hyperpolarized democracy: “Politics is partisan warfare: this is our world...by almost all measures, Americans as a whole have recently become dramatically more partisan...” (p. 277). Though there is evidence that these toxic dynamics involve small, highly partisan groups of extremists and does not engage the bulk of the centrist populace (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011), the extremists are

the voices heard whenever conflict erupts both in the local community and at the national level. Meanwhile, many evangelical clergy continue to feed cultural conflict fires regardless of their congregants' generally conciliatory attitudes (Uecker & Lucke, 2011), which, when combined with watchdog activity by national advocacy groups, provides ample fuel for local conflict.

Evangelicals Leading in the Cultural Crossfire

Hyperpolarized politics and hyperpartisanship offer little middle ground for school leaders to find compromise in the midst of a culture war skirmish, though that is the space where public education is anchored when it best serves communities (Tyack, 2003). In such an environment, when school leaders seek compromise there is often fierce opposition from local culture warriors who view it as capitulation. For those who consider public schools a place of indoctrination in an anti-Christian worldview (Metarko, 2010), compromise is tantamount to dealing with the devil.

In her study of curriculum conflict in California, Adler (1996) described this dynamic in action and how Christian leaders get caught in the crossfire:

Some teachers and principals have tried to defuse these situations by assuring parents that they also are "good Christians." In many cases this is the least productive approach because it can be interpreted in two ways. Either you were so inefficient that you did not know what "evil forces" were at work in your school, but now you will take charge by summarily removing the offending material (which would violate most school board policies). Or, you knew about the material and support its use, in which case you are acting as a tool of evil forces even though you say you are a Christian. (p. 343)

Though the media cover conflict when high visibility issues erupt, there is clear evidence that most of this cultural conflict in schools is sorted out in mundane, day-to-day interactions

similar to the experiences of the leaders Adler studied. For example, book censorship is often religiously motivated and it has been estimated that approximately 85% of such situations are handled informally (Doyle, 2011). McGuire (2009) detailed widespread non-compliance with Supreme Court rulings regarding school prayer, especially in the South. Another study conducted in the Bible Belt (Bennett & Foldes, 2014) concerning religious practices reported a low level of inconsistencies in district policy but a higher level of inconsistencies in practices.

Though the Bible Belt has been a common region for study, the issues are relevant across the country. A review of Ohio practices of prayer at commencement and baccalaureate services (Weldy, 2011) detailed the range of superintendent opinions and the extent to which the practice continued in violation of the law, especially in smaller and more rural districts. Berkman and Plutzer (2010) drew from a national survey of high school biology teachers and detailed the ways personal beliefs lead many Christian teachers to defy state standards and law (pp. 192-193). All of these studies explore the day-to-day experience of school leaders who are engaged in decision-making concerning cultural conflicts, and this experience is not well understood.

Research has noted shifts in strategy and focus in recent years among Religious Right organizations as they pursue political agendas, including issues related to education (Green, Rozell, & Wilcox, 2003). The effect of those changes is certain to be present in what school leaders in the midst of a culture war skirmish experience as compared to a similar incident at the height of the publically combative approach followed by many national groups in the 1990s. The shifting characteristics of evangelicals in American culture (Smidt, 2013) is also likely to influence the method of engagement with public schooling by conservative Christians, especially as an individualistic, market-oriented, choice-focused reformist agenda gains momentum. That agenda aligns well with the individualistic, small government leanings of most evangelicals.

Though evangelical parents may still be “people who feel they are outside by mistake,” and “are certain of their place at the heart of America just as they are certain of their faith in God,” (Greeley & Hout, 2006, p. 67), the shift to school choice and option models may allow many Christian parents to get what they want for their children and step away from community conflicts in which the long-standing negative cultural stereotypes of fundamentalism are quick to surface.

It is likely that some of the most vocal local conservative Christian activists have made more dramatic choices. Christian homeschooling has grown and has a strong anti-public education animating narrative (Kunzman, 2009) that is amplified both within many conservative church congregations and among networks of like-minded families, another example of the cultural echo chambers described by Putnam and Campbell (2010). If the shrillest voices have left the field of battle, the local tone may be far more tempered than what was common just a decade or two ago.

Evangelicals who serve as leaders and must navigate these issues in public school settings are likely to encounter many of the same obstacles evangelical leaders face in other fields where similar dynamics have been studied. Lindsay’s (2007) massive investigation of 360 prominent evangelical leaders in positions of cultural power—both public and private—did not include public school leaders, but offered several applicable insights. Many of his subjects “spoke about negotiating the demands of their multiple identities as people of faith, successful professionals, and devoted family members” (p. 212), and he observed them “struggling over the right way to invoke faith in a religiously diverse society” (p. 212).

Evangelicals who do not hold top leadership positions commonly experience fear and trepidation when it comes to faith at work. For example, Bruce (2000) surveyed public

administrators concerning religion and spirituality and observed, “people who work for government are often frightened of anything that might smack of religion in the public-sector workplace” (p. 464). This contrasts with the private sector efforts to bring spirituality to the fore in positive ways (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Hicks, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Just as evangelicals often consider their faith to be central to their mission as school leaders (Flintham, 2010; Gibson, 2011), Christians who are public administrators generally lean upon their religious and spiritual traditions in their decision-making. However, workplace culture restrains them from bringing those insights and motivations to bear in discussions and group processing (Bruce, 2000). These insights are echoed in research among conservative Christian social workers (Ressler & Hodge, 2003). These Christians view their faith as extremely important to them and integral to their work, but feel misunderstood, devalued, and the victims of religious discrimination. “The respondents...appear to be a disenfranchised group who frequently suffer in silence and fear” (p. 140), and in the view of the subjects, the field of social work “is not a safe place to say what they believe and to work openly for that which they believe is in society’s best interest” (p. 140). A pattern of behaviors that hide faith and reflect a fear of exposure permeates these public service contexts.

Though not working as part of the governmental structure, journalists serve a public purpose that is considered vital for healthy civic life in a democracy. The profession generally strives to maintain neutrality in service of the common good. Schmalzbauer (1999) investigated the tension between religious commitment and the expectations of professional objectivity among high-profile Catholic and evangelical journalists. Noting that his subjects “live between two social worlds with two very different ways of talking about reality and truth” (p. 365), Schmalzbauer found three broad strategies employed:

1. Privatization and selective compartmentalization which symbolically separate religious and professional worlds;
2. multivocal bridging languages which symbolically connect religious and professional worlds; and
3. the rhetoric of objectivity and journalistic detachment, which both symbolically separates and connects religious and professional worlds.

(p. 365)

The concern that professional integrity would be jeopardized by disclosure of their evangelical faith dominated the interactions with several of the subjects and underlines the pervasive sense that in many professional contexts evangelical faith is viewed as incompatible with competence and a threat to religious neutrality.

Hunter (2010) also observed that evangelicals who work in the “higher echelons of culture” are “under great pressure to carefully ‘manage their identities’ in part by hiding this discrediting information about themselves.... The temptation to be deceptive or dishonest about one’s faith in these circles is enormous” (pp. 258-9). For at least some evangelicals, the identity risks are significant.

Nevertheless, evangelicals in varied contexts often find strategies to connect their faith and work in acceptable ways that avoid bold identification as an evangelical. A common approach is to adopt language that describes work in terms that are rooted in religious identity, yet connected to practices and themes in their profession. Schmalzbauer (1999) found this in his subjects and noted that Robert Wuthnow (1996) promoted just such a strategy, arguing that “religious people must learn to translate the languages of their subcultures into the broader vocabulary of American civil society in order to gain a wider hearing” (p. 383). Lindsay (2009)

also endorsed leaders' "speaking in multiple registers" (p. 52) in order to effectively communicate with diverse audiences in ways that remain true to their faith commitments and community, yet connect with the larger culture and the common good. How evangelical leaders in public schools navigate this translation process is not well understood, however some insights may be gleaned from studies of teachers.

Though few studies have looked specifically at evangelical Christians in public education, the evidence that exists suggests that faith is a crucial aspect of the work of these educators, both as a motivation for service and as a guide for daily practice. Neubert and Dougherty (2013) contended that for both evangelicals and African-American Christians in theologically conservative congregations, God is perceived as actively engaged in the world, and the daily work of Christians matters. They observed, "Faith is not a private matter in these traditions; it is a defining aspect of identity" (p. 52). They further asserted, "The tendency to regard religion as a private, personal matter misses the ways that faith guides individual thoughts and actions in other realms of life" (p. 64).

However, an array of challenges face evangelicals in connecting their faith and their work. For example, Lederhouse's (1997) study of three elementary teachers showed deep and complex connections between faith and professional practice and respect for the boundaries that are viewed as important involving personal beliefs in the classroom. The subjects' faith communities provided essential support, yet also added to the conflict experienced by the teachers. Nelson (2010) conducted case studies of two K-8 teachers who worshipped at the same evangelical church and taught at the same school. This study provided rich descriptions of the complexity each individual brought to the task, how important religious identity was to professional practice, and how important it was to resist making assumptions about teachers

based upon church affiliation. White (2010) conducted case studies of six teachers, three Christian and three Jewish, to explore the intersection of personal faith and teaching practice, approaching the questions with a multicultural lens. One of the teachers was an evangelical Christian. The study established that for those teachers, religion provided purpose, guided relational structures in the classroom, and influenced instructional strategies. The overarching finding was “that the individual religious orientations of teachers...can impact how they enact their professional roles in the classroom” (p. 45). White went on to propose five themes where questions should be addressed with teachers where faith and practice intersect: purpose, relationships, management and discipline, social and cultural roles, and religion in the classroom.

Evangelicals and Role Conflict

Professional careers typically require a college education and most degrees are earned at secular institutions. The antipathy of college faculty towards evangelicals is well documented (French, 2010; Rosik & Smith, 2009; Tobin & Weinberg, 2007), and accounts of the experiences of evangelical college undergraduates who encounter this hostility abound (e.g., Bramadat, 2000). Even Wright (2010), in a lengthy effort to correct what he characterized as a falsely negative impression of how non-evangelicals view evangelical Christians conceded that higher education is genuinely antagonistic: “whether intentional or not, American college campuses may have fostered climates of open hostility to Evangelical students, faculty, and staff who display their religious beliefs” (p. 206), what Bolce and DeMaio (2008) characterized as a “prejudice for the thinking classes.” Smith (2000) acknowledged the phenomenon with a humorous observation: “Who among the well educated will speak well of Evangelicals? It’s like standing up for the Crusades” (p. 195), and Wellman (www.patheos.com/blogs/jameswellman/2014/05/last-acceptable-prejudice-on-college-campuses/) labeled negative attitudes towards conservative

Christians as the “last acceptable prejudice on college campuses.”

Evangelicals who teach in secular institutions have been found to sacrifice “identity capital” when integrating their faith with their professional practice (Craft, Foubert, & Lane, 2011). Graduate school experiences appear to follow a similar pattern. A study of graduate students in a program to prepare for careers in college student services (Rogers & Love, 2008) found that evangelical student voices were inhibited: “Those students who identified as religious felt they would be ‘outliers’ if they shared this aspect of themselves, despite the program’s stated values of openness” (p. 54).

Worldview conflict in graduate social work programs was explored by Hodge (2006). Even in an area of the country where the highest faculty representation of evangelical Christians would be expected (Southeast), just 3.2% of full-time social work faculty in 25 schools located in 12 states self-identified as evangelical Protestant. Given this lack of representation and the negative cultural attitudes about evangelicals, Hodge concluded, “it would be surprising if evangelical Christians did not report elevated levels of discrimination” (p. 261). Other researchers looking at graduate programs in social work have echoed these concerns (Thaller, 2011; Thyer & Myers, 2009).

Given the hostility between public education and conservative Christianity detailed above, it is unlikely that graduate faculty in educational administration programs are significantly different in this regard. The graduate school experience of evangelical leaders in all fields can be expected to provide at least some practice in guarding against overt expressions of faith.

The national leaders Lindsay (2007) described generally represent what he referred to as the “cosmopolitan” variety of evangelicals. More educated and affluent than fellow evangelicals, for them “legitimacy was a principal concern” (p. 221). He detailed tensions between

cosmopolitan evangelicals and “populist” evangelicals who he asserts represent the majority of the subculture. Populist evangelicals typically view cultural encounters as battles between good and bad, eschew compromise, and look to populist leaders such as James Dobson and Jerry Falwell for guidance. The divide between these two versions of evangelicalism is exacerbated by the tendency of cosmopolitan evangelicals to withdraw from the local church, which Lindsay suggests is:

both the cause and effect of a declining commitment to a communitarian ethic, to a way of life that cares deeply for one’s neighbor—not just around the world but also down the street....The loss of a communitarian ethic among cosmopolitan evangelicals is especially saddening, for it used to characterize much of American religious life. (p. 223)

Lindsay’s (2007) insights into the loss of engagement in the local church by cosmopolitan evangelicals is particularly valuable since little research has been done concerning the experience of evangelicals who are challenged for their faith in their careers and face scrutiny because of their careers when they are among members of their own faith community. Role conflict research has tended to focus primarily on work or work-home contexts rather than faith contexts.

Looking at a related aspect of role conflict, Rhodes (2011) studied those within the evangelical community who are active Democrats, two roles which most assume are in conflict given the close alignment of conservative Christianity and conservative politics in America. The core finding was that evangelical Democrats compromise rather than conform to either of these two roles. However, they also tend to shy away from church attendance without pulling back from political engagement. This suggests they are more comfortable at Democratic events where religious identity may create some discomfort than being at church, where Democratic political

affiliation can be quite contentious. Rhodes explained, “After all, one would certainly be less likely to attend an event or belong to a group, whether religious or political, in which many of their values are not only regarded as wrong, but are sometimes regarded as such with substantial vitriol” (p.44).

Lindsay (2009) noted that many of the powerful evangelical leaders he interviewed gradually moved away from church attendance for reasons that differed from the subjects in Rhodes’ study: “Dozens of the leaders I interviewed referred to the evangelical subculture as ‘baggage’ weighing them down on their way up the social ladder” (p. 43). The study by Lederhouse (1997) noted above uncovered tension within the evangelical subculture triggered by a local curriculum conflict in her study of three elementary school teachers. Her subjects reported “a general lack of support from national evangelical leaders who harshly criticize public education on moral and academic grounds” (Lederhouse, 1997, p. 200), but conflict did not cause her subjects to withdraw from their local church context.

Conclusion

School administrators have much in common with the experience of teachers and leaders from other fields, but there are important differences in roles and responsibilities. While there is growing evidence of the importance of spirituality in effective leadership in schools (Fite, 2011; Gibson, 2011; Shields, 2005), there are few studies of evangelical school leaders, and those that have been done have typically included a focused investigation of issues of race and gender in the context of educational leadership (e.g., Smith, 2011; Stiernbert, 2003; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). Issues of race and gender are critical elements in the study of school leaders, but there are unique challenges for Christians. Many conservative Christian churches bar women from leadership roles and the racial divides within the evangelical church are a well-studied

phenomenon. Recognizing the vital importance of race and gender, there is still a need to better understand the general experience of all evangelicals who are administrators in public schools, particularly in the midst of the current culture wars.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

“The purpose of narrative research is to produce a deep understanding of dynamic processes,” according to Josselson (2010, p. 872), and “knowledge is viewed to be localized in the analysis of the particular people studied and generalization about processes that might apply to other populations is left to the reader” (p. 872). With that perspective as a starting point, this study explored the personal experiences of a small number of school leaders by crafting narratives that re-storied each unique experience and looked for insights and themes that emerged within and across the stories. This study was descriptive in intent, seeking to assure that an “accurate description is produced of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals...use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 161-162).

As Creswell observed (2007), “the methods of conducting a narrative study do not follow a lock-step approach, but instead represent an informal collection of topics” (p. 55). Creswell’s description held true throughout this study, and the expectation that the project would not follow a clean, linear path was accurate. Specific plans for each methodological component were proposed, including procedures for the location and selection of participants, gathering of stories, re-storying and analysis of narratives, and collaboration with participants as the narratives were shaped into research texts. Each step required adjustments and modifications.

Reflexivity in Narrative Inquiry

The researcher, an evangelical Christian, experienced the variety of culture war skirmish this study sought to better understand while serving as a public school administrator. It is important for narrative researchers to practice reflexivity (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) and share

personal experiences and other sources of potential bias as thoroughly as possible. Narrative inquiry methods take advantage of the insights personal experience provides while simultaneously recognizing the dangers of bias. To that end, the strategy of writing a “personal disclosure statement” (Rouna, 2005, p. 235) was utilized. Swanson and Holton III (2005) concurred with this strategy, and recommended the researcher

write a personal statement in which you strive to surface and reflect on yourself as it relates to the study. Doing so will help expose your assumptions and biases. You should revisit this statement often throughout the study to help you remain aware of how you influence what you hear, see, and understand. (p. 235)

The statement that follows contains the personal experience of the researcher relative to the area of investigation, along with related worldview perspectives and assumptions, and was revisited throughout the study:

I am an evangelical Christian who served in public schools for 30 years, 24 of those years as an administrator. Though I was aware of the tension between conservative Christians and public schools as a classroom teacher, the pivotal event in my personal experience of this conflict occurred during my first principalship. I guided the school through a transition from being a junior high school to the adoption of a middle school model, implementing more developmentally appropriate structures and practices. This involved more than a change in grade configurations (7-9 to 6-8); it also required a change in philosophy and programming. Central to this change was the need for an effective advisory program.

Advisories are a time in the day when faculty meet with a small group of students to help them better understand themselves and the world. It is intended to personalize the school experience, humanize the adults in the eyes of students, and provide a safe place to address affective topics and provide guidance. The planning team identified a program called Quest, underwritten by a national service club that offered both materials and

training.

A Christian teacher on the staff brought concerns to me about the program as it began to roll out. The concerns were distributed through national Christian organizations and media. The program used a variety of authors, including James Dobson, the founder and head of Focus on the Family, a major conservative Christian organization. This high profile Christian leader attempted to distance himself from the project and raised questions about the appropriateness of the materials through his organization's media resources. Local parents, prompted by the concerns raised by trusted Christian media sources, began mobilizing and local media became involved. Attempts to clarify factual information were not successful in quelling the reaction. Instead, such attempts seemed to fuel the fire. The issue was eventually channeled into a formal challenge of curriculum materials that made its way to the School Board, which upheld the use of the program. A committee was formed that included the most vocal opponents to help plan lessons and suggest supplemental materials from several other programs. Parents were allowed to opt their students out of the entire advisory program or specific lessons, and 21 such requests were processed.

This episode opened my eyes to the depth and dynamics of the cultural divide between Christians and the public schools, and between Christians when it comes to the public schools. It eliminated any naiveté I may have harbored, and sent me on an exploration of this topic that continues today. In the ensuing years as a middle and high school building administrator and as a central office administrator, I have had multiple opportunities to see this dynamic at work. I have been a part of, or close to, battles over course content, religious release programs, teacher behavior, gay and lesbian students and families, textbooks and novels, multiculturalism, prayer in schools, holiday music, theater productions, curriculum battles, assessment, and myriad other issues.

Detwiler (1999) included the *Quest* controversy in his study of church-state conflict in schools, and he suggested that:

Dobson's assessment of the *Quest* materials serves as a perfect illustration of the

difficulties public school curricula present to the Christian Right. From the perspective of leaders like Dobson, in order for Christian parents to find schools acceptable, both the content of the textbooks and the pedagogical techniques and assessment criteria used by public school teachers in the operation of their classroom must be completely compatible with the Christian worldview. (p. 79)

These expectations are unattainable and in a hyperpolarized conflict compromise is considered capitulation. Families who agree with Dobson, therefore, are left with only homeschooling and Christian schooling as acceptable educational options. The researcher's personal experience, then, is situated within the cultural conflict being investigated.

Locating Study Participants

The study required a purposeful national sample of five or six public school administrators. Leaders were sought who experienced a culture war skirmish within the past seven years but were no longer experiencing media coverage of the event. The time frame requirement assured that some distance existed between the experience of the central event and the narration of the event. Eligible cultural conflict areas included:

- Textbooks and other instructional materials
- Multiculturalism or bilingual programs
- Gay and Lesbian issues related to students, parents, and/or staff
- Creationism/Intelligent Design
- Climate change/global warming
- Assessment and grading/reporting practices
- Student social misbehavior and lack of morals (e.g., dances, hallways, buses, etc.)
- Sex education

- Celebration of holidays (e.g., Christmas, Halloween)
- Prayer
- Student/staff expression of religious beliefs at school
- Bible curriculum/classes
- Political viewpoints promoted that do not match parents' views
- Clergy and religious groups on campus (e.g., informal visits, speakers, assemblies, group meetings, etc.)

Locating potential participants proved to be a far more labor-intensive process than had been anticipated. The initial plan assumed that a snowball strategy, utilizing faculty at Consortium of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) schools with administrative licensure programs, would be the most fruitful approach. There were 37 CCCC schools identified with programs that prepared school administrators for licensure (see list in Appendix A). Since CCCC faculty were expected to be familiar with the local Christian community and programs at these institutions could be expected to attract a good number of evangelical students, these faculty were viewed as a unique resource. Faculty email addresses were harvested from CCCC websites. Deans and program directors were emailed first to encourage them to alert faculty to the coming email (see Appendix B). Professors were then emailed and asked to forward a recruitment email along with personal encouragement to potential participants (see Appendix C). Contact with faculty members in those programs was supplemented by personal networking of the researcher and the researcher's faculty colleagues.

Snowball emails were also sent to public school administrators known to the researcher to be evangelicals, colleagues, doctoral graduate cohort members from the researcher's program at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, two networks of evangelical pastors, and the

members of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education, an organization of Christian professors of education. Of the nearly 800 snowball emails sent out, it is impossible to know what percentage were forwarded as requested, but only a handful of responses can be linked to the snowball strategy, and only one participant was located in that way.

As noted in the working definition of a culture war skirmish, one of the criteria was that the conflict was reported in the media, which typically included references on the Internet. Broad Internet searches were conducted using areas of conflict as search terms along with terms such as “school” and “conflict.” Along with searches, another major Internet-based source of leads were websites of national groups attuned to church-state issues on the left (e.g., Americans United for Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way) and on the right (e.g., The Eagle Forum, The Liberty Institute), which provided extensive online reporting on culture war skirmishes in schools.

The Internet search effort provided ample evidence that culture war skirmishes were common in all regions of the country and offered a fascinating range of issues and contexts. Skirmish issues clustered topically:

- Prayer: At school events, in morning announcements, and in classrooms
- Displays: Bible verses, religious messages, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and portraits of Jesus
- Evangelism/Proselytizing: Mixed with sports, guest speakers, pastors on campus during lunchtime, assemblies, performers, and evangelistic films
- Homosexuality: Gay-Straight Alliance, bullying, positions on gay marriage, and gay couples at dances
- Instruction: Teaching with the Bible in the classroom and in Bible classes, teaching

creationism or intelligent design, sex education, teaching yoga, teaching about Islam, plays being performed, book challenges, and Christians belittling non-Christians

- Christmas: Music and celebrations
- Christian Clubs and Activities: Good News Clubs and others
- Student Expression: Wearing religious and anti-religious attire, singing talent show songs about Jesus, and sharing the Gospel in classrooms and in public speeches
- Distribution: Students and others distributing Bibles and religious messages and materials

These topics aligned quite well with the expected areas of conflict detailed above. Once an incident was located that appeared to have the potential to meet the skirmish criteria and provide a viable participant, the incident data was recorded on a matrix divided by region (West, South, Midwest, Northeast). The data included key media references and web links, contact information, and notes on the incident, and records of communication. Ultimately the matrix contained information on 61 incidents in the South, 40 in the West, 28 in the Midwest, and 21 in the Northeast.

In most cases, there were attempts to determine if the potential participant was active in a Christian church prior to attempting any contact. It was rare to locate this information, but there were cases where such searches yielded clear evidence of evangelical faith, active membership in a church, or at least a strong possibility that the individual was a Christian. When the evangelical faith of an administrator was either noted or hinted at based upon information available on the Internet, it was most often in communities where identity as a Christian was consistent with the dominant local religious culture. In less religiously homogeneous communities, the faith commitments of school leaders was, not surprisingly, very difficult to

discover.

The original plan was for the first step in communication to be an email of inquiry. This was used in most cases (see Appendix D), and was used for all cases where the religious commitment of the administrator was unclear or unknown. The email message was personalized to match the facts of the skirmish.

It was important that initial contacts with potential participants be discreet, whether made by telephone, email, or letter. Administrators willing to consider participation after initial contact were asked to complete an online screening/profile survey (see Appendix E). A link embedded in the email took the administrator to the project webpage where he or she could become acquainted with the details of the study, read about the researcher, and complete the online screening survey. The survey provided demographic data and information concerning personal beliefs, church affiliation, level of church participation, and personal political views to inform purposeful sampling. Part of the survey included a section for respondents to indicate willingness to be considered as a participant in the study.

Later, this approach was modified to encourage any response desired, allowing curious but cautious administrators to engage directly with the researcher if desired prior to completing the screening survey. As the strategy shifted to a more active recruitment process, more personal initial contacts (by telephone or letter) were employed, especially in cases where the Christian faith of the administrator was reasonably certain. This was a more effective recruitment tool and led to two of the participants' positive responses.

District and school websites provided contact information for direct solicitation of these potential participants. Often it was discovered that the administrator at the center of the skirmish had moved to a new position or retired. In those cases, online searches were conducted to locate

news reports on the departure of the individual and information on their current location. For retired administrators, contact with the school or district was sometimes made to request either contact information or to request that the inquiry be passed on to the retired administrator. Occasionally third parties who had a connection with the potential participant assisted in making contact.

In spite of all the strategies employed, it was a significant challenge to find administrators who had been involved in a culture war skirmish, met the faith criteria, and were willing to participate. As noted above, snowball email contacts through personal and professional networks yielded only a handful of responses of any kind and only one fruitful lead. Web-based searches and recruitment became the primary strategy for locating potential participants.

Many factors were present that worked against participation. The initial plan was to distribute the snowball email invitations during the time between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. School administrators are more likely to have time to consider such an invitation over the winter holidays and away from the daily rush of work. Due to delays in the project, appeals did not go out until late winter and participants were sought online throughout the spring. Additionally, in spite of steps to build trusting connections through the search tools, it is likely that some were not comfortable discussing matters of faith. As one retired superintendent emailed, "I do not feel comfortable discussing my faith or church attendance over the Internet with a stranger" (personal communication, February 27, 2015). Even for administrators who might have been willing to participant, lawsuits often complicated matters. Several national advocacy groups provide legal counsel in religious conflict situations. Once a lawsuit is part of the story, freedom to share information is often restricted. Another factor expressed to the researcher was fear of rekindling community hostility that was part of a recent culture war

skirmish. The wariness of potential participants prompted aggressive, persistent, and personal pursuit of possible subjects discovered through Internet searches. Four of the five participants were identified using this approach.

In many situations, the faith of the leader as revealed through further investigation or by way of the online screening survey did not match the research criteria. One Gay-Straight Alliance conflict in a district in the Midwest was dropped when it was determined through phone and email contact with staff at a local evangelical church that the superintendent was a Catholic, and the evangelical Christians at the church were blunt in observing that he was not holding the line they believed he should on moral issues in the schools (personal communication, October 24, 2014). In another situation, a middle school principal from the Midwest was contacted. He dealt with an evolution-creationism and proselytizing conflict and he was an active and devoted Christian. Because he worshiped in a mainline church and did not ascribe to some core evangelical beliefs, he was not well-suited to the study. However, another contact from the South completed the survey and matched all the criteria quite well, but indicated at the conclusion of the survey that he did not want to participate in the study.

A number of leaders who almost certainly had such experiences either failed to respond to emails or decided not to participate:

- A West Coast high school principal who was embroiled in LGBTQ issues and was quite public about his Christian faith failed to respond to repeated emails and multiple attempts at phone contact.
- An evangelical school superintendent in the Midwest involved in a case featuring a Christian teacher acting inappropriately in sharing his faith was pursued with the assistance of his former pastor. In a phone conversation, the potential participant recalled

the difficulty of days spent giving testimony in court, but he said he would consider participating once the legal process was concluded. The case was appealed to the US Supreme Court, but in the end, after the Court chose not to consider the case, he decided not to be part of the study. He wrote, “My wife and I discussed the situation again this week and we really want to move on. I know this is not what you want to hear but at this time this is how we feel. Thank you for your understanding!” (personal communication, October 24, 2014).

- A school administrator in the Midwest who likely met the selection criteria was caught in the middle of an intense issue involving LBGTQ students. The conflict became national news and triggered legal action. After multiple phone conversations and emails, he declined to participate due to concerns about legal aspects of the situation and potential disruption of the fragile calm that had finally settled over the community. After four months of phone calls and emails, he wrote, “ I am going to decline this offer and I appreciate your understanding” (personal communication, August 1, 2014).

- A skirmish over sex education in a small community in the West was handled by a superintendent who was about to retire. Based upon preliminary information, he fit the criteria, but he finally declined. He wrote, “After consideration, I will pass on involvement. It is great to be retired and be able choose whether or not to be involved, as I have no intention of revisiting that series of events” (personal communication, March 31, 2014). In further exchanges, he went on to characterize the incident as “brutal” and referred to the “crazy and more than vicious attacks” that were part of the conflict (personal communication, April 4, 2014).

- A high school principal in the South who dealt with a football team event that included

baptisms left a phone message in which she said, “I have given thought to this research project as I typically like to assist all fellow colleagues. However, this issue affected my personal life as well as my work, and I do not wish to rehash any of it. My sincerest apologies,” (personal communication, May 5, 2014).

Even those who eventually participated in the study were, in some cases, quite hesitant. After being solicited, Sharon wrote,

Honestly the situation regarding our Bible class was not a war or skirmish but was quickly and amicably resolved, with absolutely no “negative” residue, so I really don’t think this would be the best for your study. I appreciate your interest, but respectfully decline (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

In the end, a total of just 19 administrators completed the online screening survey. Those that met the selection criteria were contacted for an informal phone conversation, as was the original plan, unless sufficient email communication had already occurred to ascertain information and data needed to determine if the individual would become a participant in the study. As Patton (2002) pointed out, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 273). The phone conversations, emails, and online survey assured information-rich interviewees who had experienced the type of culture war skirmish at the center of this inquiry.

The term “Religious Right” provides a vague but useful label for the political activity of evangelicals who often have serious concerns about public schooling. However, the Religious Right is not a political monolith (Wilcox & Robinson, 2011) and evangelical Christians are far from homogeneous in their support of the various causes embraced by Religious Right leaders and organizations (Myers & Cibulka, 2008; Smith, 2000). Local evangelical churches similarly

vary in the degree to which the politics of the Religious Right are evident, both from the pulpit and among the congregation. In order to identify participants who were in churches where the Religious Right was a contextual factor of some consequence, questions about the political leanings of participants' churches and the interviewees' personal political beliefs were included in the screening/profile survey.

Consideration during selection was also given to the variety within the sample in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographic region, size of school, size of district, size of community, and years of administrative leadership. Such considerations were not intended to enhance generalizability, but rather, to enhance the verisimilitude of the findings (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The process for locating potential participants, then, began by using a combination of Internet searches, colleague networking, and CCCU faculty contacts. Individuals were invited to complete the online screening survey. All who completed the survey, matched the profile sought, and indicated a willingness to be a participant in the study were considered. The match of each individual to the selection criteria was evaluated through the survey responses and direct communication with the potential participant. During this process, the potential participants had an opportunity to ask questions about participation and express interest in moving forward or declining to be considered.

Anonymity

Anonymity was a challenge throughout the study. It was expected that some leaders would be eager to share their stories and unconcerned about anonymity. However, it was just as certain that some leaders would be willing to tell their stories only if assured anonymity. Based on literature on the targeted population and those in similar situations in American culture, the desire to keep their religious identity unknown at work was expected to be a common and

intentional professional strategy, making them a somewhat concealed population. Because of this, building trust was an important feature of the recruitment process.

One step towards gaining trust was to provide a complete profile of the researcher on the project webpage where potential participants accessed the online screening survey. The profile presented the researcher as an insider in the target population, both as an evangelical Christian and as a former public school administrator who still worked with leaders in the field and someone who had personally experienced culture war skirmishes. Another strategy was to use CCCU faculty as facilitators in the process of locating participants as noted above, utilizing existing trust-based relationships to assist in making contact with potential interviewees.

The details concerning safeguards to assure anonymity and confidentiality were shared during the recruitment process. As the study progressed, participants had the opportunity to review and collaborate on field texts and final narratives to assure that the use of pseudonyms, fictionalization, and other devices used in the story-writing process adequately protected their identity.

Benefits of participation

There were limited financial incentives for participants. Each received a gift certificate for a dinner at a favorite local restaurant. However, engagement in the process of storytelling and shaping the story into an emplotted narrative was expected to have value to the participant. The research text that comprised the story of their culture war skirmish was expected to provide them with a meaningful chapter in their personal history that was of value. Additionally, Riessman (2008) contended that “Telling stories about difficult times in our lives creates order and contains emotions, allowing a search for meaning and enabling connection with others” (p. 10). Administrators are limited by confidentiality when dealing with public conflict. Even when

given the opportunity to discuss such experiences, they are often hesitant to do so with others who are not likely to understand the complexity of their context. They may also hesitate to share with family and friends if they do not want to burden others with the weight of the situation. An opportunity to share their story with a researcher who walked the path they walked was expected to be a valued experience for most potential participants. The participants in both pilot studies conducted for this project expressed appreciation for the opportunity to tell their stories and found value in the experience.

Methods for Data Collection

Extended, semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather the stories of each participant. As described by Merriam (2009, pp. 89-91), semi-structured interviewing allows for preparation of questions and areas for exploration, but provides broad flexibility to allow the subject to tell his or her story, making this method of data-gathering best suited to the research questions. The telephone offered an option for communication between the researcher and the participant.

Interview Protocols

Questioning during interviews was guided by practices included in Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview approach, which "assumes that people interpret events and construct their own understanding of what happened, and that the researcher's job is to listen, balance, and analyze these constructions in order to understand how people see their worlds" (p. 10). Rubin and Rubin promoted the use of three types of questions. Main questions are closely aligned to the research questions and prepared ahead of time (p. 116). Follow-up questions are keyed off answers to the main questions and seek "to obtain further depth and detail, to ask for clarifying examples, and to clarify concepts and themes" (p. 117). Probe questions are not linked directly

to answers, but rather seek to keep the interviewee talking, get clarifications, or elicit examples or evidence (p. 118).

The researcher strove to create a trusting, relaxed, affirming, safe context. This began with the introductory contacts and was supported by the web-based orientation process. Online, the subjects were introduced to the researcher and provided with a biographic profile that revealed enough of the researcher's background to assure them they were talking to an insider without biasing the process. Arrangements for the face-to-face interviews were made based upon the preferences of the participants, which included the decision whether to conduct both the first and second interviews together, or to separate the interviews by a day or more. As much as was possible, the locations and times of interviews were determined by participants.

The interview format followed a modified version of the three-interview model proposed by Seidman (2006). Interview protocols were structured to elicit all narrative elements necessary to support the re-storying process. The planned foci of each of the three interviews was as follows:

Interview one: The setting and characters.

The focus of the initial interview was to continue building a relationship of trust and create a complete profile of the participant and the context of the skirmish they experienced. As Moen (2006) noted, "To understand a human being, her or his actions, thoughts, and reflections, you have to look at the environment, or the social, cultural, and institutional context in which the particular individual operates" (p. 64), and this interview was intended to directly address that goal. The broad, contextual details of the culture war skirmish were verified and additional textual or online resources that helped the researcher better understand the incident were solicited from the participant. The interview was recorded. Originally, the intent was to allow

for verification of key quotes, and notes taken during the interview were expected to be the primary data record. However, after the first participant was interviewed, the first interview for all remaining participants was also transcribed. The detailed protocol for the first interview is provided in Appendix F. The alignment of the prepared questions with the research questions is provided in Table 1.

Table 1	
<i>Interview #1 Alignment to Research Questions</i>	
Interview questions	Related research question
Tell me how you came to be an educator and how you ended up as a school administrator.	In the context of this conflict, what assumptions are present in each person about their purpose at work and the relationship of that purpose to their faith commitments? What is their understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and loyalties involved?
What does your faith look like in the way you live it out?	
Describe the relationship between your faith and your work.	
Have you experienced discomfort being identified as a Christian in your school leadership? If so, please describe this for me.	
What is your faith story?	
How do your personal political views compare with the views generally associated with the Religious Right?	
How do people at your church view public education?	
Tell me about the religious aspects of the community the school/district serves. How do you and your family fit into that? How does that impact your school/district?	
What do you make of the conflicts between conservative Christians and public schools? What are the reasons they exist and why do they play out the way they do?	
Tell me about the political make-up of the community the school/district serves. How does that impact your school/district?	

Interview two: The details of the experience.

The second interview provided as little structure as possible as the participant told the story of the skirmish experienced. During the second interview the subject was asked to reconstruct their lived experience of cultural conflict with as much rich detail as could be elicited. This interview was recorded and transcribed. The protocol for the second interview is provided in Appendix G. The alignment of the prepared questions with the research questions is provided in Table 2.

Table 2	
<i>Interview #2 Alignment to Research Questions</i>	
Interview questions	Related research questions
I assume you've been thinking about the events surrounding (The Incident) ever since we first started to communicate. Can you tell me what happened in as much detail as possible?	How do these evangelicals who serve as public school administrators experience the culture wars, specifically when caught in a high profile conflict in their school or district? How do their work and faith communities respond to them personally in times of intense, local cultural conflict? What are the key moments in such situations?
What part did your faith community and your Christian friends play in your handling of that situation?	
What did you see as your responsibility in this conflict?	
How has this event changed you and/or your life?	
Have any of your views, beliefs, or attitudes changed because of this event?	

Interview three (if necessary): Reflection on themes and follow-up.

A third interview was scheduled if needed. Potential purposes included exploration of aspects needing more information and allowing the participant to respond as part of the collaborative work of crafting the narrative. The protocol for the third interview, when conducted, was adapted to the situation. In all cases but one, all follow-up information was

gathered via email communication.

Field Tests

Two field tests were conducted in order to explore options for investigating the research questions and to inform decisions concerning methodology. For the initial field test, an email was sent to 20 public school leaders known to the researcher and believed to match the subject criteria well enough to participate in the screening survey. As there were many technical and procedural aspects involved in data gathering, subjects familiar to the researcher were used in order to gather experience at the expense of friends rather than strangers and in order to solicit honest feedback. The email introduced the project and asked for their willingness to either take the survey or take the survey and also participate in a three-interview sequence.

Fourteen of the 20 emails were answered, all indicating a willingness to complete the screening survey. Nine were willing to participate in the interview protocol. Two questions in the survey were written responses. One asked for a brief description of an incident where cultural conflict was experienced as a school leader and the other asked for narrative feedback on the survey itself. Unfortunately, due to an error in the survey, participants were unable to enter their responses. This limited the ability to gauge the level of conflict beyond the self-reported intensity.

The results of the screening survey were reviewed in order to select an interviewee. Overall, most of the respondents were White, evangelical, non-charismatic, born-again males who serve in suburban schools. The interviewee chosen was selected based upon his willingness to commit to the interviews, his self-reported level of cultural conflict experienced (higher than most), and his general match to the indicators of “evangelical” identity. He was a high school principal serving in a suburban district and had almost 20 years of experience in public school

administration. He identified himself and his church as evangelical. However, his religious responses in the screening survey do not align him solidly with evangelicals. For example, he did not report a “conversion experience” as most evangelicals do, nor did he select “fully God and fully man” to describe Jesus Christ. The candidate with the best match to the desired criteria (relatively high levels of conflict experienced and alignment to evangelical identity) decided not to participate in the interviews due to the time demands, so the interviewee used was a second choice.

Interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded and were separated by one-week intervals. Transcriptions were done using Dragon Dictate software, and the checked transcriptions were entered into Microsoft Word tables for coding. Each response was first segmented into meaningful chunks. The segments were then coded, and a coding schema was constructed to reflect the actual data. During the coding, some segments were further divided as meanings were further uncovered. After the transcript from an interview was coded, the protocol for the next interview was revised to address any questions that had been noted in the previous interview’s data. The transcript of the second interview was sent to the subject prior to the third interview with a request for him to review it and to be prepared to address any corrections, additions, or other questions or comments he may have as part of the final interview.

Reflections on the initial field test.

The expectation from the literature that the religious identification and beliefs of public school leaders may often be difficult to accurately predict was evident in the initial field test. Identifying the religious identity of potential participants, therefore, was expected to yield a sampling that was a mixture of administrators with varying levels of identification with the evangelical subculture. The lack of response by the few women and minorities in the pilot group

underscores the challenge of getting a diverse pool of respondents.

Additional items were added to the screening survey to better gauge the nature of the respondent's political context in their church community: the alignment of the respondent's congregation to the "Christian Right" viewpoint and the respondent's personal alignment with that political orientation.

The interview protocols were revised to be more structured for the purpose of better probing the self-identification of participants with the evangelical community, the Religious Right, and the mission of public education. Prepared questions to probe these areas of affiliation were necessary to gauge the context within which the leaders experience the cultural conflict under investigation.

The second field test.

A second field test was conducted using the revised interview protocol in order to address several of the weaknesses uncovered by the first pilot. Only participants who had experienced a specific culture war skirmish in their professional experience were considered. Another significant shift involved the approach to re-storying the narrative. Due to the change to a specific incident, a change in coding (adding structural narrative coding to thematic coding) was used to produce a story as a research text.

A local school principal who was involved in a high profile conflict over a middle school play that addressed bullying and gender identity was the subject of the second pilot. Online searches yielded ample resources concerning the incident, including television news coverage, newspaper articles, and blog posts. The second interview protocol, slightly revised from the first pilot, was utilized.

A research text was produced utilizing the core story process (Emden, 1998), with the

inclusion of snippets of media coverage to provide helpful contextual details in support of the participant's words. The draft was shared with the participant, and a few minor edits were forwarded and applied. The core story was prepared in collaboration with the participant.

Reflections on the second field test.

The story told by the administrator demonstrated that school leaders who have been in the middle of culture war skirmishes are likely to have rich narratives to share. The response of the participant also indicated that it is reasonable to expect that respondents will appreciate the opportunity to share the story of their experience with a knowing investigator.

Based on the second pilot, final revisions were made, making Christian leaders in public schools that have experienced a specific culture war skirmish the focus of the study. The interview protocols were adjusted to make the second interview the central data-gathering event, with the other data sources serving to provide context or clarification. It was also determined that such difficult experiences warrant face-to-face interviews. Both pilots were conducted with subjects well known to the researcher. To build and sustain trust with participants who are not known to the researcher and to elicit rich and thick descriptions, a more personal approach to the core interviews was deemed essential.

Reliability and Validity

According to Riessman (1993), the purpose of narrative research is “to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (p. 2). In pursuing that end, narrative research is concerned with observable events in actual time, however the focus is on how the participant experienced those events and the meaning made of the incident. This creates a dynamic tension in addressing issues of reliability and validity, especially when considering what “actually happened.” What is

“true”? What is “fiction”?

“Narratives are truthful fictions,” suggested Sandelowski (1991), “but fiction is itself linked to interpretation in that all interpretation (even scientific explanation) involves human fabrication; the making out of what happened and the making up of what something means” (p. 165). Lather (2001) observed that narrative researchers are “Caught between a rock of responsibility and accountability and a soft place of the continued claims of scientism to one-best-way production and legitimation of knowledge” (p. 248). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) asserted that the “researchers’ primary aim is not to discover whether narrators’ accounts are accurate reflections of actual events, but to understand the meanings people attach to those events” (p. 424).

Given the emphasis on the meaning subjects make of their experiences, qualitative researchers take many different approaches to reliability and validity. Some eschew the terms, turning instead to what they consider more appropriate concepts, such as *trustworthiness*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Rubin and Rubin (2012), for example, called for *accuracy* and *credibility* in interview-based research. Lather (2001) also contended that the primary focus of qualitative research should be on *credibility*, defined as “the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy as based on a set of standard practices” (p. 244), and added the implication that “external validity shifts from generalizability based on sampling to reader assessment of transferability” (p. 244).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) retained the use of the terms validity and reliability, but approached these concepts in ways they asserted are better suited to interview research. They explained, “Issues of reliability and validity go beyond technical or conceptual concerns and raise epistemological questions about the objectivity of knowledge and the nature of interview

research. The question is whether knowledge produced through interviews can be objective” (p. 242). Not surprisingly, their focus is on the *quality of craftsmanship* throughout the research process, which was detailed in seven steps from theoretical presuppositions through reporting: “Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during an investigation, on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (p. 247).

“Narrative truth is distinguished from other kinds of formal science truths by its emphasis on the life-like, intelligible and plausible story,” according to Sandelowski, (1991, p. 164). Because of that, many narrative researchers consider *verisimilitude*, defined by Kramp (2004) as the “appearance or likelihood that something is or ‘could be’ true or real” (p.108), to be the most appropriate criterion for addressing questions of validity. Verisimilitude enhances transferability, a concept that turns on a shift to the role of the reader as a key determinant in the value of qualitative research. The essential question becomes: Does the research ring true and allow the reader to transfer the insights gained into other settings, recognizing that the complexity of each unique situation and story does not allow for blanket statements of fact or formulation of a theory?

Several practices and strategies were employed in this study to assure that the quality of craftsmanship can be assessed by readers, establishing the trustworthiness of the research project leading to the verisimilitude of the findings, thus enhancing the transferability of the results of the project. These practices and strategies include respondent validation in several forms, transcription with multiple accuracy checks, accessibility of data to fellow researchers, triangulation of incident specifics and reporting, and thick descriptions of each incident. Details concerning these efforts are provided in this section and in the following section on data analysis since data gathering and analysis often occurred simultaneously.

The goal of the narrative inquiry process is to keep the focus on “the participant’s understanding of her experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 26). Through the use of a limited number of open-ended questions, focused follow-up questions and probes, and the avoidance of leading questions, interviews sought to elicit thick descriptions of the context and the events in order to enhance transferability (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). When possible, data from documents and online resources were used to independently verify incident details emerging from the interviews and internal consistency was monitored during the interview process, providing a limited degree of triangulation. Discrepant reports were to be expected from respondents as they recalled and narrated their experiences, but these discrepancies were used to follow up as needed to probe aspects of the incident if multiple versions of events competed for preeminence during the skirmish being narrated.

Faculty colleagues of the researcher served as research collaborators to enhance the trustworthiness of the process and findings. A faculty collaborator reviewed the data and assisted in the analysis for each participant. The specific aspects of this collaborative role were adjusted to match the study as it progressed and the insights and preferences of the collaborators were clarified.

Working with Interview Data

The researcher wrote up notes from the first interview and included key quotes using the interview recording to check for accuracy. Data from the interview was combined with data from the online survey in order to draft a sketch of the participant and his or her context, yielding what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to as an interim text (p. 133). The draft sketch was shared with the participant for review and comment. This member check was one of multiple points of respondent validation employed (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). The sketch was also shared

with the faculty collaborator and a discussion was held between the researcher and the faculty collaborator when feedback from the participant was received to revise the draft.

The second interview was transcribed by a third party. The transcript was independently checked against the interview recording by the researcher and the faculty collaborator. The transcript was also sent to the participant for review, soliciting corrections, additions, and clarifications. A meeting between the researcher and the faculty collaborator was used to make corrections in the transcript.

As detailed below, the final draft of the transcript and the sketch developed from the online survey and initial interview underwent preliminary coding to identify data gaps with the intent of gathering all essential elements needed to craft a full narrative. That initial analysis, the questions raised by the researcher and faculty collaborator, and the response from the participant determined the necessity of a third interview and, if necessary, the areas of exploration during that interview. If a significant range of items needed to be probed or discussed, a third interview was scheduled. Minor clarifications were handled with email. If a third interview was conducted, it was recorded in order to capture accurate quotes and narrative details.

A research journal was utilized by the researcher to capture observations and insights, and support continuous consideration of bias based upon the researcher's personal experience with culture war issues and the evangelical subculture using the personal disclosure statement of the researcher as a touchstone. Emerging potential thematic threads and insights were noted in the research journal, both for individual participants and across all participants. Meetings with faculty collaborators provided a forum to vet considerations and insights from the research notes.

All recordings, transcripts, and the research journal were kept on a password secured computer. Unless a subject insisted upon being identified in the reporting by name, in researcher

notations and the research journal all individuals were referred to using pseudonyms and the names of locations and schools were fictionalized. Incident-related documents, hard copies of transcripts and emails, and other data that were part of the research along with running notes on the importance of each item were kept in a locked file cabinet and/or password secured computer. Five years after the conclusion of this study the tapes and electronic files will be deleted and the paper files will be shredded.

Data Analysis

The intent of narrative inquiry is to create “a narrative or story that will capture what the narrator experienced in such a way that the reader will gain a new insight and a new understanding of the larger issue behind the particular series of incidents” (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, p. 230). It was essential that each individual story be narrated fully and well. The format provided through the narrative coding process and exemplified in the second pilot research text supported production of this vital outcome. Narrative inquiry studies personal experience and meaning making in a systematic manner in order to produce complete, reasonable, believable, re-storied narratives that capture the richness and complexity of each experience. The stories these individuals tell provide others in similar contexts unique windows into these experiences.

However, “If no larger issue (societal or theoretical) can be found behind the narrative, it is a story best left untold” (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, p. 229). Analysis of the narratives is the additional step that explores each unique experience and moves towards the larger social and theoretical issues. There was no bright line between data gathering and analysis in this narrative inquiry. From the very beginning, the intent was to move in and out of the data, looking for key insights, noting aspects of each narrative that were missing or unclear, recognizing the plotlines in each story, monitoring researcher bias, reflecting on the stories of each individual participant

and capturing initial insights into patterns across the stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the process this way:

A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts. Although the initial analysis deals with matters such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone, these matters become increasingly complex as an inquirer pursues this relentless rereading. With narrative analytic terms in mind, narrative inquirers begin to *narratively code* their field texts (p. 131)

Recognizing and honoring the complex nature of the work, this project nevertheless included a plan to move methodically through an analytical process, anticipating the many times the process circled back, leapt forward, or took an unexpected turn. Each step was recorded in the research journal in order to maintain a full record that is available to other researchers.

As noted above, the recording from the second interview was transcribed by a research assistant, compared to the recording by the researcher and the collaborating faculty member, corrected, and sent to the participant for comment. For the first participant, the sketch produced from the online survey and first interview, the final draft of the second interview transcript, and any supplemental data from communications with the participant were formatted in Microsoft Word as a data table. For all participants that followed, the transcripts from the first interview rather than a sketch was included. This data table facilitated the coding process.

The practice of Seidman (2006) was followed, in that in-depth analysis of the data was delayed until all of the interviews were completed (p.113). There were three phases to the coding work. First, pre-set narrative codes were used to facilitate the re-storying process.

Coding labels suggested by Creswell's adaptation of Clandinin and Connelly's work (Creswell, 2007, p. 171) were used to sort the data into narrative categories related to chronology (epiphanies, events) and plot (characters, setting, problem, action, resolution).

The second phase was conducted simultaneously, "pre-coding" within the text and using inductive thematic coding alongside the text as the transcript was being chunked and throughout the re-storying process. The question that provided a frame for inductive thematic coding was: In listening to the participant's experience of work and faith, especially through the lens of a particular culture war skirmish, what implicit understandings, values, beliefs, and motivations, and what patterns of behavior are in play? After independent coding was completed, inter-subjective agreement was sought through review and critique of the coding notes by the collaborating faculty member. After the narrative was constructed (see process details below), a process of re-coding was conducted. Emerging themes were identified and cross-case comparison ensued.

Preliminary analysis of the data included an intentional alertness to evidence of assumptions on the part of the respondent. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) pointed out, "Distinguishing between when informants are unwilling to discuss a topic and when they assume the investigator already knows about the topic requires a lot of familiarity with the subject matter" (p. 93). Since the affinity between a former administrator and current administrators who all self-identify as evangelical Christians was expected to facilitate the building of relational trust, the likelihood that assumptions would be made during the interviews was quite high.

Based upon the analysis, the researcher and the faculty collaborator considered what follow-up questions were needed. Only once was a third interview necessary, and in that situation, the recording was transcribed by a third party and subjected to the same process as the

transcript of the second interview, resulting in a Microsoft Word table document that was coded as detailed previously. Most of the additional information and clarification was obtained by email correspondence.

Writing the Core Stories

By successfully investigating gaps in the narrative elements and clarifying assumptions, the necessary data to collaboratively craft a narrative was produced. Polkinghorne (1988) described narrative creation as *emplotment*, which he defined as a "dialectic process that takes place between the events themselves and a theme which discloses their significance and allows them to be grasped together as parts of one story" (p. 20). Though narrative structures provide a helpful framework for presenting the participant's story, Polkinghorne was clear that "emplotment is not the imposition of a ready-made plot structure on an independent set of events" (p. 19).

The process of crafting a *core story* from the field texts (Emden, 1998) provided a strategy for beginning the emplotment process Polkinghorne (1988) promoted and it is the heart of the re-storying and analysis plan utilized. The core story was treated as a work in progress, another interim text, which facilitated collaboration both with the participant and with each faculty colleague assisting with one of the respondents. In applying this strategy, these steps were followed by the researcher:

1. Read the full interview text and all related data several times within an extended timeframe (several weeks) to fully grasp the content.
2. Delete all interviewer questions and comments from the interview texts.
3. Delete all words that detract from the key idea of each sentence or group of sentences uttered by the respondent in the interview texts.

4. Read the remaining transcript text for meaning.
5. Repeat steps three and four several times, until satisfied that all key ideas are retained and extraneous content eliminated, returning to the full data set as often as necessary for rechecking.
6. Identify fragments of constituent themes (subplots) from the ideas within the texts.
7. Move fragments of themes together to create one coherent core story, or series of core stories.
8. Return the core story to the respondent and ask, 'Does it ring true?' and, 'Do you wish to correct/develop/ delete any part?'

The interim texts that emerged from this process primarily consisted of the actual words of the respondent. The voice of the narrator must be genuine in order to assure verisimilitude. The final step in Emden's (1998) process targeted that goal. The draft of the core story was sent to the participant, which included the previously prepared backstory, with a request for response, asking questions related to the events: Does it ring true? and, Do you wish to correct/develop/ delete any part?, as Emden suggested, but also asking questions related to voice, such as: Is this you? and, Do you see yourself here? as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended (p. 148). Collaborative interaction with the respondent was done in whatever format the participant desired, but typically took the form of email.

When the core story was completed, the collaborating faculty member checked the draft and considered the degree to which the interim text was true to the data. The researcher created a revised version based upon this review process. In this manner, the narratives for each participant were re-storied.

When the core story had been collaboratively crafted and was accepted as authentic by

the participant, the researcher, and the collaborating faculty member, the focus of the analysis work shifted to the identification of emerging themes, which are often referred to as plots, subplots, or threads in narrative inquiry.

Inductive Analysis Across Core Stories: Looking for “Threads”

Riessman (2008) pointed out that “Although narrative analysis is case-centered, it can generate ‘categories’ or, to put it differently, general concepts, as other case-based methods do” (p. 13). Each participant’s narrative was analyzed for emerging threads and insights followed by a comparison of emerging threads and insights across the narratives. Though this is a specific step in the data analysis plan, notations in the research journal were added as insights and potential themes emerged throughout the course of the study.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) described the role of theory in analyzing data as “a trade-off...between bringing a lot of prior theorizing to the theme-identification effort and going at it fresh” (p. 94). While it was important not to inhibit openness to what might be in the data, “Assiduous theory avoidance...brings the risk of not making the connection between data and important research questions” (p. 94). Bearing that tension in mind, attention was paid to repetition of topics, ideas, and concepts; the use of metaphors and analogies; and causal links and other assumptions about forces at play. Kramp (2004) described these themes or sub-plots as being “like ‘threads’ that, when woven together, create a pattern with a plot-like structure. (The) task is to grab on to these themes by lifting appropriate words and phrases of the narrator from the text” (p. 117). Special attention was given to the insights, or “epiphanies,” narrators shared.

Inductive thematic analysis was conducted for the research texts of each respondent. Results were shared with the faculty collaborator, who reviewed the results and critiqued the findings. A draft discussion of the analysis, describing the dominant emerging themes, was

written and shared with the respondent.

Validity of the analysis is strengthened through an accurate presentation of the process used, ongoing review of emerging thematic findings and insights with collaborating faculty colleagues, and review of analysis with participants. One strategy to attend to the voice of the narrator was solicitation of reaction to the initial thematic “threads.” Nevertheless, the focus questions again were, “Is this you? Do you see yourself here?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148), and the extensiveness of the interaction between the researcher and the participant that follows were given direction by the respondent. The experience of participants in this study was expected to be one of growing self-understanding, and it was expected that some of the analysis would not be embraced. When participants did not agree with the findings, but the researcher believed there were key insights that had to be included, the plan was to incorporate both voices, but that situation never occurred.

Engaging in this kind of collaborative work with participants “is appropriate when one of the goals of research is to identify and apply themes that are recognized or used by the people whom one studies” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.104), as was the case here. However, the likelihood was that theory from other fields would be applicable, and, “In such cases, researchers would not expect their findings necessarily to correspond to ideas and beliefs held by study participants” (Ryan & Bernard, p.104). Ongoing reading of the literature supported consideration of cases that do not align with the narratives of the participants, and considerations of those discrepancies were incorporated into the analysis. By providing space for multiple voices, analysis is more robust.

Analysis also considered similarities and differences across the narratives of all of the participants. As Josselson (2010) described this final step, “After each participant’s story is

understood as well as possible, cross-case analysis might be performed to discover patterns across individual narrative interview texts or to explore what might create differences between people in their narrated experiences” (p. 872). When analysis of all narratives was completed, a matrix was prepared capturing the emerging themes from each story. Thematic similarities and differences across the participants are presented and discussed.

Limitations

Limitations of this study are primarily found in the sampling methodology. Selection bias was a concern early on as the snowball method utilizing CCCU faculty, which was expected to provide the bulk of potential participants for this study. This approach was likely to favor those most connected to social networks in the target population. Isolates who may be the most important subjects for this research would also be the most likely to be missed. Internet searches for candidates became the primary location strategy, which helped to moderate this issue.

Delimitations

Communication with CCCU faculty took place in late winter, 2014. They were asked to forward email invitations to potential participants among school administrators they know who experienced a culture war skirmish within the past five years. Independent contacts by the researcher with potential participants identified through incidents found via Internet searches began simultaneously.

