BUILDING RESILIENCY: THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE TRAUMA-AFFECTED COMMUNITY OF SANTA FE, TEXAS

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On May 18, 2018, a shooter entered Santa Fe High School, killing eight students and two teachers. Using ethnographic methods, this research examines the role of faith, rituals, language, and symbols in the trauma-affected community during the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts as perceived by the Santa Fe community and those impacted by the tragedy. Qualitative data collected from 100 individuals ages of 17-84 illustrated how historical trauma, community culture, and faith-based organizations impact community resiliency and how illusions of a homogenous view of the community left many feeling shocked, divided, forgotten or muted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, to my sons: Westin, thank you for being my rowdy debater, making sure I took breaks to eat, and for all the rounds of general knowledge to break up the mundane. Wade, thank you for the hugs when you knew I needed them, the rounds of Uno with endless laughter, and always being your honest stubborn self. To both of you, you are my inspiration in life, my heroes. I am so proud of the young men you have become, and I love you more than you will ever know.

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To my "tribe," you know who you are; thank you for listening to me vent, cry, and become emotional during this and continuing always to be there. You are so important to me!

To Aldergate United Methodist Church, I want to say how much I admire the work you did for the community of Santa Fe; you will forever have a place in my heart. Lastly and certainly not least, I want to thank all my participants (interview and survey) for sharing your true selves with me and allowing me to be a part of your lives.

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INTRODUCTION

The six degrees of separation theory states that every person on the planet is connected to any other person through a series of six acquaintances and introductions (Smith 2008). In Santa Fe, Texas, we believe the degrees of separation drastically decrease because almost everyone within the community knows each other through only one other person or less. Therefore, when tragedy strikes, it is felt collectively throughout the community.

On May 18, 2018, the worst imaginable tragedy struck when an accused[1] 17-year-old student at Santa Fe High School entered the campus and opened fire, taking the lives of 10 individuals. The immediate response included numerous press conferences from school officials, politicians, community leaders, news stations sharing nonstop coverage, and viral social media posts, including the all too familiar "Pray for Santa Fe."

Almost as immediate as these responses, the FBI and the American Red Cross arrived in Santa Fe and set up base at a local church, Aldersgate United Methodist Church. Within a short time, members of the congregation offered help and assistance, and a few began to think about recovery efforts and the long-term resiliency of the community after such a tragic event.

This research evaluated the role faith-based organizations play in a trauma-affected community during the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts. The research also examined the impact faith had on the community's sense of inclusion and social belonging after a mass shooting. Other related themes that emerged from the research included how the community's culture, previous traumatic history, political and religious differences, and social norms impacted

[1] The accused has been charged but has not gone to trial, due to mental instability. Therefore, he is referred to as the shooter or the accused and never by name.

social belonging in the community of Santa Fe.

The research resulted in two products: an evaluation of the role Aldersgate United Methodist Church played in the trauma-affected community of Santa Fe, Texas, and a master's thesis for the University of North Texas to obtain a Master of Science degree in applied anthropology.

1.1 History of Santa Fe, Texas

Santa Fe is a small rural town in southeast Texas, roughly 30 miles south of Houston and less than 20 miles north of Galveston Island, with three major thoroughfares (State Highway 6, Farm-to-Market 1764, Farm-to-Market 646) [see Fig. 1.1]. Located in Galveston County, Santa Fe has a population of 13,509 residents within the city limits and more than 30,000 live in the Santa Fe Independent School District boundaries (SFISD), which includes unincorporated areas around the City of Santa Fe. All of this area is known locally as the Santa Fe community.