Identification of participants was ongoing. Initially, “windows” for subject interviews that aligned with school administrators’ rhythm of work were identified, but actual interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Though there was extensive flexibility, face-to-face interviewing was restricted somewhat by the obligations of the researcher. Follow-

up contacts and collaboration with participants extended through the completion of the writing process.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Individuals sought for this study sometimes experience their religious identity as marginalizing or stigmatizing in their work context. Respecting privacy and the need for anonymity among respondents was, therefore, key. The approach to participant identification detailed above avoided some of the problems that come when the researcher was provided referrals or located a potential participant online and then initiated contact. However, to strengthen that safeguard, CCCU faculty forwarding the recruitment email were encouraged to use private email addresses. For situations where no private email address was known, a preliminary email template was provided that simply noted a desire to forward a research opportunity and asked for a private email address for that purpose. Contacts made with potential participants located through Internet searches were similarly approached.

The online screening survey included consent information and a “click” step to indicate acceptance. Information concerning the expectations of participation in the study were included as part of the online screening survey. The online survey included an explanation that responses were for selection purposes. Participation in the initial telephone conversation allowed for another layer of consent, including personal clarification of any specific questions. It was made clear to potential subjects through written documentation online and in telephone and email contacts that throughout the study they were invited to be as active in collaboration as they chose to be and that they were free to cease participation at any point.

It was important to provide respondents who felt they were personally and/or professionally vulnerable with tools to protect their responses from inadvertent disclosure.

Along with precautions noted above concerning email, the online survey site used passwords stored using one-way encryption, secured login, and non-disclosure of full participant identification on-screen. A secured access process that did not require transmission of documents was offered to interviewees who did not want transcripts emailed for their review or mailed as hard copies. All transcription was done in the home of the researcher.

To assure both accuracy and confidentiality, collaboration with respondents was a feature of this project. Interviews were flexibly scheduled to allow for maximum privacy for each subject. Pseudonyms were assigned as requested by each participant. All other identifying characteristics named in the interviews, such as the names of schools and districts, city, county, state, and specific events, were also changed based upon the directions of each participant. Details in narratives concerning the actual conflict were also altered under the guidance of the participants to assure the retention of essential meaning without allowing for loss of anonymity.

Summary

Narrative inquiry methodology as applied here allowed for selection of a small but purposeful sampling of evangelical Christians who experienced skirmishes in the culture wars as public school administrators in the United States that yielded full and rich stories from each concerning those experiences. Using media reports and CCCU faculty, potential participants were identified. The online survey, emails, and initial telephone conversations assured that each participant had a rich narrative to share. Collaboration with the respondents throughout the project enhanced the power of the narratives produced and added depth to the analysis. Collaboration with faculty colleagues guided the project as it unfolded, and provided vital reliability checks along the way. The two semi-structured interviews (with follow-up data gathering as needed) allowed respondents to narrate their stories without undue constraint and

simultaneously assured that all narrative elements were shared. Ongoing journaling by the researcher facilitated continual analysis and attention to insights throughout the study, and provided for monitoring of researcher bias. By attending to the quality of the craftsmanship in a manner that was transparent, the trustworthiness of the study assured verisimilitude and led to stronger transferability of the findings.

Chapter IV: Introduction to Skirmish Narratives

The Participants

Based upon all of the information gathered, five candidates willing to participate in the study were determined to best match the selection criteria (Table 3). Matching participants to the definition of “evangelical” employed in this study proved to be more complex than initially envisioned. Research on evangelical Christians has been plagued by differing criteria used to identify the population of study. Denominational affiliation, self-identification, and beliefs are typically employed (Hackett & Lindsay, 2008).

Table 3							
<i>Selection Criteria for Participants Selected</i>							
Name	M/F	Ethnic/ Racial ID	Admin Position	Yrs as Admin	Enrollment	Location	Region
Craig	M	White	Elementary Principal	26	School: 500	Suburban	West
Terry	M	White	Superintendent	23	District: 11,000	Suburban	West
Eugene	M	African American	Superintendent	39	District: 16,400	Small City	South
Sharon	F	White	Elementary Principal	14	School: 380	Rural or Small Town	Midwest
Laura	F	White	High School Principal	12	School: 2300	Suburban	South

For this study, questions concerning personal faith categorization, church affiliation, level of church community involvement, and key theological beliefs linked to evangelicalism were included in the screening/profile survey (See Appendix E). It was important that participants self-identified as evangelical Christians and that they were active in an evangelical church

community, but the specific responses to the screening survey did not align completely with those expectations. Nevertheless, all participants were deemed to be sufficiently “evangelical” for this study. In part, this was due to limitations of survey instrument, and upon direct communication the responses revealed an “evangelical orientation” behind the survey result. Discussion of specific participants follows.

Craig self-identified as a “liberal protestant,” though he described his church as “evangelical” and selected all four responses linked to a traditional evangelical experience of “accepting Jesus.” He also selected “don’t know” on beliefs concerning the Bible and the afterlife. Upon follow-up communication, Craig’s faith journey had led him to question labels (such as “evangelical”) and doctrines concerning the proper reading of the Bible and the afterlife, both of which are active aspects of evangelical theological discussion.

Sharon described her experience of being “saved” as a series of moments throughout her life, and she recognized that this is non-standard in the evangelical subculture. Nevertheless, she strongly identified with evangelicalism. Laura also has a strong evangelical identity, but selected “Pentecostal” in her survey responses for reasons that she clarified during the interviews.

Eugene’s responses were fully aligned to the evangelical norm, however, as an African-American, he did not self-identify as evangelical. This is to be expected, as White evangelicals share a great deal of common beliefs and values with Black conservative Christians, but the African-American church generally does not embrace the term “evangelical” (Emerson & Smith, 2000). Eugene’s participation provided an important experience from that population of Christians who match the definitional criteria but do not self-identify as evangelicals.

All participants experienced a culture war skirmish involving the school or district they served and the evangelical faith community. As the search for candidates began, the most

desirable participant was envisioned as an evangelical Christian who was caught between two communities: public schools and evangelicals. That population remained elusive. For the most part, the candidates for this study mediated a skirmish, but did not experience torn loyalties or cultural “cross-fire.” An overview of the five skirmishes is provided in Table 4, including the main actors in the conflict, the event or action that triggered the skirmish, and the outcome.

Table 4			
<i>Skirmish Conflict Summary Information</i>			
Participant	Main actors	Conflict trigger	Outcome
Craig	<p>Craig vs. Superintendent</p> <p>Alternative narrative: Larger Christian Good News Club/evangelical churches v. powerful board members and district leadership</p>	Promotion of prayer breakfast to honor teachers	Fired, later settled out of court
Terry	<p>District leadership with local churches vs. One parent and an advocacy group</p> <p>Alternative narrative: Local Christian community vs. advocacy groups, mostly external to community</p>	Lunch volunteer from a church invited student to youth ministry event via social media	Policy revised, church volunteers returned to schools
Eugene	<p>Eugene and virtually entire community vs. Anonymous individual and external advocacy groups</p>	Weekly emails from Eugene to all staff that used religious content	Practice stopped, alternate language adopted

Sharon	Sharon and most of community vs. One parent and ACLU	During the day, in classrooms Bible class	Religious release program created to replace Bible class
Laura	Laura, district leadership, and most of local community vs. One teacher and a local atheist group	School day character assembly with evening voluntary evangelistic program	Assembly held as planned

Narrative Presentation

The diversity of methodological approaches in narrative inquiry noted in the previous chapter is mirrored in the choices for reporting results. The nature of the experience being explored helps to narrow the options.

Most narrative studies gather the experiences of several participants. The data from those experiences yield themes, which provide a structure for reporting findings. That approach is well suited to explorations of broad experiences, such as support for novice principals (Waido, 2013), principals who are also pastors (Jones, 2010), or principals dealing with reform-driven mandates (Smadu, 2008). Projects of that variety elicit numerous stories from each participant that are components of the full narrative. The component stories from all of the narratives are sorted according to the identified themes.

A different approach is utilized by studies that privilege the intact narrative of each participant. Examples of such projects include an investigation into the experience of public high school by Christian students (Moreno-Knittel, 2012), the spiritual lives of

elementary principals (Howarth, 2011), self-care and burnout avoidance by clergy (Morse, 2011), and the mentoring experiences of school administrators (Dick, 2005).

From the beginning of this investigation, both the story and the voice of each participant were privileged. The study yielded narratives anchored to a specific event—a culture war skirmish—and due to that focus, it was determined that a structure for reporting results that retained the wholeness of each story was the most appropriate approach. Though there were other options, it was concluded that it was essential that the presentation of findings maintain the unity of each narrative since the re-storied narratives constitute the most significant findings of the study and provide the vehicle for understandings and insights. Consistent with that commitment, each of the five re-storied narratives is presented in their entirety in the five chapters that follow.

Narrative Structure

The narratives are all structured similarly, though there is some variety in accordance with the uniqueness of each story. Narratives begin with a backstory that traces the individual's career path and faith journey, and explores the connections between them. Views on conflict between public education and the Christian Right are provided, the community where the skirmish occurred is profiled, and key characters are introduced. The experience of the specific skirmish is then described, followed by the participant's insights and reflections.

Stories of school leaders caught in the midst of intense cultural conflict were sought. The most difficult and wounding of those stories were not accessible, as detailed in the previous chapter. Rather, most of the participants in the project experienced somewhat less dramatic culture war skirmishes. During the initial interviews, it became

apparent that the skirmish stories were grounded in rich narrative streams concerning participants' careers and faith, the interplay of those two aspects of their lives, and the political and social contexts where the conflicts played out. It became clear that in order to understand the story of each skirmish, it was essential to understand the backstory of the career, faith, work-faith connection, and community where the participant lived and served. That realization led to an expansion of the initial conception of a participant "sketch" into a more extensive "backstory." The backstories provide thick descriptions comparable to the skirmish stories, and the skirmish stories are not fully comprehensible without the backstories. As was the case with the treatment of each skirmish account, the goal for the backstory was to use participants' own words as much as possible.

The task was to shape each full narrative using the structures of the core elements under study: faith, public school leadership, the culture war, the specific skirmish, and the meaning participants made of all of these aspects of their leadership experience. In order for the narratives to feature the voices of each participant, the participant's words from the interview transcripts were used to the maximum extent possible. In close collaboration with the participants, different segments of transcript text addressing the same scene, observation, or insight were combined, and textual elements were moved for chronological flow.

Also in collaboration with participants, phrases that did not convey meaning (e.g., "um," "things like that," and, "you know") were removed, characteristics of spoken language (such as contractions, omitted words, word order, sentence fragments, etc.) were addressed, and errors were corrected. Multiple cycles of member checking assured that both the voice of the participant and the accuracy of the story were retained.

Voice of the Participants

Narrative studies that privilege the voice of the participant face a challenge in presenting long passages of re-storied narrative. The goal is to allow the reader to move through each narrative with ease and with clarity about when the participant is speaking and when the researcher is speaking. There are no options provided by standardized APA formatting that serves this unique purpose.

For example, Dick (2005) presented the words of participants in boldface, whether within a paragraph or in extended sections, and did not use quotation marks. Also, double-spacing was used for extended segments rather than single spacing. The reflections of the researcher were presented in italics. Syed (2008) took a slightly different approach, and presented all participant words in italics. Again, this was done regardless of whether the words were embedded in a paragraph or in an extended indented passage. As with Dick, quotation marks were not used for any participant quotations.

After considering these and other narrative studies, Syed's (2008) approach was adopted. Within each narrative, all participant words are in italics. Extended passages are indented but are double-spaced and quotation marks are not used for participant quotations.

Use of Pseudonyms

Participants were asked to express preference for anonymity. Based upon participant preference and key features of geographic location, in each case it was agreed what level of pseudonym use would be applied. In Craig's case, all names of individuals have been replaced, but most place names have been retained in order to allow the unique

diversity of Southern California to be a part of the narrative. For Terry and Sharon, all names of people and places have been changed. The same is true for Eugene, except the name of his college, which is retained since an important incident from the Civil Rights era that is part of his story is linked to that university. Laura's location in Texas was retained, but all other names have been changed. Texas, as detailed by sociologist Robert Wuthnow (2014), is a state with a unique mix of faith, politics, and schooling, and retaining that context was deemed to add important texture to Laura's narrative.

Conclusion

After presentation of each of the five narratives in Chapters 5 to 9, the dominant emerging themes particular to each participant's story are described in Chapter 10, using selected quotes to illuminate the descriptions. Chapter 10 concludes with the dominant thematic threads that emerged from across all the narratives. Those cross-case thematic threads are supported by participant quotations and discussion of those threads includes important variations within each thread.

Chapter V: Craig's Story

Introduction

Both interviews with Craig were conducted at his home. The interviews were separated by a day. The sessions were held in a small, comfortable room that appeared to be used for several purposes, including as a guest room. The atmosphere was casual. Craig is a genial man with an inviting manner common to those who work with elementary age children. He has a quick laugh and a warm demeanor.

Craig's career.

Craig attended Westmont College in Santa Barbara, majoring in economics and business. Upon graduation he took a position in a bank but did not find the work to be a good fit.

Within three weeks I realized, this isn't for me. I spent three years after my BA just trying to figure it out. I actually became a ski bum for a short period of time up at Lake Tahoe. Despite the emphasis of my degree, I didn't find it very satisfying.

A neighbor who was an elementary teacher invited him to visit his sixth grade classroom.

I walked in the door and he handed me the teacher's edition of a spelling book and said, "Take that group over there." I said, "Whoa! Hold on a second here!" I said, "OK, I'll do it," so I go, "Hey, this is really cool!" I talked to him some more and I did another visitation and I decided, "This is it. This is what I want to do." I found a job where I could make a contribution. I have a social

conscience. Just trying to make money—it wasn't working for me. Being a factor in kids' lives—I seemed to have a knack for it.

He got his teaching credential and secured his first teaching position in San Juan Capistrano. His initial move towards administration came after just a few years of classroom teaching. *As a teacher, my fellow teachers kept encouraging me to go into administration*, he recalled, and he and a teaching colleague completed a program to earn their administrative certification. He had a chance to move into an administrative role soon after, but said he declined as he felt he was not yet ready. After eight years of teaching, an opportunity to move into administration presented itself and he took it, serving as an elementary school assistant principal for three years.

Craig pointed to a job his wife took in Fallbrook, a community about 50 miles away, as his prompt to look for a position closer to her work. He accepted an elementary principalship in Lake Elsinore, which was an elementary school district at the time but soon after he arrived became part of a unified (K-12) district. He was an elementary principal there for 20 years. In that time, he opened two new schools and gained extensive experience in multi-age education. His departure from the district was prompted by what he perceived to be a lack of integrity in the fifth of the superintendents under whom he served, and his discontent was severe enough to compel him to submit his resignation even before he secured a new position.

A district near Santa Barbara posted a principal position for a school that featured multi-age programming. The district had students in grades K-6 in a community of 80,000. There were nine schools in the district, all K-6, serving a total of 3,700 students. The superintendent and five-member school board provided top

leadership. When students left sixth grade, they were moved on to the Santa Barbara Unified School District for grades 7 to 12.

Craig said he believed he was uniquely suited to the position. Though he had not planned to move, he had social connections to the area from college and knew his experience with multi-age programming made him a strong candidate. As he recalled, *It was a perfect match.* He applied, was hired, moved, and started as principal at Sunnyside School. Working in the new district was an adjustment. *I like to solve my own problems, but this district was so different than my previous district. I didn't want to call the district office for everything so I tried to figure things out.*

Craig's faith.

Craig grew up in a Christian home in San Diego.

My mom was raised in a Baptist church. My dad wasn't so much so. My parents met at a church function. I was raised in a Baptist church and my maternal grandparents were very strong in that church. My grandfather and I had many, many discussions about prophecy and things like that.

As is common in evangelical families, Craig accepted Jesus as his savior in his childhood. *I was probably eight, nine years of age and I'd been hearing the message. Finally, I said, "OK, I'm a believer." I still had some questions, which I still do, but I knew Christ is the Son of God and I responded to that.*

Craig recalled being a fairly typical "church kid" who attended regularly, had many church friends, and participated in the various activities evangelical churches offer for children. He even served as president of his high school youth group for a year. In his teen years he had one circle of friends at church and another at school. Though his

school friends were not Christians, he reported that he never got involved in drinking or drugs.

Craig remembered wanting to leave home for college and his grandmother provided some funds that helped make it possible for him to attend Westmont, a Christian college in Santa Barbara. He had first-hand knowledge of Westmont from a Youth For Christ (YFC) event he attended there during high school. YFC is an evangelical organization directed at teens.

During his undergraduate years, Craig remembered enjoying theological and philosophical discussions and studies. His musical talents led to service in religious ministries, highlighted by a seven-week evangelistic trip he led to South Africa at the end of his senior year. *That was a great experience being in an evangelistic situation.*

Craig recalled deciding he needed to leave the area for a time to test the foundations of his belief after graduation. *I needed to get away from my Christian friends for a while. I needed to know that my Christian faith was my own, not just something imposed upon me by my parents and circumstances.* His memory is that the experience provided him evidence that his faith was strong even when the support of family and friends were absent.

He returned to Santa Barbara and continued his search for a career, ending up in his decision to pursue teaching, which was detailed above. He recounted a period during his later adult life when he *fell away from church*, a time when his wife wanted to go to church and he did not. That situation flip-flopped when the younger of his two step-daughters, whom he had raised since she was age two, decided at age 15 to live with her

biological father. *I was really traumatized by that. She and I were so close, he remembered, becoming visibly emotional.*

It tore me up. Finally I said, “God, I give up. I give. I give. I just give up.” That was a kind of transformational time for me. I mean, I’d always known that God was involved in my life; I just always knew that He was there. There was never any question about that. But I wasn’t actively engaged. At that point [when Craig’s stepdaughter left], I became actively engaged, and it’s at that point that I wanted us to go to church and my wife didn’t.

Craig reported that not long after this time his wife had an affair, then moved out, and they were subsequently divorced. Though many churches make divorce a stigma, he indicated that he did not experience that, partly because he was not deeply involved in a church at the time and partly because he did not bring it up when he was there. He recalled his determination not to marry again, but he met his current wife at a church function, appreciated her strong faith, and their relationship developed quickly and they were married. Throughout his second marriage, Craig reports that he and his wife have been active in church. While still in Fallbrook, they were part of the music ministry and led the music worship at the church.

Craig said of his faith during his principalship at Sunnyside Elementary, *Back then I was more “evangelical” than I am now.* He observed that his faith has taken new directions since the skirmish. One of the topics that was part of this reconsideration was the question of hell.

I’ve had a real problem with the whole concept of hell. That has always plagued me. It’s just really been an issue. I’ve recently—well, even prior to this—I’ve

taken on more of a “universalism” approach. I think the term is—I don’t like labels—but it’s probably “evangelical universalism” is where I’m coming from. More recently I was introduced to Richard Rohr [a Catholic writer popular with many progressive evangelicals]. I just really like the things he talks about. I do understand that there are some things in the Bible that are contradictory to that, which I still deal with. I guess you have two choices. You can either say the Bible is not what it claims to be, or maybe there’s a misinterpretation and maybe it’s not as literal as we would all like it to be. So I’ve taken the latter of that, because I really do believe that Jesus is the Son of God—I really believe that—I do believe He was born, virgin birth and the resurrection. That has not changed. But I guess what it comes down to is how can God tell us as a very strict commandment to love your enemies, but He’s going to send a majority of those people to hell?

His reflections on his faith journey over the past couple of years were also reflected in his hesitancy concerning the common labels used in the evangelical Christian community. *I think the word “Christian” has taken on a world of it’s own that’s not necessarily following Christ. I don’t even like the word “evangelical” anymore because what it’s perceived to be.* He clarifies,

You get the very right wing, FOX News, Rush Limbaugh, very right wing Christian, Pat Robertson, all those people who I think give a bad name to the true definition of Christianity. All the connotations that come with the label that has, in a sense, evolved over time. I don’t do this, but I’d really even prefer not to say Christian and to say I’m a follower of Christ.

Craig's constructivist approach to education made him amenable to less literal views of scripture:

I believe the Bible is the word of God, but I don't think we should take it so literally. When Richard Rohr says that literalism is the lowest level of meaning, I went, "Oh my gosh!" I get that and I totally agree with that. Through metaphors and parables there's much more depth. Christ primarily spoke in parables. Of course, the difficulty is: Which part of the Bible is literal, what part is figurative? That's a difficult thing. My thinking is that there's more figurative in the Bible than just Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, that there's more of that throughout. What parts? I don't know.

When describing his faith, life events loomed large.

Certain events in my life have affected me, at least where I am now from a spiritual point of view. When my youngest stepdaughter moved out it was pretty traumatic for me. About two years after that she revealed that she was gay. I was never condemning of her, but my stepdaughter knew where I was coming from. That really hit me hard because in the evangelical world there's this perspective that, "Homosexuality is a sin and they can choose [whether or not to be gay]. There's a reason they're gay and they are not born with it. You look at the Bible. Leviticus and Romans are pretty clear about the perspective on homosexuality." So is the Bible invalid or are we somehow not interpreting it correctly or in the right context? Well, I've come to conclude that there are people out there that are gay by birth and it's just the way God made them. That one issue with her has been a significant part of me stepping back and taking a little bigger picture, at

the whole Christianity world. I don't have all the answers and I haven't resolved that whole thing.

Craig pointed to this experience with his daughter as the catalyst for his reconsideration of his views on homosexuality.

It's not like some event changed her or something. It's just, she's gay. That's just the bottom line. I finally came to realize I needed to apologize for things in the past, things that I had said or just implied. So she and I sat down and I made an apology to her. In her response she said, "You need to understand...do you think I would have chosen this lifestyle?" That was part of my evolution in growth in Christianity and why I've taken what would be considered a more liberal perspective on Christianity in the evangelical world.

He identified key spiritual companions as important to his spiritual life, including his best friend, a cousin, and other Christian friends, including old friends from his undergraduate days at Westmont. In the personal practice of his faith, he explained that his focus was on daily prayer and meditation, and embracing his understanding of his belief, *God, you're in charge and I'm not.*

The church he attended during the skirmish at the center of this narrative was a large evangelical community church. While attending there Craig and his wife were part of a small group that met in homes led by one of the pastors. Craig helped with the music by running the soundboard during worship services. He reported they later left the church over music preferences, but had no disagreement over theology or church teaching. At the time of the interviews, he and his wife worshipped with his mother-in-

law at a Reformed Presbyterian church. *I'm not the most comfortable with that, he admitted, but we'll see how that goes.*

Craig's Career-faith Connection

I enjoyed being a principal, been a principal for 23 years, Craig noted, adding, I felt that was God's calling. He pointed to a link between his faith and his leadership style.

As a principal, I can't say I thought of Jesus, therefore I'm going to copy Jesus. I can't say it was that overt in my thinking, but I know as a principal, right from the get-go, my feeling was, I'm there to serve the students. But what's more obvious is, I'm there to serve the teachers. I've had a servant's attitude.

As a servant leader, he did not approach leadership as what he termed an authority power trip. *Indirectly, my Christian beliefs, and Christ as an example, has helped me be a better leader. Christ was a servant. He served. He washed the feet of his disciples.*

Craig explained how he lived his faith as a school principal. *I'm not one to proselytize. That's just not me. But if someone asked me, I'd certainly respond to them.* He noted that he went into education to make a contribution, and his mission was grounded in his faith. He also committed to conducting himself in a way that he believed mirrored Jesus. He recalled that in one school in Lake Elsinore his secretary was a fellow Christian and he asked her to hold him accountable for his behavior. He instructed her, *If you ever see me doing anything that you think is not in a Christian-like manner, you call me on it. And it was good just knowing she was watching me.*

He viewed his service to children as the foundation of his educational orientation.

My focus has always been on what's best for children. I've gotten myself in a bit of trouble over the years by not following the protocol of the district or following the letter of the law. I believe in following the intent of the law. But, if it's not good for kids, I'm not going to do it.

As an example, he provided the story of an elementary expulsion hearing involving a young child with an item deemed a “weapon” by the letter of the law, *Though there was no danger or intent on the part of the child to break a rule or threaten anyone.* He did not follow the strict policy language. In another example, he pointed to his principled opposition to expansion of standardized testing in his district, which was based on what he believed was best for students. *It's not a direct thing, necessarily, but I have these children in my care. I want to make sure they are physically safe, obviously, but instructionally safe also.* He discussed his willingness to place the best interests of students ahead of policy:

In a lot of decisions over the years as a principal, you might say I was a pretender with my superiors. I did some pretending in that they were thinking I was doing certain things, but I wasn't. I never lied to them, but I just thought to myself, “We're not going to do that—it's not good for kids.” It wasn't real blatant stuff. I wasn't breaking the law, per se, but I wanted to provide a healthy environment for kids.

He also saw a connection between his faith and his constructivist approach to learning and his support for multi-age education. Craig observed first-hand how multi-age schooling promoted a more positive experience, especially for children who were

physically smaller or slower to develop intellectually or socially. *It's more an indirect kind of thing, but there is a connection between the two. I really believe that.*

Prior to his tenure at Sunnyside School, Craig did not recall facing any negativity due to his faith, though had never been blatant about his beliefs.

It's not that I wear it like a badge—"Hey, I'm a Christian! Look at me!" No, it's not that. But people knew I was a Christian. I didn't shy away from it. I know my immediate boss [while Craig was in Lake Elsinore] was definitely not a believer and one day he came in my office and said, "OK, Craig, share with me what you believe." I did and he said, "I just can't buy it." So people knew I was a Christian, but I wasn't proselytizing.

Craig described the situation in Lake Elsinore as *relaxed* when it came to Christianity and faith. There were Christian families who knew of his faith and related to him based upon that, but he asserted that fellow Christians never asked for special treatment or approached him to address a faith-based concern. He also recalled a member of the school board who was a Christian and would occasionally interact with him based upon that commonality, but never regarding policy issues or school practices. In that community, Craig remembers feeling comfortable in his work-faith relationship:

I didn't feel in Lake Elsinore that there would be any kind of hostility toward me. I never felt that. In fact, when I first came to Lake Elsinore it was an elementary district. I remember the first board meeting when the president of the board actually conducted prayer before the board meeting started. I thought, "I

didn't know you could do that in a public environment!" But then we became a unified district and that stopped.

Craig's Personal Politics

Craig explained that he is a registered Republican who sees himself as a fiscal and economic conservative, but moderate on many social issues. He is solidly *pro-life* but does not support how the issue is often used as a litmus test. He does not select candidates as a single-issue voter. The partisan extremes on both the right and the left, including media personalities, such as Rush Limbaugh and Bill Maher, and the animosity they fuel, irritate him.

It was his view that the concept of separation of church and state has strayed far from the intent of the Founding Fathers and resulted in an unnecessary and even harmful compartmentalization of religion and school life.

I'm not necessarily a proponent of school prayer, per se—in other words, the idea of me as principal conducting prayer. I would be more than happy to do that. In fact, I've done that. I've actually conducted prayer as grace before a meal with my staff. I've done that, and probably would have gotten in trouble for doing so. As far as conducting prayer with children, I see a benefit of doing that. You can do it in kind of an ecumenical way. That's not a real big issue for me, but I feel that even back in Lake Elsinore, but for public schools in general, there's just such an aversion to anything related to the Bible.

Craig articulated his belief that the sensitivity to Christianity in public schools is a trigger to a great deal of the conflict between evangelicals and education. He explained the difference he sees in how Christianity and Islam are treated in schools:

I'm going to sound real right wing when I say this, but you dare not say anything against Muslims in this country, so that's open territory. But you can't talk Christian. We've just gone to an extreme. We're not comfortable with being bigots against Muslims, but we have no problem being bigots against Christians. What's that all about? I have a real problem with that. It's kind of a sore topic with me.

Craig's Community and School District

The culture in Lake Elsinore was very different from Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara being a very liberal town. It's funny, I didn't know when I was at Westmont back in the seventies—I guess I was kind of oblivious, or it's just become more liberal over time. But there's a very, very distinct difference.

Craig pointed out that Orange County was traditionally a bastion of *White republican* attitudes, as was the San Diego area, whereas Santa Barbara County was quite liberal. Lake Elsinore, in the shadows of Orange County and San Diego, reflected the political and social cultures of those two regions.

To illustrate the difference between Lake Elsinore and Santa Barbara, he described a prominent display of “In God We Trust” at a car dealership along the main roadway in Lake Elsinore. He contended, *You would never see that in Santa Barbara.* When he was at Westmont College, the community started a summer solstice celebration. When he moved back to the community, he went online to see what activities were a part of that celebration. He found an event that was specifically for atheists and agnostics. He viewed that as another indication of the negativity towards Christian faith.

In characterizing the local media in Santa Barbara, he observed, *There's a whole liberal slant that in my whole career I just wasn't exposed to.* He referred to a phenomenon he said many local conservatives call the *Hollywood Syndrome*, a belief that when wealthy stars began moving to Montecito—the most posh section of the Santa Barbara area—they brought a liberal political ethos to the community. Craig contended that the liberal hue of the Santa Barbara community was most clearly evident in the context of political activity around gay rights. In the past, he observed, Santa Barbara was the only county in Southern California to vote in support of gay marriage.

Craig described an incident during his first year at Sunnyside School that he believed illustrated the sensitivity of his new community regarding gay issues. Students from the middle school music department were on his campus one morning practicing for an assembly they were to present to the elementary students that day. The middle schoolers were in front of the building performing dance scenes from the musical *Grease* as parents dropped off their children. Craig remembered getting an email the next day from the mother of a kindergartener. She assumed the performers were older Sunnyside Elementary students. The parent noted that the dance scene being practiced involved couples, but all the couples were boy-girl. She chastised Craig for not having same-sex couples included. He remembered thinking, *Wow, this is really a different culture.*

Craig recounted many interactions with gay families in his leadership at the school. He recalled meeting with a lesbian couple that had two boys in his school during his first year at Sunnyside. The parents shared a concern regarding Father's Day from the prior year. One of their sons struggled with an assignment to create a Father's Day card. The teacher suggested he make a card for an uncle. The boy was quite upset by

this and so were the parents. They asked Craig to eliminate all future recognition of Father's Day at the school in order to avoid making children of lesbian parents feel marginalized. He refused to do that, but committed to make sure their son was not put in an uncomfortable situation again. He saw the request as reflective of an *agenda* and instead, he described his actions as following his foundational priority of doing what he believed was best for that child and the other children in the school.

Though differences between the Lake Elsinore and San Juan Capistrano communities and the Santa Barbara area were significant, and Craig noted evidence of wariness about Christianity in the school, he did not harbor deep concern. *It's not like there's embattlement going on, there's not that per se.*

His memory was that the relationship between evangelical Christians and the schools was positive for the most part. *Wherever you go there are people who believe Satan lives in the public schools. That kind of paranoia exists anywhere,* Craig observed, but his observation was that the Christian community supported public schooling, especially at the church Craig and his wife attended at the time. In fact, their pastor's wife was a public school teacher.

Overall, Craig characterized the relations between the public schools and Christians in the community as positive: *I don't think there's a difference here where a Christian can't be comfortable in a public school.* An exception he recalled was the degree to which traditional Christmas music had disappeared from schools. *There was certainly a paranoia about doing anything that was too Christian, but again you could have anything other than that,* as schools promoted what he characterized as a

multicultural recognition of various holidays and an avoidance of specifically Christian elements.

Craig's new district was run in a manner quite different from what he had experienced in his previous districts, so he had to learn a whole new system. For example, he came to the district assuming the superintendent would be in charge and the school board would play an important, but limited role. That was the leadership model he had experienced in the other districts. Looking back, he was not sure whether his new superintendent wielded power or operated on behalf of powerful board members. Regardless, the dynamics were new to him.

Craig believed he got off to a strong start in his new district:

The superintendent told me the teachers were real strong at Sunnyside School, but the retiring principal was lacking in providing school discipline. The school needed a firmer hand. And I did that so she saw that right away. The teachers were happy because I was doing what they were hoping I would do. They were happy, she was happy, it was a very positive thing.

The Main Characters in the Skirmish

The superintendent.

The Superintendent hired Craig to replace a retiring principal. *She chose me, and my experience with superintendents is that when they come to a school district and there's people already working there, there's less loyalty to that employee than to somebody that they hire themselves.* He recounted that she viewed him quite favorably in his first year. She had strong opinions, was not averse to using strong language at times, and seemed to Craig to be *a strong leader.*

They also saw eye to eye on their approach to schooling, according to Craig: *She and I had similar educational philosophical beliefs, so we were on the same page there.* He observed that she was an articulate speaker, had a good sense of humor, and *could really banter with the guys; be one of the guys, banter with them and tease like guys tend to do sometimes. She was good at that, so it wasn't just that she was good with women.* During the time he was there, Craig noted that the gender make-up of the central office administrative team, which had all been men when the superintendent was hired, changed. This he saw as *a bit of an agenda to balance things out*, and he recalled a comment she made in public about the “*boys club*” going away, which he believed underscored this feature of her leadership.

Craig's knowledge of the superintendent's personal views on religion was limited. He was not sure, but he believed she had been raised by a Catholic mother and a Protestant father and was not at that time involved in any faith community. He saw no indication that she was anti-religious or anti-Christian in any way.

The school board.

Craig recounts that school board members rarely contacted school principals directly. The only member he remembered visiting his school was a Christian and fellow Westmont College alumnus whose father used to work at Westmont. He believed the connection likely prompted her visit.

It was right after Christmastime that first year because I made a comment which, in a sense came back to haunt me...because I said I'd like to see more traditional Christmas songs during the Christmas presentation, thinking she would like what

I had to say. She never commented, but then later on that came back to kind of bite me.

The board member who initiated the complaint that triggered the culture war skirmish at the center of this narrative was a professor of computer science at the local city college. Craig explained that his interactions with him were few, limited to a couple of committee meetings and public board meetings where he was also present. Craig described him as *more vocal than the rest. He wanted to state his opinion, and he wanted everybody else to know his opinion.* Craig's overall impression of him prior to the incident was: *He was a very articulate guy, fairly full of himself. I don't know if he was anti-religious. In fact I tried to find that out. I tried to investigate that. I got nowhere.*

Other administrators.

Craig recalled that there were two other administrators in the district he knew were Christians. One was the head of maintenance and the other was the assistant superintendent for human resources. He had few interactions with either. The head of maintenance was forced out of his position during the time of the skirmish, though Craig did not know all that went into that situation. The human resources director was at the elbow of the superintendent throughout the conflict with Craig, and based on his interactions with her, he did not hold her in high regard.

Someone must have told me the assistant superintendent in charge of personnel was a Christian. In my opinion, she was probably the least competent district administrator I've ever experienced. People said things about her, and how she was deficient as a principal. And I'd seen how she'd been in personnel situations. Highly emotional. Her dealings, I felt, were not handled competently.

Lou Dean and The Together Project.

Lou Dean runs The Together Project in Santa Barbara, an organization that helps feed and clothe the poor. It's not faith-based, but Lou happens to be a Christian. I first met Lou when I came to Santa Barbara and got invited to CBMC-- Christian Businessmen's Committee or Club--whatever it's called. They meet for breakfast once a week and I got invited to that in the summertime when I could go. He was in charge and I met him there.

The Together Project has a telethon every year. Lou handles that event with such grace and such expertise. The singer Kenny Loggins has been a Santa Barbara resident for years. He was one of the founders of The Together Project and he sings as part of the telethon every year.

Lou is a very tall man, very articulate, beautiful sounding resonant voice and just has God-given gifts, has a good presence about him, just a very gifted man.

The Superintendent of Santa Barbara City Schools.

All students in the region fed into the Santa Barbara City Schools for high school. Craig judged that the superintendent of his district did not have a positive relationship with SBCS Superintendent, who also participated in the video promotion for the prayer breakfast that triggered the skirmish detailed in this narrative.

My superintendent and the Santa Barbara City Schools superintendent didn't get along. She would kind of bad-mouth him a little bit. When a superintendent bad-mouths another superintendent, to me that just reflects their insecurity. I mean, there's just no need to do that. It's kind of unprofessional in my view. She would bad-mouth him occasionally and try to make herself look better.

Prelude Incidents Leading to the Skirmish

As he reflected on the skirmish, Craig believed there were three incidents with his superintendent that provided critical background for the prayer breakfast conflict. These incidents form a prelude to the central conflict and were recounted by Craig in detail.

Request regarding charter school board membership.

In January of my first year, I was asked to be a board member for a charter school back in Lake Elsinore. I felt that I should ask permission. I went to my superintendent and said, "I've been asked to be on the board of a charter school down in Lake Elsinore and I just want to make sure that you'd be okay with that." Her reaction was, "I'm not your mother. You can do that. You don't need to ask me for permission." I felt kind of like an idiot for asking.

The Easter egg hunt.

Then, around Easter time I got a request from the church across the street. They wanted permission to use the school field on the Saturday of Easter weekend to do an Easter egg hunt and also asked if I would put out flyers for the kids to take home. Not really wanting to call the district office, I thought, "Okay, what's been done in the past?" I asked about past precedence and protocols--what do you guys do here? Tell me about it and I'm not going to change it. The office staff said, "We've had it for years. The church uses the playground." The flyer was about a fourth of a piece of regular paper and it had an Easter bunny on it. It was colored and on the back it had in small print, "Sponsored by Christ Community Church." I saw that and in my mind an Easter egg hunt is not a religious activity. I thought, "They've done it in past years." We had policies,

but in my mind I said, "This is not saying come to Easter Sunday. This is an Easter egg hunt for kids." I think, "Cool! Have the kids come to an Easter egg hunt! Why not? It's not a big deal." The request form went through me and then I sent it on to the district office. They approved the event. That Friday, Good Friday, the flyers went in the Friday folder, when things go in backpacks for home. On Monday morning the superintendent called me. She said she got two calls and I said, "Yeah, I sent the flyers." She said, "Craig, that was a mistake." She was real nice about it; she wasn't real angry. I explained to her my thinking and she said, "I see your point, but it's still sponsored by the church that's on the flyer." She was correcting me, but not in a negative way. It was a very positive thing. And I apologized: "I see your point. I messed up." I said, "OK, I'll tell you what. Let me call these two parents and I'll take care of it." She said, "Okay, great." I called one parent and apologized. The second parent was actually on campus. So I went and talked to her in person, but she was real reticent. I guess she didn't accept my apology, but, there was still a positive exchange.

The Good News Club.

The Santa Barbara Independent is a very small publication that tends to be on the more liberal side. There was an article about the Good News Clubs in local schools. I knew we had a Good News Club on the school site because there was one Christian teacher and he let his classroom be used after school once a week. I'd seen kids out there, but I'd only seen at the most four kids. I never saw a big group. The superintendent called me and asked, "Did you see the article?" I said, "Yeah, I heard about it. I saw the article." She asked, "How many kids do

you have?" I said, "Gosh, I don't really know how many we have in the club, but I'll find out." She wasn't angry, she was just trying to investigate what was going on. She said, "You know, we need to make sure that people realize that they have a right to be there. Just go investigate and get back to me." It turns out there's only two kids in the club, and they were brother and sister. I called her back and let her know. I said that's all we've got. That was it. Not another word from anybody. It was benign. There was really nothing to it.

The Skirmish Setting

The skirmish was triggered by reaction to a promotional online video that was intended to garner business sponsors for a community prayer breakfast to honor teachers. Craig was asked by his friend Lou Dean to be one of the three educators featured in the video.

Lou called me and said, "Craig, this year for the annual prayer breakfast, we'd like to focus on teachers. We want to pray for teachers, give them a gift certificate, serve them breakfast, and that sort of thing." Until I got the call, I didn't even know there was a prayer breakfast or that it's an annual thing. The breakfast is held downtown, so it's not exactly close. It's more of a Santa Barbara event, near the pier. Lou also said, "I want to do an advertisement." He didn't specify it would be TV, Internet, or what it would be, but he was trying to garner support from the local businesses to buy tables at the breakfast for teachers. Each business would have a table that they bought to seat six teachers. So the advertisement would be to get support from local businesses to buy a table.

He said, "I have the superintendent from Santa Barbara City Schools, and I'm going to get a teacher from the high school. I'd like you as a principal to speak in the advertisement." I said, "Sure, that would be great." I don't remember if he said anything about my district or whether he contacted the superintendent. But the point was he wanted a superintendent, a principal, and a teacher, in that order, and I said, "Sure." He said, "Prepare a 30-second speech." I said, "Okay." He told me we'd meet on a specific date at the Santa Barbara City Schools office and videotape it there and we did.

In the video, Craig's name and the title, "Principal, Sunnyside School," appear on the screen. The transcript of his portion of the video was as follows:

Hi, I'm Craig Smith, principal of Sunnyside School. Being a teacher is tough, but noble. In these current times, with all the policy and financial calamity, sometimes teachers question if they made the right choice of profession. But to be part of the process that takes a curious child and turns him or her into a thinking adult is nothing less than inspiring. For educators to be acknowledged and prayed for is both an encouragement and a great honor. Your support of the community prayer breakfast is greatly appreciated.

Later at an administrative meeting the superintendent said, "You may have heard that there's going to be a prayer breakfast focusing on teachers this year." She said, "Our district is not going to support it." The concern was that if teachers are down there and there happens to be an accident on the freeway, they won't get back in time for classes. It was a very practical concern and had nothing to do with religion. The timing wasn't going to work and I understood. I thought, "That's too bad. Maybe I can still go because I'm not going to be in the classroom." But I thought, "Wow, it's just a shame." So the word was, we're not

going to support it. It wasn't that we were against it, but we were not in support of it for that very practical reason. I gave Lou Dean a call. I said, "Lou, I don't know if you heard, but my district is not going to be involved." I told him the reason why and I said, "You know, she's got a point." He was disappointed, but he said, "We're still going to put on the event and it's still going to be about teachers and we'll get a lot of people from Santa Barbara." And that was the end of it.

The Skirmish Trigger

Monday morning superintendent's phone call.

Monday, the exact day of my 60th birthday, I got to school and the superintendent had left a voicemail. I could tell by the tone of her voice she was not happy.

"Craig give me a call." I called and she said, "Did you make an advertisement for the prayer breakfast?" I said, "Yeah." I don't recall what she said after that, but she was in a chastising mode at that point. She said, "Be in my office at 4 o'clock in the afternoon."

That day I got a phone call from my previous boss back in Lake Elsinore, the one who retired, who had been a mentor to me. He called just to wish me a happy birthday. I said, "Hey, Gib, thanks for calling. While you're on the phone can I get your advice on this?" He's not a Christian man at all. He said, "Craig, what's happened is, superintendents don't like to be surprised. A board member has found out about this, called her, and because she didn't know what you did she's being blindsided. What I would do is write a letter of apology. Make it to the board saying the superintendent had no knowledge and you are taking full

responsibility.” He asked, “Does the superintendent like you?” I said, “Yeah, we get along great, fantastic. It's been almost two years and it's great.” He said, “It'll blow over.” I wrote the letter.

Monday afternoon meeting with the superintendent.

I got to her office at 4 o'clock that afternoon and she was there and had the assistant superintendent for personnel, the Christian lady, as a witness for her. She was probably taking notes. She wouldn't identify which board member called her, but on Sunday a board member had seen the advertisement on the Internet and was unhappy. I was in apology mode. I gave her the letter and I said, “I'm really sorry, I guess I messed up. I did not mean to have you embarrassed by the board.” She said, “We told you we weren't supporting it. I told all of you that we were not supporting the prayer breakfast. What about that did you not get?” I said, “I know you weren't supporting it, but I didn't think you were really against it.” Again, I explained that my part wasn't involved with teachers, that the advertisement was for the local businesses. I said, “Again, I apologize I didn't notify you.” She was not happy. She was very angry. Still, I made the apology. I said, “Please forgive me. It was nothing intentional.” She said, “Well, the genie is out of the bottle and I'm not sure I can get it back in. We are going to meet on Wednesday and we're going to discuss your fate. The board may not want you back and I'm not sure I do either.” She said, “You and I will meet on Thursday.”

Thursday afternoon meeting with the superintendent.

Thursday came and we met at 4 o'clock. She said, "Had you said, 'I'm Craig Smith, a principal,' I would have had no problem with it." But when I said, "I'm Craig Smith, principal of Sunnyside School," then I became a representative of the school district and I was told that we were not supporting this event. The hinge, from their point of view, was identifying Sunnyside School, and in her mind I became a representative of the school district. I said all of us--superintendent of Santa Barbara Schools; the teacher at a local high school—we all identified where we worked. I didn't say anything about my school district. I didn't say the district supported the event. I didn't state that. She said, "You know, between the Easter egg hunt and the Good News Club and now this..." Then she said, "Well, we've decided that because it's past March 15, you will retain your position for another year. But after that you will no longer be a principal in this district." It was not a discussion. I was being dismissed. I asked, "Is there any way I could change the board's mind?" She said, "I guess you can never say never, but I wouldn't bet on it." Later, when I met with her about a letter of recommendation from her at the end of June, I asked, "Does the board still feel the same way?" And she goes, "Yep." In other words, "You're gone."

After the Decision

Before I left the meeting, I asked, "Is there anything I can do?" She said, "Well, you can get the damn thing off the Internet!" I said, "Okay, I'll work on that." I left her office, got on the phone, and said, "Lou, I've got a problem. The superintendent is popping a cork over this thing. Can you get that thing off the

Internet?" He said, "Okay, I'll work on it." He called the superintendent in Santa Barbara, and told him what was going on. I don't know why he called him, but he did. The superintendent, according to Lou, thought the situation was ridiculous. He asked, "Why is she reacting like that?" Lou called me back less than a half-hour later and said, "I got it off the Internet." And he said, "I just can't believe she reacted like that." I said, "Yeah, but it's off the Internet." I called her office and said, "It's off the Internet." I think she even thanked me for that. The fact that I got it off the Internet wasn't enough.

Though he was facing the prospect of losing his job after the following year, Craig explained that nothing was divulged to the rest of the district employees.

In front of all the other principals, you couldn't tell a difference. No one knew. I went along with it too. In fact, there was some discussion between me and the superintendent that this would not be talked about. I think she was trying to make sure I kept it quiet by taking the position that they would be doing me a favor by keeping it quiet. I kind of picked up on that. I was friendly and I didn't say anything to anybody. I finished off that school year and I kept it quiet. I held it inside. I might have told a couple friends of mine, but not in Santa Barbara. I tried to keep things out of Santa Barbara because it wouldn't serve any good purpose. It might come back to haunt me if I did that.

Meanwhile, Craig took steps to find another job.

There was a job opening for a director position at Montecito. I had done my student teaching there, so I was familiar with the school. It was a great little school, so I applied for the job. I told the superintendent I was going to apply for

the job. She said, "Okay." I asked, "Will you write me a letter of recommendation?" So she wrote me this letter. It was pretty vanilla. It wasn't like, "I really recommend this guy," or, "He's going to do a great job for you." It was less than stellar. I didn't feel good about it. I took her letter and spruced it up. I went to her and I said, "Here's the letter." But I asked, "Can you be a little more enthusiastic?" She said, "That's about as enthusiastic as I am going to get." I got an interview for the job, but I didn't get the job.

Craig recalled finally getting his written performance evaluation for the prior year as the new school year was beginning, which included language that accused him of poor judgment regarding church-state issues.

Craig's Last Year as Principal

When the new school year began, Craig remembered how the message was sent early on that it was not going to be a year of pleasant interactions between him and the superintendent.

There were two days of in-service: a district in-service day on Thursday and then site in-service on that Friday before school started on Monday. Teachers like to work in their classrooms. They spent all Thursday at the district in-service, so I planned just a couple morning activities for Friday. On Thursday I talked with another one of the male principals about what we were planning to do on Friday, and then we got another female principal and talked with her. I don't know how, but somehow it got back to the superintendent and she had the impression I wasn't going to do very much on Friday. She came storming in that morning: "Where's your agenda?"

I said, "It's right there."

"What're you going to do?"

"I'm going to do this and this."

"Okay, well I heard you were going to do..."

I said, "No, I'm doing something this morning. They're going to have classroom time in the afternoon. You said that would be okay."

I kind of exaggerated. I didn't have a lot planned, but it was going to be at least two hours. It may not have taken the entire morning. I was going to go over some changes to the parent-student guide, the typical kind of stuff. So she stormed out.

Craig remembered that once knowledge of the lawsuit became public, the situation changed.

The lawsuit came out late that fall. When that happened, a teacher came to me and said, "Craig, the teachers are really talking about this press release. I think you need to talk to them because it's like there's an elephant in the room and they need to hear from you." I wasn't planning to do that, but I thought, "You know, she's right. I need to do that." So I held an emergency meeting at the end of the day. I remember walking from my office to the teacher's lounge. I entered the teacher's lounge and everybody was there. I said, "Well, we'll be short, but there is an elephant in the room and I feel like I need to address that. I'm trying to save my job, but let's keep business as usual. Nothing is going to change. I'm going to be here for the whole year and so don't worry about it." I tried to just calm the waters a little bit and make them feel more comfortable, because there was some

angst about what was going to happen and how it was going to affect everyone.

I also talked to the PTA, but I don't remember that conversation.

The oddness of the year was punctuated by regular meetings with the superintendent, which Craig remembered in detail:

My evaluation required that the superintendent meet with me every three weeks.

Part of the agreement was that I would not speak in public and would not do all these sorts of things, but we were going to meet once every three weeks to check up. At first I had my own witness come to these meetings to take notes, but the meetings were so benign I thought, "Why are we even doing this?" I was expecting: "Have you spoken in public about anything related to Christianity?" Never any questions about that. It was always: "What's going on in your school for the past three weeks?" "What's going to happen the next three weeks?" Just talking about events, that's all it was. It was all done in a very jovial fashion. She would cut up like nothing had happened. It was just a perfunctory act, basically. Nothing about Christianity was even brought up or about my actions. Not even mentioned. So after a while I stopped having a witness. It was just so worthless. But I had to go every time that whole school year.

Craig detected another pattern during the year that he connected to the lawsuit. *Because the district knew they were in trouble with the lawsuit, Craig believed they used two situations to bolster their case to support dismissing him. One involved services to a special education student and the other involved a personnel matter.*

The IEP settlement.

The year before, we had an IEP meeting with the parent of a second grader. At the IEP, the parent said, "My son has had difficulties in school." He hadn't learned to read yet, but second graders don't always learn to read by second grade. But he had some other difficulties. She said, "I want to take my son out of school and enroll him in this program." We saw this was not the best thing for the child. There was a great team effort and we talked her into just taking him out for the mornings. And she said, "I'm paying for the program. I am going to take him out and then bring him back at lunchtime" so he'd have the afternoon at school. I signed the IEP. Then in late fall the parent came with an advocate. The advocate said the district needed to pay for the services that they received. I called the lady in charge of special education and said, "Here's what's going on." She asked, "Did you sign that IEP back a year ago?" I said I did, but I gave her the whole story, and she said, "I understand what you did, Craig, but that was probably the wrong thing to do." She said, "I'll try to keep this out of the superintendent's ear as much as possible, but I may not be able to." So she was kind of siding with me, but she wasn't. There was only so much she could do, so finally she had to reveal this. I found out that my predecessor had done the very same thing four times previous to that.

Nevertheless, the district settled the situation by paying \$10,000. *The district now had that against me. So, "Craig Smith cost us \$10,000."*

The “sourpuss” lunch lady.

Back in my first year at the school things were going well except the lunchroom. The two ladies in the lunchroom were not under my jurisdiction. They were under food services and were district employees. The one serving the food seemed to be nice with kids for the most part, but the lady taking the money was just a sourpuss. I was getting complaints from the kindergarten teachers that their students were afraid to go to the lunchroom because of the lunch lady. So I call the lunch ladies in and tried to be nice. I said, “Here's what's going on. These kids are just kindergartners. You need to put on some warmth with these kids. I don't want those kids to be afraid.” After the second meeting I had to call their supervisor and say, “I need your help on this because they are just not cutting it. They are yelling across the room and the kids are afraid.” I tried to do it myself, but it wasn't working, so I got the food services director involved even though I didn't want to. Now it's two and a half years later. After having meetings with the food services and the two ladies, I hadn't gotten anywhere and I'd just kind of given up. But we had a new food services director, so I was on the phone saying, “This lady has got to go. Just got to go.” This particular day I got a call from the food services director. The door to my office was open. I took the call and I said, “She shouldn't be working with kids. She's in the wrong business. She shouldn't work at a school district.” It turns out she was walking by. She filed a complaint and the assistant superintendent for personnel, this lady who had been the witness at my meetings with the superintendent, she reamed me out but good. I ended up apologizing to the lunch lady about what I said with the door open.

Craig remembered viewing both situations as intentional efforts by district leadership to cast doubt on his competence to bolster the district's defense in the lawsuit. *So the district had those two things on me, which I shared with my lawyer.* Meanwhile, he remembered sharing skirmish details with more people after the lawsuit was filed and made public.

In our home group from our church they would ask what was happening, so I would share with them. They were in disbelief. "What? There's more to the story, there's got to be!" "No, there isn't, that's about it!" People were very supportive. I was contacted by the media, but I was advised not to talk to them. I got a ton of emails from people across the country who read about it. Some were wackos sending me things about guns and some really whack responses. But most of them said things like, "We're with you brother," "We're praying for you," "I can't believe this is happening to you," "It's a whole thing of discrimination."

As the school year wound down, Craig remembered the process of his transition out as principal.

At the end of the year they named my replacement. Sally was my resource specialist teacher and had applied to be a principal earlier and had not made it. Earlier in the year the superintendent said Sally was a summer school principal and didn't do a very good job and she never saw her as a principal. Sally told me she was going to apply for the job and she asked, "Are you okay with that?" I said, "Absolutely!" Well, she did get appointed to the job as my replacement. That made it easy to transition because she knew the school and had been there for a number of years.

The Next Year: Craig Assigned as a Teacher

Even though I was dismissed as principal, I still received a principal's salary for the following school year as a teacher due to the pending court decision because then they could say, "We didn't pay him any less." Because a principal works a longer work year than a teacher, there were two weeks before the year started for teachers in which I had to work. I was assigned to take inventory of all the textbooks throughout the school district. I had to go to all nine schools in the district and provide an accurate count of all textbooks, which required a significant amount of physical lifting.

Craig recounted his memory of returning to the role of classroom teacher.

I came back to start the school year as a teacher. Teaching is a very creative process and I've been espousing constructivism all these years, so I was looking forward to it. I was going to be a teacher. They said fourth, fifth, or sixth grade, and I said, "That's fine. Upper grades is fine." That's been my primary experience, so I'm fine with that.

Craig's very tough class.

Craig described how his positive attitude eroded over the course of the year.

They gave me a fifth grade at a school with a high Hispanic count. No problem, because I'd been involved in bilingual education back in Lake Elsinore. I only had 25 students in my class. That was not bad, but 12 of them had ADHD. It was really the class from hell, is what it was. The student who as a fourth grader the year before had been the school hellion was in my class, and I'm sure that was no

coincidence. So I had a really difficult class. I'd never seen a class that difficult, even as principal.

Craig remembered feeling that stress was beginning to get the better of him.

Between teaching and the court case, I was stressed out. I feel the stress right now just sharing this; I'm reliving that stress. I went to a Christian counselor who was a professor at Westmont besides being a counselor. I said, "I'm stressed to the max." He asked, "Can you get some medication?" So, I went and talked to my doctor about meds. I was having a little trouble sleeping, so I took them just for a short period of time. My doctor said, "You've got a crazy situation going on, that's nuts," and he's not a Christian guy. The counselor asked, "Craig, how much sick leave do you have?" I had accumulated a little over six months. He said, "Take it." It wasn't, "I think,"—He said, "Take it!"

Craig had to process his leave through the HR director, the fellow Christian who was in the middle of his dismissal process. He remembered that interaction:

I called up the director of HR and said I was going on stress leave. The interaction was just procedural. I remember nothing but silence on the phone at her end. There wasn't anything like, "I'm really sorry." I got the leave and they got someone to take my place, and that was in October.

Craig's Decision to Retire

Craig recalled the events that transpired when he came back from his stress leave, events that led to his decision to retire while the lawsuit played out in the legal system.

I was feeling better about things. I was planning to go back and I figured I'd finish out the school year, then we'd think about the next year. I was being paid a

principal's salary and the court case was still pending and was going to Superior Court. Then the HR lady says, "Hey, Craig, do you have a bilingual credential?" It's called a CLAD. At first I said, "Yeah, I've got it," because I thought I did. I thought I had it waived or something. I went back and looked. I had a certificate, but it was not a CLAD. I called her and said, "I actually don't have it." She said, "You can't go back to the classroom without it. You need to go take a class." I'm thinking, "Now I have to go take a class?" She should've thought of that before she assigned me to that school. I said, "That's it. I'm not going back and taking a class. I'm hanging it up."

The Legal Process

During his final year as a principal and the following year when he was assigned to teach, the legal system was processing his complaint. He recalled that he did not expect the twists and turns his case took. His first step was to explore his options for legal counsel offered by national organizations that provide attorneys for church-state cases, and his recollection of that process began with his Christian friend, Lou Dean.

I remember talking to Lou earlier. I said, "They are actually going to fire me on this." He said, "You've got to be kidding me! You need to call and get some legal help." He referenced the ADF [Alliance Defending Freedom], but I didn't call them at that point. At the point I didn't get the job in Montecito, I had already thought about a lawsuit. I don't know if I had made the contacts, but I was thinking, "This really is discrimination. There's no two ways about it." And I thought, "Now what do I do? I'm going to be out of a job in a year. I can't retire yet, so maybe I should pursue a lawsuit." I notified ACLJ [American Center for

Law and Justice], Rutherford Institute, and ADF. I wanted ADF because they had a local lawyer and I met with him. He said, "Yeah, you've got a pretty strong case here." ACLJ and Rutherford also wanted to take the case, so they all felt I had a good case to take. The hope was to save my job. That was the whole thing. The idea was that the district would say, "He's got grounds for this dismissal as being anti-religious, therefore we'll back off." I thought I would probably alienate some people but I knew there would be some supporters. I was positive my staff would be supportive of me and they were. The parents were, too. The school was behind me.

During this phase of the process, Craig remembered being advised to keep his story to himself.

I kept it quiet. In fact the guy in charge at ADF said, "Craig, the less you talk about it the better, because it will come back and bite you." I said, "Well, I've kept it pretty quiet for that very reason. I felt like there was nothing gained by trying to spout off about it." Almost nobody in town knew. I didn't even tell our home group from church at first. ADF planned out how they'd do the press release and it was on TV news. Now people were talking about it.

Craig recounted the way in which the cultural context guided decisions by his lawyer about how to proceed with the case.

As for strategy, my lawyer said, "I don't like Santa Barbara Court because they're quirky." That was his word—they're "quirky," they're unpredictable. He said, "What I think we should do is, because this is a First Amendment thing, I'm going to file a complaint in federal court in Los Angeles. It's a more conservative

area than Santa Barbara and it's a federal statute. So let's just go right to the top. Let's forget the lower courts." So that was the strategy.

Craig remembered the depositions, which gave him a chance to hear others answer questions about the skirmish.

We deposed three board members, the superintendent, and the assistant superintendent for HR. I was there the whole time, and so was the superintendent. The first board member we deposed was one that had left the district since this all happened. My thinking was that he would be more inclined to spill his guts, and the lawyer agreed. He was worthless. He didn't know anything, really. Then we deposed the board member we suspected was the one who had called the superintendent. He denied everything, but it turned out he was the one that called the superintendent. He saw the promo on the Internet and called the superintendent that Sunday afternoon. Then we deposed the board member that was a Christian lady. I thought she might be on my side. She was not. She was very antagonistic. I was talking to my lawyer, who is a Christian guy. I said, "I guess I didn't see that coming." He said, "Yeah, that's not going to be of any help."

Craig described the deposition of the person who was his primary antagonist in the conflict, the superintendent.

Then we deposed the superintendent. Of course, she denied everything that I remembered and wrote down about our conversations about the Easter egg hunt and the Good News Club. She said, "No, I don't have any recollection of that," and she didn't have any notes. She denied all of that stuff. I'm thinking, "Well,

maybe we depose the Assistant Superintendent for HR who served as witness at my meetings with her,” but she didn't provide notes. We subpoenaed the notes, but they didn't have anything of any substance whatsoever. The HR lady did say, when asked what she thought the reasons were that the district didn't support the prayer breakfast, “I think it was because it was a prayer breakfast.” She did say that. Of course, that reason was never communicated to the principals, but she did say that.

Craig recalled both his disappointment with the results of the depositions, and when the district moved to have the case dismissed.

We didn't get a whole lot from those depositions and the district filed for what is called a summary judgment. That means, in essence, going to a judge saying we don't think this is a valid court case for these reasons, so throw it out. It was filed and we waited to hear back on that.

Craig remembered how one of the key unexpected twists occurred at this moment in the process.

This is where my lawyer really messed up. He didn't see this coming and he should have. He called me at school one day and he said, “Craig, we lost summary judgment.” There are two court cases setting precedents where they claim the Eleventh Amendment. You cannot sue a state agency based on a federal statute. The district was saying they are a state agency. The court agreed, so the thing was dismissed.

The second court filing.

Craig recounted how he took the initiative after the dismissal of his lawsuit, and looked for another way forward.

I started doing research about this whole Eleventh Amendment thing and I found this opening in the tunnel, you might say. The lawyer should have caught this. I found out you cannot sue the state, but you can sue an individual, like a superintendent or a board member. I shared this with the lawyer and he said, "Let me do some investigating." He called ADF and they said I was right. We could pursue that. My lawyer apologized and he said, "Craig, I should have seen it coming." ADF said the case had been dismissed from federal court but we could just go to Superior Court in Santa Barbara. My lawyer said, "Okay, let's do it." The district again filed for summary judgment. My attorney's son, who also worked at the firm, wrote a pretty good refutation of the district's filing. I was very much involved in that, saying, "This is incorrect" or "How about this?"

During this time, Craig remembered exploring the details of the case, noting aspects that worked in his favor but had not, in his opinion, been exploited well.

One day Charlotte [his wife] and I were talking, and she said, "Craig, you know your advertisement? You never encouraged teachers to attend." It sounds obvious now, but it was never really emphasized. I was just getting businesses. That's all this was about. I never once encouraged teachers. Also, in her write-up for deposition purposes, the superintendent wrote that I said, "I'm Craig Smith, principal of Sunnyside School of such and such school district." I said, "That is not right. You listen to the tape. You got that wrong. I never said the name of my

school district at all.” My lawyer asked if there were any other Sunnyside schools in the area. We went online, and there actually is a Sunnyside School, a private school, in Carpenteria, just 10 miles from here and still in our county. So there's another Sunnyside School in the area. I was almost kind of embarrassed by it, but he had a point: there are other Sunnyside Schools. I was not identifying this school district.

Victory, mediation, and settlement.

In February they scheduled mediation, where you meet with a mediator and see if you can solve it outside of court. We had this mediation date, but we hadn't had a decision on summary judgment yet. We were still waiting for that, and my lawyer was not real hopeful, quite frankly. So, we get to court and the judge says we have a decision on summary judgment. My lawyer takes the document, reads it, and he comes back out and says, “Craig, you won on all counts.” There were like 25 things. He was in shock. He calls his son [the lawyer who had prepared the refutation] and he says, “We kicked butt, man! We did it! We won on all counts!” So my lawyer’s thinking, “Great!” So now we go to the mediation session. I thought I would be part of this sit down meeting. It turns out I wasn't. It was just the mediator and the two lawyers. Not me. I didn't expect that. I had to just sit out and wait. The superintendent was now retired, so there was a new superintendent and he was out there in the hallway too. My lawyer went in and then came back out in the hall later and we went outside the courthouse altogether and he said, “They are offering you your job back. You want it back?” I said, “Well, I don't know. I’m now retired. I don't know if I can even go back

[because he had begun to receive his retirement payments].” I told my lawyer, “I can't answer that right now. I've got to think about that.” So while I was making this decision I called to find out if I can come back from retirement. It turned out I could. It was complicated, but it could be done. My lawyer said, “Bring some figures in case there's a settlement. Just be prepared” and he went back in the courtroom. I gave him the figures that I'd worked out and a couple of settlement offers went back and forth. Then my lawyer came out and said, “Craig, I'm going to pull you in. You're going to talk to the mediator. You need to listen to her.” I went in and she said, “Craig, I've looked at your figures. You don't want your job back.” I said, “I don't think so.” I wasn't real emphatic about it. She said, “I've taken your figures” and she pointed out one thing in my calculations that was an error. “But everything else you wrote was fine. I've taken that figure and I've cut it in half and here's the reason why. If you go to court, you could lose. You could win and you'd get a big large settlement, but they could appeal it. And I will tell you right now, juries don't like taking money from school districts because they think they are taking money from children.” I said, “Okay, I see your point. I'll take it under advisement. I need to talk to my attorney.” So we walked outside to talk. I've been on this train now for a couple of years. I said, “Bill, what do you think?” He said, “Craig, I think you ought to take it.” I said, “Okay, tell me why.” He said, “Besides what the mediator said, you need to understand something. If we go to court and win, and I feel confident that we would win, districts have insurance. If we win, they could appeal it. It could be four, five, six years down the road and they can afford the appeal process. If we go to court,

it's going to be ten grand upfront for court costs. You need to understand that it's going to be ten grand." So I asked, "Are you telling me that deep pockets win over shallow pockets?" He said, "Yeah" and I went, "Oh..." We went back into court at the end of the day. There was my lawyer and me, and the new superintendent and their attorney. The judge said, "I've been told by the mediator that you've decided to settle and I need to know that everyone is okay with the settlement." She talked to the superintendent first and then she asked me, "Are you okay with it?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "If you're not happy with this, you have a right." I said, "I'm okay with it judge. It's fine, it's fine." Then of course I had to sign something to that effect. When we walked out of the court the opposing attorney talked with my attorney. Later he said, "I need to share something with you, Craig, that the opposing counsel told me. She said she felt that I was treated harshly by the superintendent." I said, "Well, that's nice to know," because she was there for all the depositions. She saw it all.

Craig's Reflections and Insights

Craig's interactions with the superintendent before the conflict.

When I asked the superintendent about serving on the charter school board, I don't know if she was just in a bad mood that day, but I walked out thinking, "Well that was a mistake." That was the only time prior to the calamity I thought, "Wow! That was a really negative reaction." She could've said, "Thanks for asking, but you don't need to ask." I thought it was kind of a degrading response. In the back of my mind, that leads up to what happened with the prayer breakfast. In retrospect, I shouldn't have approved the Easter egg hunt. One of the parents

who complained said she felt attacked by Christians. She was sensitive because, in her mind, nonbelievers are under attack by Christians. When she said that, I thought, "Wow, that is a different perspective." Because, if anything, we Christians think just the reverse. It's Christians that are under attack.

The prayer breakfast.

When the superintendent shared concerns about the breakfast at the administrative meeting I thought, "She's right. It's too bad, but she's right." I was kind of mad at myself for not thinking that in advance and telling Lou he needed to work out something different to make it work. I didn't have any concerns about making the promo and maybe that was naïve on my part. If anything, as far as getting a negative reaction to that, my thinking was, "Who would be against a prayer breakfast for teachers? What educator would be against that?" It was just beyond me. So there was nothing on my radar at all. And you've got a local superintendent who's making the video, too, so I'm thinking, "What's the big deal?" In Lake Elsinore, had I been involved in a prayer breakfast, I might have been considered a hero. If anything, I would not want to share it because it would have been like bragging. It'd be like I got invited to be in this advertisement, and, "Look at me! Aren't I cool!"

The Monday morning call from the superintendent.

During the day I was thinking, "Whoa! Really?" What I did for the prayer breakfast...I wasn't going to teachers saying, "Teachers you need to go to this." My thing was for the local businesses. It had nothing to do with the teachers. I was thinking, "I didn't do anything wrong," but I was second-guessing myself a

little bit. I didn't have enough information to really figure it out. But I realized, "She probably got blindsided and that's why she's mad." I messed up.

The Monday afternoon meeting.

I vocalized that I made a mistake, but in my mind I didn't think I really did anything wrong. I think the fact that she was blindsided was important. I got that. I was totally on board with her and I apologized. When the superintendent made the comment about the genie being out of the bottle, I can only speculate as to what she meant. The context of the comment was in reference to the prayer breakfast, but I'm still left with the ambiguity of her metaphor. I personally believe it was tied to her "church and state" reference in my evaluation, but of course, I have no proof. I didn't really believe she was going to take my job. I was in shock. There's no question I was in shock. I guess my angst was more that I disappointed her. I couldn't believe what was happening. I was just like, "Wow, this is really hard-core." Charlotte and I went down to the yacht harbor for my birthday dinner. I couldn't enjoy my birthday. I just kept thinking, "They're not going to fire me over this thing." Charlotte and I prayed about it. I'd like to say that I said, "Okay God, whatever you want to do is fine," and I was okay. I'd like to say that, but I just kept going over it in my mind.

Craig's competence in his work had always been an area of pride, but the interaction with the superintendent called that into question.

I took pride in my work. Up to this stage, I'd had a really successful career. I opened two new schools in Lake Elsinore. I'd had a really good career as principal and felt very successful. I had always been complemented on my job. I

remember back at Lake Elsinore when board members would visit there. One board member said, "You know, Craig, I don't get out to your school very often because we seldom get a complaint call. We just know you're doing a great job." I wanted my boss to like my work and now she was really upset with me and was threatening to take my job. I had that angst until Thursday, but I just kept thinking, "They're not going to fire me." Well, I was wrong.

The Thursday afternoon meeting.

I thought, "You have got to be kidding!" I was just stunned, absolutely stunned. I had complete disbelief. Her office had windows along the top of the wall. I remember looking out those windows and thinking, "I can't believe this is happening" and I thought, "The Good News Club? I had nothing to do with that. I mean, you can be a little upset with me maybe with the Easter egg hunt, but I had nothing to do with the Good News Club." She didn't elaborate specifically why I was fired and in retrospect I should've asked her to give me more details, but I didn't. I was just stunned, just beyond belief. I was in shock. I was thinking, "Are you actually going to fire me? I can't believe this." I was just totally distraught. I was thinking, "I'm not old enough to retire. What's going to happen?" I told Charlotte and we were just flabbergasted.

Sharing news of the lawsuit with Craig's staff.

When I went into the staff room to tell them about the lawsuit, they all stood up and applauded me, and that felt good. I knew they would be supportive of me, but I was surprised by the applause.

Craig's written evaluation and the monitoring plan.

I know for certain she didn't ever have the lawyers take a look at my written evaluation, because I know they would have written it differently. The second sentence says, "Craig has difficulty discerning the separation of church and state." When I saw that, I went, "Gotcha!" I thought, "You screwed up lady, because you just confirmed what I know to be true." In her mind it was a church and state issue, but it really wasn't. I did nothing wrong. Then I knew I had a good case. I don't know for a fact, but it was probably the board that said she needed to have meetings to check up on me. So right from the beginning of the school year I was thinking, "This is going to be one hell of a year." Oppressive is the only word I can say, the whole year long. When you know someone's looking over your shoulder, when you're looking behind you all the time, it's hard to look forward. I didn't do a good job as principal. I maintained. I kept the boat afloat. But I was not in a proactive mode. It was so completely oppressive.

Craig's summer work assignment.

I know with my summer work assignment with textbooks there was a humiliation factor that was being imposed upon me. At the same time, I'm sure they had difficulty figuring out what to do with me. I actually didn't mind going out to the different schools. It was certainly better than having to work at the district office! And I chose to be positive about it. Anyway, even at 61 years of age at the time, I was in fairly decent shape physically. However, I received no training on lifting properly, nor was I given one of those waist belts to help prevent a hernia. Charlotte and I were amazed that this decision was made, clearly not considering

that it was a prime situation for a workman's comp claim. Then again, maybe that was their plan.

Other performance issues during Craig's last year as principal.

It became clear they were trying to get me on other things so that they could say they were dismissing me not because of Christian beliefs, but for these other reasons. In the situation with the IEP, I had some experience with advocates back in Lake Elsinore. They weren't really helpful. They were really more contentious and out for their own self-interest. That was my experience. I was warned by the new director of special education to watch out for this lady. She was tough. Right away I could see she was right. This lady had an ax to grind and she saw herself as the expert on dyslexia. The district decided to go ahead and pay something like \$10,000 to the parent. They didn't fight it. I asked, "Why are you going along with this advocate?" They said they'd save money in the long run. They were afraid of the advocate, deathly afraid. The case was being made against me and I'm thinking, "This is ridiculous." Of course I had a defense for it. With the lunch lady, should I have gone and closed my door? Yeah, I should have. I didn't. It was a goof on my part, but I still stand by the fact she shouldn't work with kids. That's just the bottom line. But, you know something? She finally did improve after all that. She was never great, but I told the superintendent, "Well, she is better. I can say that." So, if that makes it better, so be it. She's never going to be Miss Charming, but she was more positive with kids.

Craig's replacement as principal.

I thought Sally would never get the job as principal at Sunnyside, but when she did I was actually happy. I thought, "I know what they're thinking: in case I win my suit and get my job back, they can put her back in the classroom. There would be less disruption, because if they hire someone from the outside to be the principal, then they would have a problem."

Craig's teaching assignment.

Since no one was going to hire me [as an administrator], I thought, "If I can hang in there until retirement and they're paying me a principal's salary...and with the lawsuit, maybe I'll get my job back, too." So I took the teaching position. I didn't challenge the principal at the school where I was assigned to teach, but I couldn't help but think at meetings, "I'd have done that a little differently." I had a really tough class, but I realized the principal had a permissive culture at the school and so the problem was not just my class. It was the whole school. That particular year she had this new discipline plan, and I thought to myself, "Been there, done that. This is not going to work

Receiving the news he lost the summary judgment.

I got the bad news from my lawyer that the district was granted summary judgment. I'd been teaching a month. I just went, "Ah! You've got to be kidding me!" I felt so defeated at that point. It took the last wind out of my sails.

The board member who complained.

I was thinking that if the superintendent was being intimidated, it was probably by him. He was the one that was just so arrogant. His arrogance was just over the top. It was amazing.

The board member who was a Christian.

My mistake was thinking because she was a Christian that she might side with me. During the deposition I was just so shocked by her, shocked more than by anybody else. She was antagonistic toward me. But the anger from her told me she'd been lied to by the superintendent because there was no reason for her to be so antagonistic toward me. I thought, "She's probably looking at me like, 'How dare you, as a Christian, act like this?'" That was my take on it, and I'm pretty sure that's right. She was being lied to by the superintendent, but I don't know what was said. I've thought, "If I ever run into her again, what would I do?" I've thought about that.

The Christian assistant superintendent.

I remember when we took a break during depositions. I was sitting and just feeling defeated, and thinking, "Gosh, what a convenient lack of memory" on her part. I know they have a lot of meetings with a lot of people, but this was something out of the usual. You would think they'd remember. And I remember she was sitting there across from me. Everybody else left. And I just sat there. I didn't talk to her, but she was looking out the window and I was thinking, "What is she thinking right now? I bet she's got some really torn feelings about what happened." I don't know if she did or not, but she was very pensive and not

happy in her thoughts. I think she was very torn between her Christian beliefs and what was really going on there. But she did say she thought the opposition to the breakfast was really because of religion, and I thought to myself, "She's going to get her hand slapped by the superintendent when she gets back!"

The superintendent.

She retired early. I have no doubt that the board probably said, "You screwed up this thing with Smith." I have no doubt. She wrote that thing about church and state in my evaluation. My lawyer said if she hadn't done that I probably wouldn't have had a case. I'm sure they raked her over the coals for that, because that was clearly a mistake on her part. I don't think I had an opportunity to really decipher who was in charge: the superintendent or the board. I never had a real sense of that. I would love to run into her and have a conversation and say, "Okay, you've retired now, I'm retired, it's all over. I forgive you. Now, okay, it's past. What happened? I'm just curious."

Craig's decision to retire.

They should have checked with me before they assigned me to that school, a high Hispanic count school. They could have easily assigned me to a different school that didn't have that. So the HR lady messed up on her end, and I didn't think of it until she brought it up. Sometimes I think I should have gone back and taken the class and finished the school year out. But I didn't. I just thought, "No, I'm done. I'm just done."

Mediation and the settlement.

When my lawyer said we won on all points in the summary judgment, at that point I'm going, "Cool!" Then came the decision about getting my job back. "Man! Let me think about this. That's not what I was expecting." I wanted my job back. That was the goal, but so much had happened, and in my mind I still wanted to go to court. I wanted to go through with this thing. I want it publicized. I didn't pay for any attorney, and ADF wanted to be able to publicize the result: "Hey, religious discrimination! We won this court case!" I told them right from the get-go, "I'll follow through to the end," and they were happy to hear that. For me to bail out and take money would kind of be failing ADF. But when we lost the first summary judgment, they really backed off. They weren't as supportive of the second case, so I wasn't real happy with them at that point. But, still, I made a commitment to go to the very end. I really thought through it. I hadn't been working for close to a year and a half. I was thinking, "It's not going to be a good situation. It's not that they want me back. They're having to take me back because I won." And then I thought, "Sally is now in charge of the school. Do I want to go back there, or maybe they'll put me in some other school. That's a possibility." If I'm going to go back, I want to go back to a school where I want to go. I picked up on what my lawyer meant when he talked to me about the settlement. What he was saying was, "They are bigger than we are." As I took the next hour deciding, I thought, "My lawyer is going to say he can't go forward with this. I'm going to be on my own." He never implied that, but I just kind of thought, "This whole thing with shallow pockets, he's going to say his firm can't

do that.” And I kept thinking that my lawyer screwed up once before and I’m the one that found the avenue to pursue it further. I’m weighing all these factors. One of the factors was the toll on my ability to handle stress. I had always handled job stress with relative ease. Since my last year as principal, the first two months back in the classroom, and all that followed with the lawsuit, I’ve observed within myself a lesser ability to handle ordinary stress. I feel blessed that this didn’t happen to me earlier in my career. I could have come back as a principal, but I thought, “No, I’m not doing this,” but there was still this ambivalence within me. I said, “You know, I’m kind of tired. I’m kind of burned out on thinking about this stuff.” Even though I was not working, it was still on my mind. I was thinking, “Let’s just go forward.”

The aftermath of the skirmish.

The next couple of weeks after the settlement, every day I felt better about the decision. My cousin, who is a therapist, said, “Craig, I want you to make lunch dates with all of your buddies and tell them the story. Now you can reveal the whole story and tell them about it. You need to get it out of your system.” So I did. I met with three different friends and told them the story and it was kind of a cathartic experience.

Craig reflected on several key points from the conflict that continued to churn in his mind.

To this day I have not figured out how much of it was that the superintendent was being anti-religious and how much was that she got blindsided. Or was her job in jeopardy and the board member was putting on pressure, like, “If you let this

happen again, you're out"? I kind of think that's what happened, that the board member was putting pressure on her, because he's a very vocal and a very big man. He commands authority. So I thought, "He really intimidated her so she threw me under the bus to save her own job."

In the actions of the court in the summary judgment, Craig saw his legal victory. *The judge who decided on summary judgment, she got it. The redeeming aspect of the whole thing was getting that document. I felt really good about that. Hallelujah for that judge! She understood my intent and got the whole thing. That to me was my victory. I felt like framing it. And it was a victory. It was not a court victory, per se, but it was still a victory, and it had nothing to do with the money. It was the fact that I've got the statement from the judge who saw it for what it was. The truth. And the judge saw--and the district realized—Craig won. So they had to succumb, had to pay me off because they did not give me my job back because I didn't want it back.*

Craig placed the experience in the context of his faith journey:

I can't say the experience strengthened or weakened my faith in Christ. My faith's not going to change. It hasn't made my faith waiver because Christ never said we weren't going to suffer. I've had a pretty good life overall. I wouldn't have chosen to end my career the way it did, obviously, but it is what it is. You just go on from there. I feel that God has blessed my life. There are situations that you have--I had a divorce and I didn't expect that to happen. And I look back at the thing with my daughter. I remember when she shared with me, when I found out she was gay. That was the worst day of my life, at that stage of my life.

I was, "God, please, no, not that!" I was traumatized by her being gay. But I learned from that and thought, "Now wait a minute, let me take a second look at that."

Life is a journey. I think some people view Christianity in a superstitious way: "If I do this, then God will be good to me." God is not Santa Claus. I do believe we're meant to suffer at times and that's fine. Just because I'm a Christian, I'm not going to have an easy ride, no guarantees. I never have subscribed to that thinking. The whole time I had faith there was a reason for all of this. I didn't know the outcome. I'm not arrogant like that board member is, but if it was God trying to humble me, I've been humbled. I wasn't necessarily trying to get an answer, because we don't have the answers to a lot of things that happen in life and I don't expect to have an answer. I was hopeful and prayerful that it would be a positive outcome in the sense that Christianity would be viewed in a positive light, that there would be some victory for the sake of saying that you could support a prayer breakfast and not lose your job over it. There's got to be other people out there that are going to look at this. I wanted this to be a precedent setting case. Though it didn't go to court, my lawyer said that this summary judgment itself will be a valid document used in other situations. Of course, every case is different, but there's value to that particular document, not just for me, but for other people.

Chapter VI: Terry's Story

Introduction

Terry has been a school superintendent for many years. He has an affable and approachable style that makes conversation easy. His broad smile and a quick wit are also engaging qualities. The first interview was conducted during the first week of school in the urban office where he was serving as an interim superintendent. It was the end of a long day filled with the many details and unexpected problems that come with the opening of the school year in a large district. The second interview was held in a public eatery on a Sunday afternoon.

Terry's Career

Becoming a teacher.

Terry's father was a middle school counselor. *He didn't talk a lot about school, but enough to know that school was not a bed of roses. I didn't want to do any of that, none of that kind of stuff.* But, Terry observed, *What do they say? "Life happens as you are making other plans."* He had two degrees in cartography, a wife, and two children when his father took him sailing. *He said, "Son, it's time to get a job."* By taking two courses and doing his student teaching, Terry became a teacher.

I turned my cartography/geography degrees into a social studies teaching credential and I was hired by a fellow Norwegian on the dock because I could coach swimming. No rigorous interviewing, no high qualifications.

Even with a master's degree in hand, Terry, like all teachers at the time, was required to go back for a fifth year of coursework. Not sure what to focus on, he figured, *I might as well take the administration courses. I'd never need them, but I might as well take them.* Since he'd already earned a master's degree, he thought, *Why not finish a PhD? And since I was doing*

administration, why not a PhD in administration? So he got his administrative credential and his PhD.

His experience as a leader began with his involvement in the teachers union during his first teaching assignment in Bayview.

I was young and radical. Our teacher's union endorsed Nixon for president. I actually supported Nixon for president, but I was incensed that they had used my dues money to make an endorsement. I made all kinds of radical noises and they elected me president.

In that role, he led the union on a one-day strike to make a point concerning an issue bubbling at the time, giving him some added exposure. *I guess I had a little bit of quote-unquote leadership. One could question that, but a little bit of leadership experience went to my head, and I suppose it was not atypical of that time.* His leadership was also developing at the building level.

I had an administrator that was kind of laissez-faire, laid-back. He was the one who hired me on the dock because I was Norwegian and could coach swimming. That was kind of the way he ran most of the rest of the things. I proposed all of these ideas for how to run faculty meetings and he deferred and let me run them. I was probably very young and obnoxious.

To Alaska.

Soon he was looking for an opportunity to move into an administrative position. The prospects in the region were bleak, so he looked in other places where he could get hired, and with just four years of teaching experience, he was selected as a principal in Alaska. His superintendent quickly pushed him along the leadership pathway. *He said, "Have you ever thought about being a superintendent?" I said, "No." I didn't even think I wanted to be a*

teacher or a principal. Then the superintendent listed the reasons he wanted Terry to go in that direction.

He said, “A. You should think about being a superintendent, B. I would be glad to teach all of the courses that you need, C. I would be glad to pay for you to get your internship, and D. You are not going to have a job here next year.” So I did.

The timing was fortuitous.

Alaska created 21 new superintendencies that year. I wasn't first hired, and I don't know if I was last, but I was probably pretty close to last. Somebody was desperate and needed a superintendent. I was available and they hired me.

Of the forty years that have passed since he was first hired as a superintendent, he served 24 of them in that role in several different districts.

Back home.

His first superintendency was a difficult situation and he was glad to have an opportunity to return to his home state. He was hired as an assistant superintendent in Centerton. After three years, he was named superintendent and served in that capacity for a decade. His approach to collaborative negotiations with unions and bridge-building garnered national attention. But there was controversy, too.

There was this perfect storm of a variety of things: We became minority-majority; we had to do a desegregation plan; we had to do HIV training; we had to do sex-ed training; and then we were pushing outcome-based education.

Terry was committed to closing the achievement gap, especially for the Hispanic students who had become the majority of the student population. *We needed to use outcome-based education to get there*, he recalled, but that triggered opposition.

The conservative churches, the conservative Catholics, the conservative Mormons, and some of our teachers that didn't want to deal with all of this improving learning stuff and trying to help Hispanic kids do well found common cause and began to make my life rather difficult.

Terry described those years as tough times.

I'm not sure I remember a lot of those details about that time period. I've tried hard to forget them. I had [James] Dobson, and Phyllis Schlafly, and [a state Christian advocacy foundation] all taking me to task publicly on the radio, on the television. Finally, it got to the point [with the state foundation] where I had to go and hire my own personal attorney and send them a warning across the bow that said you're treading on defamation of character, you're not being factual, you're not being actual, you're not being truthful. Stop it! I didn't quite get that far with Dobson and Phyllis Schlafly, but there were similar kinds of conversations.

Terry recalled that the opposition took a toll on his leadership, and his board was not fully behind him.

At some point in time I realized I was not going to have three board member votes to continue. So I left Centerton. It was the end of my contract and I was going to move on to other things.

Shortly after his departure, the local paper reported on a bitter battle between reformers seeking to better serve the expanding Hispanic community and conservatives. The superintendent, a Hispanic, resigned in the wake of death threats, but was then quickly reinstated by a board that feared rioting might break out.

After Centerton.

When he left Centerton, Terry was well known and well respected. He was asked to serve as interim director of a state educational commission and he then joined the faculty at a Christian university, where he was on faculty for four years and developed a program to train superintendents. He returned to being a superintendent in the Lakeport School District.

I was hired as interim and told repeatedly to do what was needed as superintendent. It did become clear however that the board chair wanted me to clean house but the board always denied that. When I failed to clean house I was not considered as superintendent. Both districts [Centerton and Lakeport] had major chaos after I left and bought out the contracts of my successors.

He then moved on to service in the Belleville School District, which was also in the same region. His next move was to Madrona.

Madrona was experiencing a difficult time. Conflict had peaked during a long teacher strike, and there was significant damage within the community to be repaired. When he started as superintendent on July 1, Terry recalled that he had no time to settle in.

You start and you figure, "Oh, okay, nice. I'll get to know a few people and look around and we'll have a couple of months and we'll get ready for the start of school." Well, because they had been on a lengthy teacher's strike, school was still in session going through pretty much the end of July. And I'd lost four principals who had either retired or moved on to another position. So I had to find four temporary principals, and I had to keep school going. I was 10 people short. I was missing four principals and I was missing six administrators at the district level, including an assistant superintendent and including my secretary. By then it was late; in a sense the school year for administrators

had already started. This is not the best time to try to find somebody to come help.

He managed to make his way through that first summer, and went on to a successful tenure there. The high regard for his work in Madrona was evidenced by his selection as state Superintendent of the Year in his third year leading that district.

After retiring from Madrona, he began to work as a consultant. In that capacity, he assisted the largest school district in the region, and when the superintendent there took another position, he was asked to be interim Superintendent. He agreed and was in that role during the time he participated in this study.

Terry's Personal Faith Story

I was born and raised in the church, and made a decision to follow Jesus as a five-year-old, probably not knowing very much about that. I dedicated my life in eighth grade at summer camp. I was baptized when I was in Alaska as a superintendent.

Being baptized as an adult is not typical for Evangelicals raised in the church.

I suppose at least part of it was going to a Southern Baptist church [at that time] that was really big on baptism. It was still no big deal to me, but it sounded like a good thing to do. I didn't have anything against it, so, why not? My wife was raised in an interdenominational church. I was raised in a nondenominational church. They're so different that they're the same. I don't know that they said anything bad about baptism, but I can't remember that they did anything about baptism to encourage it. Since then I have come to recognize the importance of baptism in a much more personal way, as a deeper commitment to God's work in my life.

Faith lived out daily.

In describing his faith from day to day, he said, *There's this personal part and there's this professional part that aren't that different.* In his personal and his professional life, Terry viewed prayer as central. A key question he said he often asked himself was,

Who's my prayer support? I have always asked God to raise up "prayERs" who will pray a hedge of protection [common evangelical phrase meaning "God's protection"] around the city leaders, the school board, our school leaders and myself. God has honored that in miraculous ways. And I have always had a team of personal friends and colleagues that have committed to pray for me regularly.

He also considered daily devotional time—Bible reading and prayer—as essential. *I'm still not very good at it. I'm a good self-reliant Scandinavian. I can do it myself and when all else fails, pray. But every day I remind myself that I need God's direction and protection.* A Bible verse that he reported praying often was Isaiah 58:11:

May the Lord continually guide you, May he give you the desires of your heart in desperate places, May he strengthen your frame, May you be like a well- watered garden, a stream whose waters never run dry [Terry's version which mixes several Bible translations]

He said, *I used to emphasize the front end of that verse. Now, I have come to trust God for the front end and lean on him more for the strengthening and watering.* Reading and learning from others are significant parts of his faith experience.

I read widely with at least one Christian fiction and one non-fiction book each month. I have also spent time with Christian leaders like John Maxwell [a popular Christian writer and speaker on leadership] and many in the church growth field.

He looked to pastors he came to know in Madrona, where he still lives, for ongoing

support in his faith journey. *My personal fellowship this last year has been with three of those pastors who have been kind of my prayer team, my support team.*

Terry's faith was also influenced by his family. He explained how he changed his approach to the concept of honoring the Sabbath, which is Sunday, due to the influence of family.

I have a son-in-law who is Seventh-day Adventist, which has not been part of my faith journey. But I have studied the Sabbath part, and I've decided that really is important, particularly as I get older. I don't take all of Sunday off to pray and do meditation, but with very few exceptions, I at least don't do work on that day. So it's partly rest, and some devotional time, but partly just de-coupling and turning the engine off for one day out of the week.

Church involvement.

He described helping out in various ways in the churches he has attended. *I have served on the board for two of the churches. More often I have been friend and confidante of the pastor sometimes doing vision shaping, evaluations, or church surveys on their behalf.* Beyond the local church, he and his wife have been active in “para-church” ministries, which are organizations that operate outside local churches and denominational structures.

We have served as lay reps with Wycliffe and Seed Company [both are international Bible translation organizations], my wife with Christian Women's Club, and me with Child Evangelism. I just got back from Papua New Guinea where I helped with a school financial review for a Christian international NGO.

Terry and his wife moved many times. This allowed him and his wife to participate in a number of different churches over the years, but they never officially joined any of them.

Superintendents are carpetbaggers, and between nondenominational and

interdenominational there's lots of denominational options to choose from. In Alaska, we attended a Southern Baptist church but we didn't join. Then we attended a GARB [General Association of Regular Baptists] Baptist church in Centerton. It became apparent to us that it just wasn't working. My wife was president of Christian Women's Club, I was on the child evangelism board, and we were both supporting Wycliffe. And our church was telling us, "You are visiting with the heathen." The message was kind of like, "Our denomination is the only way. This is the only way, and it's the way you have got to be." We were fine probably when we had the old pastor who was kind of westernized. Then we got a new pastor right from seminary, who said, "Nope. You're consorting with the enemy out there." We thought, "I don't think so." Then we went across the river. We always tried to fellowship with our local church and so we went up to a nearby town where we were part of a Conservative Baptist Church.

After leaving Centerton, Terry and his family attended a Covenant church in Lakeport.

In Madrona, they ended up in a Free Methodist church.

They were all kind of evangelical, but a variety. I haven't gone too far over into the liberal mainstream. God was looking out for me when we moved to Madrona. We kind of liked the idea of supporting a local church and so we ended up shopping churches for a while. Probably the first four to six months we visited a lot of the local churches. I was just getting to know the pastors and the pastoral fellowship and we ended up settling on the Free Methodist church because we liked the pastor's teaching style. When I say God was looking out for us, it turned out that all the local pastors expected me to choose the Free Methodist church because of my university affiliation with a Free Methodist college. So all of the other pastors said, "It took him four months to figure that out? We knew he

was going to go to that church!” The difference being that our family had never been a part of a Free Methodist congregation. But that gave us a kind of cover that helped avoid offending the others.

The assumed Free Methodist affiliation allowed him to maintain strong relationships with pastors of other churches he had visited.

Faith and Work

Terry’s mission in his work has remained steady throughout his career.

I read one of those self-help books every five years and go through the exercises and it always leads me back to the same mission: “I build teams of people who figure out how to close gaps for kids and share with others how to do it.”

That mission often involved building relational bridges among groups in conflict.

Bridge-building and peacemaking are threaded throughout his career, beginning with his first superintendency in Alaska.

My job was to create a district out of four communities that saw each other as archrivals.

That first experience did not end up with success. *I didn't do that very well and at the end of three years they were ready for me to leave and I was ready to leave.*

However, he moved on to Centerton, and was successful. *The first thing I did was keep school open for a 10-day teacher strike and then tried to repair the damage and rebuild the relationships. I did that.* His next two superintendencies also involved rebuilding relationships.

I was hired in Lakeport to pick up the pieces after the superintendent literally disappeared in the middle of one evening. I mean, they knew where she went, but she never came back. She was gone. They needed somebody new to come in and bridge that gap. Then I was hired in Belleville to rebuild relationships and make peace with their

labor union. When I left Belleville, my staff presented me with an integrity picture which has hung in my office in Madrona and now here in my current job as a reminder of my calling.

That pattern continued when he was hired as superintendent at Madrona.

When I went to Madrona, it was after this long teacher's strike and people thought I was just absolutely crazy to go there. It was very much a sense of, I don't know, 'God's calling' is a little strong, but I walked into a situation that nobody wanted and got all kinds of congratulations and condolences from people statewide, then felt very much like God had prepared me for a lot of what I saw. It was a degree more complex, bigger, stronger, harder, whatever. But it wasn't something I'd never seen before.

I haven't made a secret of my faith, Terry explained, but I haven't worn it on my sleeve either. He reflected on how Christian faith and leadership intersected in school administration and how that shaped his personal mission as a superintendent.

When I was on faculty at the university I went through Scripture and pulled out God's talking points to school administrators sorted into some of the things that we think about as our inside profession. Like, what does God have to say about how we treat others? How we work with others? etc. I would probably update that a lot right now. Reading through Scripture again and again and you see God's principles just everywhere when you start looking for it.

He pointed to a book by World Vision CEO Richard Stearns (2009), titled *The Hole in Our Gospel*.

It talks about the fact that we've divided into "evangelical" and "liberal" camps, and we both gave up half the Gospel. The evangelicals gave up the "feed the poor," and the

liberals gave up the “save the poor” or “save the lost.” So I would update it. We really do have a mission and a calling to serve those that are the least and the last.

Terry noted that prayer has always been a central feature of his approach to leadership.

When I came to Madrona I asked everyone I knew to pray for me and for Madrona. The pastors immediately surrounded me with prayer. I needed those prayers. Since then, I have heard story after story of how people have been called to pray for Madrona long before I came to Madrona.

Terry regularly prayed for the community, the churches, the schools, and especially the local pastors. It was not unusual for him to wake up in the night and pray for the pastors. He recalled discerning that *Evil is at work in our community*. Terry specifically saw the unity of the churches in Madrona as a target of Satan, who would work to disrupt that unity. He viewed prayer as a necessary and powerful strategy to protect the people and work being done by churches in the community.

Terry explained how the experiences and opportunities he had shaped his understanding of his calling in his professional life.

I think there's a strong tie between my faith and making sure that the least and the last are being cared for and attended to. I've come to that conviction more and more over the last several years. And being old enough to have retired ten years ago, that doesn't hurt! I guess my calling is this: [the state where he lives] is the least equitable state in the nation. We have the biggest achievement gap between White and non-White children. Students of color this year for the first time in America's history will be 50% of our population. There is about a 20% achievement gap. The White population is declining, students of color are increasing. Even though schools are doing better than they ever

have before, they are doing that for White students, which are diminishing. So this is an exciting time in our history. I've got this higher Ed and K-12 background. It's kind of like we know more than we've ever known before and we still haven't figured this out. This is the last frontier. If we can't figure out how to close this gap, not only is that a travesty for the poor, the fatherless, the needy of Scripture, but it's a travesty for our communities and for our nation. So you can tell I'm a little passionate about this.

His work with the Native American community served by the Madrona schools served as a place for him to challenge himself.

I kept telling the federal and state government that if they really cared they would give us more money for the needier kids. And somewhere in there I realized that applied to me as well-- "So if you really cared about the kids, what would you do with the resources that you have?" We did a ton of things around race and equity, and many of them could be dismissed as just hot air and talk, but we were moving into something beyond and at least it was going somewhere.

He has been involved in a national group that has been at the forefront of educational reform, and that has provided a forum for his viewpoints on the need for equity leadership.

The passion in the group is now, "How do we lead across differences? How do we build bridges? How do we build communities of caring, justice, and equity?" And I guess that's my job. I was trying to think, "How do I take on more of that kind of work? How do I learn how to do that?"

After participating in one of the annual rallies of all the churches in Madrona that supported schools, Terry wrote in his journal, *Fourteen pastors. Lots of prayer, unity, applause. God is at work. This is why I stay in Madrona.*

Fellowship with fellow Christian administrators.

After many challenging years in leadership, Terry described seeking fellowship with other Christian administrators.

When I was in Belleville, and probably when I was at the university, I started to think, "What does a fellowship of Christian educators look like?" I had been through my own storm, partly political, that most superintendents will go through at some point in time. They might make like a parade and leave town just before they need to, or they may wait too long and have it happen to them. It is not too different from pastors; you know, friends come and go and enemies accumulate. So I pulled four or five friends together and that became, for lack of a better word, a men's group. We would meet once a month. Ostensibly we were trying to create this fellowship of statewide believers who were school administrators. We did a newsletter for a while but we never quite figured out how to pull any of those people together. We kind of talked about doing it at a conference, getting a room, having an opportunity to gather. That men's group still exists. We don't meet regularly anymore because we're scattered, but we do meet periodically, a couple of times a year. They met with me right after I was hired in my current position. As soon as I got hired it was kind of like, "We have to get together. We have to make sure we're praying for Terry." They were very instrumental as I was hired in Madrona. They were working, not literally around-the-clock, but just about as I went. They said, "Yep, you can do this job. Yep, we'll help you, we'll work on your resume. Oh, we need a picture. Let's fix this, let's do that." They were right there for me.

This group has been a continuing support for Terry in his work-faith connection. I've

figured out a way to keep the men's group going. I think there's a practical part to that as well as spiritual.

Terry's Experiences with Culture War Skirmishes

Terry noted, *Twice over my career I have lost a position at least partially because of my faith.* The most intense situation was in Centerton. *It was due to Outcome Based Education and a desire to reach and teach every student, including the fifty-plus percent that were Hispanic. Religious groups—including far right national groups—banded together to seek my removal.* Opposition came from conservative church members of various types. Beyond the various Protestant churches, Catholics and Mormons were significant forces in the faith community in Centerton. In both cases, Terry's public school leadership created tension. For Catholics this involved declining enrollments at the Catholic schools.

I was doing a pretty good job of putting the Catholic school out of existence, which helped contribute to my downfall because then some of the conservative Catholics were upset with me. Their numbers were declining, I think probably more so from the recession, just the tough times for everybody. I reached out to them. We'd have lunch every now and then and whatever. And we just never quite connected.

Most complaints came from conservative Protestants, some of whom might have been worshiping in the same church as Terry and his family.

It was kind of ironic. It wasn't because I was a Christian that I was in trouble. I interpreted it in terms of because I'm trying to do God's calling, you're trying to get my job and get me fired. People I would be sitting with in the pew fellowshiping with on Sunday morning were attacking me as an enemy for trying to help work with the least, the last—I don't know about the lost—but the least and the last anyway.

Caught in the line of fire and stung by fellow Christians, he admitted that when he left Centerton, served at the state level, and then went on to a university position, he was angry with God. *Depression and despair followed my time in Centerton. I was doing the right thing and it was not working out. During that time I was mad at God and I was not easy to get along with.* He responded by turning to the Bible, prayer, and reflection.

When I was commuting to the university I had half an hour a day. I ended up memorizing Scripture. Only gradually, with lots of Bible study, meditation, Bible memory and prayer did God wash away the anger and hurt of those years.

He had another conflict with a national evangelical advocacy group while he was superintendent in Lakeport, the district he served after his time in higher education. It involved the Rutherford Institute, a group that provides support for Christians involved in public schools who request legal assistance.

We approved a Good News Club in Lakeport when I was there. Rutherford brought out their big guns. That was kind of an interesting one, too. So we have Christians learning how to be corporate bullies. Well, I know how to play that game, or at least I can understand the game that they're trying to play.

Terry had another culture war skirmish in the same district concerning Christmas. *Their story, when I came, was that they couldn't put up a Christmas tree. My response was, "No, that's not what the law says." So we went through it all and decided, yes, you can put up a Christmas tree, but it can't be a quote-unquote "Christmas tree." It has to be a symbol of winter season. So yes, you may have to put up a menorah along with that. That caused a little ripple in the Jewish community, but not a lot, because I did a carefully crafted memo, and sent it to all of the teachers, trying to thread the needle for*

them.

I think we did have a little bit of controversy over music, too. I think the district had taken the fork in the road. You can't have a Christmas tree, but then depending on the faith of the music teacher, you might have a totally Christian music ceremony, or you may have a midwinter Festival with everything but a Christmas carol in it. I think the Jewish community got into, "Well, how many songs would be representative without being over-representative?" So, I kind of knew some of the ropes, pulling it out and going through it, and then citing as much of it as you need to in order to satisfy people that, "Yeah, okay, this might not sound exactly like what you've heard before, but we have done our homework."

His focus on Bible reading, prayer, and self-reflection continued.

Following my time in Lakeport, I was commuting to Belleville with at least 30 minutes a day for Bible memory. God's grace dealt with my pride and my anger and knocked off at least some of my rough edges. During that time, I began journaling, Bible study, Scripture memorization and prayer. The journaling was one way to write out my experiences and address concerns.

Terry explained that his format included half an hour of prayer for people from an extensive list of names, journaling about daily observations concerning God's activity as he could discern it, Bible reading, and journal entries on precepts from Scripture.

Scripture memory has been a huge part of my healing. I have a bound set of three- by- five cards, each with Scriptures on them. They are now dog eared and coffee stained. They also note key dates when I prayed specific Scriptures as prayers; and many with second notations about how and when God answered those prayers – often removing key

barriers in ways that I could not have imagined.

Terry's Personal Politics

He stated that he aspires to the biblical directive, *As much as in you is, live peaceably with all men*, so Terry's political views were colored by a growing discontent.

Increasingly I get angry every time the Republicans call me. I used to think of myself as a Republican and I think it's a travesty what they are doing. It's not exclusive to the Republicans. The Democrats aren't being any easier to get along with.

The hot button issues that so dominate the headlines were not central concerns for him. *I guess I duck a lot of those issues around homosexuals and around abortions and etc., etc. Increasingly they're just non-starters to me. There's a universe of people that are starving and dying and yet we're not going to talk to somebody because...? I don't know, I guess I'm becoming more liberal in my old age.*

On his take on the dynamics of the Christian Right in the political arena, he offered, *At the risk of trying to be a psychoanalyst, which I'm not, I guess I wonder if that comes from a fear that the world is spinning out of control. And it is. We don't know what that means for our job security. We don't know what that means for our safety. We have sex and drugs available to our kids, and we're fearful about that.*

He observed that the difference between a problem and an opportunity is the amount of skill available, and pointed out, *We don't have a lot of skill available and so we become "lid-sitters"—we tell our kids, "Just sit on it! Don't do this, don't do that, don't do anything!" We don't talk about it.* Terry also pointed to technology and social segregation as contributing factors.

I don't know if it's the Internet or our ZIP Codes. We are our ZIP Codes. We're

gravitating to people that think and act like us, and then through the Internet we can be Facebook friends with just that little group. Then our view of reality becomes,

“Everybody thinks this way and everybody else out there is the enemy.”

With these issues in play, and wrestling with many of the complexities himself, he exclaimed, *Then I catch myself and it's kind of like, “Whoa! I really am starting to sound like a liberal! But I definitely don't want to be leaving the gospel behind!”*

Terry's Community

Though he has experienced several culture war conflicts during his long career, the skirmish detailed for this study occurred during his years as superintendent in Madrona, a community of over 60,000 at the edge of a major Western metropolitan region. *Madrona is a bedroom community*, confirmed Terry, and exponential growth of the community since 1980 has transformed the area into a retail and service economy supported by commuter workers. *Virtually everybody commuted somewhere, so it was hard to get parents out to any kind of parent meetings, because they are busy and tired at the end of a long day.* The location relative to the urban center also meant Madrona was on the periphery of media attention. *We were not a media market, so, you had to be in big trouble before one of the stations from the city would drive here and put you on camera.*

The community's attitude concerning educational attainment was ambiguous. *It tends to be a blue-collar town. Fairly well paid, but not necessarily well educated. Maybe more likely to be thinking, “I got by without a college education. I don't know that my kid needs a college education.”* That attitude was reflected in how Terry was viewed. *I probably was one of the biggest public figures in the community, but not overly revered or deferred to.* Overall, the political tenor of the town was *not as liberal as the city. Not quite redneck, but affluent blue-*

collar.

Churches played a significant role in Madrona, but their role in people's lives was limited.

Plenty of churches in the community, but not overly churched. I mean, some small towns you would find that it might be a throwback to the 50s, with an attitude that we are all nominally people of faith. Not so much there.

Part of this was due to commuting and full calendars.

People were busy, tired, wouldn't come to the school meetings, but they probably were not in church pews on Sunday either. They were boating or sleeping or doing something else.

The community was a contentious place when Terry arrived, buffeted by a number of school-related conflicts, most recently an extended teacher strike.

When I first came to Madrona, it seemed like every week we would have people storm into the office and tell us what they thought of us, and what we had to do about things, and they were going to sue us, or they were going to go to the newspaper, or they were going to go to the media. So we dealt with that literally all the time in the beginning.

Key Characters in the Skirmish

Several characters played key roles in the skirmish Terry managed in Madrona.

Background on each of them is provided below.

The ministerial association.

When he arrived in Madrona, Terry went to the pastors group and said,

I need prayers, and I'm asking God for 1000 people who will pray for me regularly. And here's what else I need: I need a place to live, I need somebody I can count on in terms of administrative support, and I need these thousand pray-ers.

That initiated a lasting and important relationship with the pastors of the community.

They became just an incredible fellowship group for me. I didn't go to every one of their monthly meetings, but I went as I could and I probably hit half of them during the year. The pastors group had re-formed just before Terry's arrival. He believes a controversy years earlier involving two local televangelists who were attempting to build a new facility in the town had contributed to the group being disbanded.

I don't know a lot of the details, but the conservative Christians were kind of in the face of city council. It was kind of like, "We're going to pray God's wrath on you!" Anybody who wanted to be a gentle, caring voice in the community may have felt, "I don't want to do that." The tenor of the current pastors group truly was that they wanted to be Christ's love to the community.

Terry described how the newly formed group was active in collaboratively organizing, leading, and promoting a number of ministries to children and families, many in partnership with the schools.

We did interesting and incredible things with that group. For most of those activities I was a cheerleader on the side, but we did backpacks for 5000 kids, we did feeding programs for kids over the summer, we did what ended up being a chaplaincy within the city and within the school district. And then they did Serve Day events where they would get their congregations to come out and target one or two of our schools for improvement projects. So we created this kind of symbiotic relationship where they adopted some of our schools.

Periodically—at least once a year—the schools would be going through whatever the crisis of the week or year or month or whatever it was, and they would lay hands on me and pray for me. So in addition to God's grace, there was that camaraderie and that

sense that I wasn't in it alone, that there were other people working with me on their end. Over time I eventually recruited some of those people to be on the school board.

The pastors took a strong interest in the schools and would occasionally promote specific issues.

I had interesting conversations with one of the pastors in terms of our native students. He had a young daughter that went to middle school, and he was talking about the fact that the school had abdicated its responsibility to teach values to kids. He wasn't in my face, and he recognized the difficulties with it. It was, "If there's a way to pull this off, we really should think about doing this."

Terry recalled that not long after, a character program was implemented, one that featured Native American elements.

There are the seven tribal values, which are: respect your elders, tell the truth, and so on. Madrona still teaches values every day in a quasi-religious Native American ceremony. We didn't have any trouble, because you could argue that they're Christian values, or at least good moral values.

Not every church participated in the pastors group. Crossway Bible Church sponsored Crossway Academy, the largest Christian school in the community with over 300 students in grades K-12, but they did not participate. Mormon leaders wanted to join.

The Mormons are pretty strong in Madrona and for the most part, they were happy with the schools. They periodically would reach out to me. We never quite made it happen. They participated in the Serve Day events, and they invited me to several things in their church. I would've gone, it just never quite worked out. And, again, I think maybe they might have given up thinking that I just didn't want to. [The Mormons] wanted to be part

of the pastoral group and the pastors did a dance around that. The pastors said, 'If you buy into our statement of faith [which they could not endorse], so that was awkward. I think the Mormons probably thought I didn't connect with them because I was associated with the pastoral group, but we still did certain things together.

The most active partner churches.

Among the churches in the community, Terry pointed out that New City Church was particularly active and their pastors were heavily involved in the pastors group.

They were a big going concern. There were well over 1000 worshipers and they had three or four pastors on staff. They were young and energetic, and they had a young congregation.

Another active partner church was Madrona Presbyterian.

They adopted one of the schools. We had no money for professional development anymore, so we had an early dismissal one day a week at the school, which was high poverty, to provide time for the teachers to meet. The church says, "Hey, we have a director of music in our church. How would it be if she comes over and takes a bunch of the kids in the afternoon while the teachers are doing their professional development?" We said, "Wow, great! Great opportunity! Why don't you do that?" So they came over and did that. And then it was, "You need some volunteers to read with the kids? How about if we circulate in our congregation and volunteer tutor sign up?" So they did that. And then they came and they looked around and said, "Gee, it's winter. The kids don't have shoes or coats. Would it be okay if we..." So they collected gently used items and the money to do that. Then the school said, "Could we come over and do a concert for you at Christmastime?" So they do this concert. People came, bringing their coats and

jackets, and then we trucked the kids that were identified as needing that extra support back across the street and they had tears in their eyes. A new pair of shoes, new parkas, new whatever.

The district human relations director.

Key work as the district responded to the complaint that triggered the skirmish was handled by the district human relations director, who Terry reported did not see eye-to-eye with him on the appropriate approach to church-state issues.

He was on the board for a large main line church in the city. He probably would have been inclined to just cut the pastors off and tell them that they couldn't do that. He's not quite as old as I am, but kind of indoctrinated in the strict separation of church and state. For him, it was just kind of like, "Nope, you can't do that."

The Skirmish Situation

Volunteers were welcomed at one of the district middle schools after a protest concerning what some students viewed as lack of discipline. The additional adults assisted school staff during lunch hours, helping to monitor the students as they ate and socialized, talked with students, and participated in activities. The New City Church sent a number of volunteers. Volunteers were not to mention religion unless students brought it up, and contact information was not to be gathered. However, details concerning interaction with students on religious topics was not explicit in the volunteer handbook, which led to misunderstandings on that point.

Volunteers were in the schools regularly, and for the most part did a pretty good job of just being there and being friends with the kids and hanging out and getting more adults around to create a kind of a calming environment.

The Skirmish Trigger Event

A mother complained to the school district that a teenage youth intern from New City Church who volunteers at her daughter's school used social media to invite her sixth grader to a youth event for middle school age students at the church and offered to provide transportation if needed. The message detailed "free espresso for visitors," and "Super rad games and activities," and suggested she come to "Hang out with cool people. Plus you are really cool so it would just make it that much cooler." The mother reported initially finding it humorous, but quickly became angry. The mother was unhappy that a religious group was in a position to acquire her daughter's contact information while at school and interact with her daughter without her knowledge. She characterized the invitation as a "bribe."

The parent made her concerns known. It seemed like there was maybe more than one contact. I think that the parent sent an email. I don't know the order in which the emails arrived; whether she had already called the news media or whether she copied me in on something that went to the news media. As I recall, she alleged the youth minister was there at the school, and she was inviting the kids to come to a Sunday night event or outing, which she took to be over the line. That triggered the parent's response, and that then triggered some of the other responses.

I had an ongoing relationship with the pastors and the chair of the pastor's group was the associate pastor from the church where I worshipped. I had an ongoing relationship with the senior pastor for the church that had the volunteer that was called out by the parent. I suppose the horns of the dilemma I faced was from a standpoint of church and state, and from a standpoint of being superintendent of schools and having a relationship with all of the pastors in this ministerial association.

Terry was concerned how the incident might negatively impact the volunteering and partnerships between schools and churches in the community.

People saw New City Church as the church most engaged and involved in doing this work in school lunches, but everybody else was highly interested in terms of, A, “What does that mean to us if we do it?” B, if we’re thinking about doing it, or, C, “Just what does this mean for our community and how we all get along?”

The District Response

After receiving the parent’s complaint, the district contacted the New City Church and began an investigation. There had been no complaint about the New City volunteers prior to this incident. New City leaders indicated their concern that policy may have been violated, and communicated their renewed commitment to follow policy.

We did an investigation. We were trying to figure out—Is the youth minister here to serve students from their church? You sit and you have lunch with them, and you chat about things like, “I’m going to see you on Friday night.” Is it kind of incidental, or is it, “You need to come to our youth group activity on Friday night”? I don’t remember where we ended up on that. It’s kind of a little hard to tell if you weren’t there. The HR director agreed to take it on, work with the attorney, and come up with some guidelines for what this would look like.

Terry recalled that his role was *keeping his finger* in the work of the HR director.

That means, “Let me see the draft.” There was an organization out of Washington DC under [President] Clinton that did a pretty comprehensive view of about ten seminal cases and laid out what could be done, what couldn’t be done, and in some cases, what has to be done. If you want to pray at the flagpole, that’s an open public forum event

that is permitted. If you've created an open public forum, it has to be an open public forum. You can't say, "Well it's open to everybody except for Christians, or gays, or whatever." So we worked through that.

While the district investigated the complaint, the church kept their volunteers out of the school. *I think the context for the pastor at New City Church to pull his staff out was to give the school district some space to work on it and go through the process.* The incident did not generate much conversation for Terry at church or among his Christian friends.

Surprisingly, very little was mentioned at church. And if there were one or two comments, they were, "I read about you in the paper and I'm praying for you," or "You've got a tough job." My friends might say something like, "I'm here if you need me," "Call if I can help," "Thinking about you," "Praying for you," things like that.

The incident drew the attention of local media and national advocacy groups. A regional alternative newspaper investigated the relationship between the New City Church and the school district. The church was renting a middle school for services and was sending volunteers to help at the school every week. The district received a letter from a national advocacy group demanding information on the New City church's relationship with the school district. Terry promptly replied and assured them they would get the information they requested.

Coverage in the press was followed by a series of strangers driving past the home of the New City Church's Pastor and taking photographs. *They were wackos in the community. It wasn't so much an overt threat, just kind of noticing, "Hey, this guy's been by my house three times."*

Meanwhile, district staff were gathering resources to guide the new training that was being planned and Terry personally kept New City leadership informed concerning the district's

plan to write guidelines to get youth workers back in the school, explaining the time it was taking, and affirming appreciation for the service the church provided to the district and the community.

Commentary and reporting by advocacy groups reflected highly partisan views. Some saw the church volunteers as victims of unwarranted criticism. At the other end of the cultural spectrum, the New City Church was described as “Fundamentalist Christians” seeking to lure students into a cult-like community. One national advocacy group leader accused the church of treating the school as a mission field and undermining parents’ rights.

The Skirmish Resolution

The district developed a plan with their attorney to train and then return youth ministers who volunteered to school, all in compliance with law. A revised policy and new volunteer handbook with explicit instructions about what could and could not be said concerning religion resulted.

We had this interesting confluence of events. The pastoral group rotated for their lunch meetings, and it came to the Madrona District boardroom in June. So we are providing lunch and we had plaques to present to them thanking them for their participation in “Jubilee”—which was this backpack grand event: haircuts, school supplies, carnival shows, etc.—and then it was, “And here are the rules: You can do this and you can't do that.” Half the churches don't even know what we're talking about. They don't have youth ministers in the school. I think the church that had the instigator, so to speak, was probably most interested in terms of, “Are we being told we can't do this or that? Where are we?” But they were okay with it. It was kind of like, “Okay. Sounds reasonable.”

Training concerning the revised policy followed, and volunteers from the church returned to the school the following fall.

We did go through a training process. I believe the HR person led it after we'd vetted it all and put together a little booklet. We actually did scenarios to try to lay it out and say, "This is what you can do and this is what you can't do."

Terry's Epiphanies and Reflections

Since the HR director had a key role in the response but was predisposed to limit church-state collaboration, Terry had to monitor the work.

The HR director and I, we did a little bit of a dance through there. I kept my finger in it to try to maintain that razor's edge in terms of—I didn't want it just to become "No, you can't. Absolutely not!"

One of my responsibilities was legal. We needed to do the right thing. Another one is doing the right thing in the right way. And then, another one is having as many of the participants as possible know that the issue was heard, researched, and resolved appropriately. Sometimes in this region—and I don't know if it's the Scandinavian way—even if you've processed it the right way, people say, "We don't care about the process. We've got our perspective and we're sticking to it."

[I was] kind of dancing on the razor's edge. I wanted to value and respect the work the pastors do, and at the same time, I have a responsibility as a representative of the secular school system to do what's legally expected. So it's, "Okay, let's dig in there and let's find out what those requirements are."

I knew what the rules were, and so I don't recall being overly anxious over it. I am sure that there were more feelings because of the pastors and my relationship with them. But I've been down the road enough before that it wasn't like I was trying to protect them and

give them a leg up in the conversations. And it wasn't like I had promised that to them and now I was having to retreat from it.

The schools and the ministers worked through that event by reviewing legal requirements and the purpose of being on campus, which is loving our community. After writing and reviewing procedures together, the school campuses were again opened to youth ministers. The waters smoothed afterwards. It was a good working relationship. It was, “We’re going to get through this together.” To some extent, it certainly characterizes all of my time in Madrona, and maybe all of my time elsewhere.

Reflections on other culture war conflicts.

What's the old saying about how you get wisdom? You get experience. How do you get experience? You make mistakes. I read one of John Wooden's biographies and a Bill Belichick biography [famous coaches in college basketball and professional football, respectively]. Both of them hit their stride in their thirtieth year. At the time I thought, “I'm just coming up on my thirtieth year, and I'm not sticking around too much longer!” I started as a superintendent at 27 or something like that. I was trying to unify four communities. I was young, naïve, left-brained, linear, thinking, “How hard can this be? Just write a bunch of policies, write a budget, and everybody follows it,” without thinking too much about the people involved. That was an opportunity to make and learn from mistakes and move on. My mistakes and the need to move on had nothing to do with faith—just my headstrong youth and immaturity.

It wasn't too much later I went to Centerton. There I kept school opened during a ten-day strike. Then the president of the teachers union and I started to work on a backlog of a dozen or more grievances. I think it took us 18 months to settle the first grievance. Then

we looked at win-win bargaining. Our state, at that point in time, was really into adversarial bargaining, and so I was advocating amongst much older colleagues that we should do interest-based or win-win bargaining. We did. We went from a bitter labor strike to settling the contract the next time in not very much time—I want to say 24 hours of bargaining. Teachers told me there was this major moment on a hot summer afternoon when I just put down my pencil and said, “Let's talk. I want to know about the issues.” I don't know that I knew very much about interest-based bargaining at the time, and it was not exactly my style, so maybe it was God's grace. Who knows? But that was a major breakthrough that led to a lot of peace and harmony and that led to a groundswell across the state in terms of more districts saying, “Maybe we can make this interest-based bargaining work and we don't have to be so adversarial.”

Emergence as a peacemaker.

Since then, Terry's career has involved international work on peacemaking that has emerged from his work as a school district leader.

I don't know where that comes from, but problem-solving, that's been my work. Even in Alaska, I wasn't smart enough to notice it at the time, but that was a conflict-laden situation that I wasn't smart enough to discern. In Centerton the conflict was obvious, and I was much better at it and I lasted ten years. And every job since then it's been, “Can you come help us make labor peace, can you help come pick up the pieces, can you help?”

It's not always a matter of stepping in and saying, “I know exactly the right answer.” It's probably the contrary. I operate from the premise that good people with good information will make good decisions. We're going to get good people in the room and

listen to them; we're going to talk to find out what their interests are. Somewhere out of there, something will emerge that causes people to say, "Yeah, that's it!"

His experience in Centerton introduced him to the influence of partisan state and national advocacy groups on local citizens. *I recognized that these interest groups were finding each other, but I was never smart enough to try to pull them together to have a conversation about what that meant, what that looked like.* The advocacy groups affiliated with the Religious Right were particularly aggressive in that situation.

What did I learn from my conflict with the Religious Right? I've been far more willing to reach out and engage people. In Madrona, it was relatively easy to do. It was kind of like, "I'm new. Come talk to me." I've found over the years that many times those people—even though you may or may not agree on the issue—you end up becoming colleagues of a sort. You've got a personal relationship and sometimes become friends even though you disagree on issues.

It was his faith that provided the guidance he sought in promoting peace in his work. He mentioned a passage in the New Testament (James 3) that addressed the extent to which Christians are to strive to get along with others.

It's kind of like, you need to bend over backwards to get along with people and you don't quit. It just goes on and on and on and on and on. It's really convicting; I thought I was doing James, but I needed to get my act together! It's a matter of listening. It's a matter of being open. It's really building enough of a relationship, making it safe for people to put ideas on the table.

His peacemaker approach was prominent and well-matched to the needs he found when he arrived at Madrona.

We had been around the block a time or three, and we ran into problems everywhere we looked. And then everybody else was like, "I wonder how that's going to work out? We are right behind you...way behind you!" And we just kind of wade into it and roll up our sleeves and start. I guess from a secular standpoint, it's interest-based bargaining. It's kind of like asking, "What's your concern? What do you hope to get out of this?" And amazingly, nine times out of ten, you end up getting enough stuff on the table. We can take a little bit of this, and we can take a little bit of that, and we can put that together with this.

Terry described his approach as seeking the *radical middle*, which he admitted is not popular in polarized situations: *That is the challenge, because you've got to see the whole 360°. When you hew that middle ground, you run the risk that people can look at it from either perspective and find fault in it.*

Reflections on Christians serving schools.

He wrote in his journal concerning two different ways churches approach schools, one he supports and one he does not:

Churches can be good stewards without proselytizing. One group comes to school only to win souls/belief/dogma. The other comes to see people as fully human ready and needing to be loved. And through that love come to know and love God and God's people. There it is again—a divide of sorts.

People are special to God. He died for us. He created us for His work. He loves us and wants our best. As leaders, we need to know God's grace in a special way so that we can love others in that same way that God loves us and so that we can see their potential and develop them.

Reflections on prayer.

In a written reflection, Terry explained the power of prayer in his work, with specific application to his time at Madrona:

I have always asked God to raise up prayERs who will pray a hedge of protection (footnote here) around the city leaders, the school board, our school leaders and myself. God has honored that in miraculous ways. I have always had a team of personal friends and colleagues that have committed to pray for me regularly. I have learned many times years after the fact how God had gone before me to prepare the way through the fervent prayers of others. I mentioned the four pastors that had seemingly been brought to Madrona by miraculous means to form the center of a coalition of pastoral support for me and for the schools and for the community in Madrona. The result was leaders of faith in the school district, city, and police departments.

Prayer was an essential aspect of his devotional practices, and it was his method for seeking guidance and strength. Again, he wrote about this:

A verse that I pray often is, “May the Lord continually guide you, May he give you the desires of your heart in desperate places, May he strengthen your frame, May you be like a well-watered garden, a stream whose waters never run dry” [Isaiah 58:11.] I used to emphasize the front end of that verse. Now, I have come to trust God for the front end and lean on him more for the strengthening and watering. I can be a well-watered garden if I keep turning to God for water from the wells of salvation from Jesus’ inexhaustible supply. And, increasingly, I can point with joy and thanksgiving to the many deeds by which God has sustained and supported me. He has restored double for anything that I have lost and continues to bless me beyond anything I can think or ask.

He has provided me with the joy and opportunity to serve in the ways that I love and was created to do.

Perspectives on God's work in Madrona.

Terry recounted his perspective on what he views as the providential history of the growth of unity among the Christian churches in Madrona at a citywide church celebration event where he was one of the speakers:

This is a story of God's revival work in Madrona over at least two decades. The story probably began much earlier but comes to light in two prayer warriors in the 1990s. Both had prayed for Madrona for many, many years. This is the story of how God has answered those prayers. In the late 90s, two pastors in Madrona met for coffee and decided to see about restarting a ministerial alliance group of area pastors. About the year 2000, two new churches began in Madrona: New City Church and Praise Tabernacle. New City was started by Sam and Candy Moorehouse. As Sam tells it, he was driving through the area when he felt God's call to Madrona. He and Candy came and started a small church plant. They walked the city and prayed for God's protection. They started a 'Summer Jubilee' where they gave away backpacks to students in need. They offered places for school lunches during the summer and during a lengthy teacher strike. Pastor Jonathan had a thriving church and ministry in Easton when he felt God's call to Madrona. He established a growing church, participated in the ministerial meetings, and brought a dynamic sense of God's presence. Pastor Jeff came from Plymouth where he had helped establish a dynamic chaplain ministry. He was called here as an associate pastor and he helped establish a chaplain ministry by working quietly with city, fire, and police leaders over time. Gradually they came to trust that the

chaplains would be there for support rather than to proselytize. Jeff also became the quiet leader of the ministerial alliance, a group of about twenty that met monthly. I came to Madrona as superintendent immediately following a long teacher strike. I came with a heart to rebuild the schools and community. I went to the ministerial group asking for prayer and saying that my prayer request was to raise up 15,000 “pray-ers” to pray for the city and our pastors and community leaders, and to pray for our pastors and churches to demonstrate God’s love to our city. Over the next few years, the churches came together in several ways: the annual School Jubilee, Serve Day projects, and pulpit exchanges. Individual churches and informal alliances of churches sponsored many other events in support of our community and the community of faith. Pastor Jeff’s personal ministry of support and encouragement eventually included the superintendent, the mayor, and the police chief. After a tragic off campus auto accident that left one student dead and two with serious injuries, the school district entered into a formal agreement for chaplaincy support modeled after the city agreement with the chaplains.

I retired from the Madrona School District, giving praise to God, the community and the staff for a remarkable turnaround for the schools. God has indeed been working quietly and then not so quietly behind the scenes for decades in Madrona. He has indeed raised up thousands of pray-ers in and for the community. He has indeed demonstrated his love through the work of the pastoral alliance and the chaplains.

Larry interpreted personal and community history through a lens that sees an active God at work.

As the story of Madrona unfolded, it was kind of like, before they called I will answer them. God was working. He was preparing me over in Centerton and all these other

places and He was preparing these pray-ers over here, and putting us all together. I am certainly proud of the work that we did in Madrona, and at the same time just kind of in awe of how God used me in His grand plan to make all of that happen.

Nevertheless, subsequent events included a number of difficult incidents.

Two years later, Pastor Sam is asked to leave when they had a church split. The pastor of Praise Center, one of my other great prayer warrior supporters, died literally during the morning service. They were the two that seemed to be called specially by God to come to Madrona. There were a variety of other things that went on during that time as well. We had board members that were trying to get me fired.

Terry's spiritual journey.

Terry viewed all of the challenges and setbacks as part of an overall journey that has been beneficial in his spiritual journey.

In the long run it strengthened my faith. It took me around Robin's barn back to God, to say God's not the enemy, God is on my side. And I won't be agreeing with all of the people of the world, even all fellow believers in the world, but I can do my part between me and God. Let God worry about the other people.

Chapter VII: Eugene's Story

Introduction

Eugene is a native of Marion where he has served his entire career apart from his years in the military. He was raised in an extended family grounded in the African-American church, an institution that is a significant part of Marion's culture and history. Both interviews were conducted in library meetings rooms, one in a public library, and the other at the local college. Eugene is a large man, dignified, and somewhat formal but friendly in his interactions and demeanor. He has an aura of authority that is often present in long-time high school principals and superintendents. He was careful in his responses and spoke with a deep, broad voice.

Eugene's Career

I graduated from high school in this district. I went to South Carolina State College where I majored in math, minored in education, and was a member of the Army ROTC advanced course program.

The Civil Rights Movement was a prominent feature of his college experience.

There was a desegregation of the bowling alley my senior year. I was away student teaching the night of the Orangeburg Massacre.¹ I could have been there. If I was there, I wonder whether or not I'd been right there in that number. That was very tragic. And of course, that same year, Dr. King was assassinated. And later Robert Kennedy was shot. It was a very turbulent time. I got a commission as a second lieutenant when I graduated.²

¹ The Orangeburg Massacre was the name given an event in 1968 when three African American men were killed and many others wounded after Highway Patrol Officers opened fire on a group protesting racial segregation at a bowling alley.

Eugene began what he expected to be a career in the military, serving in a variety of capacities as an officer in a volatile and dangerous demilitarized zone between North and South Korea before returning to the States.

My intent was to make the Army a career, but my wife did not like the Army experience.

So, having the last word in my house, I said “Yes, Ma’am,” and when I got out, we came back to Marion. I took a 50% cut in pay and I became a math teacher at one of the junior high schools. I knew I would love teaching.

I taught for one year and I was asked by the superintendent if I would be interested in becoming an assistant principal at the high school. I said, “Yes, I would,” and so the next year I took that job. He felt that I was a strong disciplinarian. Three years later, the new superintendent asked me would I be interested in being principal at the school from which I graduated 10 years prior. After talking to my wife, we prayed about it, and I took the job and became the youngest high school principal in the state at 28 years old.

Leadership at his former high school meant facing a long-time challenge of making desegregation a success.

It was four years since the desegregation order for the district. There was still some adjustments being made, still some trust issues. I accepted the challenge. I wanted to turn the school from one that people did not want to send their children to, to one that they did want to send their children to. I wanted to build the trust level in the community across racial lines and show that excellence can exist in an environment that is predominantly African-American. I wanted to handle issues with integrity so that the trust level would be earned and would be sustained over the years.

A firm hand and high standards are foundational aspects of how Eugene described his leadership style.

There are standards, expectations that you set. And you say, I'm not going to compromise on these principles. There are things that, as a principal, you set the climate for your campus. I enjoyed that, not doing that in a haughty manner, but you had to make sure that whatever decision you made, that the purpose of the rule was with the safety and welfare of the students. And whenever you did that, you're on safe grounds. I made decisions based upon what was fair, what was equitable, and what was safe.

You did not compromise on the principles and you stayed focused on the issue and you dealt fairly, evenhandedly. So, the things that are not violating the law, there are positions that I took that many people would not take, like the dress code. Things like wearing your hat in the building, sagging pants, and that kind of stuff—I said, “No, we're not going to have that here.” And so that's the principal's decision and I didn't back up on that. And I would not do that. And so, in my years as an administrator, I've never been called on the carpet about that. I'm going to do what I know to be right.

As a principal, Eugene dealt with a number of culture war issues on a regular basis. Each year he gave a “State of the School” speech to the entire student body, and one year a comment about families caused a reaction among gays and lesbians.

One year I made a statement as it relates to family relationships and everything. I was talking about how important it is in the home for a mother and father. I said that God made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. And so that was...tried to be blown up. And it wasn't...I didn't realize how many couples were in the school at the time, so it was not intended to try to offend them—that kind of thing.

Nevertheless, Eugene asserted that his commitment as a school leader to eliminating bullying was strong and consistent.

There were issues around bullying. Definitely. We looked at several programs nationwide as well as in the state. As a principal, I made it known on a weekly basis that everybody had a right to come to school without being threatened and intimidated and under no circumstances would it be tolerated. If it did happen, it would be dealt with irrespective of who did it. And people knew that. The word got around that the principal means what he said.

Not surprisingly, racial conflicts were also part of his leadership challenge.

There are situations that are racially sensitive, and also sensitive in terms of the social status. I had a student that came on campus flying the Confederate flag. I didn't make an issue out of it as long as it doesn't disturb the school. We had Malcolm X shirts, and Confederate belt buckles, and Confederate shirts that didn't cause a problem. I wouldn't allow them to be a problem, but I told them, let's call this student in. I said, "You cannot fly this flag." And I went into the policy. "Only three flags can be flown, that's Old Glory, the state flag, and the school flag." And so, I called the parent and I explained that situation to them and that was the end of that.

He retired after serving 31 years as principal at Jefferson. A few years later he was approached by the school board chair and asked to serve as interim superintendent. *My wife and I prayed about that, and I accepted. I was "interim" for two years, and in November, 2012, the board, by a five to four vote, removed the word "interim" for the next two years.* After a productive but politically contentious time, he stepped down from that position and retired from the district a second time.

Eugene's Faith Story

Eugene grew up in a church family and in a context where the church was a foundation of his life and that has continued through each life stage.

Growing up, I was real fortunate to have a family that valued faith in God. We attended two churches. One was in the city. We had two Mt. Lebanon Baptist Churches at that time, one White and one Black. Because of the mail mix-up, the African-American Mt. Lebanon became New Mt. Lebanon. I attended there first and third Sundays. My mother's home is out in Shelton Meadow and we attended that church second and fourth Sundays, but, both churches were pastored by the same person.

I joined Shelton Meadow Baptist Church when I was 12, and I've been a member there since that time. At that time we had what you called the mourning bench. If you wanted to join the church you sat on those seats during revival, which was for a week. And people would pray over you and you decided whether or not you wanted to join. If you did, the following Sunday you'd be baptized.

They did have some youth programs. They always had Daily Vacation Bible School in the summer, and Sunday School, and then you had junior ushers and junior missionaries for young people to join, that kind of thing. Your faith is something that you grow into based upon your experiences. You're maturing - coming from being in elementary school, junior high, high school, going off to college.

Eugene recalled how church was a place where his leadership was nurtured, and that continued in college.

In college I became president of the Student Christian Association at South Carolina State. We were able to accomplish some great things. We had a Student Christian

Center and we did activities. And we took trips where we coordinated with student Christian groups from some of the predominantly White colleges. We would have a retreat and that was a good thing.

As a young Black man in the center of the Civil Rights Movement, Eugene discussed how he was deeply impacted by the events of those years.

Dr. King was very prominent in our lives as being a primary spokesperson for the Civil Rights Movement and the fact that he was a Baptist preacher and advocated non-violence; that helped to reinforce a lot of our involvement. The faith-based involvement in the Civil Rights Movement was very much influential. We had some racial conflicts down in Orangeburg and we were able to schedule a recording of our choir to go on the local radio station and that was a breakthrough.

Eugene remembered how his years in the military tested his faith as he transitioned to life on base and while stationed overseas.

In the military, I had the opportunity to go to church on Sunday but it was different. You had the chaplains there--very different from the setting in the community. They'd kind of give you a holistic service rather than denominational oriented. And that didn't sit well with some of the men that I took with me sometimes. But nevertheless, you had to make sure that you stayed grounded.

He identified his enemies as not only the North Koreans, but also spiritual foes.

Your whole orientation is protecting yourself against the enemy. You go from congregational to individual meditation. It was a real eye-opener. But you read the Bible. When you were on an Army post in America you could branch out into the

community and go to the church of your denomination. We did that and that worked out real well. Went to Bible Study and church every Sunday.

After the military he returned to his church roots in his hometown. *I'm still a member at Shelton Meadow; my name is still on the roll. My wife's too. My wife was a member of New Mt. Lebanon and then she came and joined where I was at Shelton Meadow.* Though he has held leadership roles in his church, he has also encountered conflict.

I was ordained a deacon at Shelton Meadow, but I resigned because of differences and practices that I considered to be ungodly. I don't attend there now because I have a problem with the behavior of the pastor. He doesn't walk the walk. I didn't see myself going where you have the pastor that doesn't value accountability. But I go now to New Jerusalem AME Church. I've been attending there around four years. I'm involved in church activities there on a limited basis, and I've made myself available as they need me.

Eugene identified himself as a “liberal Christian” but is uncomfortable with labels. For example, he did not identify with the term “evangelical,” even though his beliefs and practices placed him in that category.

What I can see “evangelical” being is a way of witnessing. I think being called a Christian without so much emphasis on denomination is more appropriate because with denominations you get people to start majoring in the minors. You know, whether or not you sprinkle, whether or not you baptize [by immersion], and that kind of thing. That's not what this is all about in my opinion.

I think the life you live ought to mirror Godliness. I think a Christian is going to model Christlikeness, and that is what's very, very important to me. I try to let my action mirror

the Word. In this day and time you stay in the Scriptures, in Proverbs and Psalms. They give you that guidance for modeling Christian virtues and modeling Godly behaviors. I read the Scriptures every day. In addition to the Daily Word [a monthly publication with devotional readings] and also a daily devotion book called Morning and Evening. I believe that it's more important to see a sermon than to hear one. You walk God's expectations in your life. You don't have to talk it—you live it.

Eugene's Career Faith Connection

Eugene's faith assures him that God is in control, and he described how he is comforted by that belief, especially when faced with significant life decisions and when his administrative work is especially challenging.

I think that when you rely on your faith and God, then He orders your steps. I felt that He led me to accept the principal position and meet the challenges. I see the connection of my faith and my work being modeling my faith through my work.

Administrative leadership has provided a way to be a positive influence in the lives of others, which he viewed as an outgrowth of his faith.

The public schools have the same philosophy as the church: whosoever will, let them come. I enjoyed being principal because you can affect immediately the kind of behaviors. And people see that. Parents respect that and students respect that. But it means a whole lot when you model that yourself, because that models integrity and that does more than anything that anybody can say. It's a matter of being salt, a matter of being impactful, and not trying to be impressive. That's what I believe. A lot of people say they know that I'm a man of faith. They know that by the way I walk. I carry my

Bible with me, even when I was principal. Every day. I don't talk about it, but I keep it close.

He was quite aware of the conflicts that arise when faith and the public schools mix, and yet he insisted his experiences in that regard were not dominated by conflict.

*I'm always cognizant of the separation of church and state. There's some things that I did knowing that if I ever got called on the carpet for it, I would have to stop it. For example, before Parent Teacher Student Association meetings we would have prayer as a principal. When the ruling came out that we could no longer have prayer at graduation, I said, 'OK.' But I would have a song that would be performed by our concert band like The Children's Prayer [from the 1893 opera *Hansel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck]. Our band director also played arrangements of the hymns It is Well and My Faith Looks Up to Thee. I didn't get any kind of kick back from that at all. You look for legal ways to evidence faith and people respected that.*

Eugene's Personal Politics

Though he shares some of the same biblical standards for social behaviors as the Religious Right, Eugene did not indicate that he identified with that movement. He also pointed out where the labels that are used in exploring these dynamics are limited.

When you start talking about liberal and conservative in the political arena, it's so much of an all or nothing kind of thing, and so much room for mistaken identity. But to me, you can be labeled a conservative but have open-mindedness. And liberal should not be defined as anything goes.

I think that a "liberal" Christian in my sense is that you are in the world, but you're not of it. You don't care for the sin, but you always open arms to the sinner. I think that this

whole business now about homosexuality and other life-styles that are Biblically unjustifiable, people have their choice and you just express to them, I'm your brother, even if I don't approve of your life-style. Anything that's happening in the world today is in the Bible. Homosexuality, murder. But everything that is Biblically explained is not Godly, and that is the highest order.

So, that's how I would look at being a "liberal" Christian. We co-exist, but you don't want to be persecutorial. You use the Bible as your standard for behavior, but you don't use it to browbeat people.

His views on the Religious Right were reflective of his own approach to social issues, which caused him to be somewhat sympathetic with certain positions he viewed as biblical, but he disagreed with the approach. His concerns included his opposition to racial aspects of the political practices and beliefs involved.

The Religious Right has, in some cases, an intolerance of what exists in our society, as many of us do. But I tell you, there is a certain amount of hypocrisy that goes with that. Here you have some people who are in religious circles that are jumping all over homosexuality but they don't do the same thing about adultery. And so, you get this perception about the degree of sin. And sin is sin.

In many instances, some churches don't receive some people. I mean there is a discriminatory practice in some churches. During the Civil Rights Movement some of my college classmates worshipped at two of the biggest White churches here in Marion—Central Methodist and First Baptist Church. Those churches didn't have any African-American members there for a long time. The Southern Baptists adopted the behaviors of segregationists and Dr. King called them out on that. The letter to the Birmingham Jail

is a very prominent example of that. It wasn't until the '90s, I believe, that their formal statement came forward saying that their organization was wrong.

I believe there is this objectivity in terms of what's Godly and what's not Godly that is seen by the Religious Right. I understand that we should not tolerate sin. But our vision must be broader than what I see. Unfortunately, some of the Religious Right have gone to the point of having racial overtones, which is not acceptable at all. When you get to the point where you're going to be exclusive and you think you've got all the answers, that's dangerous.

He has seen how the mindset of the Religious Right has been displayed even on the school board in Marion.

We have one board member that has taken it on, talking about we need to put prayer back in the schools. Well, that's one of the most misleading statements that anybody can make. What the Supreme Court ruled on was mandatory prayer, forced prayer. Right now the moment of silence is a compromise. You pray every day. And the thing about it—you don't have to have an audience to pray. Here again, that's where this political right, these people—it's their way or the highway. A lot of these people, they're so high on the praying but they won't even speak to you in many instances. What kind of Godliness is that?

People know what your faith is about by the way you act towards people—people who don't look like you, people who do look like you. You can differ without being argumentative and disagreeable to the point that you become irrational. And then to see people making money off of this – the news media, some of these talk show hosts, it's absolutely ridiculous and it doesn't help our country.

Eugene's Community and School District

The Marion Public School District covers nearly 300 square miles. The city of Marion is home to about 40,000, but it is at the heart of a larger metropolitan area of over 200,000. The school district encompasses all or part of several communities as well as the city of Marion and serves over 16,000 students. African-American students make up just over half the population.

As a community that has historically been racially divided, there have been many difficult situations, and in this conflict Eugene has seen strong leadership, both Black and White.

I think here locally you have more of an effort to work out differences. You do have elements in the community that are very much staunch conservative, but you've got people in this community who are more open-minded. Even back when I was a student, the editor of the [local paper] was one of the most levelheaded men in the community who happened to be White. One of the reasons why we did not have the violence that existed in other cities in the '60s, was the fact that you had people working behind the scenes to keep things civil.

As with many southern communities, segregation spurred the creation of private schools for Whites.

The one private school that was founded on the basis of desegregation closed a couple of years ago. Believe it or not, it desegregated before it closed. It wasn't poetic justice or anything like that. It was just a situation where you just wait on time. Ironically, the district bought that property and has converted it to a first class environment for early childhood education and an alternative school. There are now two prominent Christian schools here in Marion, and there are several Christian schools in the area, and they

have all desegregated. A lot of that has to do with funding rather than doing what's godly and Christian.

The district has a long and conflict-ridden history in its attempts to implement school segregation. Eugene has been a part of the district throughout that long history as principal at Jefferson, and one strategy was to reach out to both Black and White churches.

What I did was to help build a relationship. We had and still do today have baccalaureate services for our graduation classes. What we did under my tenure, is alternate ministers from the White community and the Black community. That proved to be very, very positive and productive. And out of that grew contacts, interactions that built trust in an environment where there wasn't that interaction at all.

Eugene's skirmish came in the context of a highly contentious political situation where fellow African-American leaders often questioned his performance. That contentiousness dogged him his entire tenure. He mused, *I guess the Book says a prophet has challenge in his own country.* He said his approach has been to strive to live a life of integrity.

I think the highest compliment that any person can get is to be respected. To be seen as a person of integrity, not just by one group of people, but across the board. I'm appreciative of the respect that I have earned. I didn't do it by trying to be political. People might not like you, but the question is, was he unfair to you? Did he disrespect you? I always made decisions that I could live with. And regardless of which direction the question came, everybody got the same answer. You treat people fairly; you don't necessarily treat them the same, but you treat them fairly, so that when you see them they have this respect for you. It's been particularly rewarding to me that members of this

community – White, Black, Asian – have come to me and expressed their appreciation for the fact that I've been a fair man.

Key Characters in the Skirmish

Besides Eugene, the other central character in the skirmish was the district school board. The community had a long and contentious history of conflict related to desegregation and the racial aspects of local politics were a prominent feature in the workings of the school board for decades. This pattern continued during Eugene's tenure as superintendent and featured opposition against him from Black board members along with division within the board.

It wasn't about me, but I was a catalyst. And because of the dynamics on the board, there was a contentious atmosphere specifically between African-American board members and me. I was beat upon pretty good by the African-American board members, both in public and in private. I could have responded, but I didn't. I felt that the community saw what was going on. Basically, I remained silent. I just let them have their say and did my job. In my last year I knew I would not have the board's support and so I made a statement publicly that I would not seek to be one of the candidates for being the superintendent. That took the sting out of the contentiousness among three of the four African-American board members.

The Skirmish Setting

Eugene recalled very few dissenting opinions in the community over the way the district dealt with church-state issues.

The only experience that I had was with the local rabbi, and he was very nice. His child came to Jefferson, by the way. Very smart young lady. He and I had a very, very cordial relationship and he was just saying that we know that there's a division between church

and state and that we shouldn't just be heavily Judeo-Christian and that kind of thing. And, so I listened. And I involved him as much as possible. Although we had our differences, it was an amicable situation.

One difference we had was that of having the district continuing to allow baccalaureate services for graduation classes at the end of the year. He felt that we were in violation of the law. Another one was whether or not we were receptive to the inclusion of all faiths. That was raised, but there was no evidence of our excluding any faith whatsoever. We talked about that. As a principal, I made sure by appeals for participation of my students that all faiths were invited. Most of the faith-based student activities were of the Christian faith, but if there was a request that was made for Jewish students or Buddhists, we certainly would accommodate that and we always opened it up to that. Along about the same time we were talking about prayer at graduations. We had differences about that. So nothing went beyond that, and it never got confrontational during my tenure at all.

Legal challenges in nearby districts prompted review of practices and changes to avoid exposure to legal action. Though Eugene asserted *praying is always appropriate*, he helped the district adjust to the legal parameters.

We used to have prayer before football games and that was discontinued.

It was because of the courts. This was something that was a consequence of a ruling in another part of the country by a court about prayer at graduation and prayer during the football games. Of course, the compromise was and is the moment of silence at which time persons can choose that time to pray but it would be individual and silent.

Those changes came when he was a school principal. The same prompt of legal action in a nearby community caused changes to prayer at school board meetings while he was superintendent.

When it comes to having prayer at the school board meetings, we invited the superintendent of the district that had a suit filed against them and had a session with him about that, getting advice. Rather than get into what other districts had gotten into in terms of litigation, we decided to heed the advice and voluntarily discontinue that practice and went from that to a moment of silence. That was a bone of contention, particularly with one board member, and it continues to be today.

The prevalence of Christianity in the community was mirrored in the composition of the staff. Eugene estimated the percentage of administrators in the district who were Christians at *ninety-nine percent*, and he noted that religious elements were common in daily leadership practice. *There would be some quotes that had reference to God on emails from some of the other administrators. It was a common practice, not just by administrators, but by some teachers. It was not unusual.* Another feature of the religious tone of the community and schools was a “faith-based partnership” that was initiated after Eugene retired as high school principal. He was a member of the leadership core that launched the partnership, which continued to grow during his years as superintendent.

We had a core group that consisted of the superintendent, director of public relations, retired educators, and pastors to meet almost monthly for breakfast and talk about these opportunities. We looked at seeing what we could do to complement the Fellowship of Christian Athletes program and get a program in all of the schools. On two different occasions the faith-based community brought Dr. Tony Evans here to be a guest speaker

for a prayer breakfast, and at the last one in 2006 he challenged us to not just come together and eat but to make a difference.

Evans encouraged the group to consider The National Church Adopt-a-School Initiative, which began with a church-school partnership Evans initiated as pastor of the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. The initiative “promotes community revitalization through church-based social services by leveraging the existing structures of both churches and schools” (Retrieved from <http://tonyevans.org/miracle-of-the-million/church-school-partnerships/>). The organization website asserts, “It is possible to offer social services to those in need without forcing religious beliefs on them.” The stated mission as posted on the website is to “rebuild communities from the inside out with comprehensive, faith-based programs and community partnerships.” Eugene and his wife were sent to Dallas for training in the model.

When we came back we approached the board about beginning that program and it was unanimously adopted. We have mentoring, we have Christian Leadership Centers in the middle schools, we have Good News Clubs at all of our elementary schools, and we have a church-school adoption initiative for each school. We invited all the churches irrespective of their denomination to be a part of the church-school adopt-a-school initiative and each one of our schools right now is adopted by at least one church.

All the programs in the collaboration are funded by non-district dollars, Eugene clarified.

The Christian Learning Centers (CLCs) are a middle school version of religious release time programs common across the country. As with the district’s elementary level Good News Clubs, participation in the CLC is voluntary for middle school students, and requires parental permission.

The CLCs are opportunities for a Biblical curriculum to be taught off campus during the school day. That's been ruled by the courts to be within the parameters of church-state. It's a very, very popular course at all three of the middle schools. As a matter of fact, there's a waiting list at all three of the middle schools.

Eugene explained that the plan was to extend the CLCs into the high schools. *The high schools are in need, but before we can establish Christian Learning Centers in the high school, we need to be able to satisfy the waiting list in the middle schools.* The blueprint, according to Eugene, called for an aligned curriculum from elementary through high school in the faith-based initiative programming, but that was a work in progress. *We zeroed in on the middle schools and elementary schools for a specific curriculum, and right now we need more money in order to have the continuity from the elementary school to the middle school to the high school.* Eugene reported that the mentorship program and the church partnerships were also making progress.

We have over 300 mentors in the district dispersed throughout the schools. They do everything from tutoring, to being a lunch or breakfast buddy, to assisting teachers in the classroom. It's very, very successful and we're real proud of that. With the church adopt-a-school initiative, that got all the schools involved.

Eugene was aware that the level of cooperation between the church community and schools in Marion was rare.

A lot of it is the approach that is made towards the community members and the faith-based community trying to get buy-in from the churches, from the school board, and from the administrators, faculty, and support staff. This works in our district because of the leadership of the principals. If you don't have their support, then it's not going to go anywhere. But, it works because the people see the value in it and they enjoy

volunteering and see this as a way to not focus on the differences of church and state, but what can be within the parameters legally.

Unlike in some other places where there have been confrontations overtly in board meetings and others concerning church and state to the point that it's gotten very acutely adversarial, that's not the case here. A lot of it depends upon where you are in this country. You know, in the Northeast—New York specifically—you've got battles about church and faith based communities using school facilities. It's ridiculous, you know? I mean, it's not hurting anybody. We do that all the time here.

The Skirmish Trigger

When he took the reins as superintendent, Eugene began sending out a regular Monday email to all staff.

The purpose of the emails was to encourage all of my employees. I sent them out to all certified employees as well as non-certified employees, so every adult that was employed in the district that had email got it. I would shut my door. I would say something like, "Good morning boys and girls! Another weekend we have been blessed to come through, and no matter what situation you're going through, you know Who holds tomorrow," and that kind of thing. I would quote a verse from a hymn, and I would say something like, "We need to be in prayer about different situations and encourage each other." I had a book called Bits and Pieces, that's where I got my quotes from, and they're on different topics like love, encouragement, having confidence, those kinds of things. I just picked them out. Then I would use quotes from different people. I would quote past presidents, philosophers, pastors—including Chuck Swindoll [a well-known evangelical preacher

and author] and Dr. King. And at the end I would say, “Have a great day and keep your head up.”

Eugene elaborated on his purpose for sending the Monday emails:

People have death, they have sickness, they have births—all the gamut in terms of emotional experiences. They come to work, and whether they’re bus drivers, cafeteria workers, or whatever, and when I would go to visit the schools and a faculty member would come—and this was irrespective of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status—they’d come to me with tears in their eyes and say, “I just want you to know, I look forward to your emails every morning.” They said that, and they said it frequently. And I said, “Well, it makes it worthwhile. If you benefit from it, then it’s worthwhile.” So I didn’t make a big deal out of it, I wasn’t trying to make a name for myself about anything. I just know that in the work environment it’s one of those intangibles. When people see that you express concern, care about them, they enjoy coming to work. I know while you can’t measure that, I believe it had made a difference in terms of the attitude towards academics, towards going about your daily work, feeling good about coming to work, and knowing that a person that’s at the district office has a sensitivity for what’s happening in your life.

Eugene could not recall receiving any complaints prior to the formal complaint that set off the skirmish described below.

No complaints. Not a one, not a word. I got positive feedback every day. As a matter of fact, before I had discontinued with the religious content, I had employees that would send them to their pastor and they sent them to their relatives. They told me this. And they said, “Look what my superintendent sent us,” that kind of thing.

Letters of complaint received.

The skirmish was triggered by two letters from national advocacy organizations that arrived during Eugene's first year as superintendent.

We got two letters, one from the ACLU and one from the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, stating that you are sending out emails and making religious references. They quoted one of my emails when I said, "I just feel like singing one of the hymns." And one of my principals was cited also. The letters came to the district. They came to me. And I think a copy may have gone to the school board chair, but they didn't go to all the board members. I made copies and then forwarded them to our school attorney. I also forwarded a copy to the principal. This one principal was singled out because she was accused of sending multiple emails to the staff at the beginning of the school year and having faculty meetings where faith was brought up quite frequently. I think the distinguishing factor with this principal was that in other schools the emails and the assemblies were not as prominent.

Eugene pointed out that it was believed by staff that the letters were prompted by a complaint from a single employee, but the identity was never confirmed.

The District Response

It was quickly decided by leadership that they would comply with the request to discontinue the practices and avoid any legal actions.

I talked with the chairman of the board about it, and after consulting with our attorney, we decided to put it on the school board agenda so that we would deal with it publicly. My concern was about getting an opinion from the attorney on angles that I possibly had

not considered. But in talking with our attorney, we headed off what could have developed into a legal battle.

The situation was particularly challenging at the elementary school of the principal named in the letters, since it was assumed one of their staff had been the source of the anonymous complaint.

The complaint brought the ire of the overwhelming majority of the faculty there. But we encouraged the downplaying of that, because it would create more problems than it would solve. I did not go to the school. I talked to the principal on the phone and said that the best way to handle this is for us to discontinue the practices.

In the community, there was local media coverage in the newspaper and on television news.

The basic coverage came from the newspaper reporter being at the board meeting. At that time there was a partnership between the [local newspaper] and [local television station], in particular. The reporter interviewed several people in the community about what had happened, but I did not have any proliferation of interviews with the television station. As a matter of fact, I didn't have a live interview at all. They just took what I said at the board meeting and went with that.

There was little talk at Eugene's church and among his Christian friends.

It was spoken about by a local minister in a newspaper article, but nobody was talking to me directly. Persons talked about it, but it wasn't something that persons would come up to me and say, "Yeah, I read about so and so and so," and wanted to chat about it. But it was talked about in various circles.

Though Eugene was leading in the midst of a politically charged context, he affirmed that none of his opponents took advantage of the situation for political gain. The board asked to receive copies of the emails since *there was this suspicion that I was sending something that was controversial, but they had no evidence*, but there was no political price to pay.

The board was not critical at all. You had three African-American ministers on the board, and then the board member who's advocating about prayer [at school board meetings and in school]. I just told them, "This is a way of encouraging our employees." The pastor that was quoted in the paper said, "How are you going to criticize somebody for encouraging your employees?" The board chairman is an elder at his church, and he said to me, "The community, they're very, very supportive of what you were doing." The reaction from the community was very positive. And that was very satisfying.

Nevertheless, Eugene recalled moving with caution, knowing the political situation with the board was volatile.

The way I conducted myself was very, very important in terms of being responsive, and being professional, always maintaining your poise, and watching your words. And so, in other words, you don't use that issue to grandstand and call press conferences to bring attention to yourself. I didn't do any of that. That's not me. Any contact that was made with the press, it wasn't initiated by me, it was initiated by a reporter. I know they went other places about it, but here again, knowing the dynamics between the superintendent and some of the board members, I didn't want to get sidetracked into a sideshow. I wanted to stay away from that and just stay focused on the issue.

Once the story was public, Eugene was contacted by an attorney who volunteered to provide pro-bono services.

It wasn't necessary. I let our school attorney know of the offer. And of course, that was welcome. We didn't say, "Thank you but no thank you," but we didn't see, based upon the option that we took, that it was necessary to do that. But he was prepared to go to the nth degree with it.

The Skirmish Resolution

At the next school board meeting, Eugene explained his proposed actions.

The most effective way to deal with the complaint from those national organizations as well as individuals was just to discontinue what their allegation was, and just to go and do the same thing but within the parameters. I said during the open session of the board, I would just refrain from using the religious Biblical references and the hymns and that kind of thing.

The school board agreed. *We responded by saying that we would discontinue practices they identified. After that, there were no problems. That was it.* There were many in the community who were initially opposed to acquiescing to the demands of the letters of complaint, but the overall community reaction to the board's decision was one of understanding and support, according to Eugene.

There has not been such an overt adversarial reaction because people know that the route that we've chosen is the one that really has to do with being cost effective. As a school district, we can't afford to go into litigation. A district where you have employees that had not been given a raise in three years and chose to balance it's budget without laying people off, but balancing it through attrition. So there's a respect for that and also knowing that the district has faith-based programs in place and so is not anti-religion. They don't like it, but there is an understanding about why the decision was

made. I mean, people in the community know that I'm a person of faith. I don't go around bashing people with the Bible, but they know, and that helps. I guess that goes with the fact that a lot of people will say, "Well, Eugene Robinson can take care of himself." And so, it wasn't a situation where you had to prove anything to anybody, and common sense was the way to go.

The practice of Monday emails continued, and Eugene made the adjustments as he indicated he would to the school board. He remembered how staff noticed the change and noticed how he continued to pursue his original intent, but in a new way.

I didn't discontinue the emails. I just said it a different way. And so did the principal. When I modified it, a lot of the staff said that there was regret that I'd do that, but they understood. I would write, "Always remember to stay in touch," and I would put this in quotation marks. And those people of faith knew what I was talking about. They'd say, "We got your message. That's right, that's right."

Eugene's Epiphanies and Reflections

Eugene had no second thoughts about the district's response or his actions regarding the skirmish.

It was a no brainer. We didn't have the money to spend on that. We had bigger fish to fry in terms of increasing salaries for our employees who hadn't had a raise in three years. And that included our custodians and cafeteria workers who are the lowest on the totem pole as far as the pay scale. So you could posture, but there wasn't any point in doing that. From a personal standpoint as well as a professional standpoint, I knew that I could accomplish the same thing, just doing it a different way. And so, that was my thrust. I would just continue to encourage them in a different way.

The legal challenge to his approach to the weekly emails was something he expected would come eventually.

I wasn't surprised. I mean, when I opened it up and I read it, it was one of those situations where you say, "Well, what I suspected would happen, it finally happened." My philosophy was, I would do it until I met that particular challenge. I knew it would be challenged. I did. I felt that it would be sooner or later, because it only takes one, and I felt that out of 2300 employees, there would be one that would say something. So, I was prepared for that. And when I met that challenge, I modified it. I didn't stop, I just modified it. I didn't say, "Have a blessed day," I said, "Have a happy day." I just used the definitions that meant the same thing but did not have the biblical direct line or quotes. Even today, I have faculty members that send word to me that they miss my memos.

Eugene said the experience did not change his approach to his work or his faith.

I think, if anything, it's strengthened my resolve that you go by the Golden Rule. I knew that my reference to God would be offensive to somebody, at least one person, but while it was overwhelmingly welcome by the community, the intent was positive. So it just reinforced the need in operating to monitor and adjust. And you do it without flair and a hearty disposition that humility comes before honor. And so that just reinforced the Word.

The characteristics of his community were a significant factor in his understanding of how cultural conflicts play out and he understands that the situation is different in other regions of the US.

A lot depends upon where you live in this country, and we're in what's called the Bible Belt. The Southeast has, in my opinion, a higher toleration level of church-school partnerships than the Northeast, the Midwest, and definitely the Far West. California, you know, that's another world. Churches using the school facilities is a non-issue here in Marion, but it's a major issue in some other parts of the country. And you ask the question, "Why?" You're talking about two, three hours for a congregation to come. Only thing they're going to do is come in and sit down, sing, and pray, and hear the Word. You have some people that just need to get a life. There are those forces out there that don't realize that this is about respecting all religions, not about suppressing Christianity. So we're able to do some things, until we get challenged on it, because the community is very, very faith based.

Chapter VIII: Sharon's Story

Introduction

Sharon was interviewed sitting in a conference room next to her office during a regular school day. At her request, both interviews were conducted together. Her school, which is just a few years old, is an impressive facility bordered on three sides by the farmland that dominates her rural community. Before the interview began, she shared, *I'm just going to tell you so this doesn't throw you off—When I talk about my faith, my school, I'm probably going to tear up. But that's just me.* Her openness about her emotional attachment to her faith and her work illustrated her transparency as she shared her story.

Sharon's Career

Sharon's career direction was set in high school and she pursued her college education and her early career all in the region where she was born and raised. Her faith was an element of her career trajectory from the beginning.

I'd gone to Franklin High School, a big high school. Up to the point when I was a junior in high school, I thought I'd probably go into business, be a business major, something like that. My dad had been a successful business owner. I was taking a required US History course and had this teacher who I thought did a great job. Probably halfway through the school year I was sitting in the class thinking, "What am I going to do?" And then I realized, "Wow! Not everybody's so interested in this. Maybe this is something for me. I looked at the teacher and thought, "Yeah, I could be a teacher!" At the end of the school year, I remember going up to the teacher, Mr. Maher, and said, "I want to let you know something. I want to be a history teacher. I realized that this year

in your class.” And he said, “Oh, honey, you’re never going to get a job!” And I was like, “What?” He asked me, “Do you coach anything?” I said, “No, no!”

As she reflected upon her experience in college and early teaching career, she recalled that her high school teacher’s predictions concerning the challenge of her gender held true.

I majored in education, but I tried to take the higher-level history classes to prepare, and often I was the only female in those classes. So I know where he was coming from. I went back to Franklin and subbed for a year and eventually I did get in and I was the only female. So there I am, with Mr. Maher, and we would joke about how I was never going to get a job. They would call me “TF”—which was “Token Female.” They don’t mean anything by it. I wasn’t offended. And, that’s kind of how I got my start.

Sharon met her future husband when he was student teaching at the school. He got a teaching position at the school, so they were both teaching in the same building.

I taught world geography for several years, but decided the big school just isn’t for me. It was too big. I really wanted to get to a smaller school setting. My husband had gone to a middle school, and it was a third of the size of Franklin. I thought maybe I’d like to go to a middle school, too. There was a seventh grade world history position that opened up, so I transferred to a middle school that was out in the country.

Sharon reported that the change from high school to middle school and from an urban to a rural setting was positive for her. Her new principal was an important feature of the change, as he provided an example of how to be a leader who is relational and passionate.

Of the three middle schools that feed into Franklin, it was much more rural and had more poverty. I felt right at home. I remember meeting the principal, Don, for the first time. He shook my hand and said, “Sharon Fitzwilliam! Nice to meet you!” I thought, “Oh

my goodness, he knows my name!” The principal at Franklin didn’t. He says, “I want you to work hard for me.” And I said, “I will.” He told me, “I have never got to hire anyone.” First of all, he didn’t have many people leave and if they did, transfers came in. So, he said, “Once again, I didn’t get to hire anybody. So, please, work hard for me, because I don’t get a choice in these things.” He was a great mentor in that sense, to show feeling and have passion for what you do. And he did neat things like, he had a notebook in his pocket and a kid would need to introduce themselves three times to him. They would come up and he would write their name in his notebook. If you got to the third time and he couldn’t remember your name, then he’d buy you a pop. I said, “Wow, I bet you don’t have to buy many pops,” but he said, “I buy them all the time!” But that example of reaching out to people and being a people-person...

Sharon remembered that it was during this time she started work on her master’s degree, not because she had any career goal in mind, but because of the pay increase it provided. She also earned her administrator’s license, which was something she had not planned to do.

I didn’t have children yet and thought, “I want to get my schooling done before I have my children.” A part of your master’s is that you needed another 16 credit hours. I thought, “Holy cow! Sixteen is a lot! I could almost get another endorsement!” So I started thinking, “What else could I get? Counseling? No. So then...well, administration. Well, OK, maybe I’ll try that.” I think I’d only been teaching for three or four years and there was a cohort program for administration and you had to be teaching five or more years. The principal wrote me a letter and they let me in. I was by far the youngest person in that group. I did that and my master’s and my administrator’s license all at the same

time. I finished that up and after I got done, I thought, “I don’t care if I ever become an administrator!”

She continued in her teaching career and recounted that she had no other professional plans on her mind, but several years later, that changed.

I was still teaching at the middle school. We had started a family by this point. I was on my second pregnancy. In my mind, I was thinking, “Oh, it’s going to be great!” I was due in November or December, so I would have taken the rest of the school year off. I was really looking forward to only having several months of school. And, to be honest, taking that time off would give me new perspective and a second wind, and then I’d be ready, and I’d be thinking, “Yep, I need to go back. This is what I’m supposed to be doing.” So I was looking forward to that and, obviously, to welcoming another child. But then I miscarried over the summer. The wife of the assistant superintendent for personnel had been an English teacher and she was doing workshops at our schools. I had maybe been in a workshop with her once at my middle school. She called me and said they needed a dean of students at the high school. Her husband was going through everyone’s licenses and noticed that I had an administrator’s license. She asked, “Would you consider doing that?” I said, “Mary, honestly I’ve heard about that job and I don’t know.” She said, “I’ll be honest with you—I’m going to be the senior dean just for this year. And, Sharon, how bad could it be? If it’s that bad—I mean, I sleep with the assistant superintendent of personnel—I’ll get him to get us some help!”

Thus prompted by a colleague she barely knew, Sharon accepted the job, her first administrative position, back at the high school where she had graduated and where she first taught.

So I go from being a seventh grade teacher and I end up taking that dean position. And, wow, that was an eye opener. My head was just spinning. My husband was teaching across the street, and he came to pick me up during the first or second week of school. He sees a mom and daughter who are crying, and another mom and daughter are crying. I come out and I start crying once I get into the car. He asks, "What happened?" I said, "I had to suspend and recommend expulsion." Somebody was trying to sell Adderall and anyone who touched it, even if they passed it, they were in possession. I was thinking, "This is not for me. I'm here because I believe in education, and now here I'm recommending people for expulsion." I just struggled, but I did that for two years.

She recounted that the position was a struggle, and she was not happy in the role. She became pregnant again and went on maternity leave.

When I was still pregnant, my husband said, "My college coach is a principal over at Clearwater." I didn't even know where Clearwater was, never heard of it. He said, "I think you should go over and talk to Bill. Being at a smaller school, I think you would realize that administration is for you. It's just not the right setting where you are now."

I hee-hawed around, then by late winter I called. They didn't take off Martin Luther King Day at that time, but Franklin did. So, they were in school that day and I wasn't, and I called Bill, the principal, and asked, "Could I come and visit?" And he said, "Sure." I had no idea even how to get over here, so my husband draws me a map.

As she remembered, the visit went very well and Sharon was sure it was a place she wanted to work, but it was a small school and there were limited opportunities. *It was just Bill and an assistant principal at that time, so I remember calling and saying, "If you ever have an opening..." but thinking, "Oh, yeah, right!"* That spring there was an opening at the school for

an assistant principal position. She applied. *So, Bill calls and gives me an interview, and then, sure enough, offered me the job.* She accepted and her family moved to the rural community and she became assistant principal at Clearwater Jr.-Sr. High School. Five years later she took the position of principal at Milton Elementary, another school in the district.

Sharon's Faith Story

Sharon described being born into an observant Lutheran home and being raised in that faith tradition.

I was baptized as an infant. I was confirmed in middle school and every Saturday prior to that for several years I went to confirmation classes. We had a great pastor who spent time drawing cartoons and talking to us, which was probably the best thing he could have done. It was much better than having us memorize Bible verses from the King James Bible that didn't make sense to me, but I'd memorize just so I get my sticker during Sunday School. So, it couldn't have been better for me. On the day you got confirmed, he would give you a verse from the Bible that was supposed to be your verse. Mine is, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" [Psalm 46:1]. I remember looking at him and saying, "What? You think I'm going to get in that much trouble?" "No, no, no," he said, "but you need to always remember this." And he says, "That was my verse that I was given. I have never given it to anyone, except for you." I have just felt that, well, that's not a coincidence that he was my pastor and that he taught me that way and that there was that connection there.

Sharon viewed the events integral to her faith story as more than mere coincidences, and instead considered them evidence of providential involvement. She described one such event during college that provided an opportunity for her to deeply examine the faith of her childhood.

In my senior year, I had to take a seminar class and they only offered it once a semester.

The semester that I needed to take it, it was on the Reformation. I grew up Lutheran, and so I thought I better stick to something I know a little bit about. I picked the sacrament of baptism and what that meant to Luther. Wow, did I learn a lot about grace—or not—and faith based on works.

Sharon reported how the class triggered a great deal of self-reflection concerning religious matters and led to many discussions with her family.

I recall having a lot of real discussions with my parents about the emphasis put on the works that you do, and that's not how it works! Even when my mom died when I was 28, she was our church organist, head of the altar-guild, and all that kind of stuff. She and I would have a lot of these conversations. Sure enough, when she died my dad bought new hymnal plaques dedicated to mom, because it's so ingrained that you go to church on Sunday, and you do the works of being the organist, the choir director. I'm sure my mom would say that was her calling, too. I think sometimes my dad still has it in his mind that if he can check these things off, that gets him a little closer. So, good discussions came out of that seminar. It challenged me and got me to think a little bit more about what I felt my faith was personally.

Sharon said the topic of the seminar, which appeared coincidental, was important to her faith and was just one of the providential incidents in her life. This pattern of incidents provided her assurance concerning her faith.

What were the chances that the topic was going to be the Reformation? My life has been full of what some might consider “small” steps confirming God's role in my life, but for me this has created a feeling that He has always been with me. I know it was all leading

me to here. I didn't know it would take all those different paths, and I was reluctant all the way. I have never doubted. Even as a small child I always knew there was a God and He was all-powerful, but I think my view of Him has changed over the years. And maybe that's what's been most remarkable to me. I always believed Jesus was His Son and all of that. But my view of God growing up was more of punishment and to be afraid of Him. I do remember at a young age feeling like I wasn't going to be good enough to go to heaven.

Sharon self-identified as both “evangelical” and “born-again” in describing her faith. Her beliefs concerning the Bible and faith in Jesus as the only hope for heaven are common among evangelicals. However, evangelicals typically point to a specific moment when they were “saved.” She does not and she explained that she is aware that this sets her apart.

I think most people say, “This is when it happened.” I can't pinpoint one time, because I just feel like there's always been things showing me, “Sharon, this is what you're supposed to do, this is where you're supposed to go.” But, it's just always been there. I haven't had a chance to really question or come back to it. I mean, it's just always been there.

Sharon reported that as she has lived out her faith day-to-day, she has found she needs the local church to keep her accountable.

I do the things that you think a Christian should do. I go to church on Sunday and I'm active in church. We go to the small Missionary Church.³ Prior to that, we went to a large church. Around here it would be considered a mega-church. But, it was so big and I need more accountability. I need to be signed up to greet at the doors, so that I know

³ An evangelical denomination that holds to conservative theology and is part of the Mennonite tradition.

I'm going to make sure I get there, because I know people are counting on me to open up that door. I've got to have that, so I go to a small local church.

While church participation is vital, Sharon explained that the focus of her faith was on living a life fully aligned to her beliefs. That required dependence upon God.

In everything I do, I try not to just do lip service to things. I try to make it a part of my actions. I have a plaque in my bedroom that I made that says, "If God brings you to it, He'll bring you through it." A lot of times I've got to remind myself that. I wake up in the morning and I see that plaque. And that's what I go to bed looking at, too. He will bring me through this, whatever it is, He will.

Sharon's Career-Faith Connection

Sharon's faith story is tightly entwined with her career, and she described how she viewed the events in her work as instrumental to her faith journey. Her interpretation of these events through this lens reached back to her epiphany as a junior in high school about becoming a teacher.

It was the first time in my life that I had experienced a weight being lifted off my shoulders, knowing God had lifted that off my shoulders and gave me the vision.

"Sharon, that's the answer, I just gave you your answer." And I knew that that was a direction that I was supposed to go.

She pointed to her transfer to a poor, rural middle school as another affirmation of God's hand in her life, especially since the principal was a role model of caring, personal leadership for her.

To me it felt like these people, these kids, need me. This is what I'm here for, to serve. The principal was much more hands on and he would tell the kids how much he cared

about them. And when he did things with faculty, same thing. He would try to build us up.

As she looked back on getting her administrative credential, her decision at the time was pragmatic, but she explained how she saw God's hand in that as well.

I wasn't feeling like I was being called to be an administrator. Really, I just was trying to be efficient. At least that's what I was feeling at the time. I know now that it was more of a plan; it was leading me to this.

Her first position in administration came in a manner that Sharon interpreted as providential, especially in terms of how the initial contact came immediately after her miscarriage. The personal nature of the offer of the high school dean position and the encouragement that accompanied the offer from a person she barely knew were meaningful to Sharon, as was the prompting of her husband. She viewed all of it as evidence of God's direct involvement in her life.

It probably wasn't even two days after having the miscarriage, which nobody but my husband and I would have known about, I got the call from the wife of the assistant superintendent of personnel at Franklin. I didn't know her very well at all, and she insisted, "Sharon, I really think this is something you're supposed to do." She wouldn't have known that I had been pregnant, that I would have said, "Nope, you 're not going to want me because I'm going to have to take off in December."

I got off the phone and I told my husband.

He said, "Yeah, I think that's something you need to do."

I said, "I don't know." I have always been a very reluctant person to change. "No, no," he said. "I think it would be good."

“I won’t be home in the evenings. And what happens if I don’t like it? How am I going to get back into the classroom? I’d have to keep doing it until an opening so I could transfer back out. I’d be stuck!”

“No, I think you should do it.”

So, I always blame my husband for all of this.

Sharon also interpreted the circumstances surrounding her move to Clearwater as providential, beginning with her visit to the junior-senior high school.

We never had delays at Franklin—fog delay, ice, snow, whatever—you went to school. They [Clearwater] happened to have a two-hour delay that day. I went on time, and so that gave Bill and I even more time to talk. I walked in that building and I immediately thought, “This is for me, this is what I need. This is where I’m supposed to be.”

Since the school had only two administrative positions—the principal and an assistant principal—the chances of an opening were slim. Nevertheless, she remembered being convinced it was where she was meant to be. She recalled how her conviction was validated, another turn of events she attributed to divine providence.

Would you not know that the assistant principal ends up taking a position farther south, and they’re looking for somebody. I had gone in February, and nothing happened all spring, then all of a sudden—boom! I’m sure there was good competition, but I thought, “Nope, this is where I’m supposed to be. I know it.”

Sharon was hired as the assistant principal. She found in her new principal a mentor who overtly integrated his Christian faith in the day-to-day practice of his leadership in ways that appealed to her.

Bill was a great mentor for being an administrator and someone of faith. He was very active in his church, and just carried that kind of mission right over to the school in how he dealt with parents, and kids, and teachers. It was very much a part of his Christian faith and how he felt Jesus would want him to do it. So, for me—Wow! Great! I mean, it wasn't unusual for us to have some devotion time in the morning before we'd get started.

Sharon described how the expression of her mentor's faith extended to how he handled student expulsions.

He just totally believed that this is a part of learning. I will never forget Bill saying over and over to the student, "This is about making you better. I hope it doesn't make you bitter, because that's not our intention. We want you to learn and we want this to make you better." And he would often say, "This is what God intends. He knows we're not perfect, but He wants you to learn. You know, that's what we want to help you do."

Sharon commented that the role of Christian faith in her principal's approach to school leadership was quite different from what she had experienced at her former district. She viewed the change of districts as a catalyst for significant growth in her own faith.

The district was so very different from Franklin, and as for me, it really helped me. I don't think, had I stayed at Franklin, that I would have grown like I've grown here, just because of the people I've had around me. I certainly believe that this job as principal has been a major part of me growing in my faith. I have to be able to live my faith here, because it is a part of my life. Every morning, for example, as I come in to work, I pray on the way here. I have two daughters who go to school with me here, and I pray for them as we come in. We do our pledge of allegiance and we have a moment of silence.

On my desk there's a sign: "Lord, take me where You want me to go, tell me what You want me to say, keep me out of Your way." I pray that every morning and I pray a hedge of protection⁴ around this building. Every morning.

When completing the online screening survey for this project, one question offered options for describing how faith is expressed at work. The option Sharon selected was, "My faith is most often expressed by sharing with co-workers what I believe verbally and in other ways as well." That description is consistent with how she sought unity between her work and her faith. She pointed to a state audit as an example of how her faith and work blend, and how the experience prompted growth in her faith.

We just had the state come audit us for our title program⁵. You're on the defensive on those kind of things. You feel like, "We're doing a great job. We have test scores to prove it," but, you don't know. And, in the past our former governor made comments that there's not a single good school district in the state. You just assume when they come to do the audit, we think we're doing things right, you've kind of told us all along we're not. So that's what you're expecting. I know my staff were praying for me and for our superintendent for that audit. We had a faculty meeting on Wednesday, then the audit was on Thursday. The faculty prayed for me at that Wednesday meeting. I was at total peace about the audit, which is not usual, not normal for me. I feel like I was at peace with it because I finally believed He'd bring me through it.

The staff held a regular, voluntary Monday afternoon prayer time, and at that prayer meeting Sharon was being prayed for as she prepared for the state visit.

⁴ Praying for a "hedge of protection" is a Christian phrase that is not taken directly from the Bible, but refers to the historical use of vegetation barriers to protect livestock from predators, and as applied to people or places, invokes God's protection.

⁵ "Title program" is an abbreviated reference to federally funded programming for schools with high levels of low-income students.

I did not know that they were praying for me at those Monday meetings, but, I had said to somebody, "I'm just really at peace about it. I'm really not anguished about going through the process. It'll be OK." But, I know it [peace] wasn't coming from me.

The audit went well, and Sharon saw both professional affirmation and faith affirmation as outcomes of the experience.

According to the seven or eight people that came from the state, it was the best visit they've ever been to. It was just absolutely glowing. I even emailed the staff after that audit and it went so well, and I said I'm so proud of myself because I had faith. I really had faith, because [sometimes] I think I have faith, but then I worry. So, is that really having faith, if I'm worrying about it?

Sharon described a number of ways in which her faith is evident in her approach to her role as principal. One of them involved an annual project to assist families in need at Christmas.

Our honor society high school kids will take eight of our kids from needy families shopping for Christmas. When I first came, I asked teachers for recommendations and I looked at our free and reduced list and there was more than eight needy children, obviously. I felt compelled about what to do for those kids that didn't get adopted. So I thought, "Well, our family will take some and be an example of giving." I just put an email out to staff, and so this started a seven-year process. Now, not only do we do those eight, we do an additional maybe 15 families on top of that, all anonymous. Since we tend to kind of know what's going on, my secretary, my counselor, and I sit down to try to figure out who those families are going to be. We pray before we do that, because we are human and there are times that you get a little frustrated with people year after year. You know, that family last year, they ended up going to Walt Disney World and you

thought you were needy. Wipe that from us and help us to remember this is for the kids and what is behind this. So, we pray about that before we do it, just to give us clarity and tell us who these people should be, who needs that help.

Another example of how Sharon's faith has been lived out through her leadership was a meeting—a "conversation," as she described it—that she led with her teachers to address and resolve long-standing disunity she had detected.

By last spring, I'd been here six years. I have a couple of males on the faculty, but we're a bunch of women for the most part. I don't know why we're created this way, but there's something about the dynamic of a group of women that isn't always positive. And a lot of these people have been here 20 years or so—obviously longer than I have. So by year six I thought, "We've moved forward in a lot of ways professionally and personally. But I still feel like there's something holding people back." So, I thought, "I've been here long enough and hopefully proven myself to these people enough that we're just going to address this." In church the Sunday before, the whole sermon made me decide to do this. I sat and cried in church. I was sitting towards the back and I went up afterwards to the minister and said, "Dave, I've got to tell you, you were talking to me this morning. These are things I have to address with my staff." God was basically speaking through the minister, "Sharon, you've got to do this, you've got to do it." So, after that Sunday sermon I went home and I thought, "He'll bring me through it." In the days prior to the conversation, I had at least four different people who came and talked to me about these concerns. It was like God was speaking because I was getting all these comments. They had no idea what was coming. I'm thinking, "They need this. Just wait till Thursday."

Sharon described tapping into the common religious culture among her faculty at the meeting. She addressed the problem in spiritual terms that were overtly Christian.

I think you would have been hard pressed if you had been eavesdropping on that conversation to figure out, “Is this a church meeting or something?” I said, “The great thing is we all are Christians here. And I know you all have that same desire to do right by God. And you want to be an example of grace and forgiveness. I don’t know what’s happened in the past. I’ve only been here seven years, but I think there are some things that are holding you guys back. You need to forgive one another.” I went around the circle. I named off each teacher and told them, “You are of value, you are special, we need you here.” I think in every organization you probably have some people who think they’re better, that they’re just more capable than others. I did it for the person who doesn’t feel that. But, I also did it for the person who thinks that they’re better than that person, because I wanted them to know, “You may not think that about the others, but I do. I value them and I want everyone else to value them, too.” I said, “I want God to be proud of me. And if He’s proud of me as one of His children, then I’m being the principal He wants me to be, and then I’m being the wife, I’m being the mother.” And so I said, “We have to hold each other accountable. That includes you holding me accountable. I know that’s unusual—you wouldn’t normally hold your supervisor accountable, but this is where we are and that’s what I want.”

Sharon also described how she expressed her faith when she was outside the local community at professional educational events.

I do not go to a lot of principal organization type meetings. But, there have been times we’ve gone to conferences and things like that. It’s so easy to be focused on the

professional aspect of talking. I don't know that I would come out and try to convert somebody. You know what I mean? Let's say I went out to lunch with people. I may not say, "Well, let's bow our heads and pray." If I didn't know the people, I would just silently bow my head and I'm still going to do my thing. But I would say, "Well, I believe in being a servant-leader." The way I would interact with people and what I would say, and what I would interject into the conversation, would be that of servant. I believe in serving others and doing it that way. I mean, if we were talking about leadership styles, my job is to serve others. That's what I believe. And then if maybe that led to a further conversation [involving faith], I'm not afraid to do that.

Sharon described taking cues from others in those professional settings, and how an interest in religion might tap her willingness to discuss her faith more openly—what she termed *a further conversation*—which often included talking about the Bible class that is at the center of her culture war skirmish experience.

I will tell you about us teaching Bible. I was never shy about talking about that. I tried not to be boastful that we still taught Bible in the school during the school day. That I shared freely with people, inside and outside of education. And I can approach people from a different avenue than what I normally would if they respond positively to that.

Being open about her faith at work, and as an active member of a local church, her work and church worlds significantly overlapped. Sharon said there were many interactions that resulted from this connection, encounters she viewed as mostly positive.

One that I never would have guessed would happen was when I was assistant principal at the high school. There were these girls who were being raised by grandparents. The grandmother ends up coming to the church that I go to and she had been there several

times and had seen me. One Sunday afternoon after church I got a call, and it was her. She was calling to apologize that she didn't feel like she had treated me as well as she should have. I wanted to say, "Believe me, you treated me just fine, because a lot of people treat me a lot worse!" But, she had started coming to church and obviously something was convicting and she picked up that phone and made that effort to look up my number and call and say, "I think I treated you poorly." And I said, "No, you did not. I always felt that you were trying to support your grandchildren and I'm just glad that you see that that's what I was trying to do," and then I just asked how they were doing and kind of changed the subject. But, how often does that happen? Had I not gone to that church, she wouldn't have seen me, she probably would have not made that happen.

Another overlapping experience Sharon described came in the midst of the skirmish over the Bible class lawsuit.

At that time, I was going to the larger church. And, Dave, who's the pastor at our current church, was on the phone with me immediately and then was over here to pray for us. That is kind of what made me make the church change [from the large church to Dave's smaller congregation].

Sharon viewed challenges at work as opportunities for spiritual growth. The state audit was one of them, and she believed those challenges made her a better, and more faithful leader, and better equipped to take on the next task God has for her.

Going through the audit and having peace about it, I was really proud of myself because I had faith. It sustained me, gave me the peace. In retrospect, I can see that that's been one of the steps that I had to go through to get to the point now where if something like this would happen again, I would be able to have peace and know and have that

confidence, and think, “Yes! This is meant for me,” and be open to it. I think sometimes, not having that confidence, maybe it takes me a little longer to get it done, because I’m not saying, “OK, yes. OK, lead me. OK, what do You want me to do?” I’m a servant, but I don’t know that I’ve always been willing. I hope I’m becoming more willing.

Sharon’s Personal Politics

Sharon reported that politically she is *pretty conservative*, as is the church she attends. She described the community she serves as *very, very conservative*, so it is not surprising that many of the views associated with the Christian Right hold sway in Sharon’s community. The vast majority of families in the area sent their children to the local public schools, but some did not. She believed most of those families shared a negative view of public education that is present among others across the nation.

In general, I think people have a lesser opinion of public schools overall, whether that would just be Christian[s] or not. For those who would want a Christian school setting, public schools have, to a certain extent, become watered down. For example, being at Franklin you couldn’t say “Christmas.” I think, in those larger school corporations, they have been forced to not just acknowledge, but become very open to everything. You know that saying, “If you don’t stand for something, you stand for everything”? So I think for Christians, it just doesn’t feel like they’re valued and they want more of a focus in the public schools.

Sharon’s Community

As previously noted, Sharon has lived in the same region her whole life, and she admitted, *I can’t say that I know a lot about other places.* Nevertheless, she did assert,

I feel this area is pretty unique. The community had a strong traditional Mennonite population, and Sharon believed that made a difference. My husband was born in Kansas, but that was another Mennonite community. And so when we've gone to visit there, it does give it a unique kind of feeling.

Returning to the issue of families that do not send their children to the local public schools, including her school, Sharon expounded further on her analysis of the situation.

I think why some Christians don't send their kids here is because they want it to be even more conservative. I'm saying conservative Mennonite and Amish. For example, I think of a family who did not send their kids in kindergarten and waited until first and second grade. They were conservative Mennonites. Kindergarten was too young for them to be intermixing with kids who are not. Obviously, I have kids here who are not Christian and parents who aren't, and they just weren't ready to have them be with those kids. I think it's a protection thing. We have relatives, and the son had gone to Overton Schools, which is a pretty big school corporation near here. And when he was a sophomore he just begged to be in a Christian setting. He wasn't happy with what was being discussed at the lunch table—the drinking, the partying, the talking about sex, and all that kind of stuff. He actually wanted to go to a Christian school. It's not as if Overton is that, you know...I mean they would have a population of Amish and so forth, but of course the Amish leave school by eighth grade, and so you do kind of lose that flavor. Then, in the high school where you don't have them there, it does change the chemistry.

Being a principal in a small town or rural community is different from the experience of administrators in other settings, especially if you live in the community you serve. Sharon reflected on that experience, laughingly referring to herself as *mayor*, and she observed, *I think*

being a principal in a small town is different, because you are looked to as the example for everything and somebody who can fix everything.

She was aware that people knew who she was and noticed when she was in public.

My custodian lives in town and he came in and said, “My neighbor saw you at Walmart. You looked like hell.” I said, “Well, it was Saturday and I clean my house Saturday morning and then I go to Walmart. No, I don’t put on makeup to make myself look pretty just to go to Walmart.” But, there is this expectation. I think for my children personally, sometimes that’s tough to be the principal’s kid.

Even in her small town, in Sharon’s view social media had become a significant minefield. She explained her cautious approach.

I do not do any Facebook, any social media whatsoever. And any chance I get, I tell the staff how evil it is. We’ve had lots of conversations, because this goes to being in a small town. When I was growing up, if a parent was unhappy with the teacher, they had to call each friend individually. So, probably by the time they got to their fifth friend, they worked it out of their system. Now, you just post it on Facebook and it’s hundreds of people and of course nine times out of ten, information is not correct, but the damage has been done. So, you just constantly have to be aware of that.

Sharon’s School and District

At the time of this study, the Clearwater Community School Corporation served about 2,000 students in grades K-12 in a rural setting. There were four schools, one secondary and three elementary. Sharon recounted how traditional gender roles were a potential barrier when she applied to serve as an assistant principal at the junior-senior high school.

Of course, having a woman as an assistant principal had not been done here. I know being a woman and in that kind of power position was a concern to some on the interview committee. Even when I went to talk to the board—they had a little session prior to approving me, so the board could meet me—and you could just see registering on their faces, “Really? A woman? She? Her?” I remember finally one of the board members just said, “What’s going to happen if you think somebody’s smoking in the boy’s bathroom?”

And I said, “Well, that’s a time-sensitive thing because you can’t let them get rid of the evidence,” and I said I’d quickly look for a male staff member. If one’s not around, I’m announcing myself and going in.

And he says, “Oh!”

I said, ‘Just like a male would have to do in the women’s restroom.’”

“Oh, yeah, right, right!”

But, I know that was kind of a big deal for them to do that.”

Sharon knew the district especially well, since she first served at the district’s junior-senior high school, then became principal at one of the three elementary schools, Milton Elementary. As noted above in the description of the teacher meeting to address disunity, the staff at Milton was all-Christian, which reflected the strong Christian presence in the community. The regular Monday afternoon staff prayer meeting held in the library mentioned during the state audit was just one indication of how Christian faith was evident in Sharon’s school.

There’s not anyone on my staff who’s not an active participant in their church and their faith. On Mondays after school, my librarian will call staff who want to, to prayer. They meet in the library. I don’t always make it. If I’m with my staff at a meal, we would all

pray. We do it all the time. Like at the beginning of the school year we all go out to a restaurant together and I will have one of our staff members, ask them to stand up and pray.

Given the faith commitments of her staff and the religious context of the community, Sharon was aware that prayer was not an unusual event in her school. *I do know that there are classes in my building that have volunteers who pray and students pray.* She acknowledges, *I know that, but I don't...*, indicating that she did not look into the issue too closely.

Sharon reflected on the difference between her experience of religious belief and practice at Milton Elementary as compared to her experiences prior to coming to Clearwater.

We weren't even allowed to say "Christmas Break" at Franklin. We had to say "Winter Break." If I would say Winter Break here, people would look at me like, "What are you talking about? It's Christmas Break!" In most of my classrooms, if you went in there, there'd be a Christmas tree. The last day of school before Christmas I get the whole school together in the cafeteria. We used to read the Christmas story and we'll balance it with other things. Our Christmas program is very Christian-like. We have a Jehovah's Witness this year in kindergarten and the teacher worked with the parents to accommodate their wishes, and they opted to not have the child participate in the Christmas activities.

The Bible classes that prompted the skirmish sometimes drew attention from leaders in other communities who asked Sharon how her district managed to continue the daytime, in-school classes.

Sometimes people ask, "How did you end up keeping Bible classes?"

I say, “Our community has supported it and our board, doesn’t want to stop because they feel that our community supports that.”

They say, “Wow, that’s amazing!”

And I say, “Yeah, it really makes it a different school setting.”

I find that Christians send their children to our school here because we are Christian, we are a conservative, Christian public school. You know what I mean? Their values are being supported here.

The Main Characters in the Skirmish

The school board, the superintendent, and the district’s lawyer all had central roles in the skirmish after the lawsuit was filed. Local pastors and the Bible associations that supported the Bible class program also had significant roles in the community response.

At the center, of course, was the mother who contacted the ACLU, which led to the lawsuit being filed against the school district. *The family was here in kindergarten, recalled Sharon, but the Bible class wasn’t part of the packet or any information or anything, because we didn’t do it in kindergarten.* She recalled that she knew very little of the family prior to the incident. *He was the oldest child. It was a divorce situation, and with that mom and dad, the only child. Dad had remarried and had another family.*

The Setting of the Skirmish

The Bible classes were taught once a week during the school day in all three of the district’s elementary schools. The Bible class teachers were community members paid by local church-supported associations. One teacher taught all of the classes at Milton Elementary.

She had a cart that she kept here with her materials and she would go with that cart to each classroom, and that’s kind of how it worked. Kindergarten did not participate

because they were only here half a day. So, the classes would start in first grade, and it was first through sixth grade. You'd sign up for Bible, and you had to have parent permission.

Parents had to sign up for their child to participate in the Bible class. The sign-up information was part of the back-to-school registration packet. As would be expected, it was common for students or parents to forget or misplace permission slips, and at times students would go home after the first Bible class and prod parents to get permission to participate.

What often would happen is, some parents wouldn't sign it. Well, everyone else was doing it, so then that kid that next week would go home and say, "I didn't get to do Bible! Sign this form!" We were usually in the mid-90s [percent] as far as participation. There were people who would tell you, "I came here because you guys taught Bible in school. And I know those values are important to you."

The information sent home indicated that students that did not participate in Bible class spent the time in the hallway. Sharon was adamant that being in the hallway was not a punishment in any way.

Our hallways are not used for punishment. We do reading buddies in the hallway. You might go out to the hallway if you were absent to work on homework as they're grading it in the classroom. It's an extension of the classroom. If you get in trouble, you get sent down to the office to sit in my row of desks. That's where you sit. Or you sit at the silent lunch table or something like that. So, it's not a punitive thing.

Sharon explained that other options for non-participating students during Bible class time did not make sense because of the short time involved.

Only being 20 minutes, by the time you'd get your stuff gathered up and walked down to the library, you'd pretty much have to turn around. So it had always been that if you didn't want to participate, you just went out to the hallway when the Bible teacher came in. And we'd leave the door open, just in case you wanted to hear what was going on.

Sharon explained that the Bible class program had a long history in the district's elementary schools. *We have an administrator who's been here over 20-some years, and he can't remember a time that it wasn't here. We have second and third generations who still talk about it.* In spite of the local support for the Bible classes, Sharon admitted that district leaders were aware of culture war skirmishes nearby, alerting them to the potential of a complaint.

Periodically there had been similar situations in schools close by. Within a year or so, there had been a lawsuit in Huntington, which is farther south. Our superintendent was good friends with the superintendent in Northwood. I don't know that they ever got sued, but I know that they had to go off campus, maybe because there was a threat of that happening. There was that feeling of, "Well, it's our turn. It's only a matter of time," you know, this was kind of inevitable.

In spite of anticipation of a legal challenge, the position of district leadership was that there would be no change in the Bible class program until it was forced upon the community. *Because it's in the community's DNA, until it's pushed, it's just not going to happen. We're just going to continue to do what we're doing.*

The Skirmish Trigger

The school year started and Sharon recalled that the Bible classes began without any concerns. *I don't remember hearing anything right away. Maybe within a couple of days or something I got an email.* The email was from the mother of a first grade boy who was not

participating in the Bible class. Sharon described the gist of the message: *I just have a question and a concern, and pretty much the thrust of the email was that she just didn't like him being out in the hallway.*

Sharon explained that the boy had been at the school the prior year as a kindergartener, therefore the Bible class was not part of his school day. When the student moved into first grade, his mother chose not sign up for the Bible class. *Fine, no problem. So, that first Bible session, he was allowed to go out to the hallway with his book basket and all that kind of stuff like we normally would have done.* Sharon did not know the mom and said the tone of the mother's email was not angry. The message content was specific to her concern and Sharon remembered thinking she understood what the mother wanted and that she had the situation well in hand.

I don't know that she said she was a Christian, but I do remember her saying, "I just feel that that's something that needs to be taught at home." But the thrust of it was just not wanting him to be out in the hallway. So I made sure she understood that it was not a punishment and that we do lots of stuff in the hallway. But, if she would like him to go to the library or the computer room, that would be fine. Which would she like? And I can't remember which one she picked—I think she picked the computer lab. So, I was like, "OK. No problem. Next Bible class I'll make sure the teacher has him go to the computer room."

Sharon assumed the concern had been satisfactorily addressed. She was proven wrong when she got a surprise phone call a couple of weeks later from a reporter at the Associated Press. She recalled being stunned as she was told, *"We've picked up that there's an ACLU lawsuit involving your school."* Sharon did not immediately connect the call to the Bible class complaint since a week or two had passed and she believed it had been settled.

I didn't even have the wherewithal to say, "What!?" I was just stunned. I said, "I have no comment, you'll need to contact central office." I'd been trained that all of our press and everything goes through central office. That was kind of how it began. I called my husband right away crying. I said, "Not on my watch! Not on my watch!" He said, "Sharon, you knew that this was going to happen someday. And who better for it to happen than with you?" He sent me flowers that day, one of the few times I ever got flowers from my husband.

The Skirmish Action

I just hung up the phone and I hurried up and called my superintendent. Of course, we contacted our lawyer and things like that. The lawyer, I understood, met with the school board. The lawyer did not meet with me because the suit cited Clearwater Community Schools, not me. I think initially a lot of the board members kind of felt like, "We're going to fight this." I think once the lawyer met with them and talked with them, they realized, we really just need to focus on how we can do it and comply.

Sharon recounted her immediate concern to both notify the staff and take care of the first grade student's well-being. Sharon anticipated that there would be significant backlash for the student and the family if their names were made known. Those fears were bolstered when staff members reported hearing some in the community making accusations about the family.

They were like, "Oh, the ACLU planted them! They didn't go to school there before and they already left!" Which was not true. As soon as I got that phone call, that day, after school our staff met, I made it very clear. I said, "Look, we'll figure something out as far as Bible and stuff like that. But our focus now is this child and for him to continue to be able to go to this school." I talk about being positive, respectful, and safe. The kids

know that those are my three rules. And I said, “He has a right to go to this school and feel positive about it, be respected, and feel safe. And so, I do not want people talking about this.” Well, wouldn’t you know, he came to school telling kids about it. So the teacher’s like, “I don’t know what to do!” I said, “Call mom and just let her know. It’s fine if he wants to do this. We aren’t talking about it.” And the mom said, “Oh, no! We didn’t want him talking about it, we’ll talk to him.” So, then they talked to him.

Sharon pointed to this skirmish as a time when the connection between her and her staff based on their common Christian faith became much more open and overt. That connection centered on prayer.

When we got sued by the ACLU and I got the staff together right away, it was one of the teachers who asked, “Can we pray about this, Sharon?” I said, “Yes, yes!” So they prayed. I had only been here a year or so at the time, and would not have been so confident in where I was and where they were as far as our faith. In a lot of ways, my staff has led me.

Sharon remembered that her attention shifted quickly from her immediate response to the lawsuit to planning for a different approach to Bible classes so that the program could continue.

Getting over that stunned, you know, “What to do?” kind of thing, that was less than a 24 hour period. Then it was just like, “We really need to focus on plan B and making this work.” And there again, first thing, local ministers were here right away.

The first local pastor who stopped by the school (and who later became her family’s pastor) expressed the intent of the whole group:

He said—and this impressed me so much—“Sharon, we don’t want to do any damage. We don’t want to make this more difficult. What do you need from us?” And I said, “I

just really want people to focus on what we can do to make this work now. Quite honestly, we just need to forget about what it was, and focus on what it can be.” He passed that along to the other ministers, and then when we all met together.

The school board held a public meeting to address the lawsuit issue. It was moved to a different location to accommodate the large number of expected attendees.

They held it at the cafeteria in the high school because there were so many people. I was there, standing in the back. I’m a spectator; did not say anything. There were people in the community who wanted to fight this. There were new Christians who were kind of rough in their speaking but had the fever, stood up and used some choice words that they really probably shouldn’t have, but they were on fire for it. The lawyer did a good job of letting them speak and then re-wording again where we needed to go and then making the recommendation and they had to vote on it. I know it was very important that it be a unanimous vote, which it was.

Sharon was also concerned about the possibility that the school board meeting would become a negative event.

I was a little anxious, hoping that it doesn’t turn into a pointing of the fingers kind of thing, which it did not. It was good to see all these very enthusiastic people, saying, “No! They can’t do this to us!”

Because all media communication was directed to the central office, Sharon was not significantly involved in that aspect of the skirmish. However, she recalled that reporters appeared at her school. She shielded students, but admitted, *I couldn’t do much about them approaching adults, so they did get parents. And, of course, the ones who were really supportive don’t necessarily always get quoted.* Social media picked up on the story, but she recalled,

Honestly I wasn't going to look at it much. If it did, I'd just try to focus on what do we needed to do now. But I felt like it was pretty minimal. Her secretary was able to screen phone calls, but she did get an interesting array of emails.

I got some really random emails from all over the place, and I kept some of them. I got some from people just way out there, like, "You're a terrible person" kind of stuff. And, I'll be honest with you, I got rid of those. The ones I kept were from people that I knew. There were far more supportive emails, even from strangers, than there were, "Shame on you," "Who do you think you are!" kind of thing.

She had plenty of support within the community throughout the skirmish, and she drew strength from it.

As far as support from the community or my church, I got lots of it. I mean, through emails, phone calls, people who I had worked with in the past would say, "Just want to let you know I'm praying for you, Sharon." You know, that kind of stuff.

The Skirmish Resolution

As soon as the school board agreed to correct the violations detailed by the ACLU lawsuit and comply with the law, the lawsuit was withdrawn. Sharon described how she began working with local pastors even before the formal school board decision.

Those pastors were coming and asking, "What do you need?" I said, "I think we've just got to start." We already had the Bible associations that were responsible for teaching the Bible, and the teachers. Those people immediately become your group, and then those pastors start working on that. They asked, "Sharon, what do we need to do?" Initially it was like, "I know the first thing we need to look at is how can we have this off campus. I think if we get it off campus, we should be fine." And so, that's what they

started working on right away. “If you’re going to be taking them off campus, this is what you need.” I said, “Well, somebody needs to be the point person to go talk to the superintendent and say, ‘How can we make this happen?’” And I said, “But you’re going to have to look at transportation. There’s going to be permission slips because you’re taking them off campus. Things like medical information.” I basically gave them some of our registration forms.

Sharon assumed the early leadership role coaching the local pastors on how to shape a replacement program even though Bible classes were taught at all three of the district elementary schools.

I didn’t have them [the other principals] jump in because, obviously, those pastors had come to me because I was the school [where the conflict was triggered]. I had already started building the bridge and so I continued to do that. Later, of course, they [the other elementary principals] joined in, but initially it was pretty much that I felt that was my responsibility.

Sharon described how district leaders quickly agreed on what the next step needed to be. *The board, and even staff members, right away said, “OK, we just need to accept this and now how can we do this different?” And so then, quickly, it was, “Let’s move!” I mean, right after that board meeting. We met as an administrative team. The pastors group had not firmed up their Bible organization yet, but we met with representatives of that organization. So we asked, “How can we make this work? What’s a schedule we could do?”*

Since the pastors group had acted quickly with Sharon’s guidance, she recalled that district action to implement a replacement Bible program was swift.

I did appreciate focusing on, “What are we going to do?” The plans are already in place. I mean that was kind of the thrust of it. The plans are that we’re going to have a Bible association. If you’re interested, please join in. We need help. We’re going to have to do fund-raising to be able to pay for transportation. There was starting up costs. So it was more of just getting the information out there and trying to rally support. And so we had it up and running within months of changing. Not all of our kids participate, but I think we have like 97% of the kids are in Bible class, which is now held at a local church.

The revised Bible class was a voluntary religious release program that met during the school day, but held off school grounds. Due to transportation, the time it took for students to attend the new version of the weekly Bible class doubled. Sharon reported that in spite of all the attention to the conflict, the identity of the mother who complained and her child remained confidential, and there were no further conflicts with the family. *He is still here as a fifth grade student and I still have teachers who don’t know who the student was. It was pretty amazing.*

This year, [the boy’s] fifth grade teacher said, “Oh, everybody is signed up for Bible class. I just have two that are staying back.” One of the two non-participating students was the boy from the lawsuit.

She said, “I think I just need to send another form home.”

I was like, “No, no you don’t.”

She said, “I don’t?”

“No, no you don’t.”

But see, she didn’t even know that it was him. I have not had any issues with that family since then. So, no issues, none. And mom and I have never, ever talked about it.

Sharon's Reflections and Insights

Sharon shared a variety of reflections and insights about her experience of the skirmish and its aftermath. She judged the initial phone call from the Associated Press as the most difficult time of the entire skirmish.

I have to honestly say the worst was the first hour or two after getting the call from the Associated Press. I'm going, "What the heck?" You know, "What is this about?" And then thinking, "Oh, it's the Bible thing, I guess." And then just having some anxiety about making sure that everything went well for the boy, making sure that that there wasn't going to be any trouble for him.

Her primary responsibility to the community (and to God, as she saw it), was to help find a way for the program to continue in compliance with the law.

My attitude was: God brings you to it, He'll bring you through it. He brought this to me, and so I'm the one who's supposed to get that bridge going and get people focused on the positive, and not let it deteriorate anything—the program or just even relationships, because I knew it was important to this community. And that's what became my focus. That's what I told them at the staff meeting: "Our focus is to try to figure out a way we can do this, but it's done as far as the way we did it, and that's OK. Now let's just start focusing on what we can do about it to make it work," and then, of course, the student, making sure the student is OK.

She came to see herself as providentially placed to accomplish the desired outcome. To support her viewpoint, she compared herself to the principal she replaced and pondered how he might have handled the situation.

The principal who had been here prior, if he was a Christian, he was very much more of a compartmentalized kind of Christian. And so, I know a lot of people expressed that they were so glad that it was me because I would build the bridge and try to make it still work somehow. I remember a teacher saying to me, “Sharon, you’re our Esther.”⁶ And you’ll make sure this works out.”

When the school board addressed the issue, Sharon remembered being concerned about how she would be perceived, since her school was where the complaint originated.

I didn’t feel like any board member felt like, “Well, it’s because of Milton or something Sharon did or that particular parent.” So they knew it wasn’t, and I honestly felt from the whole situation, that it wasn’t against me. So, that was a blessing too, that they weren’t trying to point fingers.

In the aftermath of the skirmish, Sharon wondered about the way the complaint had been handled by the parent, and she considered the possibility that the skirmish had been orchestrated by the ACLU.

I will be honest. Afterwards, I kind of wondered if when he first came home and there was the Bible form and then she maybe waited to see, “Did they actually do it during the school day?” And when he came home and said, “I sat out in the hallway,” then I’m kind of wondering if she contacted the ACLU then and they encouraged her to send me an email. I don’t know, I don’t know. I have no idea.

⁶ The story of Queen Esther is the subject of the Book of Esther in the Old Testament and is remembered each year by Jews in the celebration of Purim. Esther courageously stopped a plot to have all the Jews living in exile killed. Esther 14:4 is a well known verse that asks if Esther was placed in her position close to the king by God for the purpose of saving the Jews, and the comment recounted here suggested Sharon was similarly placed by God to keep the Bible classes going.

Her primary reflections, however, centered on her attempts to understand how she believed God used the skirmish as another step in her spiritual journey.

My mom would always say, "He'll never give you more than you can handle." You know, I don't know about that. So, at that time, I was still feeling like this is probably too much for me to handle, thinking, "I can't do this," and maybe not having confidence in who I am or what I'm really capable of doing. But, now in retrospect as I kind of look back over all of this, being able to say, "Yeah, it was supposed to be on my watch," and I can believe when people said, "Sharon, who better than you?" But at the time, I wasn't believing it. I was like, "Well, that's nice of you to say, but I'm not sure of it." And I say that with embarrassment because that's lack of faith. It's been one of those things that I thought, "Right. It was supposed to be me." The ACLU situation is just another situation in which my relationship with God was strengthened and showed me how, if I am open, God will use me. I probably benefitted as much if not more in my walk than what the community got out of it. I feel like it's one of those steps that got me a little bit closer. I feel like I've had so many steps and not that big moment. But for me, it just continues to have these markers in my life that, hopefully, I'm getting better about seeing and using them for what I think His purpose is. I hope it'll be one of the things where He says, "You did well." That's what I'm working for: "You did good, my faithful servant." That's all I'm looking for.

Sharon pointed to how the incident actually strengthened the Bible program for the community, which she saw as further confirmation of divine involvement in the skirmish. She recalled, *Our Bible teacher had just said to me the week before this happened, "You know, it's basically just me."* The community rallied to support the new format, and she observed, *"Well,*

my goodness! Did this breathe fresh air into it!” In the end, Sharon viewed the former in-school Bible classes as *just the opening chapter* of the program. *It was something that we transitioned as a community.* The lawsuit was a negative, but *we turned it around, and made it something positive.*

Sharon expressed awareness that community context was an essential aspect of the dynamics of the skirmish, and she reflected on that uniqueness by contrasting the Clearwater district with her previous district.

That was a whole different setting there at Franklin. The situation that happened here would have just never happened, because Bible would not have been taught in the building. It just would have never happened. And that’s why I don’t think it was ever going to work at Franklin for me, because I don’t think I would have been able to live it there and be supported.

The Christians who spoke forcefully at the school board meeting were an example of the nature of a community where, as Sharon described it, people are *just more out about their faith.* *I don’t know that you find that everywhere.* She also observed that the level of support for, and attendance at, the school Bible classes far exceed community church attendance rates. Sharon explained that gap.

I’m sure 97% of our kids are not going to church on Sundays. But, why is that? I don’t feel like we have a population that is anti- those values, anti- having that experience. I think they’re pretty open to it—“Oh, if you want to, OK. Because all the other kids are going? OK, that’s fine.” They’ll go with it. “That’s fine.” “Oh, Wednesday night service in town? OK, yeah, sure, I’ll drop you off.” The parent isn’t going, but they’re dropping the kid off. So, they accept it, it’s fine. So I think we get a lot of participation

in those things, not that the parents necessarily are strong believers in it. But, it's OK with them. "Wednesday night? Yeah. It's convenient for me. I can drop you off and then go do what I want." You know what I mean? You have people and this is very important to them, this is their mission field, this is what they do. And then you have a large percentage that is just fine going along with the flow. And, good for us. Then, hopefully that will become more of a pattern for that student and they will go from there.

Sharon's observations indicated that the pervasiveness of Christian faith in the community, even if many were not deeply engaged, was not often challenged. The story of the Jehovah's Witness student showed that the school had addressed accommodations. But there was no mention of confrontations with other faiths, especially non-Christian faiths. Sharon had clearly considered that kind of possibility, and said, *I often think, "What happens if I have a Jewish family here or a Muslim family?" I think about that. I don't know, you know, I don't know.* But Sharon expressed confidence that if that were to happen, children would be well cared for.

She considered the pervasiveness of Christianity in the community and her school as a significant benefit in her faith journey.

My move here has really grown me. Being in the community and school I am has helped me become the child of God that I want to be. They have given more to me in my walk than I could explain. I just feel like it's very saturated here. That's why I say I think it's helped me. I know it's made me a better Christian. Because when you go outside of a setting like this, then how do you live your faith? Do you start to fall away a little bit? Right here I have the accountability, because it's so much a part of so many people's lives. As my life experiences have continued, I now see His purpose for me more. How

He is trying to use me. I just hope when it is all said and done, God will be able to glean from all my “small steps” that I did become a faithful servant, His servant. That’s what I hope I am.

Chapter IX: Laura's Story

Introduction

Laura is a diminutive woman with a big personality. She has a delightful sense of humor and she speaks with energy, expressiveness, and a distinct Texas twang. Both interviews were conducted in public spaces. The first was at a coffee shop in a suburban mall, and the second was at a fast food restaurant near her home out in the country.

Laura's Career

Laura's upbringing did not provide a clear path to becoming a school administrator. Her story of growing up in rural Texas, getting an education, and moving into a career in teaching and then school administration was anything but a predictable one.

I'm the youngest of nine children in a very blue-collar family, growing up in a rural area—the rolling plains of Texas. My dad maybe had a seventh grade education but was extremely intelligent and worked in the oil field business and ran a farm and did all sorts of things. My mother had an eleventh grade education and she was an accountant and businesswoman and ran multiple businesses at different times. We grew up respecting hard work and definitely you had to get your high school diploma. But it wasn't even an expectation that you're going to college.

Adult life came quickly for Laura, and by early adulthood she was married, a mother, and teaching, all in the area of West Texas where she grew up. She went to college, but she was not set on a career path.

I started commuting to college. While going to school, I guess two and a half years into college, I had our first child. I always thought I'd be a businesswoman. I thought, "OK, I'll try this teaching thing. If not, I'll run my business." Two weeks after I graduated, I

had our second child. Two and a half months later I started teaching English in the district where my husband worked in the very small town where we lived. With these two young babies, yeah, it was crazy, but we made it.

Laura and her family moved to Colter, at the edge of a major metropolitan area. She continued teaching and had her third child. She taught for 17 years and stated that she enjoyed it very much. Then she began to look for another challenge.

I really had never thought I'd go into administration. I thought my husband would, but he's like, "No, I like the coaching thing." I'd tried coaching at one time. I've done everything except coach Texas football, band, or drive a bus, and I'm not going to do those! Along the way people would say, "Oh, you'd be a good administrator."

Women were not leaders in church or in school when Laura started her career. Male leadership was a given.

When I got into education, as a young 21-year-old-teacher, I never considered that my role models were all male. I went to work and it was a male-dominated leadership school system across Texas. And so I really didn't think about going into the principalship.

Laura recounted how gender-based expectations extended to teaching assignments, as people assumed she was an elementary teacher, not a high school teacher.

Even as I was coming through, people would go, "Oh, you teach. Elementary?" And I'm like, "No. I'm high school." And then of course when I went into administration, kind of that same idea that I would be an elementary leader, and when I would say "high school," they were like, "Oh!," taken aback, like, "How do you handle those mean, tough kids?"

At the time she was interviewed, most of the top administrators in her district were women. Her superintendent, who was a woman, had been honored both in the state and nationally. *She's been an incredible role model. It's the coolest thing.*

My mindset changed to go into leadership when I started thinking, "I can do that job. I'm already doing aspects of that job. So, why not get paid for it?" and moving into it. I had a lot of leadership roles as a classroom teacher, so I had this bag of tools and experiences that I could share with people. It really was a natural progression.

Laura made the career move with the full support of her family. Her administrative experience began as an assistant principal in high school. Within just a few years, she was given the opportunity to open a new high school as the founding principal, the school where her skirmish occurred.

Laura's Faith Story

Laura's faith is rooted in her family. She described how church and faith were part of her day-to-day life growing up and were woven into a community where revivals were an annual occurrence.

I grew up Baptist, in a household where you get up on Sunday morning and go to church. There wasn't a time when I didn't know there was a God. I can remember accepting Christ into my heart at age eight, and actually going against mom and dad. We were in big revival, you know, hell fire and brimstone type revival. I said to my brother, who is 18 months older than I am, I said, "You know, we really feel like we need to do this--go down front and give our hearts." Our parents said, "You're really kind of young." Well, being the good child I was, I totally defied that and walked down and I had the total

conversion experience at a very young age and just knew that God's hand was in my life, always. I've never let go of that.

Laura's religious background provided foundational understandings of how to live and be good. She described how that learning came from both home and church, but being the youngest in a large family, the role of the church was especially important to her.

I always went to Sunday School, and that had a lot of influence--good Sunday School teachers and influences when I was young. But I can remember going into the church hall after Sunday School and hoping my mother was there. If my mother was there, then I had someone to sit with, you know? But if she wasn't...keep in mind, I'm the baby of nine, and there was a difference in how they raised the first seven. With the oldest children, they were always in church on Sunday morning. Then I think you just get tired and you get caught up in work and things. My dad was a deacon and very involved in a church, and then that little church went under and he didn't get as involved in the church where we were baptized, wed, buried, all of that. I can remember such excitement if I got to be there, and if dad came, that was really big, that was really big.

I don't feel bad about how I was raised or anything, because I can still look back and see different people who helped build those Christian ideals. And I had a strong sense of what was right or wrong. I would never have considered cursing, and especially not in front of my mother or father. And just knowing, as my dad would say, it's what's in your heart—you've got to make sure your heart's right.

Laura asserted that strong faith and a sense of God's presence have been constants in her life.

Praise God, I'm better than I was when I was in my teenage years, but I still knew even then that if Jesus came back today He would be proud of where I am at this moment, and so that relationship has always existed. I feel the hand of the Father on me all the time. All the time.

Laura struggled with the labels that might be used to identify her faith, and particularly wrestled with the terms “Pentecostal” and “evangelical.”

I think of myself as “Pentecostal” because that’s Assembly of God, but I’m not old line Pentecostal [“old line” or traditional Pentecostal women had strict rules for dress]— “righteous bun” in the hair, “righteous” hair, closer to God, whatever. I’m going to wear makeup and I’m going to cut my hair and I’m going to be Texas proud because I figure that’s what Texas women should do. Sometimes when I think of “evangelical,” I think of just the show of being a Christian versus that strong, solid foundation of this is who I am and this is my relationship with my God, period. But then when I look at it in terms of how it’s used today, maybe I am more “evangelical.”

Through her adult years, Laura described a religious life centered on her personal faith commitment and church involvement, but family factors have led to changes in the church her family has attended. Since her husband was raised in the Assemblies of God tradition, they had to decide which church to attend. *I married a very devout Assembly of God boy. His dad was an educator, but also a pastor, and very devout. My husband grew up with every Wednesday night, every Sunday night, every Sunday morning, you’re in church.* When they first married, Laura and her husband attended a Baptist church, but a serious illness created a spiritual crisis for Laura’s husband. The resolution of that crisis had a significant impact on their home and also caused them to begin attending an Assembly of God church.

My husband was raised and knew to be a good person, but his relationship with God came after we had our first two children, after he was on his deathbed. I did not even know what was going on spiritually with him and the spiritual battle he's battling until we have to go through that during this sickness and hospitalization. Then he had a total conversion where his pride melted away and that relationship was built. So, he truly became the spiritual leader of our household. That's when we decided that we needed to be fed more. We changed denominations— or, for me, I changed—and we quit going where we were going. That's when we started really, really, probably our journey [walking] closer to the Lord.

Though they changed churches, Laura and her family were not “church-hoppers” or “church shoppers,” leaving for a different church often. As with many evangelicals, changes were driven by the needs of their children.

We've lived in Colter for almost 24 years, and this little church we attend there now is where we first started. As my children grew, we left that church for about seven years to give them a supportive youth group. We needed that, because I found there was a conflict. My girls are highly competitive. They're athletes, they're very active in public schools. When we would work on our Missionettes or Sunshine Club or whatever [programs for girls in the Assemblies of God denomination], they earn patches and all that. My girls had their schoolwork and their activities, while for the homeschooled girls that were also in their groups, that was their schoolwork. So, now all of a sudden, my kids couldn't keep up and it really bothered them spiritually. It just didn't work. God moved us and we went to another church, but it gave the girls what they needed during those critical teenage years. It was a very strong youth program. My youngest always

stayed very connected to our old church. My in-laws continued going to the church and it was growing. We ended up coming back when my older two graduated.

Laura described herself and her family as very active in their church, and noted that this level of involvement has been a pattern throughout their lives.

We've done a lot of different things. We've been Children's Church leaders, we've been youth leaders in our churches, we've taught. My husband has been a deacon for as long as I can remember. I teach adult Sunday School now and work with our young couples. We raised our three girls and they're all involved in church. They never had to look to see if mama was going to be sitting there, because if mama wasn't sitting there, she was probably working in the nursery after her Sunday School class!

Indicative of her willingness to respond to needs she sees and her energetic, positive personality, Laura described how she and her husband began working in one area of current service at their church.

I saw the need like for our young couples, to offer them a way to get better connected and show them how you really raise Christian children and how you really are the head of the household as young men. So my husband and I take on that role and that's part of our small group work with them. We prepare lessons that really center on their needs. We do that on Sunday nights and sometimes we'll do weekend activities as well, whether it's kickball where we bring the family and have a picnic, or go bowling, or just show up at the house and have some activities.

As the center of their social activities, the church provides both service and activities. *And then, of course, just fellowshiping with our fellow church members in a casual setting, whether it's going out to eat, or hanging out on New Year's Eve, or whatever that*

may be. There's just lots going on, like Valentine Banquets and church dinners and this week Sunday we're celebrating our pastor's birthday after church. Last Sunday we had our monthly church dinner with our Women's Ministries and we raised money for our church building fund. It's something all the time.

Laura observed how the gender-based assumptions in church have changed over the years, mirroring changes in gender-based expectations in her career.

Early in my career, I can remember sitting in church and hearing my very old-fashioned pastor talk about the role of women being in the home. He was almost totally unaware. It was not intentional; it was just how he was raised. He didn't understand the career mom, the Christian woman. As far as leadership in the church, it has definitely progressed, to where there's more of an understanding. Even now, I have a 70-year-old pastor who's extremely supportive of me as a Christian leader, woman, wife, teacher, and everything. Very, very positive.

As with most evangelicals, Laura described seeking to have a daily time in prayer and Bible reading, often called a “quiet time” or “devotions,” and this was an important part of her faith.

My day goes better when I start with my devotion. My goal is to daily read my Word [the Bible] and study it and I try to connect it with the lesson I'm preparing for, so I get more background for my Sunday School class. Then sometimes I just have to read some Psalms and Proverbs, just because. Yeah, just because. And I always try to have a book. Right now I'm reading The Scarlet Thread [a novel by Francine Rivers, a popular evangelical author] because I'm interested in the power of prayer of a woman. But I try

to pray daily, and I think that can be in the car as you go, but usually right before I get up and right before I go to bed, definitely.

This personal connection with God was viewed as important by Laura as she sought daily guidance.

It's really not my journey; it's how He directs my steps. I think when you have that confidence it gives you a peace and joy that you can't have without it. That doesn't mean I always have peace and calmness. I have stress and all of that, but when I do I truly give that up and give that to God. It's all good. So, that's how I am.

Laura's Career-Faith Connection

Laura described living out her faith in her educational career in a number of ways. For many evangelicals, that begins with a sense that education is their calling. Laura reflected on whether she viewed education as her “calling” as she moved through her career.

It's so funny when I look back. I can always see where I was teaching and helping, but I didn't line my dolls up and teach to them like they say, or “I just knew because dear Aunt Sally was a teacher.” So, did I see education as my “calling”? Probably, no. Which I think is interesting. Passion? Yes. And once you're in it, you get it. You're like, “Oh! This is totally what I was meant to be!”

While she was a teacher, Laura was engaged in various student-centered activities that linked her faith and her work. For example, she reported that she and her husband initiated and sponsored Fellowship of Christian Athletes groups in their schools. As an administrator, she summarized the way her faith was expressed in her work as *servant leadership, kindness, and joy*. She expounded on that description:

I say that because that's what people will say. What you see today is what I always am. It's not a show. If I'm mad, they know, but I'm not mad very often and it doesn't last very long because there's just that peace in knowing that I'm not alone on this journey. I totally believe the steps of a righteous man are directed by God (Psalm 37:23, KJV: The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way). I think I'm where I am because God wants me to be here.

Laura approached her work as an opportunity to both serve and grow in her faith.

God has His hand on His Christian leaders. What we choose, how tightly we want to hold that hand and walk with it is our choice, you know? Walking through and learning, that's critical. If we forget that we're in this for Him and He will carry us through if we need Him to, then I think we lose that opportunity to grow closer to Him.

A key part of that work and “walk” for Laura was to be a role model who lived her faith in ways that were evident to others who got to know her.

I think I serve as a role model as a Christian leader. I totally believe that it's important. It's not important that when people see me they say, “Oh my gosh, that's a Christian!” I think they first have to know the person and then they will understand the basis and that the very foundation of things I do comes from my Christianity, and my moral, ethical responsibility is built upon those principles of Christianity. It all connects.

In her leadership position, she was able to bring leadership insights from her faith which applied to school administration and share them with colleagues. She provided an example of that is her use of the book *Leading Like Jesus* [by Ken Blanchard, an evangelical author best known for his *One Minute Manager* books].

It is one of the best leadership books you'll ever read and it has some great lessons. I'll share that with my fellow leaders. I'll tell them, "You can believe whatever you want, but this is a really good book that gives you some really simple steps to be a strong leader, whether it's feeding those close to you, or being aware that you really can't have this huge impact on everybody, but you can have an impact on 12 and then even three in your inner circle." There's a lot of leadership books that come out or leadership lessons that come out, and I think part of my walk is awareness of those. If I weren't a Christian, I don't know that I would know about that book. So I think those things come through.

Laura's integration of her faith and work was lived out in the context of what she knew is a controversial aspect of public schooling. She takes that controversy seriously, but was not intimidated by it.

I'm knowledgeable and aware that there is a separation of church and state in Texas public schools. I'm very aware of that. At the same time, I believe and know that I live in America and I have a right to say I'm a Christian and that's just who I am. And in my own time I can express that, but it's going to show through—who we are and what we do.

Laura had noticed that her identity as a Christian was evident to students through her actions, rather than her words.

With my kids at school when I was a principal, I never had to say, "I'm a Christian." They knew because of the way I treated them. Of course, we live in the Bible Belt, so maybe they expect that. At the same token, the kids that I worked with daily, any I was helping, I didn't necessarily know what they believed in.

While her Christian identity played out one way in her work as a school administrator, her denominational affiliation has been a factor in her personal life and could be a factor in other contexts.

I just became an adjunct professor for Lone Star Baptist College, which is interesting because you have to be a Christian to work there and they pray over you in the interview. Coming out of public schools you're like, "Wow!" But I can't be hired full time because I'm not Baptist. My denomination is Assembly of God, and to be full time you have to be Baptist. I grew up Baptist, but it's where your church membership is, which I find fascinating. Well, I'm not going to switch my denomination for that, but hey, it's great. It's just so interesting.

The Christian representation in her school district was strong. She estimated that 95% of the district leaders at that time identified as Christian, and at her high school when she was principal, she estimated about 90% of her staff were Christian.

Laura reflected on how she grew in her knowledge of the ways that expressions of faith were to be monitored. She was promoted to a central office position, and at times her work involved guiding other school administrators on these questions.

I've learned a lot. Like when I opened Sam Houston, we always did a prayer with the staff on the steps of the school and at our meal during in-service before kids ever came. It was a very general prayer, just asking that our year be blessed. I never had any issues with that at all, and actually had tons of people thank me a lot on that. Then you find out if it's a "captive audience" [situation, referring to the legal doctrine] you really can't do that. And so, shame on you! You can do a moment of silence, which is an opportunity to pray.

To me that wasn't a big conflict, but at the same time you have to be aware. And I get it. It doesn't mean I like it, but I do get it. My role now involves helping current campus leaders work through that. They ask, "Hey, can we do this?" And my experience helps me help them hold those tough conversations with your staff when they've kind of gone the wrong way.

Partnering with churches is one typical situation where strong bonds can also create tension. Though Laura's relationship with community pastors was strong and positive, she recounted how it could be tricky to navigate at times.

You have to know how to handle them, because people working as pastors and youth directors, they have a mission to save the world, which is awesome. But they have to understand we're a public school. When they know you're a Christian leader, they try to work that relationship sometimes and put the Christian leader in a position where they have to say, "No, you can't." And so I've had to say some of that. At the same token, I've also had that same group come and support me 100% and be prayer warriors and build a wall of support, saying, "This is the right thing to do."

The Christian pastors in the community worked closely with Laura's high school, even though she and her family did not attend church in that area. She reflected on that relationship.

It's so funny because I was so connected to the church communities; I had a very strong support base. The pastors had kids at Sam Houston, they knew me, they knew I was a Christian. I allowed their youth leaders to come in and have lunch with kids. One of the pastor's churches meets in Sam Houston on Sundays. They rent it. Just very tight as far as that goes. We just had a relationship. Some of them were on my PTA board. They want to know, "What can we do?" They were very present in a very positive way.

In her church, support for Laura's work in public schools was strong, but it was not always that way, and when they first attended that particular church, it was small and homeschooling was a strong influence. She recalled, *When we first went, there were probably 60, 70 people, and there were a lot of homeschool children.* That had changed by the time they returned to the church years later.

By that time people who had homeschooled their kids were now public school. It's just not the same feeling. The dynamics changed. A lot of schoolteachers are involved and my pastor embraces public school. I will tell you, I have a lot of support in my church, a lot of support for public education. From the leadership and the congregation, they're very, very supportive.

Homeschooling is a powerful force in the evangelical subculture, as is Christian private schooling. Laura has shifted her views on the decisions parents make about schooling.

You do what's best for your kids, and I think that's critical. It took me a long time as a public school person to embrace that, I'll be honest. I thought homeschooling or private school was just wrong and I had to come to grips with working with parents and working with kids. You've got to do what's best for your kid. That's the answer. It's not about, "Is it public, is it private, is it homeschool?" but it's, "What's the best fit for your child? What is that fit to help your child achieve the goals they set?" And I think we can't say it's public school, we can't say it's private. It's what fits for you, and what fits today may be different tomorrow and that's OK.

Laura's Community and School District

The community Laura's school district served was large and varied, and it was an area of exploding growth. The district covered over 200 square miles and included a variety of different

municipalities. Half a century ago, the district was primarily rural and a single high school sufficed. Enrollment grew exponentially and few schools were tightly aligned to a single city or town. Her high school was a case in point.

We built the high school over here in Benton, but it's not the Benton school. It's Sam Houston, and only 25% of the kids that populate that school—that now holds 2500—is from Benton. The rest of them are from Raleigh, and our boundary zone, and many from the city because the city has annexed most of our district. So the schools have to have an identity of their own while embracing and working to build a community support system within that. It's much harder than what you would have in small communities like where I grew up.

There were two parts of the school district, west and east, and Laura observed, *People would say there is a marked difference. The west side is more rural, more country. The east side is closer to the city.* She did not live in the district, but she lived in an area beyond the western boundary.

I live not just on the west side, but I live in Colter, which is a little town, and I have lived there for 23 years, almost 24. So we have roots there. We talked about moving into the district, but it's not a necessity like when I was growing up; if you worked in the school district, you lived in the school district. It may even be easier not living in the district in some ways. We have a Walmart up the road from Sam Houston. I might go there. If I went during the school day they knew, "The principal's off the school!" But, at the same time, I got my medicine filled pretty quickly! That's a plus! But, if I have a t-shirt and shorts and running shoes on, I can go to my little county Walmart and I'm not the principal of Sam Houston.

In a district as large as hers, and in a community as varied, the public presence of a school administrator was not the same as it might have been in a small town. Nevertheless, within the local community where her high school was located, she was a public figure.

I don't think I ever really realized the magnitude of, "Oh my gosh, you're the high school principal!" I mean, I'm Laura Taylor. I work at Sam Houston. But at the same time, I know the mayor, I know the city council and I had their support in different things. But I didn't go and eat somewhere and hear, "Oh, the principal ate with us today!" Yeah, who cares? I'm just very outgoing and very aware as principal that I'm the face of Sam Houston. There is definitely a sense that you need to be aware.

Laura's Personal Politics

Laura did not align closely with the Christian Right and disapproved of the negativity of partisan politics. However, she expressed her belief that Christians are compelled to hold to some views, and some of those are political positions that reflect a Republican perspective. In spite of that, she considered herself to be a person who can *see grey* in controversial issues.

I'm definitely a Christian and definitely have set beliefs. When I think of the Christian Right, anytime we go "right" and "left," I think that's so negative. But then I think if you're a Christian, you're a Christian, and there's certain things, like I don't believe in abortion. I do believe that Christ came. I do believe in more of the Republican views. But at the same time, I'm not so to the right. Where my husband's very black and white, I can see grey. I have to see grey in my role, not in what's sin and what's not sin, but in how we deal with people.

Laura believed the acrimonious partisanship often attributed to conservative Christians did not accurately represent the vast majority of Christians.

I think anytime you get a group of people together, you're going to have a few on the right, a few on the left, and a whole lot in the middle. And the few speak so loudly and so harshly that they literally yell out the voice of the middle. Ninety percent of the people on the high school campus profess to be Christians. But you're not going to hear them screaming and yelling.

In spite of that aversion to confrontation, Laura's opinion was that Christians have been too passive politically and have lost fundamental rights as a result.

Christians are really such a quiet group and that's why we've had rights pulled away from us. Now we're like, "Wait! I need that back!" So when you look at that, and then you hear this strong voice on each end, where we're like, "We just want to love people and do what's right." So, I think any time I hear "right" or "left," I think of extremists almost in that. I'm not going to go to some place and march and hurt somebody. That's not what I'm about. I'm not going to think you can live and do whatever you want, either. So I think it's balance, and I guess that's how I view that. So, when I think of the Christian Right—and I don't think about it a lot—I just think I'm a Christian, and so I'm going to fall short. I'm going to aspire to do greatness for Him, and I'm always going to fall short. So, "Christian Right," I just think that's those other people.

The Key Characters in the Skirmish

The two central actors in the skirmish besides Laura were the teacher who initiated the complaint and the pastor who was scheduled to present the assembly. *I had a teacher who is an atheist who was actually raised in church and once was a Christian. A very, very good teacher, very well liked by the students. He had a pretty good following.* The teacher was the faculty sponsor of the atheist club. The local pastor, Dylan Landry, was also the leader of the

organization that sponsored the assembly program, LiveSmart, and he was the lead presenter. Laura described him as *young and developing his program* at the time of the skirmish.

The Skirmish Setting

Laura recounted conflicts regarding religion at the school over the years. Many of the conflicts involved equal access for student clubs and the public announcements linked to those activities.

We allow posters. But kids will ask, “Hey, can we announce that we’d like the kids to come out and do something at our church?” And I’m like, “No, we can’t announce that.” Kids can hand things to kids, too. That’s not a problem.

There was a little bit of a battle, especially that aligned with this LiveSmart deal, with our student atheist organization. They even had some Christians in it. They shared ideas, and understanding, just trying to understand where people are coming from. Kids can work things out if adults will step back and allow them to. That particular organization came up a couple of times. I had a parent who said, “How can you have that?” And I explained, and they said, “Well, we don’t want our child in it.” And I said, “That’s a conversation between you and that child. There’s 2500 kids. I can’t monitor what clubs they’re in.” And so we talked about that and it went well.

The atheist club was strong at this time and I didn’t have a problem with them meeting. I can remember standing in the hallway one day, and a group of Youth Alive or Fellowship of Christian Athletes, one of them, came and said, “We are very upset.” The atheist group put up a poster about Darwinism week and had the fish with the legs, and they were very offended. They wanted me to take all those posters down, and I explained, I said, “I understand, but if I take that poster down,”—and right behind me was an FCA

poster with a big cross and fish—and I said, “then I have to take that one down.” If you allow one, you can’t say “no.” And I always would explain that if you want to meet, then you also have to allow the gay/lesbian society to meet if they choose to form a club. I said, “If this becomes an issue, and it’s disruptive to our educational environment, I’ll shut it all down. We’re not going to create disturbances. We’re a family unit regardless of our beliefs, we’re a family unit. We’re a school setting, and if this becomes disruptive, we will stop it all, period.” They worked through it. The kids worked through it.

Another area of conflict Laura experienced involved her relationship with area pastors concerning the use of the school facility.

What people have to understand is that I may be principal of the building, but I have to be very aware of how we do things. I don’t do any of the renting. That goes to central office with maintenance and operations, so I’m not in control of that. I can’t just go, “Oh yeah, you can use that,” unless it’s part of our programs in the school. Otherwise they need to go through central office.

We have a pastor who rents our facilities. There was a little pressure a couple of times for that church to be able to use, say, our performing arts center, and we don’t rent that. But it’s a beautiful facility and I understand where he was coming from for a special service to be able to have it in there. But I don’t control that, and so I have to say, “No, you have to go through....” Well, he says, “Hey, will you pull some strings for me?” “No, that’s not my area. While I appreciate you, I’m aligned with you in our friendship, I can’t do that, period.” So, just kind of being firm, and then making sure there is an awareness when people would want to come in and do something where you’re really getting kind of close to the boundaries of what we’re able to say “yes” to.

According to Laura, churches typically did not collaborate in their ministries.

The churches don't really collaborate, except when needed. They did come together to do an after hours program where there's usually a mentor and kids come together. And they're kids who are interested, and maybe newcomers to Christianity, but you're really reaching out to kids to bring them in through fun and fellowship to a Christian setting. So it's not about come in and learn. It's come in and fellowship, and then let me introduce you to Christ. And they've come together to organize that from the different churches.

But they do come together to support us. The same one who would say, "Hey, can we get this?" came and helped in a critical, critical situation, very full of grief, when we had our first death at our high school. These boys had a wreck about 30 minutes up the road and the driver, a senior, passed away, less than two months out of graduating. That same pastor was there while I was in Lubbock. I had gone from Wichita Falls to Lubbock. That pastor met with kids, they met with teachers there on that Saturday night, and he was a great support. The next day, on that Sunday, the kids needed a service type thing. Of course, even on a Sunday, I'm acting as principal of Sam Houston. I can't go, "OK, come up and pray. Come up and we'll do these things." I can say, "Here, we'll have counselors, we'll have support." But his church rented the gym and we had a memorial service and had 3000 people there and he led that. And because we knew our boundaries, he goes, "At this time, I want my friend, Laura Taylor, you know her as principal of Sam Houston, but she'll come forward and speak." So he framed it in such a way that if anyone came back and said anything [there would be no cause for complaint]. That was a moment where we had really good support.

In recalling the tragedy of a student death, Laura commented on her experience with the local media.

We had good publicity. I was very hesitant to let media do anything with that, but I watched media people who were moved by the testimony, and that young man's brother and family came to that event that night. And so, that's a great support. We had lots of pastors, lots of people who came out, many who were parents of our kids. And it didn't matter what denomination. They stood strong together as Christians.

Another area of conflict Laura experienced was school prayer. Though there is clear law to provide guidance, the conflict was one she often had to manage and she described how her own understandings have grown over time.

There's state law that dictates what you can and can't do. If you have a captive audience during the school day, you can't have organized prayer, and I made a mistake on that one time at our first-ever senior awards ceremony. If you have a captive audience, if you're saying you have to go here and be in this assembly, you can't have it. Prayer needs to be student led, but during the school day, you can't have it. Regardless. At graduation, if the students choose, they can pray. We've always had it, and that's delivered by a student. Texas has taken away basically prayer at football games. Which is interesting, because you can go to some areas, and you still have it. So it's kind of, you know, until someone says something, until someone complains, there's many things. We'd have a community pep rally before school starts. It's part of our tradition. We introduce the football team, all the fall sports, and their coaches. It's all driven by students and the student council organization, and they have a prayer in there. And it's led by a student, and they do it every year. And it's a community pep rally. There're

people everywhere. Out on the football field. And I did have a person say, "I'm a believer, but how do you get by with that?" And I said, "Well, it's all student ran, and because of that, and it's not a captive audience, we're OK."

Laura noted that, in her professional context, prayer occurred under different names and in a variety of settings.

Texas requires that we say our national pledge, our state pledge, and then a moment of silence every school day. You have your American pledge, Texas pledge, and moment of silence. They don't say that it's time for prayer, it's time to meditate, reflect, whatever. So while prayer is out, I'll tell you, with Texas state assessments and probably across the nation, prayer is strong! "Oh, Lord help me!" You know? And I'll guarantee you, every time there's an administrator who doesn't want to kill a kid, prayer is strong! I just got back from our state administrators mid-winter regional meeting, and we had a breakfast. It was led by prayer. Interesting enough, by the superintendent of the district just right up the road, the superintendent who hired me as an assistant principal. So, it's kind of neat to see that.

The Skirmish Action

We needed a program that was affordable that would help our kids make good choices and address those topics of sex and alcohol and drugs and honoring, and everything our kids are faced with. I felt a strong necessity to really work at that citizenship piece. So you want character programs, and if you look at your character programs, it's hard to find one that you need and that you can afford that's not faith-based.

On my PTA board, we were talking about needing that program. One of my

PTA board members also happened to be a pastor of Lifespring Church, and he had several kids in our school system. He said, "Hey, what about LiveSmart?" And so he and his sons, who are very involved in ministry at school, brought that and said this is what it is. And so that was kind of the link. And PTA was going to help pay for this. I said, "Well, let me learn more." The presentation looked good. He brought different speakers in. It was strong.

The program was selected, and Laura remembered briefing the presenter, a local pastor, on church-state boundaries.

He came in the first year. I said, "You can't talk about Christ. You can't even go there. It's got to be all about character." We wanted them to touch on anti-drugs, anti-alcohol, abstinence, making good choices. That's really what it all sums up.

Laura was aware that an evangelistic evening meeting was going to occur when students would be presented with what evangelicals refer to in shorthand as "the Gospel," which calls for a response to "accept Jesus as savior."

They knew the rules: you don't talk about your nighttime activity. They totally got that. So we framed all of that and had that set up. It was great, no issues. Not a peep. No problems, smooth. It was good. Got feedback from kids. Some kids loved it, some kids were like, "That was a little too much," because he was pretty intense about choices, and came down pretty hard. And so, you know, kind of weighed that information.

Laura explained that the leadership scheduled LiveSmart again for the following year. Just prior to the event, the teacher who sponsored the atheist club came to see her with concerns.

He met with me and said, "I want this stopped! This isn't right! You're over the bounds of separation of church and state." I'm thinking, "We did this last year, it was no big deal. Why is it a big deal this year?" And I'm like, "Back up!" I said, "They're going to work within it. It's all about character development. This is who we are." I'm picturing it just to go down like it's gone down the year before, and it will be all about making good choices and then they will have their rally at the night. We're not connected to that. He goes, "You've got to see this video!"

And then I see the video and it is pretty intense. The leader of the organization posted on his Facebook page how he's going to take a very evangelical, very big message. It's just totally evangelical: "We're going to go out, we're going to save all these kids at Sam Houston! You all be ready! You all be praying!" I was not aware of that video, and I'm like, "Oh, great." So when the atheist teacher saw that, he was appalled that we were bringing it to the school. But I still believe in what we're doing, and that we're not breaking any laws.

The teacher took the issue public via social media and soon there were other actors involved in the skirmish.

The teacher had this Facebook thing going on that I wasn't even aware of at the time, so things are stirring in the district. I probably met with him at least twice on it. Our relationship was pretty stressed on that. And we got letters during this time from the Freedom from Religion guy, and I just let our lawyers answer those.

The letter from the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Madison, Wisconsin, to the superintendent was made public. It noted that over 800 Texans were members of the organization and detailed several concerns about the LiveSmart presentation. The project's

affiliation with the Assemblies of God denomination was noted, and since the program had multiple speakers, it was a concern that the lead presenter was a pastor and other speakers were linked to other Christian ministries. The letter quoted the LiveSmart website, which specified evangelism as its core purpose. The organization cited legal parameters it asserted were being violated and demanded that the assembly be cancelled.

Regional newspapers and television picked up the story and the local atheist organization expressed opposition in the media and online. In response, the Alliance Defense Fund, a conservative advocacy organization, also sent a public letter to the superintendent supporting the assembly and its legality, and arguing that to cancel presenters because of their faith identity would be a violation of the law.

The District and School Response

The conflict was sparked shortly before the scheduled event, so the time for action was tight.

This happened real quickly, so it's not like months ahead of time. We're going to have this event on Thursday, and it comes down maybe a week or so before. I contacted my leadership, and my superintendent was extremely supportive. I met with Dylan, we met together beforehand. I said, "That video was not good. You've got to get that video down. I don't know what you were thinking! The timing of your video is why I'm in the middle of this mess." And we went through everything.

Laura clarified her expectations with Dylan, the presenter, that the Gospel presentation was not to be part of the school day event. *The evening event was very separate from what we were doing at school, and she told him, Remember what this about. This isn't time to bring your opportunity [to accept Jesus].*

Local churches were aware of the conflict and they contacted Laura.

That's when we probably had at least seven or eight different churches also come in and meet with me. They were totally supportive: "What can we do to support? What do we need to do to make sure our rights aren't violated? Do we need to call our organizations?" I told them, "We're fine. We're good. This is what I have to do as an educational leader. And I'm going to follow the rules. I'm not going to break our policies. That's not what this is about. This is about not allowing people to come in and tell us how we're going to run our character programs. If they have something better, and they're willing to pay for it, I would be glad to look at it. But this is what we've chosen. And this is what worked for us last year, so we're going to move forward with that." And that's kind of a summation.

As the conflict became public and was described by various parties online, Laura reported receiving emails both in favor of the assembly and opposed to it. Additionally, those in the school and community weighed in, and most were in strong support of her.

I had emails with protests of what's going on, and I might have had a few parent phone calls, but it wasn't crazy at all. I didn't get a parent phone call that said, "This is just wrong what you're doing." I got a couple of parent phone calls that said, "Talk to me about what this is," but I'd already communicated: If a child didn't want to go, they had an opt out. I worked a little with the media, the local news channels.

The staff was very, very supportive overall. Extremely. Some came to say, "I need to understand," and once I explained and communicated with them, they were very supportive. People at my church knew, and they were in prayer, and definitely a lot of prayer and support in that. But we didn't have big discussions. It's just prayer. The

whole Assemblies of God district, probably, was praying for good things to come out of it. So, yeah, I felt that.

There was an opportunity for the school board to weigh in on the conflict in public, since a regularly scheduled meeting occurred on the Monday before the assembly. The meeting opened in the typical fashion: with a prayer offered by the superintendent. *She prays before every school board meeting*, explained Laura.

Not one community member showed up to put a stop to it. The local Freedom From Religion group flew somebody in to go to the board meeting and speak. We didn't have any local people speak who were opposed, and we had local people there to support it who said, "Why are these people from out of state and out of the district coming?"

District administrators and the school board affirmed their support for holding the assembly as planned.

The Skirmish Resolution

The day of the event occurs, and we had our big assembly. Not one community member entered the campus doors the day of our character program to say, "No." The kids had a chance to opt out. They could go to the library. It was no big deal.

We had a place for visitors, and we probably had 20 to 30 pastors there to just make a presence. We had some people check in who said they were with a school district, and when we Googled them, they were Wiccans from east Texas. So we had this whole mix of different groups and they kind of watched. It was interesting just to see.

We had maybe one media group, and we let them come in. Because we've got media there, it created tension for the staff. We didn't want Sam Houston ever to be in the

media for negativity. But it's going to happen when you do good things, somebody's going to look for dirt, but we didn't have anything to hide.

Local television news covered both the school assembly during the day and the evening event. Segments of the assembly appeared in the broadcast report. At the evening event, television reporters were denied entrance by LiveSmart representatives. The television report on the evening program was done from the school outside the auditorium LiveSmart had rented for the event.

After the presentation, after the program, I always seek input from students. My biggest concern is, "Did this meet our needs? Did this really meet our needs?" So I'm getting their input, and even at that moment, regardless, I'm thinking, "Hmmm, we may need to do something different for next year." Because I'm already thinking, because of the kids' input—"It's a little bit strong on this, Mrs. Taylor"—I don't want kids leaving a program about citizenship feeling that they've been trod on because of their choices, even though they may not want to hear it, you know. So I'm getting some of that.

Based upon student feedback, Laura decided not to have LiveSmart back.

He hasn't come back since, because it was just so intense, it took away from the learning. You know what I'm saying? When you have a program like that, you want to make sure it's adding to your environment. And that was such a distraction, it took away.

Laura's Reflections and Insights

Laura recalled that her emotional experience during the skirmish was dominated by worry, obstinance, and prayer.

My feelings were a little bit of anxiety, a little frustration. And maybe a little bit obstinate. I'm pretty tough, you know? Leadership is marked by how we stand in times

of troubles and trials, and I'm not one to cower. I'm not going to back down just because you don't agree with me. I'm not going to do that when I know I'm in the right either. Other people aren't going to tell me, or us, what we can or can't do when we know we're doing the right thing. When we're doing things within the law, we're not going to have people come and change our plans. This is about the kids.

This other event [evening evangelistic event] is after school, and they have a right to do that. So when we talk about rights, we're not just talking about the complaining rights, we're talking about the rights of the Christian, too. So, you've got to keep that balance going all the time. And I'll tell you, there were seven different churches, different denominations, and some who came together and said, "We're believers, and we're going to stand firm on what we know and what's right, what we can and can't do," and so, it was good.

Laura remembered that a personal connection to Dylan Landry gave her cause for concern about what might be perceived as a personal religious agenda.

This program came to me through the PTA. I didn't make this connection. Then I remember my youngest daughter called me and said, "Oh my gosh! You've got LiveSmart coming to your school? That is so cool! That is amazing! Mom, I'm so proud of you! You're so amazing!" And I'm thinking, "What?"

OK, so I start making some connections. My daughter worked with Dylan Landry at church camp. And I am kind of worried, because I thought somebody, the media, could take that and really twist it where I had this underlying knowledge and connect dots that weren't there. And then he's connected with Assembly of God. I'm Assembly of God. Another dot. "Oh, well, she's trying to promote her religion," which was never my

intention. I saw I had a vulnerability and I had to pray through on that and just go, “OK, that’s out there.” Luckily that didn’t happen.

The entire skirmish became a prompt for prayer, according to Laura, and in her theology, Satan and evil are quite real and are active enemies that only prayer can confront. *It was definitely an attack from the devil, and so I spent a lot of time in prayer. While all of that was going on, I also had a lot of peace, thinking, “We’re going to do this.”*

Laura explained how her ultimate desire to see students have an opportunity to accept Jesus as savior—a life mission for all evangelicals—was superseded by her duty as principal to provide a positive learning environment and develop character in students.

I felt my chief responsibility was to continue the learning environment, because if I’d ever felt like it was to the point that it was being disruptive to our learning environment, I would have stopped it. I would have said, “No.” But it wasn’t being disruptive to that learning environment. Teachers weren’t getting in fights, they weren’t getting in email wars, my email was not overloaded. I’m having to deal with things in meetings and phone calls, pro-active in many ways and some reaction, but mainly pro-active, to make sure that there wasn’t a reason to not continue and move forward. Honest to goodness, if these other things happen, and there’s conversion, of course—that spiritual side—that’s great. While it needs to be our motive directing all things, that wasn’t my motive in the leadership role. I honestly wasn’t driven by that. I was looking for a program to promote citizenship. And that’s what I told my superintendent and my director—this is about promotion of character, and it’s part of our character development program, which we’re required to have by the state. So this is what we did.

You can Google “character programs” and they’re mainly faith-based, and that’s the issue. The next year we brought in Rachel’s Challenge [a program to promote a positive school culture in honor of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School school shooting]. It’s faith-based as well, but it’s different. And then we brought in Dave Roever [who was nearly killed and severely disfigured in the Vietnam War]. The man is absolutely amazing. He is a motivational speaker, he is a Christian, he preaches. And he can touch every subject you want kids to know without ever mentioning God or Christianity or anything else. Incredible. I didn’t get one single negative phone call, comment, nothing. Kids were just amazed. Parents were so pleased. It was amazing.

During the skirmish, Laura recalled having considerable support from many sources in the community.

I had support from the district level, and my church, and the PTA, so I never felt like my job was in jeopardy. And I had support from people in the community. I taught, so my parent community knew my reputation there. Then I worked as an assistant principal in the district. So I had this reputation that preceded me when I opened Sam Houston. Then they saw my work ethic, my treatment of the kids, my being right in the middle of things, and at everything, so I had a really good support and relationship with them where they’re going to trust me. So my support base from parents was extremely strong. That’s the same way the teachers felt. I’d hired every single teacher. They knew my beliefs, but they knew I respected others and others’ opinions. The staff weren’t as supportive to the other teacher who complained just because of their own beliefs. And they’d already seen me handle other situations. Because you kind of have to link them

all—It was like, “This year this happened, this year this happened, and then...,” so, they saw me tested and sustain under pressure, and I was pretty unwavering. So that helped. What mattered in that situation, and I think in any situation, is how do the people who really know you take it? And the people who really knew me were so supportive. I felt so blessed.

Reflecting on her actions, Laura noted where she erred.

I’ll tell you, I made a mistake. I didn’t Google the website. Maybe I should have done that. I didn’t realize what he had posted. But even if I had, I don’t know that he had it all built at that time. So, I probably should have Googled more, and maybe had a deeper conversation on, “You can’t do that.” Because the way he talked on the video, it sounded like he was evangelizing there on campus versus doing that at the evening deal. If I would have seen the video, I would have said, “You’ve got to take that down. You’re going to take that down. You totally promoted it differently than what we had talked about.” I can’t say that I would have said, “No, you’re not going to come,” but I would have definitely said, “You’re going to go back and post, ‘This is what we do.’”

During the assembly, Laura remembered being vigilant concerning the church-state boundary, and after the event, she was pleased with the way the event played out. She credited God with the positive result.

In the assembly, I was really tuned in to, “We’re not going to go there,” you know, making sure. It was stressful, it was hard, but there was also a peace. Dylan knew, and he handled it beautifully, just like he said he would. I was exhausted, because it does keep you awake, and you’re wondering, “OK, everything’s going well?” And there’s a

great sense of relief and a sense of pride in that we stood our ground. It came off, and it came off without a glitch.

There's also a certain sense of humility in knowing that there's no way all of this could have taken place without a lot of prayer going into it and God's hand. I mean, you can look at my life, all the way through, and you can see God's hand protecting and growing me. We're being tempered as believers, and you can see that all the way through.

Many evangelicals refer to a particular verse from the Bible when they reflect on the events in their lives: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, New International Version). Often this is done in the context of explaining how something that was not positive or pleasant eventually had a positive outcome. Laura pointed to a situation like that. She recalled how upset she was with Dylan when the skirmish was first triggered, but she viewed the outcome for LiveSmart as positive.

Personally, my carnal ["carnal" refers to human nature corrupted by sin] nature's like, "What the heck were you thinking, Dylan? What are you trying to do?" You know? I definitely thought that, versus stepping back and going, "OK. I can't question his ministry or his walk, but we can learn from it. So let's move forward." You know what I'm saying? I'm not angry with him, I'm totally thinking he's a great guy. His intention was the best in everything, and he apologized.

Interesting enough, it exploded in some ways for him at other schools. Some schools in the city were like, "We want you to come in. Our culture is fine with you talking about God or your story." A speaker has a right to talk about their story, they just can't proselytize. Because we're working with our communications department, he learned.

He actually later set up an interview with the media specialist to talk about his website.

He now has a section for secular and he has a section for faith-based, for different audiences. Because that's what you will see if you go into other programs. And that's where he was just young at it, but since then, he's worked with other schools.

I think it's exciting to see the ministry of Dylan Landry and LiveSmart and what they have been able to accomplish and how God worked. What we needed was a character program. He was able to spin off that and was able to grow, and his ministry was able to grow, so that he now has the faith-based and the secular, and he's able to minister in different ways. He's in full-time ministry for LiveSmart. I think that's pretty exciting and I feel happy about that.

Through the experience of the skirmish, Laura sharpened her awareness of church-state conflict, and she pointed to aspects she viewed as inconsistencies in her school context.

Once you go through that, you're then very attuned to what's Christ-based, Jesus-based. I would sit in a choir concert, and I'm listening to Alleluia or a tribute to the birth of Christ at Christmas, and I'm amazed at the fact that there's no backlash to that versus this. This Christmas the theater production for the Christmas holiday play was The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, which is all focused on the birth of Christ. It's an introduction to Him, but because it's a work of art, you have more leeway. Same source, same opportunity. So, when we say, "Oh, my gosh! Christ is not in public schools!" I think people just aren't looking. They're just not looking. And so it's very, very interesting to see contradictions that exist. We can do this, but we can't do that. Regardless of anything, our spirituality is part of our humanity. And we're going to seek something to

worship. You're so attuned as a leader, then, because you're thinking, "Where's the next attack coming from?"

Laura noted that the risks for a school leader are significant, and she explained that her first allegiance is to God in getting it right.

You have to be very conscientious of what you're doing to protect your career. I'm very attuned to watching and balancing that spiritual self, where I'm thinking, "God, You've got to direct me through this. If I'm going to get fired for Your name, that's OK. I can handle that." But I don't want to do something that isn't in line with what He would have me to do. So I think your constant spiritual self is in that prayer mode as you're going through that.

Laura reflected on the skirmish and what followed at her school and explained that it bolstered her confidence that God is active in her life and in the work she does.

I think when I look back at that time, I feel blessed. Because I see God's hand working all the way through it, where His intervention through people, through events, was so powerful, that you could only say, "Oh, my gosh! God did that! Totally did that!" There's a series of about four events. I needed one to be strong for the next one, to be prepared for the next one. We needed that LiveSmart experience to prepare us for that spring death of that child. If we had not come together as a spiritual community, and the leaders had not come together, my students would not have been supported through the death of that child. I spoke at that child's funeral as principal of Sam Houston, in a church setting, and used Scripture, and didn't hear one thing from anybody, you know?

Chapter X: Emerging Themes

Introduction

The strongest themes that emerged from each participant's story are presented in order of dominance. Each theme will be described and excerpts from the narratives provided to illustrate key aspects of each theme. After each participant has been discussed, the thematic threads detected across all of the narratives will be described.

Emerging Themes from Craig's Story

Lack of awareness of micropolitics.

When it came to the micropolitics of his new district, Craig was an outsider and often in the dark. He was unaware of essential facts and did not have the means to obtain them. That often left him unable to be proactive, and instead, he reacted to what others with power (especially the superintendent) said and did.

Craig's most challenging knowledge gaps involved the motivation of the superintendent and the power structure of the district. He said, *I didn't have all the information and I was trying to put all the pieces together*, and recalled, *I don't think I had an opportunity to really decipher who was in charge: the superintendent or the board. I never had a real sense of that*. In the end, he still did not know exactly what happened or why.

To this day I have not figured out how much of it was that the superintendent was being anti-religious. Was it just the fact she got blindsided and that put her over the edge? Or was her job in jeopardy and the board member was putting on pressure, like, "If you let this happen again, you're out." I would love to run into the superintendent and have a conversation and say, "Okay, you've retired now,

I'm retired, it's all over. Tell me what happened, just what happened. I forgive you. Now, okay, it's past. What happened? I'm just curious."

With a lack of insider knowledge, Craig often misread situations. For example, he recalled, *I didn't have any concerns about the promo and maybe that was naïve on my part*, and he also admitted, *There was nothing on my radar at all. And you've got a superintendent who's doing it, too, so I'm thinking, "What's the big deal?"* This theme was also evident in the many instances when he mistakenly thought an incident was resolved. In many situations, he expressed this belief using phrases such as, *It was benign. There was really nothing to it*, or, *That was the end of it*, only to find the incident was, in fact, not over. He was slow to grasp the seriousness of his own predicament—I just kept thinking, *"They're not going to fire me."* Well, *I was wrong*.

Craig's outsider status prevented him from using micropolitics to his advantage. He had support (*I was positive my staff would be supportive of me and they were. The parents were, too. The school was behind me*), but did not attempt to harness that support for his own political advantage. Instead, he chose to remain silent and work for a positive outcome within the political process framed by the superintendent: *I feel like there's nothing gained by me trying to spout off about it. I didn't even tell our home group* [his small group from church]. That approach did not yield the desired outcome, and throughout his final year as a principal he characterized the superintendent's treatment of him as "oppression":

When you know someone's looking over your shoulder, when you're looking behind you all the time, it's hard to look forward. I didn't do a good job as

principal. I maintained. I kept the boat afloat. But I was not in a proactive mode. It was so completely oppressive.

Framing the conflict.

On numerous occasions, Craig checked his perceptions of the unfolding situation, attempting to get an accurate frame within which to operate. This effort to frame the conflict is another theme that emerged. Central to that challenge was his attitude towards religion, which he viewed as essentially positive. The Easter Egg Hunt is an example.

In my mind an Easter egg hunt is not a religious activity. We have policies, but in my mind I said, "This is not saying come to Easter Sunday. This is an Easter egg hunt for kids." I think, "Cool! Have the kids come to an Easter egg hunt!"

The objecting parent caused Craig to recognize his own lack of understanding of her drastically different perspective:

She was sensitive because, in her mind, nonbelievers are under attack by Christians. When she said that, I thought, "Wow, that is a different perspective." Because, if anything, we Christians think just the reverse. It's Christians that are under attack.

This lack of understanding was evident when he considered objections to the prayer breakfast: *Who would be against a prayer breakfast for teachers? What educator would be against that? It's just beyond me.*

Eventually, as his options narrowed, Craig began to re-frame the situation in primarily rights-based legal terms. *I'm thinking to myself, "What I did for the prayer breakfast...I wasn't going to teachers saying teachers you need to go to this." My thing*

was for the local businesses. It had nothing to do with the teachers. That became especially pronounced when he believed he could not get another job.

I thought, "Now what do I do?" I'm going to be out of a job in a year. I can't retire yet, so maybe I should pursue a lawsuit because this is ridiculous. At that point I had already thought about a lawsuit. I don't know if I had made the contacts, but I didn't get the job in Montecito, so I'm thinking this really is discrimination. There's no two ways about it.

That step involved engaging outside advocacy groups as he sought legal representation, further solidifying his framing of the conflict as court-based and legal. At that point, his lawyer took the lead in his actions: *I've always deferred to my attorney, whatever he thinks is best.* Craig's focus became vindication and victory through the legal system. When an out-of-court settlement was offered, he balked. *I just want a day in court. I want it publicized. ADF was supporting me. I didn't pay for any attorney, and they wanted to be able to publicize, "Hey, religious discrimination! We won this court case."* Though he accepted the settlement, Craig believed he achieved his courtroom vindication and victory in the process. *The judge that decided on summary judgment, she got it. What the judge wrote shows she got it. Hallelujah for that judge! She understood my intent and got the whole thing. That to me was my victory.*

Faith journey.

While he had a Christian upbringing, Craig's faith journey has been as a questioning, evolving Christian. He recalled that as a child, *I'd been hearing the message. Finally, I said, "OK, I'm a believer." I still had some questions, which I still do, but I knew Christ is the Son of God and I responded to that.* That questioning

continued after college. *I needed to know that my Christian faith was my own, not just something imposed upon me by my parents and circumstances.* The process was not smooth, and he described a time when he left the church, but returned when life challenges led him back.

Finally I said, “God, I give up. I give. I give. I just give up.” That was a kind of transformational time for me. I mean, I’d always known that God was involved in my life; I just always knew that He was always there. There was never any question about that. But I wasn’t actively engaged.

His journey has included an uneasy relationship with the labels generally associated with his faith.

I think the word “Christian” has taken on a world of it’s own that’s not necessarily following Christ. Even the word “evangelical”—I don’t even like the word “evangelical” anymore because what it’s perceived to be. I’d really even prefer not to say Christian and to say I’m a follower of Christ.

His attitude about the Bible (*I believe the Bible is the word of God, but I don’t think we should take it so literally*) also puts him at odds with many evangelicals. *That was part of my evolution in growth in Christianity and why I’ve taken what would be considered a more liberal perspective on Christianity in the evangelical world.*

Faithfulness.

Faithfulness emerged as a theme in Craig’s story, though his faithfulness did not match some of the patterns common among American evangelicals. Prayer was an important part of his faith, but it included his questioning and honest struggling, as exemplified by his response when he knew his job was in jeopardy: *We prayed about it.*

I'd like to say that I said, "Okay God, whatever you want to do is fine," and I was okay.

I'd like to say that, but...

He asserted a sense of calling (*I enjoyed being a principal, been a principal for 23 years. I felt that was God's calling*) and that calling was expressed primarily in terms of servant leadership, which he viewed as having Christian roots. *Indirectly, my Christian beliefs, and Christ as an example, has helped me be a better leader. Christ was a servant, he served. He washed the feet of his disciples.*

His evangelical impulse to share his faith was present, but not overt. *I'm not one to proselytize. That's just not me. But if someone asked me, I'd certainly respond to them. But people knew I was a Christian. I didn't shy away from it.* His faithfulness was also evident in living a life of integrity, evidenced by his pact with his assistant in Lake Elsinore: *If you ever see me doing anything that you think is not in a Christian-like manner, you call me on it.* And, as is common in the beliefs of evangelicals, he did not view suffering as punishment, but rather, as an opportunity to learn and grow in faith:

[The skirmish] hasn't made my faith waiver because Christ never said we weren't going to suffer. The whole time I had faith that there was a reason for all of this. I didn't know the outcome, if it was God trying to humble me. I've been humbled, if that's the purpose. I was hopeful and prayerful that it would be a positive outcome in the sense that Christianity would be viewed in a positive light, that there would be some victory for the sake of saying that you could support a prayer breakfast and not lose your job over it.

Connections to other Christians.

Finally, Craig's relationships with fellow Christians, which constituted both a blessing and a curse, emerged as a theme. He pointed to several Christians as important supports during the conflict, including a number of Christian friends and his home group from church:

In our home group from our church I shared about what was going on. They would ask what was happening, so I would share with them. They were in disbelief, like, "What? There's more to the story, there's got to be!" No, there isn't, that's about it! People were very supportive.

However, he also described how two fellow Christians lined up against him. The first was the Christian board member. He recalled, *My mistake was thinking because she was a Christian that she might side with me*, and yet during the depositions, he remembered, *I was just so shocked by her. Actually shocked more than by anybody else. She was just antagonistic toward me.* The other was the human relations director. His thoughts on her were captured best in his recollection of a break during depositions:

I was thinking, "What is she thinking right now? I bet she's got some really torn feelings about what happened." I don't know if she did or not, but she was very pensive and not happy in her thoughts. I think she was very torn between her Christian beliefs and what's really going on there.

Emerging Themes from Terry's Story

Purpose/calling: Working for *shalom*.

Terry was hesitant to use the term "calling," but his description of how he understood his work matched the traditional Christian concepts of vocation and calling. *Shalom* is a Hebrew

word used often in Christian contexts that refers to more than just peace, but wholeness and flourishing, and is often applied to the goal of Christian impact in the world. Terry did not use the term *shalom*, but his stated goals reflected the concept. His purpose involved both serving the needy—*We really do have a mission and a calling to serve those that are the least and the last*—and peacemaking in the midst of conflict, a pattern he described through his career. He recalled his arrival at Madrona, which was reeling from significant conflict at the time:

It was very much a sense of, I don't know, "God's calling" is a little strong, but I walked into a situation that nobody wanted and got all kinds of congratulations and condolences from people statewide, then felt very much like God had prepared me for a lot of what I saw.

His purpose put him at odds with fellow Christians at times. He recalled while in Centerton, *People I would be sitting with in the pew fellowshiping with on Sunday morning were attacking me as an enemy for trying to help work with the least, the last.* It was also in Centerton where he battled with state and national Christian groups, including Focus on the Family and the Eagle Forum. *I'm not sure I remember a lot of those details about that time period. I've tried hard to forget them.* Terry saw fear at the core of much of the conflict the Christian Right has with public schools. He observed,

We are our ZIP Codes. We're gravitating to people that think and act like us, and then through the Internet we can be Facebook friends with just that little group. Then our view of reality becomes, "Everybody thinks this way and everybody else out there is the enemy."

As a peacemaker, his approach was based upon relationships:

I've found over the years that many times those people—even though you may or may not agree on the issue—you end up becoming colleagues of a sort. You've got a personal relationship and sometimes become friends even though you disagree on issues.

Terry's servant leadership was grounded in his theology:

People are special to God. He died for us. He created us for His work. He loves us and wants our best. As leaders, we need to know God's grace in a special way so that we can love others in that same way that God loves us. So that we can see their potential and develop them.

Terry stated, *I think there's a strong tie between my faith and making sure that the least and the last are being cared for and attended to.* He viewed his career as both guided by, and in service to, God. *He has provided me with the joy and opportunity to serve in the ways that I love and was created to do.* He saw his continuing work as requiring collaboration and involving challenges he was still learning to address well: *So the passion is now, "How do we lead across differences? How do we build bridges? How do we build communities of caring, justice, and equity?" And I guess that's my job.*

Personal faith journey: Typical and atypical.

Terry was raised in an evangelical home where, as in most evangelical homes, baptism was a personal decision. The churches he attended did not emphasize baptism. He joked, *My wife was raised in an interdenominational church. I was raised in a nondenominational church. They're so different that they're the same.* But while attending a Southern Baptist church, he decided to get baptized, and reflected on that topic: *Since then I have come to recognize the importance of baptism in a much more personal way, as a deeper commitment to God's work in*

my life. The timing of his baptism was not typical, but the approach and meaning are typical for evangelicals. This was just one example of how his faith was both typical and atypical.

I haven't made a secret of my faith, but I haven't worn it on my sleeve either, Terry observed. *It was pretty common knowledge in Madrona that I was a person of faith.*

Relationships have been at the center of Terry's faith journey. He observed,

I have always had a team of personal friends and colleagues that have committed to pray for me regularly. I have learned many times years after the fact how God had gone before me to prepare the way through the fervent prayers of others.

The pastors group in Madrona was one such support network Terry described. He also recounted how a group of public school administrators who were Christians began meeting through his initiative and encouragement. Relationships are important to most evangelicals, but Terry's circle of relationships took him well beyond his local church and his effort to create a group of administrators also set this aspect of his faith apart.

In his personal devotional practices, Terry detailed his Bible reading, journaling, prayer, and introspection, which were all deep patterns in his daily life. Again, the intent to have daily devotional practices is common to evangelicals, but the depth of reflection and extent of the practices Terry described are not typical. Those patterns provided a context for shaping his reflections on how he viewed God working on his faith and character through difficult events, including the culture war skirmishes he faced.

In the long run it strengthened my faith. It took me around Robin's barn back to God, to say God's not the enemy, God is on my side. And I won't be agreeing with all of the people of the world, even all fellow believers in the world, but I can do my part between me and God. Let God worry about the other people.

As he looked back over his career, Terry observed, *increasingly, I can point with joy and thanksgiving to the many deeds by which God has sustained and supported me.*

Active God.

As Terry described his experiences, he reiterated *life is understood backwards*, and by that he generally meant he could see God at work most clearly in retrospect.

God was working. He was preparing me over in Centerton and all these other places and He was preparing these pray-ers over here, and putting us all together. I am certainly proud of the work that we did in Madrona, and at the same time just kind of in awe of how God used me in His grand plan to make all of that happen.

Terry saw providential activity in very specific ways:

God has indeed been working quietly and then not so quietly behind the scenes for decades in Madrona. He has indeed raised up thousands of pray-ers in and for the community. He has indeed demonstrated his love through the work of the pastoral alliance and the chaplains.

After the interviews, Terry commented, *its been fun to kind of remember how God worked in all of those settings.*

In his descriptions of God's activity, Terry regularly related reports of communication between God and those directed to do specific work, especially in Madrona:

I mentioned the four pastors that had seemingly been brought to Madrona by miraculous means to form the center of a coalition of pastoral support for me and for the schools and for the community in Madrona. The result was leaders of faith in the school district, city, and police departments.

Though he did not recount an experience where he personally received such direct instructions from God, he did describe being sensitive to God's guiding and leading. One such situation was described in hindsight, when he shifted a stalemated negotiation process in a way that had positive outcomes:

I don't know that I knew very much about inter-space bargaining at the time, and it was not exactly my style, so maybe it was God's grace. Who knows? But that was a major breakthrough that led to a lot of peace and harmony.

Power of prayer.

Since prayer is the most common mode for Christians to communicate with God, it was not surprising that Terry, who described God as active and engaged in the personal lives of His followers and in the welfare of communities, viewed prayer as both essential and powerful. The outcome of prayer was a regular feature of his recollections, especially as he explained how he attributed the good work of the churches in Madrona and the collaboration among the pastors to *two prayer warriors*, two women who had been praying faithfully for the town for years.

Terry saw answered prayer in his own experiences in Madrona on several occasions. One involved a key hire when he first arrived, a woman he had worked with in a previous district and someone he felt he needed. *She came and she spent nine years working with me. We were a good team. God truly answered my prayer in that way, as well as so many other ways.*

He enlisted others to pray for him as soon as he got to Madrona. *One of the first things that I did was find the local pastor's group and say, "I need your help. I need a lot of prayer. I need pray-ers."* The pastors regularly prayed for Terry. *We would be going through whatever the crisis of the week or year or month or whatever it was, and they would lay hands on me and pray for me.*

Faith/religion as community asset.

Terry's vision for what the churches of the community could be and should be in relation to the public schools was as *the Christian community truly living out its faith. Not in a proselytizing way, just in a, "We love you and we want to be part of sharing Christ's love with you."* Fully aware of the concerns about church and state, Terry discussed the issue in detail:

If your intent is to proselytize, to use your authority as an adult, you can't do that. If you have another purpose—you need to have good proximity and control in the cafeteria, you need to get backpacks to kids—then you can do that. But if you are doing that so you can proselytize, you can't do that. So it's kind of like every time you try to wiggle, the answer is, "No!" You're just truly trying to be God's grace to the people. You can do that.

Terry asserted, *Churches can be good stewards without proselytizing*, and he went on to note how churches tended to approach schools from one of two mindsets: *One group comes to school only to win souls/belief/dogma. The other comes to see people as fully human ready and needing to be loved. And through that love come to know and love God and God's people.* Terry believed the church pastors group in Madrona lived out the second approach. *The tenor of the current pastors group truly was that they wanted to be Christ's love to the community.* He described some of the ways the churches lived out that mission in collaboration with him and his district:

I was a cheerleader on the side, but we did backpacks for 5000 kids, we did feeding programs for kids over the summer, we did what ended up being a chaplaincy within the city and within the school district. And then they did Serve Day kinds of things where they would get their congregations to come out and target one or two of our schools. So we created this kind of symbiotic relationship where they adopted some of our schools.

The skirmish involved volunteers from the churches on the school campuses during lunch. Terry observed that the incident that triggered the skirmish was an exception.

They were in the schools regularly, and for the most part did a pretty good job of just being there and being friends with the kids and hanging out and getting more adults around to create a kind of a calming environment.

At one of the annual “Jubilee Rallies” where the churches of Madrona met for a joint worship and celebration service, the theme was, “Greater things are yet to come...in our city.” In his remarks to the group, Terry thanked the churches and volunteers for school supplies and for a *canopy of prayer and care*. In his journal, he wrote: *Fourteen pastors. Lots of prayer, unity, applause. God is at work. This is why I stay in Madrona.*

Managing church-state boundary.

One of the central frames Terry used to address church-state questions was to avoid simple yes/no approaches, something he reported seeing all too often among school leaders.

Are we going to have prayer in schools and are we going to proselytize and save everybody? And the school administrators, they think that they've all been trained. They know there's separation of church and state, so obviously we're not the church, so we're the state. And so you can't do any of that stuff. Done! And that's not what it says either.

Terry described the balancing of the issues as his attempt to *thread the needle* and to *dance on the razor's edge*. He explained,

I wanted to value and respect the work the pastors do, and at the same time, I have a responsibility as a representative of the secular school system to do what's legally expected. So it's, “Okay, let's dig in there and let's find out what those requirements are.”

He described what that process looked like during the skirmish:

The schools and the ministers worked through that event by reviewing legal requirements and the purpose of being on campus, which is loving our community in the same ways as the chaplaincy ministry. After writing and reviewing procedures together, the school campuses were again opened to youth ministers.

His goal was to meet the requirements of the law and provide appropriate access for the churches to “love” the community by being present as volunteers in the schools. He was aware that some Christians saw the process of making adjustments as “compromise,” but he did not. Terry’s unique relationship with the pastors group put him in an odd situation.

I suppose the horns of the dilemma I faced was from a standpoint of church and state, and from a standpoint of being superintendent of schools and having a relationship with all of the pastors in this ministerial association.

He kept the pastors group engaged as the skirmish played out. *It was a good working relationship. It was, “We’re going to get through this together.”*

Terry knew there were administrators who were happy to keep volunteers off school grounds. Because of that, he took an active role during the skirmish: *We did a little bit of a dance through there. I kept my finger in it to try to maintain that razor's edge in terms of—I didn't want it just to become ‘No, you can't. Absolutely not!’* Through that process, the district developed a plan with their attorney to train and then return church volunteers to the schools, all in compliance with law.

Emerging Themes from Eugene’s Story

Personal connection to God.

Eugene was raised in a Christian home and he detailed his faithfulness through his youth, college years, and military service, and his return to his hometown to teach. At each step, he

believed God was in charge. *I think that when you rely on your faith and God, then He orders your steps.*

Prayer and the Bible were the two foundational elements in his personal faith. Besides daily prayer, Eugene referenced prayer in seeking guidance for key decisions in his life. He reported reading the Bible *every morning and every day* along with other devotional materials. The Bible was a vital aspect of his faith. He held his Bible in his hand and said, *I carry this with me, even when I was principal. Every day. I don't talk about it, but I keep it close. You use the Bible as your standard for behavior*, asserted Eugene, and he added, *I believe that any situation that occurs in the world, you get guidance from the Scriptures.*

Faith as daily public walk.

Eugene's personal connection to God was, in his view, most importantly evident in his "walk," the way he lived his life from day to day in view of others. *A lot of people say they know that I'm a man of faith. They know that by the way I walk. I think a Christian is going to model Christlikeness. And that is what's very, very important to me.* The Bible determined what that "walk" involved:

In this day and time you stay in the Scriptures. In Proverbs and Psalms. They tell you and give you that guidance for modeling Christian virtues and modeling Godly behaviors. That's very, very important.

Even as Eugene looks to the Bible for his own guidance, he warned, you don't use it to browbeat people. Instead, his goal was

modeling my faith through my work. I believe that it's more important to see a sermon than to hear one. And you walk God's expectations in your life. You don't have to talk it,

you live it. It's a matter of being salt, a matter of being impactful and not trying to be impressive. That's what I believe.

Eugene's commitment to living a life of integrity was often tested, especially in the midst of the politics of the school board, where he was openly criticized but did not respond. He recalled, *I could have come back, but I just let them have their say and then did my job.*

Regular church attendance/member.

As a child raised in an African-American church, Eugene started life with church as the center of his community, and that center has held throughout his life. When asked about the church he joined as a youngster, he said, *I'm still a member there; my name is still on the roll, my wife's too.* With that affiliation came opportunities to serve and lead and several implications of that are explored in a separate theme. It also placed him in an ethnic church community that took a strong stand concerning public education: *The church that I attend is highly supportive of public schools—highly supportive.*

Religion in the community.

Eugene was aware that geographic location mattered when considering cultural conflict and public schools, and many of the collaborative church-school practices that were part of the school experience of children in his district depended *on the cooperation and commitment of the community.* He discussed the importance of the nature of his community in this regard:

We are in what's known as the Bible Belt, and the Southeast has, in my opinion, a higher toleration level of church-school partnerships than the Northeast, the Midwest, and definitely the Far West. California, you know, that's another world. You know, in the northeast—New York specifically—you've got battles about church and faith based communities using school facilities. It's ridiculous, you know? I mean, it's not hurting

anybody. We do that all the time here. So we're able to do some things, until we get challenged on it, because the community is very, very faith based.

Eugene commented that, *Praying is always appropriate*, a sentiment shared by most in his community, and yet the schools adjusted to the legal guidelines when faced with litigation. He also asserted, *I can tell you that the community was very supportive of my emails*, and he pointed out that the emails for which he was challenged and the actions of the elementary principal who was also challenged were not inconsistent with what many others in the district regularly did. *There would be some quotes that referenced God on emails from some of the other administrators. It was a common practice, not just by administrators, but by some teachers.*

Eugene's opinion was that his emails were *overwhelmingly welcome by the community*, and he reported, *The board chairman is an elder at his church, and he said, "The community, they're very, very supportive of what you were doing."* As a further indication of the tone of the community, the anonymous complaint at the elementary school *brought the ire of the overwhelming majority of the faculty*, and there was much speculation about who was to blame. *But we encouraged the downplaying of that, because it would create more problems than it would solve.*

There was one community leader who raised questions about some of the church-school practices. The local rabbi discussed areas where he had concerns with Eugene, but it was Eugene's opinion that each issue was appropriately addressed.

One was that of having the district continuing to have baccalaureate services for graduation classes at the end of the year. He felt that we were in violation of the law. So that was a difference that we had. Another one was whether or not we were receptive to the inclusion of all faiths. That was raised, but there was no evidence of our excluding

any faith whatsoever. We talked about that. As a principal, I made sure by appeals for the participation of my students that all faiths were invited. So nothing went beyond that, and it never got confrontational during my tenure at all.

In spite of the extensive collaboration between Christian churches and the schools, it was Eugene's view that children of other faiths had equal opportunity to access similar programs. He said, *Most of the faith-based student activities were of the Christian faith, but if there was a request that was made for Jewish students or Buddhists, we certainly would accommodate that and we always opened it up to that.* Eugene did not view efforts to facilitate student involvement in Christian activities as having a negative impact on other faiths, and insisted that all religious traditions were valued. *There are those forces out there that don't realize that this is about respecting all religions, not about suppressing Christianity.*

Confluence of race, religion, and politics: Community-building potential of faith.

As an African-American growing up as a young man and attending college in the South at an historically Black university during the height of the Civil Rights era, Eugene was formed in part by this aspect of his personal history. His faith and the Civil Rights movement were woven together in his life. *The faith-based involvement in the civil rights movement was very much influential.*

In college, he was the leader of a campus ministry, and he recalled, *we took trips, we coordinated with student Christian groups from some of the predominantly white colleges. That was a good thing.*

Eugene's opinions of the Religious Right incorporated aspects of inter-racial tension. He observed, *unfortunately some of the Religious Right have gone to the point of having racial overtones, which is not acceptable at all.* He also spoke about the racial issues among Christians

in the South that lingered long past the Civil Rights era, and pointed specifically to the Southern Baptist Convention. *It wasn't until—it must have been in the '90s, I believe—that their formal statement came forward saying that their organization was wrong [in their opposition to the Civil Rights Movement].*

Members of African-American Churches tend to vote for Democrats and White evangelicals tend to vote for Republicans. Eugene discussed his discomfort with labels that are used to define both religious and political positions.

I think that a “liberal” Christian, in my sense, is that you are in the world, but you’re not of it. You don’t care for the sin, but you always open arms to the sinner. When you start talking about liberal and conservative in the political arena, it’s so much all or nothing kind of thing. And it’s all so much room for mistaken identity. But to me, you can be labeled a “conservative” but have open-mindedness. And with “liberal” not being defined as anything goes.

Faith as a public good.

At several points in his career, Eugene attempted to enhance the lives of students by utilizing religious programs, practices, and resources. This theme in his life reflected his view of faith as an asset and a public good. One example was the use of the baccalaureate service as a means to help bridge the racial divisions at his high school.

What I did was to help build a relationship. We had, and still do today have, baccalaureate services for our graduation classes. What we did under my tenure, is alternate ministers from the White community and the Black community. That proved to be very, very positive and productive. And out of that grew contacts, interactions that built trust in an environment where there wasn't that interaction at all.

In another situation, while he was retired from his principal role and had not yet been brought back as superintendent, Eugene was part of a community leadership group. *We had a core group that consisted of the superintendent, director of public relations, retired educators, and pastors to meet almost monthly for breakfast and talk about these opportunities. We looked at seeing what we could do to complement the Fellowship of Christian Athletes program and get a program in all of the schools.* This group of community leaders viewed religious programs such as FCA as an asset for individual students and the community.

Eugene and his wife were sent for training to a national organization that supported a model of churches “adopting” public schools. *When we came back we approached the board about beginning that program and it was unanimously adopted by the board and the superintendent.*

He recounted, *We invited all the churches irrespective of their denomination to be a part of the church-school adopt-a-school initiative and each one of our schools right now is adopted by at least one church.* The positive view of these programs extended well beyond the community leadership team. As Eugene noted, *This works in our district because of the leadership of the principals. And, so if you don’t have their support then, it’s not going to go anywhere.*

Eugene’s weekly emails, which were at the center of the culture war skirmish described in his narrative, was similarly viewed by him as a positive contribution to the lives of his staff. *The intent was positive, he stated. The purpose of the emails was to encourage all of my employees.* He detailed the purpose:

When people see that you express concern, care about them, they enjoy coming to work.

I know while you can’t measure that, I believe it made a difference in terms of the attitude

towards academics, towards going about your daily work, feeling good about coming to work, and knowing that a person that's at the district office has a sensitivity for what's happening in your life.

When he was questioned by the school board, he recalled, *I just told them, this is a way of encouraging our employees. The pastor that was quoted in the paper said, "How are you going to criticize somebody for encouraging your employees?"*

Church-state pragmatism.

Eugene insisted he was *always cognizant of the separation of church and state*. He discussed practices that he knew were in violation of the law but aligned to his own beliefs and the local community. *Like for example, before Parent Teacher Student Association meetings—we would have prayer as a principal*. When a challenge to a practice came with a threat of legal action, either explicit or assumed, adjustments were made with the intent of continuing the practice but in ways that would avoid legal problems. One example was prayer at football games and graduation:

When the ruling came out that we could no longer have prayer at graduation I said OK. But I would have a song that would be performed by our concert band like The Children's Prayer. We used to have prayer before football games and that was discontinued. Of course, the compromise was and is the moment of silence at which time persons can choose that time to pray but it would be individual and silent.

Eugene was plainspoken about his approach to such violations. *There's some things that I did knowing that if I ever got called on the carpet for it, that I would have to stop it*. When a challenge came, his approach was: *You look for legal ways to evidence faith and people respected that*. Though matter-of-fact about the need to change, adjustments were of the sort

that the religious intent could continue in a different, less blatant format. This, said Eugene, was accepted by the community. *They don't like it, but there is an understanding about why the decision was made.*

The programs constituting the faith-based initiative linking schools and churches were only possible with participation of a large number of community volunteers. Eugene recognized the essential nature of that support. *It works because the people see the value in it and they enjoy volunteering and see this as a way to not focus on the differences of church and state, but what can be within the parameters legally.*

He took the same approach to his emails after the skirmish.

I knew that my reference to God would be offensive to somebody, at least one person. I knew it would be challenged. I did. I felt that it would be sooner or later, because it only takes one, and I felt that out of 2300 employees, there would be one that would say something. So, I was prepared for that.

When the challenge came, Eugene applied the same approach as was used on other issues.

I said this in open session—that I would stop putting hymns and Scriptures in my emails. I didn't discontinue the emails. I just said it a different way. And so did the principal. My philosophy was, I would do it until I met that particular challenge. And when I met that challenge, I modified it. I didn't stop, I just modified it. So, I would write, "Always remember to stay in touch," and I would put this in quotation marks. And those people of faith knew what I was talking about. They'd say, "We got your message. That's right, that's right."

Emerging Themes from Sharon's Story

God is active in life.

Sharon's view of God is that of an active deity, deeply involved in her life and in the world around her. She pointed to providential circumstances and the way others were part of God's hand in leading or pushing her along. As she described it, *there's always been things showing me, "Sharon, this is what you're supposed to do, this is where you're supposed to go."* She described her faith journey as a series of key moments and situations where God's plan was made plain. She recalled when she first went to Clearwater: *I was just like, nope, this is where I'm supposed to be. I know it.* At other times her recognition of the guidance from God came in hindsight: *I know it was all leading me to here. Didn't know it would take all those different paths.* Sharon also saw God at work in her community, especially in the providential way the lawsuit ended up strengthening the Bible class program. She recalled one of the Bible teachers saying, *"Well, my goodness, did this breathe fresh air into it!"*

Sacrificial servant.

Sharon described work as a place where her faith was exercised in service to others, tested, and grown. Her care and concern for staff was evident at a staff meeting she led (*I named off each teacher and told them – you are of value, you are special, we need you here*) and her care for children was evident in a variety of actions, including her concern for the child at the center of the skirmish when she reminded her teachers, *he has a right to go to this school and feel positive about it, be respected, and feel safe.* She expected to be tested in her leadership, and she had confidence God would help her through the testing and make her a better Christian in the process. *He will bring me through this, whatever it is, He will.* In the case of the lawsuit, she said, *He brought this to me, and so I'm the one who's supposed to get that bridge going, and*

upon reflection, she observed, *I can see that that's been maybe one of the steps that I had to go through....I would hope if something like this would happen again that I would be able to have peace and have that confidence.* She added, *The ACLU situation is just another situation in which my relationship with God was strengthened and showed me how if I am open, God will use me.*

She described mentors who modeled a relational, faith-filled approach to school leadership, especially the junior-senior high principal she worked with when she first came to Clearwater. She recalled, *it wasn't unusual for us to have some devotion time in the morning before we'd get started.* Even in expulsion hearings, she recalled him saying to students, *this is what God intends. He knows we're not perfect, but He wants you to learn.*

The power of prayer.

Prayer was a common feature in Sharon's experience in both her personal life and her professional life. She described her workdays beginning with prayer (*I come in to work, I pray on the way here,*) continuing as she prayed for a *hedge of protection around this building – every morning*, and occurring with staff on a regular basis. She viewed prayer as powerful, bringing benefits to her and others. In the case of her anxiety over a state program audit when her staff was praying for her, she said, *I did not know that they were praying for me on those Monday meetings. But, I had said to somebody I'm just really at peace about it, you know?* She recounted prayers for wisdom as the staff team decided which families would get Christmas baskets: *we pray about that before we do it, just give us clarity.* Prayer was a consistent feature of her life in all contexts.

School-church collaboration: Religion as community asset.

Sharon saw the Bible class as a unique district-church partnership, but one that fit the community. She commented, *quite honestly, there were people who would tell you, "I came here because you guys taught Bible in school. And I know those values are important to you."* Sharon recognized that some adults in the community saw the Bible classes as *their mission field*. But for most parents in the community, the program was a bonus opportunity and a good thing, and they were *just fine going along with the flow*. And, *good for us*, she added, *then, hopefully that will become more of a pattern for that student and go from there*, reflecting her hope that children would find a path to faith and the benefits of that faith that she desired for them. For her and other district staff, religion could be a positive force that enriches the lives of children. Many community partners were eager to help bring those benefits to students.

Sharon and other district leaders were aware that the classes were likely to be challenged eventually and would have to change, but she noted that the program was valued and if challenged, she knew there would be a fight: *the community, because it's in the DNA, until it's pushed, it's just not going to happen. We're just going to continue to do what we're doing*. Sharon saw herself as guardian of the program, and when it was threatened, her battle cry was *not on my watch!*

In describing the Christian influence in the community, she observed, *I just feel like it's very saturated here*. That saturation extended to her school, where Sharon recounted saying to her teachers, *the great thing is we all are Christians here*. She viewed the faith of her staff as a powerful force that could be harnessed for the common good.

An undivided life.

Sharon sought to live out her faith seamlessly regardless of where she was at any given moment. *I try in everything that I do, try not to just do lip service to things. I try to make it a part of my actions.* The unity of her life was expressed in the connection she described across her life roles: *If He's proud of me as one of His children, then I'm being the principal He wants me to be, then I'm being the wife, I'm being the mother.*

As a high profile community leader, she knew she was in the public eye, and sought to be faithful as a Christian in all settings. This was most noticeable at school, where her overt expressions of her faith were commonplace. *I have to be able to live it here at school, and that's why I don't think it was ever going to work at Franklin for me, because I don't think I would have been able to live it there and be supported.* That included such practices as prayer with staff in different contexts, including at meals together: *If I'm with my staff, we would all pray, do it all the time.* When attending professional meetings outside the region, it was different. *It's so easy to be focused on the professional aspect of talking,* she pointed out, though she was not comfortable in those settings and looked for openness in others with whom she could discuss matters of faith.

Emerging Themes from Laura's Story

Faith and work: Educational mission.

Throughout her skirmish, Laura insisted the educational mission of the school was her priority:

I felt my chief responsibility, the number one thing, is to continue the learning environment and to ensure that it goes forward and this isn't going to take away.

Because if I'd ever felt like it was to the point that it was being disruptive to our environment—the learning environment—I would have stopped it.

Further evidence of that perspective is the fact that LiveSmart was not invited back after the skirmish, not for church-state concerns, but for educational reasons.

He hasn't come back, because it was just so intense, it took away from the learning. You know what I'm saying? When you have a program like that, you want to make sure it's adding to your environment. And that was such a distraction, it took away. I don't want kids leaving a program about citizenship feeling that they've been trod on because of their choices, even though they may not want to hear it.

That focus was also evident in her description of how she responded to Christian students who objected to Atheist Club posters:

I said, "If this becomes an issue, and it's disruptive to our educational environment, I'll shut it all down. We're not going to create disturbances. We're a family unit regardless of our beliefs, we're a family unit. We're a school setting, and if this becomes disruptive, we will stop it all, period."

Laura articulated her role as a school leader and the obligations she had to that work and how that required her to approach issues in complex ways. This also allowed her to consider cultural hot topics with an eye to the nuances, while others in her faith community, including her husband, did not. *Where my husband's very black and white I can see grey. I have to see grey in my role, not in what's sin and what's not sin, but in how we deal with people.*

Faith and work: Evangelical mission.

Laura's evangelical impulse to share the Gospel was expressed in a variety of ways. One was to live in a way that modeled Christian principles.

I totally believe the steps of a righteous man are directed by God. I think I'm where I am because God wants me to be here. So in that, I think I serve as a role model as a Christian leader. I totally believe that it's important. It's not important that when people see me they say, "Oh my gosh, that's a Christian!" I think they first have to know the person and then they will understand the basis and that the very foundation of things I do comes from my Christianity, and my moral, ethical responsibility is built upon those principles of Christianity. It all connects.

How she lived her life day-to-day was an important aspect of how Laura described sharing her faith. She pointed to evidence from her students. *With my kids at school, I never had to say, "I'm a Christian." They knew because of the way I treated them.*

Laura also believed that times of difficulty provided special opportunities to show others her faith in action. Through those situations, she also believed God was shaping her.

I mean, you can look at my life, all the way through, and you can see God's hand protecting and growing me. We're being tempered as believers, and you can see that all the way through. God has His hand on His Christian leaders. What we choose, how tightly we want to hold that hand and walk with it is our choice, you know? Walking through and learning, that's critical. If we forget that we're in this for Him and He will carry us through if we need Him to, then I think we lose that opportunity to grow closer to Him.

Those challenging experiences, such as the skirmish detailed in her narrative, sharpened her awareness of dangers that lie ahead.

Once you go through that, you're then very attuned to what's Christ-based, Jesus-based.

You're so attuned then because you're thinking, "Where's the next attack coming from?"

You know what I'm saying, as a leader?

Though she was specific in her discussion of church-state boundaries, Laura enjoyed times when expressions of faith were present in her professional life. She appreciated being prayed for during her interview for an adjunct position at a Christian college, and she commented it was *kind of neat to see* when a prayer opened the breakfast at a regional meeting of school administrators.

Though she articulated boundaries in her own actions and sought to honor those boundaries, Laura was pleased if indirectly through her work students were helped along the way to having an opportunity to hear about Jesus. As she commented about LiveSmart, *Honest to goodness, if these other things happen and there's conversion, of course—that spiritual side—that's great. While it needs to be our motive directing all things, that wasn't my motive in the leadership role.* She went on to say, *I think it's exciting to see the ministry of Dylan Landry and LiveSmart and what they have been able to accomplish and how God worked.*

Laura described herself as part of a larger work being done by God, and she took comfort in that. Reflecting on the skirmish, she said

I think when I look back at that time, I feel blessed. Because I see God's hand working all the way through it, where His intervention through people, through events, was so powerful, that you could only say, "Oh, my gosh! God did that! Totally did that!"

She then proposed a divine hand at work in the succession of events that included the skirmish:

There's a series of about four events. I needed one to be strong for the next one, to be prepared for the next one. We needed that LiveSmart experience to prepare us for that spring death of that child. If we had not come together as a spiritual community, and the leaders had not come together, my students would not have been supported through the death of that child. I spoke at that child's funeral as principal of Sam Houston, in a church setting, and used Scripture, and didn't hear one thing from anybody, you know?

Faith and work: Overlapping mission.

Laura's work as a school leader allowed her to serve others and she framed much of her work in terms of the needs of children. In that work, she viewed faith and church resources and programs as assets for the community, and especially for students. In this manner, biblical perspectives were present in her school, but in ways that did not violate the law.

Laura described herself with the terms *servant leadership*, *kindness*, and *joy*. While she discussed those terms as they applied to staff, her emphasis was on her students. She recounted the words of one parent that captured this aspect of Laura's leadership:

I can remember one parent looked at me and said, "You handled that very well.

Somebody questioned me, and all I told her was, 'You watch how Laura Taylor interacts with her kids. She loves them. I trust my own children with her.'"

For her high school students, Laura said *This is what we want you to be: learning to serve, learning to lead, working together in a very service-oriented community at school, and what that means*. She observed that in a district that had high schools without tight community identities, *the schools have to have an identity really of their own while embracing and working to build a community support system within that*. Community building in order to provide support for students was an important goal for Laura and her school. She embraced local churches as

helpful partners in that work, and she pointed out the local pastors *were very present in a very positive way* beginning with the opening of the school. *I allowed their youth leaders to come in and have lunch with kids.*

Laura pointed to those community resources as pivotal in meeting the needs of her students after the death of a senior. She was out of town that day, but the pastor whose church rented the school for their services

met with kids, they met with teachers there on that Saturday night, and he was a great support. The next day, on that Sunday, the kids needed a service type thing. Of course, even on a Sunday, I'm acting as principal of Sam Houston. I can't go, "OK, come up and pray. Come up and we'll do these things." I can say, "Here, we'll have counselors, we'll have support." But his church rented the gym and we had a memorial service and had 3000 people there and he led that. We had lots of pastors, lots of people who came out, many who were parents of our kids. And it didn't matter what denomination. They stood strong together as Christians.

The assembly at the center of Laura's skirmish was also linked to the aspiration of meeting the needs of students and leveraging religious resources to achieve that end. *I just wanted something that would help our kids make good choices and address those topics of sex and alcohol and drugs and honoring, and just everything that our kids are faced with.* In the midst of the skirmish, she was insistent, *This is about the kids.* She pointed out, *You can Google "character programs" and they're mainly faith-based, and that's the issue.*

Though the Christian Right projects an extremist voice, Laura believed the true intent of most Christians was lost in the shouting: *you hear this strong voice on each end, where we're like, "We just want to love people and do what's right."* She viewed spirituality as one of the

core needs of her students. *Regardless of anything, our spirituality is part of our humanity. And we're going to seek something to worship.*

Personal faith.

Laura's personal faith was a lifelong foundation that continued to provide purpose and direction. She recalled, *I had the total conversion experience at a very young age and just knew that God's hand was in my life, always. I've never let go of that.* She was raised in a church community. *I can still look back and see different people who helped build those Christian ideals. And I had a strong sense of what was right or wrong.* She added, *there's just that peace in knowing that I'm not alone on this journey. And it's really not my journey; it's how He directs my steps. I feel the hand of the Father on me all the time.*

Laura referred to the spiritual realm several times, taking seriously the belief that conflict in that dimension between good and bad beings occurs in ways that overlap with the world we see and experience. For example, she pointed to the *spiritual battle* her husband experienced when he was gravely ill, and during the skirmish, she recalled it was *definitely an attack from the devil, and so I spent a lot of time in prayer.*

Religious practices were a routine feature of her days. *My day goes better when I start with my devotion. My goal is to daily read my Word. I try to definitely pray daily.* That closeness to God was also expressed in her work context as she dealt with the assembly skirmish:

I'm very attuned to watching and balancing that spiritual self, where I'm thinking, "God, You've got to direct me through this. If I'm going to get fired for Your name, that's OK. I can handle that." But I don't want to do something that isn't in line with what He would have me to do. So I think your constant spiritual self is in that prayer mode as you're going through that. It was stressful, it was hard, but there was also a peace.

After the skirmish, she detailed how she saw God's involvement. *So there's a certain sense of humility in knowing that there's no way all of this could have taken place without a lot of prayer going into it and God's hand.* Her church community was a big part of that prayer:

They knew, and they were in prayer, and definitely a lot of prayer and support in that. But we didn't have big discussions. It's just prayer. The whole Assemblies of God district, probably, praying for good things to come out of it. So, yeah, I felt that.

Managing the church-school boundary.

Laura was knowledgeable concerning the boundary between church and state, but she was adamant that Christians not be denied what they should be free to do.

I'm knowledgeable and aware that there is a separation of church and state in Texas public schools. I'm very aware of that. At the same time, I believe and know that I live in America and I have a right to say I'm a Christian and that's just who I am.

She admitted she was a learner in managing that divide.

I've learned a lot. Like when I opened Sam Houston, we always did a prayer with the staff on the steps of the school and at our meal before kids ever came during in-service. It was very general, but just asking that our year be blessed. I never had any issues with that at all, and actually had tons of people thank me a lot on that. Then you find out if it's a captive audience you really can't do that. And so, shame on you! And I get it. It doesn't mean I like it, but I do get it.

As a leader who was known to be a Christian, Laura was aware that other Christians sometimes approached her with different expectations, especially pastors.

When they know you're a Christian leader, they try to work that relationship sometime. You have to know how to handle them, because people working as pastors and youth

directors, they have a mission. They have a mission to save the world, which is awesome. But they have to understand we're a public school. At the same token, I've also had that same group come and support me 100% and be prayer warriors and build a wall of support, saying, 'This is the right thing to do.'

Laura recalled that Christian students would also occasionally approach her to “take sides” in cultural conflict issues in the school:

I can remember standing in the hallway one day, and a group of Youth Alive or Fellowship of Christian Athletes, one of them, came and said, “We are very upset.” The atheist group put up a poster about Darwinism week and had the fish with the legs, and they were very offended. They wanted me to take all those posters down, and I explained, I said, “I understand, but if I take that poster down,”—and right behind me was an FCA poster with a big cross and fish—and I said, “then I have to take that one down.”

In articulating her approach to boundary management, Laura said she always clearly stated, *This is what I have to do as an educational leader. And I'm going to follow the rules. I'm not going to break our policies.* However, she also said, *When we're doing things within the law, we're not going to have people come and change our plans.* And she added, *When we talk about rights, we're not just talking about the complaining rights, we're talking about the rights of the Christian, too. So, you've got to keep that balance going all the time.*

Thematic Threads

In this final section, the four thematic threads identified across all of the narratives are presented:

1. Serving a God who listens, speaks, and acts.
2. Leading in the church-state border zone.

3. The uniqueness and complexity of micropolitics in local communities.
4. Viewing Christian religion as a social good and a community asset.

Each thread is accompanied by a table of exemplary quotations taken from the narratives. Additionally, a set of tables in the appendix displays the subthemes from each narrative that contributed to each of the thematic threads.

Serving a God who listens, speaks, and acts.

All of the participants had a faith that presumed a God who communicated with them, listened to their prayers, and acted both to accomplish a larger purpose and to respond to their individual needs (See Table 5). They all viewed the events of their lives as transpiring under the authority of God, and they trusted that in the larger scope, ultimately the final results are good in some way, both for the bigger picture and for their own growth and development as Christians. With that confidence, they sought direction and guidance from God in both their personal and professional lives. Public schools provided them a place to serve and to be tested and formed by the circumstances they encountered. When engaged in that work, and especially during challenges such as the skirmishes explored in this study, they drew from their upbringing in the church, their current church resources, other Christians, and daily prayer and Bible reading.

Table 5	
<i>Thematic Thread Exemplar Quotations: Serving a God Who Listens, Speaks, and Acts</i>	
Craig	<p>I'd always known that God was involved in my life; I just always knew that He was there. There was never any question about that.</p> <p>God, you're in charge and I'm not.</p>
Terry	<p>God is not finished with me yet. He's still working on my rough edges....I mean it's certainly part of my faith journey, part of my transformation, part of my disciplining, whatever you want to call that, God shaping me into something else.</p> <p>As the story of Madrona unfolded, it was kind of like, before they called I will answer them. God was working. He was preparing me over in Centerton and all these other places and He was preparing these pray-ers over here, and putting us all together.</p>

Eugene	<p>I think that when you rely on your faith and God, then He orders your steps.</p> <p>You use the Bible as your standard for behavior, but you don't use it to browbeat people.</p> <p>I believe that it's more important to see a sermon than to hear one.</p>
Sharon	<p>There's always been things showing me, "Sharon, this is what you're supposed to do, this is where you're supposed to go."</p> <p>I pray...a hedge of protection around this building – every morning.</p> <p>He will bring me through this, whatever it is, He will.</p>
Laura	<p>I had the total conversion experience at a very young age and just knew that God's hand was in my life, always. I've never let go of that.</p> <p>I think I'm where I am because God wants me to be here.</p> <p>You can look at my life, all the way through, and you can see God's hand protecting and growing me. We're being tempered as believers, and you can see that all the way through.</p>

Leading in the church-state border zone.

A legal frame dominated each participant's approach to leadership in the church-state borderlands, but their work within that frame varied based upon their contexts (See Table 6). Craig was aware that his move to a much more liberal community required caution in his actions, but he was also aware of the rights of religious people and personally wanted to see more religious expression in his school. He attempted to toe the line, only to find himself dismissed for an action he went to court to defend. By going to court, he was forced to adopt a rights-based frame. Laura was also focused on honoring the legal limits, and she was committed to assuring that the rights of Christians were not pruned. Terry was similarly oriented towards paying close attention to legal requirements without hamstringing Christians in the exercise of those rights. Both Eugene and Sharon were aware of legal boundaries that were being crossed, and both expressed the view that they, and their communities, would continue in those practices unless

and until there was a legal challenge. When those challenges came, they worked to maintain as much of the original intent of the practice as they could accomplish.

Table 6	
<i>Thematic Thread Exemplar Quotations: Leading in the Church-State Border Zone</i>	
Craig	The second sentence [of his evaluation] says, “Craig has difficulty discerning the separation of church and state.” When I saw that, I was going, “Gotcha!” I thought, “You screwed up lady, because you just confirmed what I know to be true. That this is a church and state issue. But I did nothing wrong. In your mind it’s church and state, but it really isn’t.” Then I just knew I had a good case.
Terry	<p>People I would be sitting with in the pew fellowshiping with on Sunday morning were attacking me as an enemy for trying to help work with the least, the last—I don’t know about the lost—but the least and the last anyway.</p> <p>[I was] kind of dancing on the razor’s edge. I wanted to value and respect the work the pastors do and at the same time I have a responsibility as a representative of the secular school system to do what’s legally expected.</p>
Eugene	<p>I knew that my reference to God would be offensive to somebody, at least one person, but while it was overwhelmingly welcome by the community, the intent was positive. So it just reinforced the need in operating to monitor and adjust.</p> <p>I think the most effective way to deal with the complaint from those national organizations as well as individuals was just to discontinue what their allegation was, and just to go and do the same thing but within the parameters.</p> <p>You look for legal ways to evidence faith and people respected that.</p>
Sharon	<p>The community, because it’s in the DNA, until it’s pushed, it’s just not going to happen. We’re just going to continue to do what we’re doing.</p> <p>I know a lot of people expressed that they were so glad that it was me because I would build the bridge and try to make it still work somehow.</p>
Laura	<p>I’m knowledgeable and aware that there is a separation of church and state in Texas public schools....I get it. It doesn’t mean I like it, but I do get it.</p> <p>So when we talk about rights, we’re not just talking about the complaining rights, we’re talking about the rights of the Christian, too.</p> <p>You have to be very conscientious of what you’re doing to protect your career.</p>

The uniqueness and complexity of micropolitics in local communities.

The skirmishes provide a detailed inside view of micropolitical behavior in schools and school districts. Each situation was different, but in every skirmish most of the key action took place in informal micropolitical interactions (See Table 7). A brief consideration of each will allow for discussion of the unique aspects of each case.

Craig's meetings with the superintendent and her communications with her board outside of formal meetings were the venue for his professional demise. His lawsuit led to a resolution in his favor, but Craig wanted that process to redress a grievance that emerged from micropolitical shadows he could not penetrate. Even depositions taken during his case failed to uncover what he believed was the truth of how and why he was removed from his principalship.

Terry was intentional in accessing and developing a network of Christian leaders in the community, both for his own spiritual support and for support of the students and schools in his district. His network led to a strong Christian presence in local leadership, both in the school district and in the broader community. That network served as a supportive venue for micropolitical engagement when the skirmish began, and allowed him time and political space to process an official response.

Eugene was challenged by a board divided by race, with the surprising aspect being that he was the target of fellow African-Americans on the board while he had the support of the White members. However, the community's broad support for religious activities in the schools transcended the political division. Eugene was able to work with the confidence that his actions to comply with the legal mandate would be accepted by the community. The Bible-belt assumptions that undergirded the dynamics of the community's "faith-based initiative" between churches and the schools were skillfully leveraged by Eugene throughout the skirmish.

Sharon's community was similar to Eugene's in terms of the overwhelming support for religious activity in schools, but she had a limited role in the skirmish since the superintendent and school board processed the lawsuit. Instead, she immediately began working informally with local pastors to shape the replacement program for the Bible classes. By the time the replacement program plan got to the school board as a proposal, it was essentially complete, and a large portion of credit for that plan goes to Sharon.

Finally, Laura had strong relationships with local pastors in a community where evangelical Christianity was dominant. That network of church leaders trusted her and came to her assistance when needed. With an overwhelming Christian presence among her staff and the central office leadership, Laura also had a professional network of support that shared her Christian worldview. When the challenge to the assembly was formally rebuffed by district leaders, she was free to focus on holding strong through the skirmish, and addressing specific challenges that popped up knowing she had considerable support from all quarters.

In every case, the formal records of school board meetings and official statements from the districts capture only a slice of the actual political process involved in each skirmish. It was primarily the informal micropolitical arena where deliberations and decision-making actually occurred. The micropolitics in each narrative were dominated by the religious culture of the powerful. The faith of the power group varied significantly, ranging from Craig's experience of hostility towards his faith to Eugene, Sharon, and Laura, who worked in communities where those in power viewed religious practices in a positive light.

Table 7

Thematic Thread Exemplar Quotations: The Uniqueness and Complexity of Micropolitics in Local Communities

Craig	<p>I don't think I had an opportunity to really decipher who was in charge: the superintendent or the board. I never had a real sense of that.</p> <p>My mistake was thinking because she was a Christian that she might side with me.</p> <p>I didn't have any concerns about the promo and maybe that was naïve on my part.</p>
Terry	<p>I went to the pastors and said, "I need prayers, and I'm asking God for 1000 people who will pray for me regularly. And here's what else I need: I need a place to live, I need somebody I can count on in terms of administrative support, and I need these thousand pray-ers."</p> <p>I mentioned the four pastors that had seemingly been brought to Madrona by miraculous means to form the center of a coalition of pastoral support for me and for the schools and for the community in Madrona. The result was leaders of faith in the school district, city, and police departments.</p>
Eugene	<p>A lot depends upon where you live in this country, and we're in what's called the Bible Belt. So we're able to do some things, until we get challenged on it, because the community is very, very faith based.</p> <p>We had a core group that consisted of the superintendent, director of public relations, retired educators, and pastors to meet almost monthly for breakfast and talk about these [faith-based initiative] opportunities.... Well we looked at seeing what we could do to complement the Fellowship of Christian Athletes program and get a program in all of the schools.</p>
Sharon	<p>I said, you guys, the great thing is we all are Christians here. And I know you all have that same desire to do right by God. And you want to be an example of grace and forgiveness.</p> <p>I just feel like it's very saturated here. I mean, honestly, that's why I say I think it's helped me. I know it's made me a better Christian.</p>
Laura	<p>Where my husband's very black and white, I can see grey. I have to see grey in my role, not in what's sin and what's not sin, but in how we deal with people.</p> <p>[The Freedom From Religion representative] came to the school board meeting and our superintendent prayed. She prays before every school board meeting</p> <p>You have to know how to handle [pastors]... they have a mission to save the world, which is awesome. But they have to understand we're a public school.</p>

Viewing Christian religion as a social good and a community asset.

For each of the participants, faith was a central aspect of their lives, their identities, and their mission in life and at work. However, they also shared a belief that religion—and Christianity in particular—offered a positive element to the common life of a community. They viewed that positive contribution as a resource of special importance to children in the community, and they all sought to help connect that resource to children through the schools. This belief is in opposition to the view that religion is a problem or even a danger in the public square. Wariness concerning a role for religion beyond private, personal practice, especially in public schools, is foreign to the thinking of these participants.

However, there were differences in how participants approached the connection between religion and schools (See Table 8). Craig was quite careful about the issue, but saw activities such as the Easter Egg Hunt and students singing Christmas carols as positive and appropriate. Terry worked intentionally to support a united community of churches as they attempted to help meet the needs of schools and students, but he had a steady eye on the limits of the law. He was adamant that churches could be servants in schools without proselytizing.

Eugene was a member of the community leadership group that established a “faith-based initiative” that linked churches and schools, expanded religious-release time and after school Christian programming, and established a mentorship program. He also saw how standards of behavior he drew directly from Christian teaching improved schools and grew character in students. Eugene’s weekly emails were an attempt to use Christian texts, hymns, and sayings to encourage staff in their work. He viewed all of these as substantial contributions to the quality of life of the individuals served.

Sharon considered the Bible classes at her school to be a positive contribution to the lives of her students. Laura characterized the character assembly as a way to support students as they faced difficult life challenges. Laura appreciated the character education programs provided to schools for free or at minimal cost by faith-based organizations. Both Sharon and Laura noted that their hope was that students would extend their involvement with the programs they provided at their school beyond the school, into a church or into the community, which might lead to them accepting Jesus as their savior. They were happy to see experiences that served school purposes serve as doorways to that next step towards salvation.

Terry also hinted at a “next step” hope when he pointed to a parallel between churches serving schools and participation in a Rotary Club. As he explained, Rotary members are frowned upon if they push their business at club meetings. Rather, by serving with others and forming relationships, others will come to you when they need your service. Terry saw churches working in schools in the same way, suggesting that when spiritual questions and needs arose, students and staff would turn to those church people who had been serving faithfully in their schools for guidance and answers.

Table 8 <i>Thematic Thread Exemplar Quotations: Viewing Christian Religion as a Social Good and a Community Asset</i>	
Craig	<p>In my mind I said, “This is not saying come to Easter Sunday. This is an Easter egg hunt for kids.” I think, “Cool! Have the kids come to an Easter egg hunt!”</p> <p>Who would be against a prayer breakfast for teachers? What educator would be against that? It's just beyond me.</p>
Terry	<p>Churches can be good stewards without proselytizing. One group comes to school only to win souls/belief/dogma. The other comes to see people as fully human ready and needing to be loved. And through that love come to know and love God and God's people.</p> <p>It became the Christian community truly living out its faith. The best of all possible settings. Not in a proselytizing way, just in a, “We love you and we want to be part of sharing Christ's love with you.”</p>

Eugene	<p>The faith-based involvement in the civil rights movement was very much influential.</p> <p>We were able to establish a faith-based initiative in the district where we have mentoring, we have Christian Leadership Centers in the middle schools, we have Good News Clubs at all of our elementary schools, and we have a church-school adoption initiative for each school.</p> <p>It works because the people see the value in it and they enjoy volunteering and see this as a way to not focus on the differences of church and state, but what can be within the parameters legally.</p>
Sharon	<p>I'm the one who's supposed to get that bridge going and get people focused on the positive, and not let it deteriorate anything--the program or just even relationships.</p> <p>I think you have the people who, this is very important to them, this is their mission field, this is what we do. And, then you have a large percentage; again, that is just fine going along with the flow.</p>
Laura	<p>When we had our first death at our high school....That pastor met with kids [and] met with teachers there on that Saturday night....the kids needed a service.... his church rented the gym and we had a memorial service and had 3000 people there and he led that. That was a moment where we had really good support.</p> <p>You want character programs, and if you look...it's hard to find one that you need and that you can afford that's not faith-based.</p>

Conclusion

Having considered the emerging themes within each narrative and the thematic threads across the narratives, the final chapter will examine the four thematic threads in light of the conceptual framework detailed in Chapter I and discuss other aspects of the narrative themes.

Chapter XI: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study and offers conclusions based upon the results that have been presented as re-storied narratives and the themes that emerged from those narratives. Each of the research questions that guided this project is addressed, and significant attention is given to ways in which the theoretical lenses identified before the fieldwork began align to the findings. Since this research project was, by design, a journey of discovery, a number of unexpected turns and findings are described and considered. Finally, a wide range of implications for further study and school leader preparation and support are suggested.

Summary of the Study

The experience of culture war conflict by school administrators has been little studied to date. It can be an intense aspect of the lives of public school administrators, and especially those who are evangelical Christians when their co-religionists are engaged in the conflict. The goal of this study was to understand such experiences through the narratives of a national, purposeful sample of five public school leaders.

The questions that guided this investigation were:

1. How do these evangelicals who serve as public school administrators experience the culture wars, specifically when caught in a high profile conflict in their school or district?
2. In the context of this conflict, what assumptions are present in each participant about their purpose at work and the relationship of that purpose to their faith commitments?
What is their understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and loyalties involved?
3. How do members of their work and faith communities respond to them personally in times of intense, local cultural conflict? What are the key moments in such situations?

4. What preliminary themes emerged from such experiences and what theories relate to those themes?

The type of conflict targeted for study was termed a “skirmish,” which was defined as a conflict reported in the media, managed at least in part by the administrator who participated in the study, triggered by a culture war issue common to public schools in the United States, and engaged by national advocacy organizations. As an exploratory narrative inquiry, evangelical public school administrators from different regions of the country were interviewed to capture individual narratives of such conflicts. Based on the interviews and other data sources, each narrative was re-storied and emerging themes were identified. Thematic threads from across the narratives were identified as well.

It is not the goal of narrative inquiry to produce generalizable results, but to enhance understanding and insight into a phenomenon. Each re-storied narrative in this study is unique and has been presented intact. Riessman (1993) observed that researchers “often fracture these texts in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and pieces, snippets of a response edited out of context. They eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts” (p. 3). Riessman went on to argue, “Precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved,” and that has been honored in this study as each narrative is reported as a unified whole. Additionally, threads across the narratives provide shape to the phenomenon explored. It is hoped that the deepened understanding and insights that result will inform further research and current practices in school leadership and administrator preparation.

Researcher Bias

As detailed in Chapter 1, the researcher is an evangelical Christian who served as a public school administrator and personally experienced culture war conflict. Reflections throughout the study sought to identify assumptions and biases. The most common reflection topic concerned the researcher's perceptions of the participants and the individuals described in each narrative, seeing in each one reflections of others known to the researcher from previous experiences. For example, the superintendent detailed in Craig's story reminded the researcher of a fellow principal who was untrustworthy. The colleague understood politics, was a relentless self-promoter, and moved on to a position as a superintendent. Keeping Craig's superintendent mentally separate from the colleague of the researcher's own past during the study required a conscious effort.

With a career working as an administrator in the Pacific Northwest, where questions of religion in public schools are handled with extreme caution, it was difficult for the researcher to relate to participants in communities where Christian faith was pervasive. As a leader who was responsible for compliance with law concerning church-state issues while working under the close scrutiny of stakeholders of varied religious and non-religious views, it was difficult not to apply the researcher's experiential lens to each participant's practices. That thinking often led to negative or questioning internal responses that had to be set aside in order to allow the participant's story to be captured.

Closely related to that awareness was a pervasive regional stereotype about the South. Expectations regarding the Southern Baptist influence in Southern culture had to be constantly noted and questioned. Also, while theological beliefs and jargon common to most evangelical

churches provided a shared vocabulary between the researcher and the participants, it also required caution so that assumptions about shared meaning could be tested.

Finally, exploration of the experiences of Eugene, as an African-American, and Sharon and Laura, as women leaders from evangelical communities, demanded intentional reflection on how their experiences, perspectives, and insights at church and work differed from the researcher.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

The five stories captured by this study offer narrative data that addresses each of the research questions. However, as an exploratory study, the data can only suggest tentative answers and highlight aspects of the experience that are not well understood. This is especially true because of the level of intensity in the specific skirmishes studied. The participants in this project were not caught in what might be viewed as the most challenging situations envisioned at the outset of the study. However, the narratives are sufficiently detailed and varied to offer some important insights for understanding and to illuminate further study.

That qualification being noted, each of the research questions will now be addressed in turn. Several theoretical frameworks expected to provide useful lenses for understanding the skirmish narratives were identified in Chapter 1. The degree to which each of these theoretical frameworks is supported or challenged by the narratives and themes presented by this study will be considered, and other theoretical perspectives that may be more helpful are also discussed.

Q1. How do these evangelicals who serve as public school administrators experience the culture wars, specifically when caught in a high profile conflict in their school or district?

The individual narratives offer thick descriptions of the experiences of each participant, and the thematic threads presented in the previous chapter provide insight into the commonalities of those experiences of cultural conflict among the five participants:

1. Serving a God who listens, speaks, and acts.
2. Leading in the church-state border zone.
3. The uniqueness and complexity of micropolitics in local communities.
4. Viewing Christian religion as a social good and a community asset.

With each participant, career details prior to the skirmish recounted other experiences with culture war conflict. In every case, participants were alert to the legal issues related to culture war conflict areas, and many accounts verified that this is an ongoing element of professional practice that is generally dealt with in informal ways.

Within the experiences and within the common thematic threads, there were variations, and much of that difference was contingent upon geographic location. At the heart of the culture war theory (Hunter, 1991) is the divide between those who hold to orthodox and progressive moral visions. In every skirmish studied, the polarized extremes were evident, but evident in different ways based upon the locale. For Craig and Terry, who worked in communities in more urban settings, diverse perspectives were present within the community, though in both cases partisan outside advocates were also involved. For Eugene, Sharon, and Laura, the communities they served were dominated by the orthodox moral view, and minority voices within the community quickly sought outside progressive advocacy power to help address their concerns.

The involvement of national advocacy organizations in each narrative aligns to the role of these entities in the culture war theory. Most of the participants faced challenges triggered by minority voices within their community who linked with external advocacy groups from the progressive end of the culture war conflict spectrum. However, Craig enlisted a conservative national group to access legal counsel and the pastors in Laura's community asked her, "Do we

need to call in our organizations?” when they learned that the assembly they supported was being challenged on religious grounds.

Terry guided a process of thoughtful policy review in response to the challenge from just such a tandem of local objection and national advocacy voices, and he had support from a strong local network. He described his work this way:

Kind of dancing on the razor’s edge. I wanted to value and respect the work the pastors do, and at the same time, I have a responsibility as a representative of the secular school system to do what’s legally expected.

The outcome was that church volunteers returned to the district schools with clearer guidelines.

Sharon took immediate action and provided collaborative leadership with pastors to help the Bible class continue in a manner that would not violate the law. Eugene acquiesced to the letters of complaint, yet continued to send his Monday emails, but with coded messages to fellow believers. Laura held firm in the face of a complaint to the district concerning the assembly, buoyed by a supportive central office and community.

Craig was in a different situation. He was caught by surprise when his job was taken from him, and he brought in an external organization to assist in his legal efforts to fight for his career.

The power wielded by these advocacy groups is primarily the power of law, either by way of a threat or through an actual legal action. In all cases except Craig’s, the external organization added legal power to the local voice of objection, prompting action.

The effect of the skirmish in cases where the community was overwhelmingly orthodox in orientation—as was the case for Eugene, Sharon, and Laura—was to affirm local cultural values. Craig’s removal from his role as principal was experienced, for the most part, beyond

the view of the public, so his skirmish had little effect on the larger community. Terry's skirmish was muted in the local community because of the process he followed to address the concerns and the effective network of trust across local churches he helped nurture that kept the Christian community positively engaged. However, earlier in his career Terry faced stiff resistance from conservative Christians and national advocacy groups to reforms he implemented to improve the achievement of Latino students while at Centerton. That conflict divided the community.

Culture war conflicts that create social fissures are often ripe for media coverage. All of the narratives in this study included media coverage and each participant commented on the role of the media in exacerbating conflict, and all noted their view that the media was biased. Wellman (2008) observed, "evangelicals feel that they are smeared by the media and muzzled by liberal bias and political correctness" (p. 253), and that was reflected in the views of the participants of this study. Laura was particularly wary of the press based upon previous treatment when she felt she and her school were portrayed as "the evil people." Terry commented, "They sniff blood when there's a hot story," but Laura was of the opinion the negative portrayal is often the angle the media takes, especially regarding religious items. She said, "it's going to happen when you do good things, somebody's going to look for dirt."

The liberal bias of the media is a standard complaint of the Religious Right, but none of the participants identified with the movement. That distancing aligns with the stance of the majority of evangelicals who also don't identify with the Religious Right (Smith, 2000). Participants expressed concerns about the tone and tactics, but several shared areas of concern generally associated with the Religious Right.

Q2. In the context of this conflict, what assumptions are present in each participant about their purpose at work and the relationship of that purpose to their faith commitments?

What is their understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and loyalties involved?

Each participant experienced God as an active presence in her or his life. Each also saw God at work in his or her ongoing spiritual journey, and viewed daily work as an important aspect of that journey. Because of this perspective, each of them looked for indications of God's larger intent and how He was shaping them to be better Christians through the skirmish.

In the previous chapter, the themes that emerged from each narrative provide substantial insight into each participant's understanding of their purpose, roles, loyalties, and responsibilities. In all cases, as they faced their skirmishes their loyalties were not divided.

Three of the five participants were school leaders in communities where their identity as a Christian was consistent with the dominant local religious culture. In those cases, the participants experienced their role in the culture war skirmish as what might be described as ambassadors of the broader Christian community. They were not positioned between their faith community and their school or district. Instead, the community and the school or district collaborated in response to a complaint or threat from an "other" with the power of an outside organization viewed by most in the community as hostile to their values.

Craig's objective shifted. He initially wanted to support teachers, then he became focused on regaining his job, and finally he sought a victory that would carry meaning for others who might face the same opposition he endured. Terry worked to get the volunteers back into the school in a way that followed the law and, at the same time, did not squelch the valued contributions churches were making to the schools. Eugene sought to avoid a legal battle and continue his encouragement of staff in a way that complied with the law. Both Terry and Eugene

expressed an obligation to follow the law, though in Eugene's case that was not applied until a complaint was received. Sharon's goal was to re-start the Bible class as quickly as possible in a way that would meet the legal requirement. Her loyalty was to the Bible program, which she viewed as a community "good" that she was stewarding. Laura was also committed to obeying the legal boundaries, but she was determined to provide her students with the assembly that had been arranged for needs she saw as important for their wellbeing, and she was adamant about protecting the religious rights of Christians.

In every conflict there are winners and losers, and in each skirmish detailed in this study, participants were successful in achieving an intended outcome. Those conceptions of "victory" add insight into the way each participant viewed their purposes and responsibilities in each particular situation. Initially, Craig wanted to reclaim his principalship, but he shifted to viewing "victory" as a legal judgment that clearly found the school district in the wrong. Terry guided the process by which procedures and guidelines were revised so volunteers from local churches could return to school campuses. Eugene modified his Monday emails to avoid litigation, but continued the practice using coded language that connected to fellow Christians. Sharon coached pastors as they organized and launched a daytime Bible program that did not violate legal requirements. Finally, Laura's school held the assembly as planned. In every case, these administrators framed the success as a positive good for others.

Q3. How do members of their work and faith communities respond to them personally in times of intense, local cultural conflict? What are the key moments in such situations?

Fellow Christians encouraged each of the participants during the skirmishes. Encouragement primarily came by way of prayer, which was most often offered by individuals, but at times was offered by groups as well. Terry was regularly prayed over by the local group

of pastors, Sharon's teachers prayed for her at a staff meeting, and Laura's regional denominational group sent out the request for prayer on her behalf. Encouragement also came in the form of personal comments, emails, and phone calls.

For Sharon and Laura, the support of fellow evangelicals was overwhelmingly positive. Other participants had more varied experiences. Though Craig's wife, his church home group, and several close friends encouraged him and prayed for him, he was dismayed by the lack of support he received from the district human resources director, who was a fellow Christian, and a school board member who was also a Christian. Terry had broad support from Christians during his skirmish regarding the on-campus church volunteers, but at an earlier point in his career during his conflicts in Centerton he was harshly and publically criticized by fellow Christians, some of whom he worshipped with on Sundays. External advocacy groups also attacked him.

Eugene faced a difficult political situation where African-American school board members were aligned against him. The letters of complaint concerning his Monday emails with religious content created an opportunity for school board members who opposed him to take political advantage. Nevertheless, they all supported his emails and his pragmatic recommendation to comply with the terms of the complaint.

Q4. What preliminary themes emerge from such experiences and what theories relate to these themes?

Five theoretical lenses were identified prior to fieldwork in this study. These lenses were expected to help in framing and understanding the narratives. In this section, each theoretical lens will be discussed relative to thematic threads identified and the narratives themselves. Other theories that may be more useful than the ones previously noted in understanding the experience of culture war conflict by evangelical administrators are also considered.

Culture war theory.

As discussed above, Hunter's (1991) culture war theory provides an excellent lens for understanding the skirmishes studied here. However, much of the school and district level leadership activity that transpired under the umbrella of the culture war theory might be better interpreted with two theories that focus on a more fine-grained exploration of such experiences: street level bureaucrats as proposed by Lipsky (1980) and micropolitics, especially at the local level, as detailed by Sharp (1999).

Though teachers, not administrators, were identified as exemplars of street level bureaucrats in the original presentation of the theory (Lipsky, 1980), Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) have detailed how school administrators operate in that role. In the skirmishes studied here, administrators in communities with a collective religious identity negotiated implementation of what was demanded by court rulings and law that conflicted with local values and norms. Efficiency and resource allocation linked to service delivery are at the center of most of the literature concerning street level bureaucrats, but the same behaviors are evident when applied to these situations where external mandates are implemented locally.

Micropolitical analysis, especially in informal interactions, is essential in understanding how the culture war played out in these skirmishes. Other skirmishes that have been studied illustrate this perspective. For example, when the performance of a Christian band at a high school assembly in a small Southern town was cancelled, a skirmish broke out that divided the community (Beekley, 2013). The complexities of power, personality, and law in that case is an example of how micropolitical analysis is helpful in understanding such conflicts. In the end, the school board offered an out of court settlement when new members were elected. The settlement

offer was made in spite of the fact that the legality of the decision by the district had been affirmed in court. All of the most important steps in the conflict occurred in informal contexts.

“The quandary for school administrators,” observed Beekley (2013), “is how to determine legally what will avoid litigation” (p. 326). As is generally the case, no mention was made in the case study of the religious identity of the school principal or the superintendent. If either or both were evangelical Christians, the micropolitical implications of the religious aspect would have been a fascinating feature of the conflict.

Each of the narratives in this study provided ample detail of how micropolitical practices were central to the action, and how those processes were colored by religious factors. For example, Sharon and Eugene engaged in practices they knew to be out of compliance with law. The local community was supportive, and that factor either drove or encouraged their practices. Both continued their actions knowing a legal challenge would require a change. Laura also mentioned that illegal practices in the area of school prayer were commonplace in more rural areas of Texas. Inconsistent compliance with laws, policies, and curriculum standards that run counter to the religious views of teachers and administrators were reviewed earlier (Bennett & Foldes, 2014; Berkman & Plitzer, 2010; McGuire, 2009; Weldy, 2011), but the explanation behind that data remains unclear. Do such situations reflect gaps of knowledge or are they intentional acts of defiance of the law in solidarity with local culture? For Sharon and Eugene it was the latter. They were not acting in the role of individual rebels; they were acting as leaders aligned with the local religious consensus.

Role conflict theory.

Little of the experience of the five participants was better understood through application of the role conflict theory lens. The only participant who articulated what could be best

described as a role conflict was Terry, who referred to his approach as “dancing on the razor’s edge.” Nevertheless, Terry was experienced and skillful in that “dance,” and approached it as a balancing act, not a conflict. Laura also had some conflict in her roles as a Christian among other Christians in the community and her role as a school leader, especially in her dealings with pastors who asked for special favors. However, the management of competing loyalties was not a major theme for any of the participants. If the sample of administrators in this study had included those from different settings who experienced culture war skirmishes that were more intense, it is likely that role conflict would have been much more pronounced.

Additional theoretical lens: Person-organization fit.

The theory of person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996) may have much more utility in several of the narratives that were part of this study, especially for those participants who worked in rural districts. Little and Miller (2007) explored hiring practices and teacher fit in rural schools and Hurley (1992) examined the socialization of principals in rural settings. Both studies help explain why cultural conflict is a very different issue in homogeneous communities. When strong person-organization fit reflects close alignment between the administrator and the community concerning core values and worldview assumptions, there is little role conflict related to culture war issues.

The “rural values” identified and applied in Little and Miller’s study included four aspects: community-centrism, traditionalism, primary group preference, and social conservatism (p. 10). Distrust of outsiders was prominent, as was “discomfort with gender equality or different races, religions, classes, or other groups [and the] feeling that special interest groups have gone too far in demanding their rights” (pp. 11-12). Newly hired rural principals in the Hurley study found their leadership practices reshaped by teachers, who pushed them away from

instructional leadership work towards more traditional tasks of student discipline and management. For leaders like Eugene and Sharon who served in rural communities and shared the dominant religion, core values, and assumptions of the locals, person-organization fit was high and role conflicts were insignificant.

Berkman and Plutzer (2010) asserted that teachers were hired by, and stayed in, communities where they “fit” (p. 30 and p.194). If person-organization fit strongly influences hiring decisions, then it makes a great deal of sense that there would be little role conflict for teachers or administrators. In fact, Berkman and Plutzer pointed to pressure from administrators regarding what teachers needed to cover in science class (p. 226). Administrators had an important role in guiding the discretion exercised by teachers in the implementation of external mandates concerning teaching evolution in ways that aligned with the local community’s expectations. That leadership behavior reflected congruence rather than conflict in roles for leaders and was an example of guiding implementation of an external mandate as a local culture ambassador, negotiating on behalf of the local community’s values, and helping the community minimize or avoid consequences considered negative when responding to an external mandate. That approach to leadership best describes the actions of Eugene, Sharon, and Laura captured in this study.

It is a different story in more heterogenous communities. The experiences of Craig and Terry illustrate conflicts between the roles of public school administrator and evangelical Christian. While Eugene, Sharon, and Laura gained social capital by way of their religious affiliations, Craig and Terry, both serving in states in the West, took risks in identifying themselves as Christians. Speaking of the Pacific Northwest, a sub-region of the West, where

Terry served, Wellman (2008) wrote “In fact, one could argue that there might be a negative status correlation for church attendance” (p. 276).

Craig detailed his belief that church-state concerns had resulted in too little religious influence in schools, and said he would be quite comfortable leading students in non-sectarian prayer. He admitted, “I’ve actually conducted prayer as grace before a meal with my staff. I’ve done that, and probably would have gotten in trouble for doing so.” Terry faced opposition from fellow Christians. That opposition included concern from his pastor about his work with parachurch organizations. His minister warned, “You’re consorting with the enemy.” Terry’s pastor reflected inter-Christian cultural conflict that has been described as “a civil war within evangelicalism” (Worthen, 2014, p.177) and has been a companion to the broader culture war.

Additional theoretical lens: Collective religious identity.

Collective religious identity is another theoretical approach that could prove particularly useful in rural settings. A collective religious identity “provides group members with a shared psychological field, shared cognitive representations of themselves, their own identity, and the objective world in the form of shared social norms of fact and value” (Turner & Oakes, 1986, p.250). Administrators serving for any length of time in a setting where there is a collective religious identity are likely to be in tune with that community’s religious sensibilities and role conflict will likely be minimal.

Collective religious identity has been blamed for the patterns of non-compliance with laws concerning religious practices in schools. The state of South Carolina serves as an example (Bindewald, Rosenblith, & Green, 2013). Characterizing violations in that state as occurring “with striking regularity” (p.304), the authors described two cases to illustrate the political

dynamics when local school leader actions align with the collective evangelical Christian identity in support of religious practices in spite of clear legal guidelines to the contrary.

Tyack and Hansot (1982) described nineteenth century Americans as, “Largely Protestant in religion and Anglo-Saxon in ethnic background, (sharing) a common religious and political conception of the role of public education in shaping a Christian nation” (p. 5). School leaders were guardians of the virtues that sprang from that common, generically Protestant, civil religiosity. Modern religious pluralism has made that kind of collective religious identity an historical relic in most communities, but Eugene, Sharon, and Laura all led in communities where something very much like the historic Protestant hegemony still prevails. Eugene noted the pervasive support for Christian religious programs and practices. Sharon described how support for Bible classes held sway not because the majority of community members self-identified as evangelical Christians, but because a majority were “believers” of some stripe and went along with the cultural flow of the community, creating a functional collective religious identity.

Collective religious identity does not require a shared evangelical orthodoxy to generate community consensus support for Christian religious practices. A robust civil religiosity can be built around a core of strong evangelical and fundamentalist Christians and supported by less ardent believers and those who identify as Christians but are minimal in their practice. Sharon described just such a scenario in her community where non-church families were “just fine going along with the flow,” and the demographic data from the communities where Laura and Eugene experienced their skirmishes would suggest the same patterns of compliance.

Collective religious identity in a community may also be reflected in the local understanding of what it means to be religiously “tolerant,” specifically concerning church-state

issues in schools. Eugene insisted that all religions were welcome in his district's faith-based programming, and Sharon was adamant that children of any faith would be loved and accommodated in her school. Concerning her school, Laura said, "We're a family unit regardless of our beliefs," and she recounted visiting a graduate of her school who was at Harvard. Laura asserted that the fact the young man was Hindu was not an issue. Instead, she pointed to the strong relationship she developed: "We had a relationship...and if he saw Jesus through my eyes, then that's awesome." Laura also said of her school's teachers, "They knew my beliefs, but they knew I respected others and others' opinions." Though all three of these participants worked in communities dominated by Christianity and they shared that faith, they also viewed their schools and districts as safe and welcoming places for non-Christians.

Additional theoretical lens: A "civic gospel".

In the context of his comparative study of thriving evangelical and liberal congregations in the Pacific Northwest, Wellman (2008) referenced a "civic gospel" which he asserted, "is part and parcel of the Evangelical moral worldview" (p. 19). The features of this civic gospel included:

the belief that Evangelical conversion will address and solve social problems; the government should protect America's religious heritage; the United States was founded as a Christian nation; it is hard to be a political liberal and a Christian; the promotion of democracy around the world should be encouraged; and Evangelicals should advocate for economic, religious, and political liberty...." (p. 18)

This articulation of theological and political beliefs and commitments could serve as an indication of fit in a homogeneous, conservative, Christian community. Alignment to this civic gospel by a school administrator might provide a helpful tool for analysis of fit, whether in a

community where common religious identity is present or in other settings where alignment with this civic gospel would signal inherent conflict with other factions within the community.

Faith-work models.

Faith had powerful implications for each participant's approach to her or his work as a school leader, and the theories identified prior to gathering data proved useful in describing those approaches.

Since there was a question in the screening survey (see Appendix E) based on Miller's (2007) model, it was possible to consider self-reports alongside data from the field to match participants to the four approaches to faith-work integration described in the model.

Eugene and Terry selected the response linked to the Ethics Type of integration in the Miller (2007) model, indicating a focus on ethical practices in the organization and in their own practice, and social concerns as the organization intersects with the community. It was clear from the interviews that Eugene prioritized personal integrity and racial equity and reconciliation issues in his community. Terry was clear about following policy and transparency in his district, and his mission to address social justice issues was strong.

Craig and Laura identified with the Experience Type, which centers on calling and vocation, seeing work as both intrinsically valuable and as a benefit to others. These characteristics were evident in their narratives. Both were active servants with many skills and talents that were recognized by others, and both got pleasure out of exercising those gifts. When Craig's career was cut short through his skirmish, he struggled. Miller (2007) pointed out, if a person with this orientation loses their job, they are likely to ask, "If my work is my calling, and I've just lost my job, does that also mean I've lost my calling, my purpose in life?" (p. 137). Craig's post-skirmish experience reflected that questioning.

Finally, Sharon's response marked her as the Evangelism Type (later referred to by Miller [2007] as the "Expressive Type"), which describes employees who "view work and the workplace primarily as a mission field" (p. 132), though the sharing of faith can be done in both gentle and more aggressive ways. Sharon's open expressions of her faith and her seamless integration of her faith and her work day-to-day demonstrated how well she fit this type.

Lindsay's (2007) model included a number of strategies that he found in the practices of high-powered Christian leaders in a number of professions. Those strategies were evident in varying degrees among the participants in this study. In communities where conservative Christianity was dominant, many of Lindsay's strategies were unnecessary, but in the more heterogeneous contexts, there was clear evidence of these tools at work.

Expressive symbolism encompasses ways Christians signal their faith and negotiate multiple identities. In this study, it was evident in different forms in contexts where risks were quite different. Eugene's weekly email memos to his staff and his public statements about faith came in a highly religious community. Similarly, Sharon's office wall and desk decorations signifying faith, her participation in prayer with her staff, and her open sharing of faith with staff and community members were all nested in a very religious community. On the other hand, Craig's participation in a prayer breakfast promotion in a diverse community triggered his dismissal. Terry participated in public events at churches and a Christian pastors group, but he was the superintendent, not a principal, so he was able to leverage networks to support his faith expressions in a heterogeneous context.

Networking among the participants in this study did not involve the power Lindsay's (2007) elite leaders held, but the prayer and fellowship networking he described was evident, and in Terry's case, was significant in his local context. In strongly Christian communities, such as

Eugene's, networking was extensive and, for the most part, informal. Convening power, another strategy identified by Lindsay, was also less necessary when the local culture was pervasively Christian.

Elastic orthodoxy for the participants of this study differed based upon context. Where it was necessary to work with others who did not share evangelical beliefs, elastic orthodoxy was present. Terry demonstrated this most clearly. He worked with state, national, and international groups on equity, peace, and justice issues that were an extension of his faith, but expressed in work that was not typically conducted in Christian language and linked him with a wide variety of individuals.

Overall, Lindsay's (2007) model applies quite well to contexts where faith expression requires caution and where the leader is in a position with substantial decision-making power, so it was most prominent in Terry's narrative. Those who worked in essentially homogeneous settings, such as Sharon and Eugene, tended towards the "populist" evangelicalism described by Lindsay, while Craig and Terry, who served in more diverse contexts, exhibited a more "cosmopolitan" evangelicalism (pp. 219-221). And, as Lindsay observed in the leaders he studied, those holding to a populist form of evangelicalism were deeply engaged in their local church, while the cosmopolitans were more engaged in parachurch organizations and networks of fellow believers.

Finally, Detwiler's (1999) continuum of "pure religionists," "modified religionists," and "pure secularists," which he employed to assist in analyzing culture war conflicts in schools, was of limited value in this study. Modified religionists align well with Lindsay's description of cosmopolitan evangelicalism, so it is not surprising that Terry fit that category, as did Craig for the most part. But Detwiler's continuum was more helpful in understanding the communities

within which each participant operated, since the primary value of his work was in understanding the core aspects of the culture war conflict as it played out among like-minded groups in local schools and districts, and how those parties connected with larger social forces.

Other theoretical perspectives on faith and work.

Evangelicals wrestle with an approach to work that is true to their faith. Hunter (2010) described the traditional view grounded in getting “souls saved”:

For generations of faithful Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, vocation in the secular world was at best a necessary evil. To the extent that work had “kingdom significance,” it was a platform for evangelism. The mark of true piety for a committed believer whether in skilled or manual labor or in the realms of business, law, education, public policy, and social welfare, was to lead a Bible study and evangelize their associates in their place of work. In this paradigm, work was instrumentalized—it was regarded as simply a means to spiritual ends. (pp. 248-249)

The participants in this study balanced an approach to work that promoted “saving souls” with the work of serving the educational and social needs of others. Those two purposes have often been viewed as competing rather than complementary goals in American evangelicalism. In 1972, Moberg described the twentieth century break from a nineteenth century evangelicalism that blended social action with proselytizing. That break created what he described as the “fallac[y] of being impaled upon the horns of a false dilemma. Christians became either evangelistic or socially involved, not both” (p. 34). Nevertheless, the tension between saving souls and doing good remains in evangelical culture, and was experienced in varying degrees by the participants. As the evangelical movement grew in the United States after World War II, the

challenge of this dilemma did not subside, and questions of meaning and purpose—theological questions—remain at the core of the work-faith experience for evangelicals.

Christian approaches to work nest within a theology of cultural engagement. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (1951) provided what has been a favored frame for consideration of this question, but current evangelical thinkers have offered new perspectives (Crouch, 2008; Hunter, 2010; Stearns, 2009). Schwartz (1997) described three options for teachers in public schools, each representing different theologies of cultural engagement. According to Schwartz, the Agent of Enculturation focuses on operating peaceably in the system, doing good for children, and living as a positive example of Christianity. The Christian Advocate/Evangelist “is willing to take some risks and test the limits of the church/state separation line in order to fulfill his calling to be a light in the public school system” (Schwartz, 1997, p.295). Finally, the Golden Rule Truth-Seeker treats “religious questions and concerns as a normal and healthy part of public human life” (p. 295).

His typology has potential to be adapted by Christians who are public school administrators. The categories are helpful but limited when applied to school leaders, since administrators face more complex contexts and issues. Sharon, for example, fit well into the Christian Advocate/Evangelist category, but the religious culture of her community made her actions congruent with the local context. The element of risk a teacher or administrator in a diverse context would face did not apply to Sharon.

More useful is the work of Lindsay and Smith (2010), who used data from a national study of elite evangelical leaders to zero in on how faith informs decision-making. The result was a proposed descriptive taxonomy of dispositions toward faith at work specific to evangelicals. The model addresses the work context (hostile or amenable) and faith expression

(subtle or explicit) to suggest four orientations: pragmatic, heroic, circumspect, and brazen. Miller and Ewest (2013) offered another insightful model that addressed the approach to faith and work of all Protestants. This model described five “accents” in how Protestants approach faith and work: Personal purpose or calling, stewardship/co-regency, economic justice and business ethics, modesty coupled with generosity within success, and evangelism/expression. Both models provide evangelical leaders tools for both locating their own approach to faith and work among their co-religionists, and suggesting other options for those who have not considered such a possibility.

Moral narratives.

The belief among the participants of this study was that religion is, or can be, a community asset and a social good that benefits students, especially the most vulnerable students. This belief flows from a moral narrative that conflicts with other dominant moral narratives in the United States today, and certainly conflicts with the moral narrative animated by national advocacy groups typically categorized as “liberal” that watchdog over church-state violations. This insight supports the use of what Smith (2003) referred to as “living narratives” (pp. 63-94) as tools useful for analyzing culture war conflicts and the perspectives of leaders engaged in those conflicts. The “Christian metanarrative” (p. 69) is particularly useful in understanding evangelicals, but different narratives related to the purpose of public schools and “the good life” enrich the understanding of culture war dynamics in public schools.

Advocacy groups lined up against the Christian Right have different “living narratives” that further aid understanding of culture war skirmishes. For example, the following narrative crafted by the researcher captures much of the rhetoric from secularist advocacy groups encountered during the course of this study:

Perhaps the most dangerous social agenda in our nation today is pursued by fundamentalist Christians who enlist children into their crusade to “take back” America in order to deny rights to women and gays and impose their moral view of the world on everyone else. This broad agenda animates “ministries” of various sorts that exploit court rulings on “equal access” providing entry to schools. It marches forward through various “wolf in sheep’s clothing” activities. For example, assemblies for schools peddled as character building or motivational are in fact proselytizing events aimed at conversion and “revival.” These tactics employ a masterful mix of manipulation and fear to get children to “accept Jesus” and join the ranks of the “saved” so the social and political agenda of the Far Right can roll forward. Fundamentalist school teachers are ideally suited to promote this agenda in a thousand ways in their classrooms behind closed doors, slipping the Bible, prayer, and other proselytizing activities into their every day teaching and interaction with students.

Wounding in leadership.

If the administrators in this study had been attacked by their local Christian community, or if the conflicts narrated resulted in administrators “losing” the skirmish rather than “winning,” it is probable that theoretical constructs and previous research concerning personal cost and wounding would have been more useful. The kinds of skirmishes in this study did not feature those elements. Each participant experienced challenges and, to varying degrees, personal pain, but all believed God was at work in the midst of their conflicts and was using the challenge to make them better Christians. Though only Craig’s conflict rose to the level of “crisis,” all of them looked for ways to come away from the skirmish stronger, which does align with the “wounded leader” model presented by Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002). Terry’s prior

experience at Centerton left him wounded, and he described the anger at God that resulted. It took time, but he used the next phase of his career to work through that wounding and considered the net result as growth in his faith. Similarly, Flinham's (2010) model for sustaining "reservoirs of hope" in school leaders facing significant struggles was only somewhat useful given the types of conflicts in this study. Flinham's three strategies were evident in the participants in varying degrees: *reinforcement* through peers; *renewal* through reflection, stepping back, retreats, and study; and *refreshment* through stepping away from the work for a time (pp. 96-99).

Shared reflective practice has been promoted for school administrators to deal with stressful situations effectively and enhance practice (e.g., Drago-Severson, 2012), but the unique issues faced by Christian leaders caught in a cross-fire between their own church community and their school or district adds difficulty to the task of accessing this resource. Participants in this study who had professional Christian colleagues were quick to formally (e.g., Terry's fellowship group) and informally access these coreligionists in times of challenge. Craig turned to non-Christian colleagues and mentors, who were helpful, but could not fully appreciate his faith issues. He also turned to fellow Christians who could empathize, but could not fully understand his professional context.

Additional theoretical lens: Evangelical expression of an ethic of care.

An ethic of care is pervasive in public schooling, and each of the participants in this study expressed a desire to provide what they believed was best for children in their school or district. "The 'best interests of the student' is at the heart of the ethic of the educational profession," according to Stefkovich and Begley (2007, p.212), and yet the meaning of that term is unclear in research and in practice. Differing views of the "best interests of students" flow

from different beliefs about the “good life” envisioned for students and the worldviews that reflect those valued outcomes. When combined with an ethic of care that is oriented towards those intended outcomes, educators may pursue quite different paths.

What does an ethic of care demand of a Christian educator in a public school setting? For an evangelical who considers the ultimate “good” for every child to be “accepting Christ as savior” and assuring an eternity with Jesus, it might demand getting kids “saved” by whatever means necessary. For an evangelical who considers the ultimate “good” for children to be accepting Christ as savior, but believes the best pathway to that end is to be a “good Christian” who draws others to Jesus by loving and serving others, daily practices will look much different. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) proposed a model of ethics built upon a working definition of the best interest of students consisting of three elements: rights, responsibilities, and respect. The participants in this study would likely agree with much in this definition, but would want the spiritual needs of children added and given priority. They all viewed the spiritual aspect of life as having value and as being the most desirable foundation for a safe, moral, and positive life.

Eugene was reared in the Civil Rights Movement, which was fueled at least in part by a faith-based commitment to building strong communities. He applied that connection to his educational leadership, drawing from religion as a resource for the common good. Laura, serving in Texas, had a more individualistic understanding of this connection, but she wanted all her students to flourish and she simultaneously led as a professional who respected the law. The same was true for Sharon. Terry was compelled by his faith to give special attention to the most vulnerable children. He encouraged the community’s churches to unite in order to meet the needs of the neediest students and families and “be Jesus” in tangible ways. He viewed service to children as a social good and a valuable religious work, but he also viewed it as a witness to

the community of the love of Jesus, recapturing a 19th century understanding of the “whole Gospel” (Stearns, 2009). Craig also pursued the best for all his students and staff without overt evangelizing, but his actions made him the target of a religiously-based culture war skirmish anyway.

The assertion that evangelical educators may embrace an ethic of care while simultaneously desiring that each child accept Jesus as their personal savior would be considered an impossible contradiction by many. In fact, some suggest that Christian educators are a threat to the well being of children; there is particular concern for students who are “other” in the view of the evangelical subculture or who are members of social groups disparaged by prominent conservative Christian voices as “sinners” (James, 2010; MacDonald & Kirk, 1999; Reed & Johnson, 2010). However, Hartwick (2014) found that religious devotion and a sense of calling evident in Christian teachers resulted in more positive relationships with students. Such a teacher “is more likely to treat students as unique individuals, giving students personal attention, caring about their well-being, and emotionally extending themselves to students” (p.15). Hartwick drew on Martin Buber’s (Buber, 1970) presentation of the “I-Thou” stance in characterizing the relationships between Christian teachers and their students. Evangelicals are often perceived as instrumentalizing all relationships with the intent of religious conversion for personal religious benefits. Hartwick’s findings refute that assumption. He described teachers with other-oriented, servant attitudes. In the classroom, that was expressed as an intent to love and serve in the name of, and in the power of, Jesus, rather than using the classroom as an opportunity to pressure students into “making a decision for Jesus.”

However, even if Christian educators working in public schools claim to embrace an ethic of care orientation, there is ample counter-evidence from actual practice to be found in

research and in popular media. National advocacy groups such as the ACLU provide regular reports of examples, and while media accounts may be presented in biased or sensationalized forms, court documents detail examples of experiences of non-Christian students at the hands of Christian educators that clearly violate an ethic of care. Just one high profile example will illustrate the point. In Chesterton County, South Carolina a consent decree (Anderson v. Chesterfield County School District, No. 4:11-cv-03300-RBH, January 24, 2012) was issued in a case involving a middle school student who was discriminated against for his non-belief by fellow students, teachers, and staff. Beyond the experience of non-Christian students, there are also accounts of teachers who self-silence in contexts where Christian faith dominates the school staff (Gilbert, 2008).

It is the stated intent of at least some conservative Christians to use public schools as a staging ground for missionary work, and this stance is commonplace. Just one such example is *Reclaiming your school: Ten strategies to practically and legally evangelize your school*, written by Brad and Suzanne Dacus and made available online without charge by the Pacific Justice Institute (<http://www.pacificjustice.org/reclaim-your-school.html>). The document includes specific instructions for students, teachers, school board members, and churches in mounting a successful, school-based evangelistic revival.

Discussion

In this study, the influence of the local community on the experience of Christian leaders in public schools was a prominent factor. Though this is addressed in the thematic analysis, further comment is warranted in order to consider several nuances within this aspect of the experiences of the participants. Two comparisons will serve to illustrate the points to be made.

The first is a comparison of the attitudes concerning church-state issues among fellow leaders encountered by Terry, who served in a community on the edge of a major metropolitan area, and the attitudes encountered by Eugene, who served in a small city in a rural setting. Terry had to closely monitor the central office administrator working on the skirmish issue because he was “kind of indoctrinated in the church and state separation approach. For him, it was just kind of like, ‘Nope, you can’t do that.’” Meanwhile, Eugene’s attitude, which was reflective of his community, was to “not focus on the differences of church and state, but what can be within the parameters legally.”

The second contrasts the consequences for two leaders who were both involved in a prayer breakfast. Eugene regularly attended a monthly prayer breakfast for community leaders where collaboration between the churches and the schools was planned. He was lauded for his work in the community and took great pride in what was accomplished as part of the “faith-based initiative” that was envisioned, developed, and supported by the group. This was in stark contrast to what Craig experienced. He served in a religiously diverse, liberal, urban area and lost his position as principal because he appeared on an online promotion encouraging businesses to support a prayer breakfast to honor teachers, an event he neither helped plan nor attended.

Participants were cognizant of the difference location makes in culture war conflict, but not all the variation is based on national regional location. Sharon compared the district where she grew up and started her career to the Clearwater community where her skirmish occurred. Though they are separated by less than an hour’s drive: “That was a whole different setting there at Franklin [High School]. The situation that happened here would have just never happened. Bible would not have been taught in the building.” Laura mentioned that in rural Texas communities it was not unusual for prayer over the public address system to still occur as a

valued tradition that is part of Friday night football, though the state law banning that practice is obeyed in more urban schools. Laura also reported that the assembly that triggered her skirmish got a very different reception in some schools in the nearby city. She recalled, “Some schools in the city were like, ‘We want you (the assembly program) to come in. Our culture is fine with you talking about God or your story,’” which counters the typical urban-rural expectation regarding treatment of religious issues in schools.

Eugene spoke at length about differences between the “Bible Belt,” where he served, and other parts of the country. He pointed specifically to New York, and he said of California, “that’s another world.” However, Craig’s experience in Southern California demonstrated that even in California, there could be significant differences within a region. Santa Barbara, where Craig’s skirmish took place, was quite different from the communities further south where he had been a principal most of his career. Though not rural, the area was more conservative. He recalled school board meetings opening with prayer and he described a car dealership billboard with “In God We Trust.” Reflecting on his skirmish, he said, “In Lake Elsinore, had I been involved in a prayer breakfast, I might have been considered a hero.” In the Santa Barbara area, his career was cut short.

In homogeneous rural communities, local residents typically expect the dominant worldview to be honored and, at least to some degree, passed on. When skirmishes in rural settings like the ones included in this study break out, they are often ignited by a lone voice within the community at odds with the dominant religious ethos. That dissenter solicits support from an external power source, which intensifies and expands the conflict. The outside advocacy group applies resources (generally legal) to disrupt the social status quo. If a lawsuit is filed or a formal letter of complaint is received, the skirmish becomes a legal matter, and what locals

generally perceive as the heavy hand of “outsiders” is applied to the situation in terms stipulated by laws and court rulings.

For Eugene and Sharon, the preceding depiction captures the essence of the skirmishes they experienced. The story is likely to be different in communities where there is more diversity, especially in urban settings, but also in other communities with a more heterogeneous demographic. Without a common worldview dominating a community, pluralism demands a more challenging role for a local leader seeking a common ground solution. Outside powers are typically brought in when a culture war skirmish breaks out in more diverse communities as well, but multiple views and voices make the conflict much more complex to manage. It is in those settings where the kind of active, dangerous, and demanding leadership originally sought out for this study is most likely to be found. Craig and Terry both served in such communities, but Craig’s ordeal was more personal than public, and Terry benefitted from a strong network of support and his own leadership skills. Neither conflict became a community wildfire.

Observations on the culture war as experienced in schools.

The opportunity to influence children in public schools prompts national partisan advocacy groups to support activities aligned to their own agenda, and battle activities initiated by those from the opposite end of the political and social spectrum. Liberal and progressive advocacy groups wary of conservative Christians view virtually all contact between Christian organizations and public school students, including those made through intermediaries, as problematic. They view many as dangerous and the welfare of students demands protective action. This echoes the rhetoric of fundamentalists who portrayed homosexual teachers as threats to children in past decades. The shrillness that occasionally characterizes the objections

in these culture war skirmishes rivals the shrillness of public outcries over child pornographers and pedophiles volunteering in schools, or even living near schools.

While not shrill, Stewart's (2012) portrayal of the Good News Clubs and other "stealth" strategies to slip child evangelism into public schools drips with dark comparisons to both war and insidious corporate practices. A siege mentality and foreboding sense that fundamentalist Christians are bent on converting all children in public schools pervades the book. Stewart's contention was that Christians were incrementally taking over public schools and were unconcerned about the consequences for local communities divided by the related conflict. Christians were described as leveraging the law through appeals to individual rights, equal access, and viewpoint discrimination and then creating deceptive methods that portrayed a program as non-religious, but it was all an elaborate "bait and switch" in Stewart's depiction.

Of course, aggressively evangelistic Christian ministries and individuals provide plenty of evidence that supports this kind of analysis. The term "spiritual warfare" used commonly among evangelicals evokes flesh and blood conflict and is used to defend the actions of Christians engaged in cultural conflict that sometimes becomes violent. It is common for Christian ministries targeting the young to craft strategic plans that feature conversion numbers as the measure of success. Corporate language and methods maximize efficiency and bolster their professional image, especially in the eyes of donors who want to see results. Ministries of this stripe generally expect Christian administrators in public schools to take a positive and supportive view of their programs. The fact that these programs have evangelistic goals but offer school elements that are not overtly religious provides a legal crack in the door for school access. Those who complain about a hidden proselytizing agenda often find it hard to win the argument, thus adding energy to the "bait and switch" assertion.

At the same time, Christian advocacy organizations monitor curricular initiatives and school programs supported by liberals and progressives, and wave red flags concerning much that is considered mainstream in the broader culture. These also require responses from national conservative advocacy groups that are committed to advocating for and protecting children and families according to their worldview. There are evangelical Christians who are concerned about “bait-and-switch” events, the use of peer pressure, deception, and other forms of manipulation in proselytizing, but typically behind that discomfort is a genuine concern for the spiritual lives of children who have not had the opportunity to learn about Jesus and get saved.

Those on both sides of these culture war conflicts in schools are aware of the captive audience public education provides, and both sides worry about how that opportunity is misused by cultural enemies. The church volunteers on campuses in Terry’s district, the Bible classes in Sharon’s school, and the character assembly at Laura’s high school were all activities that were challenged as attempts to take advantage of that captive audience.

An attitude of embattled but not beaten concerning religion in schools.

Sharon described her role in maintaining a Bible class for her elementary school, and she reported how others associated her actions with those of Esther, a hero of the Old Testament who acted bravely to save the Jews from genocide. That comparison positioned anyone who objected as a threat comparable to Haman, the evil official Esther was able to stop. That kind of framing was also present in Eugene’s narrative. He was forthright in discussing how he expected some of his actions to be challenged. He knew that when that objection came, he would have to desist. But Sharon and Eugene both found ways to continue the practices in new ways that met the legal requirements.

Like Eugene, Laura was not cowed by objections that might come. In her situation, a famous story from Texas history concerning the birth of the Republic of Texas captures the tone of her stance. The little town of Gonzales was asked to return a cannon to the central Mexican government. When the Mexican troops came to reclaim it, the Texans flew a banner that boldly read, “Come and get it!” The Mexican soldiers came to get the cannon and were turned back. That spirit carried over to the Alamo and finally, the battle of San Jacinto, leading to Texan independence. That “come and get it” attitude characterized the attitudes of both Eugene and Laura. Laura was determined to protect the rights of Christians in public schools, and she lamented rights that she believed had been gradually ceded over the years.

Saving, serving, or both?

The missionary goal (and duty) of evangelicalism is to make sure every person has the opportunity to accept Jesus as savior. While the theology of freewill plays out differently among different categories of Christians, evangelicals assert the necessity of an individual response. While the tactics actually employed can be coercive, manipulative, and ham-handed, the intent in most evangelical congregations is to provide sufficient information and an opportunity for a response that respects the agency of each individual.

Providing an opportunity for a decision to accept Jesus as personal savior is not viewed by evangelicals as an act of brainwashing or bullying. It is seen as a duty of care and a mission of love. If you believe you have an eternal answer to life’s most fundamental questions, and you have the opportunity to share that “good news” with those who may not have access to it via any other source, it would be unloving not to share it. This is the standard view among evangelicals.

In order to assure that listeners are able to hear and understand the good news, most evangelicals engage in activities to clear away barriers and hurdles. For many, this entails doing good deeds, serving others, and establishing relationships with non-Christians. Terry and Craig exemplified this approach, and Terry likened the relational, non-aggressive tact to being a member of the Rotary:

If you go to Rotary and hand out your business cards and promote your business, you're not going to be welcome very long. You can't promote your business, but you do it by working with somebody raking leaves and building a relationship and when they need insurance they call you, or when they need plumbing done they call you.

The approach taken by Sharon and Laura in their role as a principal involved what might be described as facilitating a “leading the horse to water” opportunity. Both hosted events where students could choose to get on a pathway that greatly increased the chances of having an opportunity to decide to follow Jesus. Sharon’s comment concerning students from families that were “just fine going along with the flow” and who allowed their children to attend the Bible classes illuminated this approach: “Hopefully that [going to Bible class] will become more of a pattern for that student and go from there,” presumably to salvation. She also noted that the classroom door was left open for students who opted out of Bible classes, “just in case [the child] wanted hear what was going on.” Laura was fully aware that the assembly presenters offered an evening follow up that included a direct appeal for students to accept Jesus as savior. She worked hard to keep the school event and the evening event separate, but she also said, “Honest to goodness, if these other things happen and there’s conversion, of course—that spiritual side—that’s great.”

Laura's assertion, "While it [conversion] needs to be our [Christians'] motive directing all things, that wasn't my motive in the leadership role," glossed over an inherent tension in the evangelical role in public schools. This tension was also described by a Texas elementary teacher:

I have a few Muslims in my class each year, and both the students AND their parents KNOW how much I love them and want them to have a successful future. I don't try to convert them, and I certainly don't "bash" their religion. I DO pray for them. I pray they will find the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ, the one and only True God. Am I intolerant? I don't think so. I see it as standing for my faith, my country, and my freedom [sic]. (Ezzani & Brooks, 2015, pp. 14)

The researchers noted, "Although this elementary school teacher believed she treated all students fairly, she dismissed any value Islam or Muslims brought to her classroom, school, or community" (p. 14).

The formal rules of engagement in the current manifestations of the culture war when skirmishes break out in public school settings are dominated by legal questions of rights. A rights-based strategy for fighting culture war skirmishes certainly fails to align to the biblical admonition to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city." The threat of a lawsuit generally "works" in that it can force a settlement or compliance at the local level, but the divisions within the community, or between a community with a common religious identity and the larger culture, remain unaddressed. In that situation, national polarizing groups fanning the flames of divisiveness and acrimony gain strength from notching victories in local communities.

The common story of how Good News Clubs are started in local schools is a helpful illustration. The clubs are fully legal and yet still trigger strong reactions. Opposition is often

exacerbated and anti-Christian attitudes deepen when legal strong-arming—with the guidance and support of national advocacy group—is employed to get locals to comply. Such skirmishes also confirm the view among many Christians that they are under attack.

Disregard for the commonweal is reflected in the approach of many conservative Christians who are more interested in what they can “get away with” religiously in public schools than what the law or the courts have to say, especially since the courts are seen by such individuals as tools of secularism that are in large part to blame for “removing God from the schools.” If you view smuggling Bibles into communist countries as doing God’s work, how can side stepping the federal court system in order to bring eternal salvation to children be any different?

Hunter (2010, pp. 202-204) contended that the weakening of a pervasively Protestant cultural context in the United States and the advent of a more pluralistic culture has meant that holding to the Christian faith, and even holding to a belief in God, requires a great deal more effort than in previous times in the nation’s history. If that is true, the conflicts in school take on a new aspect. Conservative Christian parents and cultural warriors of the right are likely to consider their local public schools as either partners in maintaining and supporting the plausibility structure for the orthodox Christian faith they embrace, or as an opponent allied with other threatening social forces bent on weakening the strength of that faith in the lives of their children. If the negative view prevails, Christians who remain with the public schools are left to either contend with other plausibility structures for influence, or worse, target the schools for unique criticism due to the historically privileged position Protestant Christianity has held in the culture. This analysis may shed more light on culture war skirmishes. It also illuminates the unique challenges faced by leaders in those schools who personally share a conservative

Christian worldview. Are they aware of that aspect of the cultural conflict they experience?
What do they understand their role to be?

As previously detailed, evangelical Christians do not speak with one voice when it comes to how they should engage the world and, in fact, often disagree. Many moderate and progressive evangelicals appeal to an Old Testament verse written to admonish Jews in exile. This verse positively frames what they believe the Christian approach to culture should be today: “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV). This was expressed by one of the participants in this study, Terry.

Implications for Further Research

As an exploratory study, an anticipated outcome was the illumination of aspects of the experiences of the participants in order to suggest and guide further research. That outcome has been achieved, and a number of potential areas of further study are noted below.

Surfacing the still-hidden stories.

Finding leaders caught in culture war skirmishes in more complex spaces who are willing to share their experiences has proven quite difficult, but remains an important goal. Being identified as one of “them” by both sides in a culture war conflict is an experience in need of more exploration as these events can be deeply scarring leadership experiences and can provide an inside picture into some of the most divisive moments in a community. The challenge is significant. The target population is far more hidden than was anticipated. It was expected that administrators who are conservative Christians would be difficult to identify in many schools and districts. The difficulty multiplies when seeking out those who have experienced a culture war skirmish. The online search for skirmishes that was part of this study yielded many

incidents in the South where the faith of the administrator was a matter of public knowledge, typically indicated by comments in the media from the administrator. In those settings, the administrator was generally in solidarity with the predominant religious stance in the community and was responding to a complaint generated by a lone voice or small group in the community that attracted the involvement of a national advocacy group that took up the cause. In those settings, a principal's faith indicated identification with the local majority and came without risk. In other regions of the nation where communities contain a more diverse religious make-up, media reports rarely revealed any indication of the administrator's faith.

In rural areas where evangelical communities contain large representations of fundamentalist believers, the politics are likely to be conservative. Progressive evangelical congregations with members holding more moderate and even liberal political views are typically found in urban and suburban contexts. It is in the more populated areas where negative stereotypes of conservative Christians are most prominent, and yet the Christians in those communities are least likely to match the stereotypes held against them. The result is that stereotype threat may be strongest for evangelicals in urban and suburban settings, making them a uniquely hidden population. Ironically, those same evangelicals often object to fundamentalist Christianity as strongly as secular critics. In rural communities where Christianity holds sway, the hidden populations are agnostics and gays, and the stereotype threat for Christians is not likely to be present.

In fact, in diverse school districts, it is not unusual to find two Christian administrators who serve in the same organization and are not aware of the faith of other administrator. Those administrators are wary of making their religious identity known. If the administrator has been involved in a culture war skirmish, extreme hesitancy to trust an outside, unknown researcher is

understandable. However, even in communities of Christian dominance where faith expression carries no risk, administrators may also be wary of an outside, unknown researcher. One retired administrator approached during this study responded: “I do not feel comfortable discussing my faith or church attendance over the Internet with a stranger” (personal communication, February 27, 2015).

Role of faith in decision-making.

This study provides an inside view of decision-making by Christians working as leaders in public schools. Faith was an important factor in the decision-making of each participant, and was central to the work of most. Recent research (Lindsay & Smith, 2010; Steffy, 2013) points to the importance of faith in the decision-making of leaders, and in a uniquely public and sensitive area of work like public education, this deserves much more attention. Each of the participants articulated a belief that God was in communication with them and shaping them through conflicts. Luhrmann’s (2012) extraordinary study of two evangelical congregations exploring how Christians “hear” God and how divine communication guided decisions might be an especially useful frame for this aspect of faith in action among Christians in administrative roles.

In pursuing this area of inquiry, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of official documents and self-reporting in capturing the truth about actual practices. For example, Brown and Bowling (2003) investigated the implementation of national policy concerning religious practices at the district level. Using online district posted policy and indications of practice and follow up interviews with district leaders, they found an uneven level of policy adoption and inconsistent implementation, a finding that would likely have yielded even less fidelity if observational data of actual day-to-day practices was available.

Christianity, ethic of care, and community development.

As discussed above, to the participants in this study, Christianity has care and love for others at its core, and they view the Christian faith is a social good that can strengthen communities. This was most powerfully expressed in Eugene's and Sharon's narratives. Both served in communities where there was overwhelming local support for Christian expressions of love and service to students. Research into the potential of religion to support school reform through community development (e.g., Biondo & Fiala, 2014) may offer insights into healthy and legally appropriate models for engaging the religious community in supporting schools and how school leaders from the Christian community can appropriately channel their personal sense of mission.

Issues related to homosexuality.

None of the skirmishes in this study involved conflicts over homosexuality and public schools, but three of the participants' narratives addressed this topic and a significant number of skirmishes located during the search for participants pointed to the importance of this issue for further study. Wellman (2008) made this observation based upon his extensive study of evangelicals:

It is hard to exaggerate the depth of negative feelings about homosexuality coming from evangelicals... This potent binary differentiates "Christians" from secularists who do not know any better, and further from "Christians" who should. That is, any who call themselves followers of Christ and equivocate on homosexuality are by definition outside the fold. (p. 252)

Conservative Christians are viewed by the gay community and many advocates as a threat (Kahn, 2006; Reed & Johnson, 2010). In a speech Eugene gave to the entire student body

while he was still a high school principal, he recalled saying, “God made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve,” but insisted, “it was not intended to try to offend.” His beliefs were firm that homosexuality was a sin, but he also expressed a no-tolerance approach to bullying and believed those who sought to have the reference in his speech “blown up” were overreacting. In many communities in the United States, Eugene would not be viewed simply as a cultural dinosaur, he would be a cultural enemy. Craig related his personal experience with his gay daughter, and how that relationship pressed him to reconsider his views. He detailed his experiences with students and families at Sunnyside School, depicting his work as caring, fair, and respectful. Terry expressed dismay with the focus on issues like homosexuality and abortion, and how those issues distracted from the basic needs of children. Nevertheless, if identified as an evangelical Christian, both Craig and Terry would most likely have been assumed to be obstacles and threats by the gay community.

Charles Haynes (2012) of the First Amendment Center detailed expectations for administrative leadership in this area of cultural conflict:

In areas of the country where gay rights are strongly protected, religious conservatives need GLBT people to support religious freedom and free speech for religious students in public schools. And in places where gay rights are not yet recognized, GLBT people need religious conservatives to help ensure safe schools for all students. (p.5)

Haynes’ challenge is a noble call to local cultural leadership. However, the micropolitical realities involved and the unique challenge it poses for evangelical leaders is worthy of closer examination.

Christian administrators who are women.

Both of the women participants in this study discussed aspects of their gender relative to their faith and their life roles. Sharon was the “Token Female” in her early professional career, and was the first female vice principal in Clearwater. Laura recalled, “I can remember sitting in church and hearing my very old-fashioned pastor talk about the role of women being in the home,” and she recounted the shift in attitude at her church over time and the expansion of female leadership in education during her career. Research that blends questions about women in leadership in the workplace and in the field of education with questions about women in leadership in the evangelical church is lacking. Lindsay’s (2007) study of national elite Christian leaders included women, and he noted the unique factors these leaders faced (pp. 9-10). Pritchett (2014) explored the experience of 13 Christian women, some of whom were educators, and tapped into the complex and contradictory nature of gender roles and identity experienced by women in the evangelical subculture. More studies such as these are needed with a focus on school administration.

There are many questions regarding evangelical Christian women in public school administration worthy of further investigation. Do they leave conservative churches? Do they face judgment in their church community? Do they face role conflicts that men do not even recognize? What do they think about feminism in their work and in their church?

Race, faith, and school leadership.

The lone African-American participant (Eugene) did not self-identify as evangelical, though his beliefs were well aligned to evangelical theology. Worthen (2014) observed, “Many, especially in the African-American community, view evangelicalism as a White word and claim the label rarely, and always cautiously” (p. 5). Eugene was engaged in race-informed politics

throughout his career, beginning with his successful integration of the high school he attended when it was segregated. He had first-hand experience of the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that viewed the public school as a vehicle for Biblical social justice. That perspective is also embraced by the African-American Church that has been central to Eugene's life and faith experience. That stance contrasts with the perspective of most White evangelical churches, where social justice is often conflated with the "social gospel" and dismissed (Sider, 2005; Stearns, 2009), and where denial of racism persists (Emerson & Smith, 2000).

Another difference noted among participants was the varied understanding of leadership in public schools as a "ministry." Lawrence's (2013) study of a Michigan school described local African-American pastors having wide-ranging freedom in a high-challenge school. The principal did not consider the religious language of the pastors as evangelizing since the student body was overwhelmingly African-American and he considered Christianity a cultural element in the community. Jones (2010) studied African-American principals who were also pastors. He found a similar blurring of the lines between church and school. The meaning of "saving" students among Jones' participants was not a definition that is shared by most White evangelicals. Jones noted, "a pastor may say, 'we got to save the lost,' but as a school administrator he or she may say, 'we got to reach the under privileged.'" (p.162). "Ministry" meant help of any kind that equipped students for life success. That "help" might include sharing Bible verses and praying with a student in the school building, during the school day. These pastor-principals were aware of the law, but they met student needs as they saw fit in spite of the legal prohibitions.

Implications for Practice

There is ample evidence that culture war skirmishes involving conservative Christians and public schools are still common (e.g., Beem, 2006; Lawrence, 2013). Leading in the midst of such conflict is part of the role of school leaders. National standards for school administrators articulate expectations regarding both the conflicting visions of public education and the conflicts generated. During the time of this study (Spring, 2015), the Council of Chief State School Officers were in the process of revising the dominant national standards for school administrators, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium educational leadership standards. The first standard addresses vision, noting that the leader is responsible for shaping a common vision of “what it means for students to become well-adjusted, contributing members of society,” and the leader is to “Foster an open, tolerant and trusting culture that values the viewpoints of all members of the school community,” and “Act in ways that consistently reflect the vision, mission and values of the school/district” (CCSSO, 2015, p. 13). Standard 4 also directly applies to cultural conflict:

Education leaders cultivate a caring and inclusive school community dedicated to student learning, academic success and personal well-being of every student.

Education leaders create healthy, safe, and supportive school environments in which students are known, accepted, valued and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

Leaders do so by fostering a culture defined by high expectations, trust and a collective sense of responsibility for the academic, social and emotional needs of all students.

(CCSSO, 2015, p. 16)

Engagement with the complexities of personal beliefs and loyalties, local culture, law, and politics is essential in administrator preparation programs and in the ongoing professional

development of school leaders. A school administrator who does not understand how Sharon or Eugene could read the sections of the standards above and consider their actions as exemplars of those standards has not fully grasped the issues at hand. Similarly, any administrator who is not cognizant of the micropolitical aspects of culture war conflicts in local communities is not prepared to lead wisely and successfully.

Practicing administrators and aspiring leaders in preparation programs must also be alert to national shifts in cultural politics, especially in terms of how those changes may echo in local political activity. As an example, the Tea Party Movement has attracted many Christian conservatives who are considered part of the “Christian Right” (Wilson & Burack, 2012). This shift is likely changing the characteristics of local conflict between conservative Christians and public schools. Local citizens who are prompted to object to the Common Core, programming for immigrant families and non-native speakers of English, multi-cultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy, etc., may engage in these local political skirmishes with the guidance and support of national advocacy organizations that are not identified as “Christian,” such as the Tea Party, rather than turning to national Religious Right advocacy groups that were in their ascendancy in the last decades of the twentieth century. The political face of conflict may obscure the religious connections and motivations. In such conflicts, the conservative Christian community may take an active but hidden role in a local issue.

As an example of this dynamic, one principal in a rural community in the Pacific Northwest anonymously detailed an effort to eliminate a dual-immersion program in his small district. He was quite aware that the conservative Christian community saw the issue as being, at the core, about immigration. It tapped opposition to undocumented families being served in the schools. With a tight alignment between church affiliation and political views among

conservative Christians, this was not unexpected, but the political activity kept the religious muscle of the local political effort out of public view. This is a shift in political tactics from previous decades when local efforts were inspired, guided, and supported by national organizations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition.

Wisdom is essential when considering services and products provided to schools for free or at reduced rates. Leaders must be alert to corporations and organizations that seek to take advantage of the opportunity to get their message to students by way of such donations and assistance to cash-strapped schools. This becomes particularly delicate when religious messages and organizations are involved. Laura's narrative involved an assembly program sponsored by a religious organization, and the ultimate mission of that organization incited opposition from an atheist teacher. Many examples of Christian organizations with the intent of equipping students to evangelize their schools have been documented (Lawrence, 2013). It is common to offer assemblies to schools that are part of the overall strategy of evangelism, while keeping that goal from public view. How are school administrators to address these "two-phase" ministries? What role does the personal faith and religious network of the leader and the cultural context of the community play? What is the guidance that should be given to young administrators? So much is said about mentoring and on-the-job internships. What does this mean in culture-changing contexts? What leadership will be modeled?

Micropolitical complexities are typically minimized or ignored in guidance provided to school leaders. School administrators are often portrayed as impartial agents working to manage the implementation of policy and law imposed upon local districts and schools. The religious views of administrators and their own biases are rarely considered. Weldy (2011) found that nearly 60% of Ohio superintendents he surveyed believed "there should not be a separation of

church and state in relation to prayer at graduation ceremonies” (p. 92). When pondering the implications of that view, it is difficult to leave unchallenged the assumption that leader bias concerning church-state issues does not have significant influence on the practices in those districts.

Culture war skirmishes typically energize polarized extremes, yet in a diverse community it is the broad middle that must be activated for a common ground agreement to be embraced. The polarized extremes are unlikely to be satisfied with the process or the result. As Sharp (1999) asserted concerning local skirmishes, “activists in culture war issues are typically galvanized in ways that make compromise, coalition formation, and other elements of normal politics difficult” (p. 3). Effective leadership seeks to successfully guide a positive process in spite of the objections of extremists. School leaders who share the worldview of one of the polarized sides in the conflict face an even more daunting leadership challenge. Charles Haynes (2012) of the First Amendment Center, an organization dedicated to helping schools positively engage First Amendment conflicts, noted that culture war conflicts typically end up in the courts, making the kind of collaborative problem solving his organization supports moot in many cases. In fact, the legal proceedings often impose an action and leave scars in the community.

The unique insights of evangelical Christians into their own subculture should be a resource for public schools when faced with culture war conflicts. The essential question is this: If the polarized political environment at the national level that encourages extreme partisanship in order to appeal to extremist bases in the two political parties and make compromise a rare and difficult achievement in Washington DC is the current climate in local cultural conflicts as well, what is the appropriate leadership approach, especially for leaders who identify with an evangelical community that is largely conservative and Republican? Well-intentioned methods

to bring together groups of stakeholders in search of common ground will, if done well, include even the most polarized elements of the community. However, leaders facing such a scenario will need to be prepared to serve the broad middle in the community and face displeasure from the fringes (Wade-Benzoni, Hoffman, Thompson, Moore, Gillespie, & Bazerman, 2002).

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt described the dynamics of the divisiveness evident in culture war skirmishes: “It’s as though these giant electromagnets got turned on in the ’60s and they’ve been cranking up ever since. And anything that has the vaguest left-right charge, gets pulled to one side. Everything gets purified” (Tippett, 2014). Well-prepared leaders will have awareness of this “third rail” of school conflict leadership. Sex education could serve as a helpful case study. In Lukar’s (2006) detailed examination of communities divided over sex education, she pointed to the different values the polarized advocates held. She labeled those extremes “sexual liberals” and “sexual conservatives,” mirroring Hunter’s (1991) conservative-progressive divide, and she asserted that this difference was the key to understanding the culture war clash over how the subject should be addressed in schools.

Further, appreciation for the varieties of “Christians” in a community and recognition that the range often covers the full conservative-progressive political spectrum are essential.

Administrators who face culture war hot topics and fail to appreciate such distinctions among various types of Christians could face a rude awakening. Cultural division and hostility among different Christian groups is detailed in Wellman’s (2008) study of thriving conservative and liberal churches in the Pacific Northwest. He found that liberals were loathe to impose anything in terms of beliefs on their children, while conservatives wanted their children to grow up solidly in the faith and have the “Truth” firmly in hand. Wellman also noted that a common concern

among liberals was that by being known as a Christian they might be assumed to be a “fundamentalist,” so they often used other labels to avoid that possibility (p.122).

Concluding Remarks

This study sought to better understand the experiences of evangelical Christians serving as public school administrators in the midst of culture war skirmishes. As an exploratory study, it points to a wide variety of issues worthy of further investigation. At the center of this cluster of issues is the interplay of the mission of evangelicals in the culture, the vision for public schooling, and the work of school administrators who are evangelicals. According to Worthen (2014), evangelicals lack a common “intellectual spiritual authority” to assist in establishing a common vision for resolving this dilemma. Worthen proposed that evangelicals are united by three foundational challenges:

how to repair the fracture between spiritual and rational knowledge; how to assure salvation and a true relationship with God; and how to resolve the tension between the demands of personal belief and the constraints of a secularized Public Square. (p. 4)

Each of these takes on a particular flavor for administrators working in public schools. As this study has demonstrated, geographic location is the most dominant of a number of factors that make the individual navigation of culture war conflicts especially complex. As a narrative exploration, the intent was to capture the stories of evangelicals leading in the midst of culture war skirmishes and illuminate their experiences in order to add understanding. The approach this study took to each participant’s story was described by Andrews (2007):

How does this individual with whom I am speaking reflect wider social and historical changes that form the context of his or her life? I am convinced that if I can listen carefully enough, there is much to learn from every story that one might gather. For

society really is comprised of human lives, and if we can begin to understand the framework that lends meaning to these lives, then we have taken the important first step to being able to access the wider framework of meaning that is the binding agent of a culture. (p. 491)

The stories from each of the participants in this study explored both an incident—a culture war skirmish—and a world unique to each participant within which that conflict occurred. Those unique worlds encompassed the cultural and geographic context, but also included each leader’s inner world of experiences and worldview. These stories of conflict, even the most dramatic public moments in those conflicts, and the rich inner world of each administrator, are generally hidden, even to fellow school leaders. As Laura commented, “You’re in your own trench, so you really don’t realize, down the road that trench is exploding because you’re trying to keep yours from exploding.”

Though each was unique, all of the participants inhabited worlds where God is a reality, a personal deity who is engaged and active, yet cannot be seen with the eye. That core aspect of their lives is a mystery to many non-Christians. Anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann (2012) embedded herself in two different evangelical congregations in order to understand this belief in part because “the rift between believers and non-believers has grown so wide that it can be difficult for one side to respect the other” (p.xv). MacNeil (2005) studied administrators who worked in the midst of that rift, and “describe[d] situations in which their spirituality was viewed with suspicion by colleagues and upper administration who advocate and enforce presumed religious and spiritual neutrality” (pp. 177-178).

Also poorly understood are communities where Christian faith is so pervasive that the lines between church and school blur. Three of the narratives in this study occurred in just such

settings. Sharon stated matter-of-factly, “There’s not anyone on my staff who’s not an active participant in their church and their faith....we are all Christians here,” and both Laura and Eugene worked in schools and districts where the overwhelming majority were also practicing Christians.

It is hoped that this study contributes to making the worlds of evangelical Christians in different settings available to others and thereby promotes greater understanding across contexts and worldviews. Though this study looked specifically at the experiences of evangelical Christians, there are other religious groups among public school administrators, such as Mormons and Muslims, that inhabit professional and inner worlds that are also poorly understood, yet important in educational leadership research. Further study and understanding of the faiths of school leaders that provide motive, mission, and the will to sustain their work will enrich school leadership practices.

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**Appendix A: Consortium of Christian Colleges and Universities Schools with
Administrative Licensure Programs**

Abilene Christian University
Abilene, TX

Anderson University
Anderson, IN

Asbury University
Wilmore, KY

Azusa Pacific University
Azusa, CA

Bethel University
Saint Paul, MN

Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI

Carson-Newman College
Jefferson City, TN

Cornerstone University
Grand Rapids, MI

Covenant College
Lookout Mountain, GA

Dallas Baptist University
Dallas, TX

Eastern Nazarene College
Quincy, MA

Eastern University
St Davids, PA

Evangel University
Springfield, MO

Fresno Pacific University
Fresno, CA

Gordon College
Wenham, MA

Hope International University
Fullerton, CA

Houston Baptist University
Houston, TX

Indiana Wesleyan University
Marion, IN

Lee University
Cleveland, TN

LeTourneau University
Longview, TX

Lipscomb University
Nashville, TN

Mississippi College
Clinton, MS

Missouri Baptist University
Saint Louis, MO

Northwest Nazarene University
Nampa, ID

Oklahoma Wesleyan University
Bartlesville, OK

Olivet Nazarene University
Bourbonnais, IL

Oral Roberts University
Tulsa, OK

Point Loma Nazarene University
San Diego, CA
Seattle Pacific University
Seattle, WA

Simpson University
Redding, CA

Southeastern University
Lakeland, FL

Southwest Baptist University
Bolivar, MO

Trevecca Nazarene University
Nashville, TN

Union University
Jackson, TN

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
Belton, TX

University of Sioux Falls
Sioux Falls, SD

University of The Southwest
Hobbs, NM

Whitworth University
Spokane, WA

**Appendix B: Email to Administrative Licensure Program Leaders at CCCU
Colleges and Universities**

Greetings!

On _____ or _____ I plan to email the message below soliciting help in locating research participants among public school administrators to the education faculty members at your institution. I know how busy everyone is, so if you would be so good as to encourage them in some way so the email does not get overlooked, I would be most grateful. For your convenience, I have drafted a short message you might want to use, but any nudge from you is most appreciated!

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

You will soon receive an email concerning a narrative inquiry research project exploring culture war conflict in public schools. This email is from Gary Sehorn, a professor at George Fox University and a doctoral student at Bethel University. The email is a snowball style request for assistance in locating potential participants. Please be on the lookout for this email and assist as you can.

Appendix C: Email Text Sent to Educational Leadership Faculty at CCCU Colleges and Universities

Greetings!

I am a professor of educational leadership at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, and a doctoral student at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am conducting a narrative inquiry into culture war conflict in public schools and I need your help locating potential participants.

My study involves a purposeful national sample of five or six public school administrators who self-identify as evangelical Christians and have experienced a culture war “skirmish” involving the school or district they serve and the evangelical faith community within the past seven years.

If you are curious about the details of the project, feel free to visit the informational webpage:
<https://sites.google.com/site/gsehornresearchsite/>

This study was approved without qualifications by the Bethel University Institutional Review Board and the George Fox University IRB.

Here is my request:

Please forward the email message below to public school administrators you know (or suspect) are evangelical Christians. Note that there is a version of the email to use when you have the private email address for an individual and a different version if you send it to their work email. This is done to show consideration for administrators who work in settings where their Christian identity is a liability.

It would be most helpful if you added a few words to encourage them to consider responding if they meet the participant criteria and to encourage them to pass the email on to other administrators they know.

Thank you for any help you can provide!

Gary Sehorn
George Fox University

*IF A **PRIVATE** EMAIL IS USED:*

Greetings!

- Are you a public school administrator (or recently retired)?
- Are you an evangelical Christian?
- Have you been in the middle of a “culture war” skirmish at your school or district?
- Would you be willing to share your “war” story if your identity was protected?

If you answered “yes” to all four questions, please consider participating in my research study.

I am long-time public school administrator who now teaches at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also completing my doctorate through Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am looking for five or six public school administrators from different locations across the country who are evangelical Christians and have experienced a culture war “skirmish” involving the school or district they serve and the evangelical faith community within the past seven years.

What is a culture war “skirmish”? It is a local conflict sparked by a hot topic issue (sex education, LBGTQ issues, curriculum/books, prayer, religious expression, etc.) that was covered in newspapers and maybe on television as well. Skirmishes also tend to light up the internet and catch the attention of national advocacy groups.

If you have had such an experience, please go to the research project webpage to learn more about me, the project, and what would be expected of you if you volunteer to participate and are selected:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gsehornresearchsite/>

Thank you! **Please forward this email to any friends and colleagues you know who may meet the selection criteria.**

Sincerely,

Gary Sehorn
George Fox University

*IF A **WORK** EMAIL IS USED:*

Greetings!

I am long-time public school administrator who now teaches at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also completing my doctorate through Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I plan to interview five or six public school administrators from different locations across the country who have experienced a culture war “skirmish” involving the school or district they serve and the local Christian community within the past seven years.

What is a culture war “skirmish”? It is a local conflict sparked by a hot topic issue (sex education, LBGTQ issues, curriculum/books, prayer, religious expression, etc.) that was covered in newspapers and maybe on television as well. Skirmishes also tend to light up the internet and catch the attention of national advocacy groups.

If you have had such an experience, please go to the research project webpage to learn more about me, the project, more details on the kinds of participants I am seeking out, and what would be expected of you if you volunteer to participate and are selected:

<https://sites.google.com/site/gsehornresearchsite/>

Thank you and **please forward this email to any friends and colleagues you know who may be candidates for this study.**

Sincerely,

Gary Sehorn
George Fox University

Appendix D: Email Text Sent to Potential Participants

Heading: Research on leadership in the midst of cultural conflict

Greetings!

I am long-time public school administrator who now teaches at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also completing my doctorate through Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

For my research I plan to interview five or six public school administrators across the country who have experienced a culture war “skirmish” involving both the school or district they serve and the local Christian community.

What is a culture war “skirmish”? It is a local conflict sparked by a hot topic issue (sex education, LGBTQ issues, curriculum/books, prayer, religious expression, etc.) that was covered in newspapers and maybe on television as well. Skirmishes also tend to light up the internet and catch the attention of national advocacy groups.

I am using several methods to identify potential participants, and through online searches I became familiar with the controversy you experienced concerning XXXX.

Based upon what I have learned so far, you may be an ideal candidate for the study.

If you are willing to explore this possibility, please go to the research project webpage to learn more about me, the project, more details on the kinds of participants I am seeking out, and what would be expected of you if you volunteer to participate and are selected:
<https://sites.google.com/site/gsehornresearchsite/>

Please call or email if you have any questions.

Again, thank you so much for considering this request.

Appendix E: Online Survey Questions

1. Please indicate your gender
(Male, Female)
2. Please indicate the ethnic/racial category with which you most closely identify
(Hispanic or Latino, White, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Two or More Racial/Ethnic Categories)
3. Please indicate your current administrative position
(Principal, Vice or Assistant Principal, Other building level administrator, Superintendent, Other district level administrator, Retired or working in a different role at this time, Other-please write in space provided)
4. How many years have you served as a school administrator? (Fill in number)
5. How many years have you served as an administrator in your current district? (Fill in number)
6. (ONLY for "Retired or working in a different role at this time" in #3) How many years did you serve as an administrator?
(Fill in number)
7. Indicate the student enrollment in your school
(Fill in number)
8. Indicate the student enrollment in your district
(Fill in number)
9. Which of the following best describes the community where you serve?
(For "Retired or working in a different role at this time" in #3: Which of the following best describes the communities where you served as an administrator?)
(Rural or Small Town, Suburban, Urban)
10. In which state is the school district located? (Fill in)
11. When it comes to your religious identity, which of the following terms best describe you?
(You may select ONE or TWO of the following)
(Pentecostal, Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Mainline, Liberal Protestant, None of these)
12. (If 2 selected in #11) Of the two categories you selected in the previous question, if you had to select the one that is the stronger of the two in your religious identity, which would it be?
(Pentecostal, Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Mainline, Liberal Protestant)
13. Are you a charismatic or affiliated with the charismatic movement?
(Yes, No)

14. Thinking of the congregation you attend MOST frequently, which one of the following terms BEST describes that church?

(Pentecostal, Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Mainline, Liberal Protestant)

15. Do you consider yourself a born-again Christian?

(Yes, No)

16. Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?

(The Bible is a collection of writings representing some of the religious philosophies of ancient man; The Bible is the Word of God but is sometimes mistaken in its statements and teachings; The Bible is the Word of God and is not mistaken in its statements and teachings; Don't know)

17. Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about Jesus Christ?

(Jesus Christ was a man, but was divine in the sense that God worked through Him-He was the Son of God; Jesus Christ is not God or the Son of God, but was a great religious teacher; Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man; Don't know)

18. Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about life after death?

(There is no life after death; There is life after death but what a person does in this life has no bearing on it; Heaven is a divine reward for those who earn it by their good life; The only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ; Don't know)

19. Have you ever had a religious experience—that is, a particularly powerful religious insight or awakening—that changed the direction of your life?

(Yes, No)

20. Is the religious experience you had still important to you in your everyday life?

(Yes, No)

21. Did your experience involve Jesus Christ?

(Yes, No)

22. Was your religious experience a conversion experience—an identifiable turning point that included asking Jesus Christ to be your personal savior?

(Yes, No)

23. How many times in a typical month do you attend worship services and other events at your church?

(Fill in number)

24. Do you participate in a small group (home group, Bible study, etc.) of some kind that is affiliated with your church?

(Yes, No)

25. How often do you socialize with others who attend your church outside of activities and events organized by the church?

(Not At All, Occasionally, Frequently)

26. Do you serve in some way on a regular basis in your local church? (teacher, committee member, usher, greeter, helper in the kitchen or nursery, etc.)

(Yes, No)

27. Do you hold a formal leadership role in your church?

(Yes, No)

28. The "Christian Right" is a term often used to describe Christians who are politically conservative—who hold anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage positions, for example—and who typically support Republican candidates. To what degree do your personal political views align with the "Christian Right"?

(None, Little, Some, A Lot)

29. To what degree do the political views of those who attend your church align with the "Christian Right"?

(None, Little, Some, A Lot)

30. Please indicate the degree to which you have found yourself in the middle of cultural conflict between Christians and public education. Move the bar to indicate where your experience falls from NEVER (0) to FREQUENTLY (100).

- While at work and while among colleagues (Scale of 0 to 100)

- While at church and while among fellow Christians outside of work (Scale of 0 to 100)

31. What culture war “hot topic” issue triggered the skirmish you led through in your school or district? (A very brief answer is sufficient at this point.)

(Fill In)

32. When it comes to how your faith is expressed in your work, select the sentence that best describes you most of the time.

- My faith is most often expressed by giving attention to ethical concerns within the organization, social concerns as the organization connects with those outside, and my own ethical behavior;
- My faith is most often expressed by doing quality work, serving others well, and seeing the good that work does for others;
- My faith is most often expressed by sharing with co-workers what I believe verbally and in other ways as well;
- My faith is most often expressed in the company of other believers at work where we can share our challenges and successes and encourage each other

33. THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY! Please select the response that represents your interest in participating further in this study:

(NO THANK YOU, I am not interested in being considered as a participant in this study; I'M UNSURE—I may be interested in being considered as a participant in this study; YES, I am willing to be considered as a participant in this study.

34. (Those selecting second response in #33) Please detail the questions and/or areas of concern you have and also indicate how you would like to be contacted to follow up on those questions and details: (Fill in)

35. (Those selecting third response in #33) THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THIS STUDY. In the space below, please indicate your preference for how you would like to be contacted (email, telephone, etc.) and then provide the contact information (name and email address, phone number, etc.)
(Fill in)

Appendix F: Protocol for Interview One

Setting & Characters (*Up to 1 hr. long*)

1. Introduction: Review of purpose of study and the procedures as detailed at the project website.

2. Ask for permission to tape the session

3. Review Purpose of Interview #1

“This session is a time for me to learn a bit more about your professional history, your faith story, and the setting for the skirmish you experienced. These topics are important for me to understand when we talk next time about the details of the skirmish.”

4. Check Setting and Readiness

“Any questions you have before we get started?”

“If you need to take a break at any point, just let me know and we can take a quick 5 minutes.”

5. Questions About Participant:

- Tell me how you came to be an educator and how you ended up as a school administrator.

Probe areas:

Personal mission/purpose/calling
Motivation

- What is your faith story?

Probe areas:

Conversion experience
Religious beliefs
Religious identity

- What does your faith look like in the way you live it out?

Probe areas:

Church involvement
Personal religious practices

- Describe the relationship between your faith and your work.

Probe areas:

Sense of vocation
Faith/work approach

- Have you experienced discomfort being identified as a Christian in your school leadership? If so, describe this for me.

- How do your personal political views compare with the views generally associated with the

Religious Right?

- What do you make of the conflicts between conservative Christians and public schools? What are the reasons they exist and why do they play out the way they do?

6. Questions About the Context for the Skirmish:

- What is important for me to know about the community where the skirmish occurred?

Probe areas:

Key individuals

Local media

- How would you describe your role in the community?

Probe areas:

Involvement

How perceived

- Tell me about the religious aspects of the community the school/district serves.

How do you and your family fit into that?

How does that impact your school/district?

- What is important for me to know about the church you attended at that time?

Probe areas:

Church's views of public education

Views on Christian schools, Christian homeschooling

Key individuals

- What is important for me to know about the school and/or district where this conflict occurred?

Probe areas:

Key individuals

- What media sources reported on the skirmish you experienced?

6. Wrap-Up:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me before we wrap up this session?

Appendix G: Protocol for Interview Two

1. Introduction: Greet. Preview the structure of the interview session.

2. Ask for permission to tape the session

3. Review Purpose of Interview #2

“This session is a time for me to learn as much as I can about your personal experience of the skirmish. There are no right or wrong answers, just your own experience. I will ask you to be as specific as you can about the situation, doing your best to recreate those events for me to understand them well.”

4. Check Setting and Readiness

“Any questions you have before we get started?”

“If you need to take a break at any point, just let me know and we can take a quick 5 minutes.”

5. Participant Sketch

“Is there anything from the sketch I sent you that you would like to correct or add?”

“Is there anything you would like talk about that you thought was important but overlooked as you reviewed that document?”

6. Questions Concerning the Skirmish:

- I assume you’ve been thinking about the events surrounding the skirmish ever since we first started to communicate. Can you tell me what happened in as much detail as possible? Start wherever you want to.

Probe areas:

Details of events

Perceptions of cause and effect

Turning points

Epiphanies

Resolution of conflict

- What part did your faith community and your Christian friends play in your handling of the situation?

- What did you see as your responsibility in this conflict?

- How has this event changed you and/or your life?

Probe areas:

Professionally

Personally
Faith
Relationships

- Have any of your views, beliefs, or attitudes changed because of this event?
(If yes) How so?

7. Wrap-Up:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me before we wrap up this session?

Appendix F: Thematic Thread Master Matrix

Thematic Threads	PART. #1 Craig	PART. #2 Terry	PART. #3 Eugene	PART. #4 Sharon	PART. #5 Laura
<p>1. Serving a God who listens, speaks, and acts (Regular Type)</p> <p>2. Leading in the church-state border zone (Boldface)</p> <p>3. <i>The uniqueness and complexity of micropolitics in local communities (Italics)</i></p> <p><u>4. Viewing Christian religion as a social good and a community asset (Underlined)</u></p> <p>Outside Themes; Not Included</p>	<p><i>Lack of Awareness of Micropolitics (“Outsider”)</i></p> <p>•<i>Micropolitical actions: Life made difficult</i></p> <p>•<i>Differential treatment of Christians</i></p> <p>•<i>Lack of knowledge</i></p> <p>•<i>Incredulity and naiveté</i></p> <p>•<i>Misreading situations & people</i></p>	<p>Purpose/Calling:</p> <p><u>Working for SHALOM</u></p> <p>•<u>Peacemaking</u></p> <p>•<u>Repair, rebuild</u></p> <p>•<u>Build community</u></p> <p>•<u>Overcome “us/them”</u></p> <p>•<u>Guided by Bible</u></p> <p>•<i>“Radical middle”/common ground</i></p> <p>•<i>Positive use of micropolitics—relationships</i></p> <p>•<u>Social Justice for least and the last—“Whole Gospel”</u></p> <p>•<i>Stepped into tough situations</i></p> <p>•<i>“Perfect Storm” for a season</i></p> <p>•<i>Price of peacemaking; not safe</i></p> <p>•Uncomfortable with political labels & Partisanship</p> <p>•Christian opposition</p> <p>•National partisan advocacy group opposition</p> <p>•<u>Cultivating intentional relationships</u></p> <p>•<u>Inclusive process</u></p>	<p>Personal Connection to God</p> <p>•Raised in church</p> <p>•Saved as child</p> <p>•Prayer for guidance</p> <p>•Importance of Scripture</p> <p>•Personal devotional life</p> <p>•God’s leading</p> <p>•Faith journey</p>	<p>God is Active in Life</p> <p>•God’s guidance in life</p> <p>•Directed towards God’s Will from others</p> <p>•Providential circumstance</p> <p>•Assurance of where to be/what to be doing—aligned to God’s will</p> <p>•Faith as a journey with key moments</p>	<p>Faith and Work: Distinct and integrated missions</p> <p><u>Educational Mission</u></p> <p>•Priority of learning experience</p> <p>•Duty to community</p> <p>•See “grey” in controversial issues</p> <p><u>Evangelical Mission</u></p> <p>•Tested and testifying</p> <p>•Witness by daily walk</p> <p>•Prayer (limited)</p> <p>•Uphold Truth</p> <p>•Indirect support for Gospel sharing</p> <p><u>Overlapping Mission</u></p> <p>•<u>Church/Faith as community asset</u></p> <p>•<u>Servant leader</u></p> <p>•<u>Ethic of Care</u></p> <p>•<u>Biblical Truth translated to school context</u></p>

	<i>Framing</i> •Legal Framework for Conflict •Rights-based lens •National legal groups <i>•Triangulation for Perception Checking</i> <i>•Competing Perspectives on Religion: Religion as concern vs. good</i> •Importance of victory	Personal Faith Journey—typical & atypical •Raised in church: Saved, re-dedicated life, baptized (late) •Daily reflective faith practices •Period of anger at God •Strengthened/Shaped through conflicts •Many churches—not focus of faith •Faith no secret; not worn on sleeve •Circle of support Christian educators “PrayERs”	Faith as Daily Public Walk •Integrity •Respect •Fairness •Godliness/Personal Holiness •No discomfort in Christian identity <u>•Build trust</u> <u>•Build Relationships</u> <u>•Be salt—impactful</u> •Lived faith as witness •Known as a person of faith •God is Active: God’s provision for challenges •Spiritual warfare, challenges •Hate sin, love sinner •Hot Topic—Gays •Hot Topic—Bullying	Sacrificial Servant •Experiencing God at/through work •Emotional connection: faith-work •Work as crucible context where faith is refined •Personal/Relational approach to work & God-centered mission •Faithful Leader Mentors <u>•Care for children and staff</u> <u>•Special care for needy children</u> •Relational leader •Challenge of attending to voices/views of “other”	Personal Faith •Raised in family & community of faith •“Total conversion” •Confident of God’s care and direction •Husband raised in church •Spiritual battles •Daily devotions—Bible •Faith as core •Importance of prayer •Faith Journey •God’s providential work
	Faithfulness •Evangelistic impulse & witness of life •Calling and Purpose •Right behavior/integrity •Importance of prayer •Expectation of trials	Active God •Prepares people •Hears & answers people •Speaks to people •Calls, raises people up for specific tasks •Works through people •Is at work in communities; has plans	Regular Church attendance/member •Personal religious leadership roles <i>•Strong church support of public education</i>	<u>School-Church Collaboration—Religion as community asset</u> <u>•Bridge between church and school</u> <i>•Uniqueness of context</i> <u>•Community support of religious activities</u> •Guide/Coach to keeping it “legal” <u>•School as mission field</u> •Aware of	Managing the Church-School boundary •Knowledge of Law •Duty to comply—find “workarounds” •Wary of national advocacy groups (including Religious Right) •Faith rights advocate •Area of learning—mistakes

				<p>church-state boundary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Aware of practice that violate boundary •Outside groups as threat to status quo •Work to keep unique religious program 	<p>•Conflict:</p> <p>Anticipation and reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Awareness that complaints often needed to trigger law implementation •Others with different agendas to be managed •Micropolitics and collaboration with fellow Christians •Role of media/Social Media
	<p>Connections to other Christians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Blessing & Curse of Fellow Christians</i> •<i>Supportive church</i> •Home group 	Power of Prayer	<p>Religion in the Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Geographic location in country matters—cultural differences</i> •Lack of perceived religious conflict •Broad support of religious practices •Importance of Prayer 	<p>Undivided life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work as extension of faithful life •<i>High community profile</i> •Overtly religious in work context most of the time. •Code-switching; self-editing when outside community 	<p>Church a big part of life—Active</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Church importance for children •Gender roles & expectations •Church social hub •Active in church service, working, leading •<i>Church views on types of schooling</i>
	<p><i>Importance of Professional Competence</i></p>	<p><u>Faith/Religion as community asset</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Expression of love of Christ</u> •<u>Can serve without proselytizing</u> •<u>Relationships with and among pastors</u> •<u>Churches united as Body of Christ</u> •<u>Build relationships</u> 	<p><u>Confluence of race, religion, & politics—Community-building potential of faith</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Civil Rights Era experience</u> •<u>MLK influence</u> •<u>Desegregation challenge</u> 	<p>Power of prayer</p>	<p><i>Unique Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Lack of or inconsistent policy/law compliance</i> •Denominational Importance •<i>Community norms & expectations regarding faith in</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Type of community/location</i> •Some didn't fully "fit" (Mormons, Catholics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Religious Right as divisive •Not comfortable with religious labels— •"mistaken identity" 		<i>schools</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Evangelical Bible Belt/Texas</i>
	<i>Geographic location and faith</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Elsinore v. Santa Barbara</i> 	Managing church-state ("razor's edge" or "threading the needle") <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reliance on legal resources and procedure •Legal framework & responsibility •Clear on both "boundaries" and rights 	Faith as a <u>public good</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Faith-based initiatives—</u> collaborating and coordinating with <u>community</u> •Focus on voluntary nature of participation •<u>Parallel to religious foundations of civil rights movement</u> •<u>Use of religious practices in schools to strengthen community and build trust</u> •Find "workaround" to continue practice •<u>Ethic of Care</u> •<u>Godly behavior as standard</u> •<u>"Sin is sin"</u> 	Church is personal/relational part of faith <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>Active in Church</i> •Accountable to Church 	"Meant to be"— Unintentional Administrator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Career Path Not To Admin •<i>Church support</i>
	God is active	Negative Role of the Media	Church-State Pragmatism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Awareness of legal issues •Legal Framework for Conflict--Rights-based lens •Willing to take actions until challenged/Aware 	<i>Gender Issues</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<i>College</i> •<i>Career</i> •<i>Roles & Identity</i> 	

			that action is not legal •Compliance as “monitor & adjust” •Avoid litigation •Avoid confrontation with outside advocacy groups •Role of national groups		
	Church-State sensitivity •Church-State too separated •Anti-Christian bias power •Hot Topics—Gays •Hot Topics—Christmas music		<i>Race & Micropolitics</i> •Positive Local Politics •Personal politics-disingenuous •Insider view, often outsider in micropolitics •Race Matters •Opposition from African-American board members	Wary of Media & Social Media	
	Servant leadership •Leadership developed in ministry •Values integrity		Role of media		
	<i>Power and Gender</i>				
	Ethic of Care				
	Media •Annoyed by media extremists •Media as Prompt to Action •Perceived liberal media slant				