Figure 1.1: **Texas Map Showing Santa Fe (Source: Reuters)**

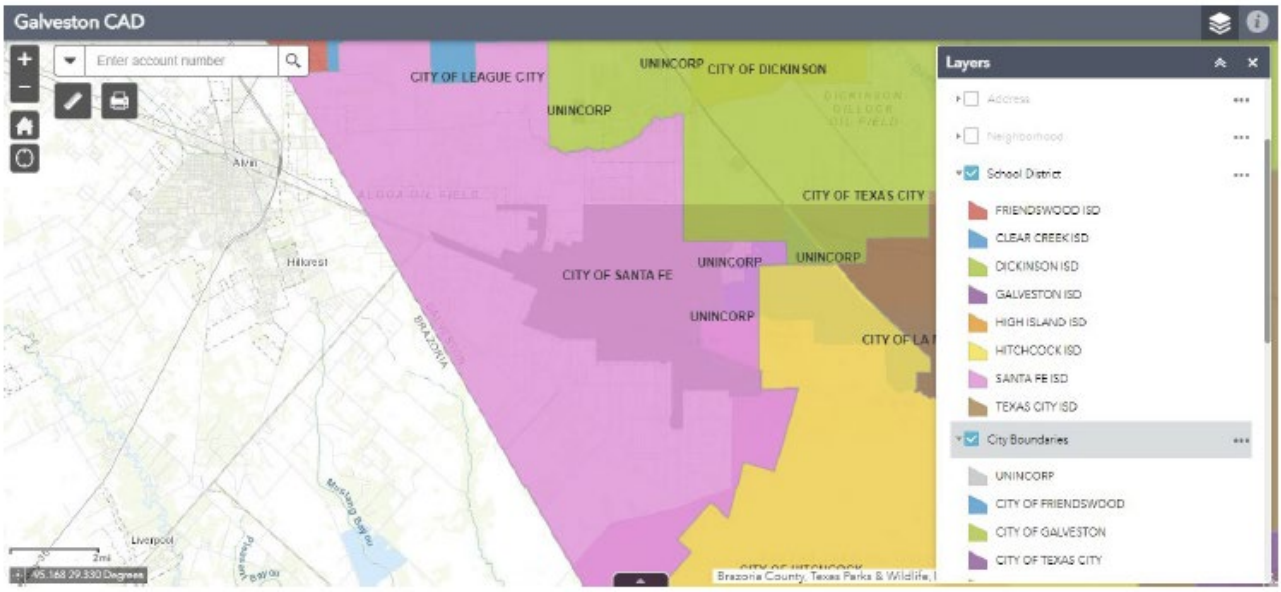


Figure 1.2: SFISD Boundaries (Source: Galveston County Appraisal District)

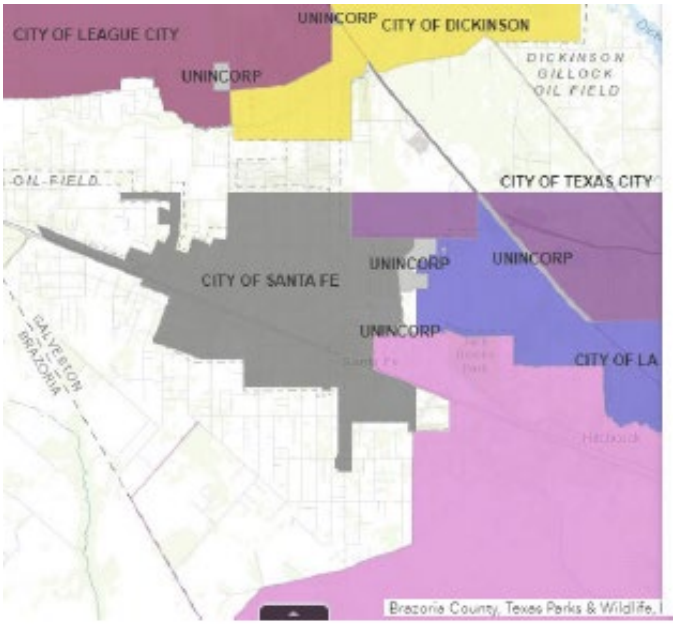


Figure 1.3: City of Santa Fe Boundaries (Source: Galveston County Appraisal District)

Figure 1.2 illustrates the SFISD boundaries and the City of Santa Fe boundaries. Notice, the large pink area is the SFISD boundaries. Residents with school-aged children living in this area attend Santa Fe school district and U.S. citizens who live in this area have the right to vote in the SFISD school board elections. Somewhat faintly, is a smaller gray area, this is the City of

Santa Fe city limits. I added Figure 1.3, to identify the boundaries more clearly. The City of Santa Fe area receives all city utilities and votes in city elections. While, most individuals do not live in the city limits of Santa Fe, they do have a Santa Fe address, or they say they are from Santa Fe when asked. Therefore, when referring to the Santa Fe community in this thesis, I am referring to the SFISD boundaries which encompasses parts of nearby cities, Dickinson, Hitchcock, La Marque, Texas City, League City, and Alvin, and includes parts of Brazoria County.

The city's ethnic and racial diversity is minimal at best with .2% Asian, .2% Black, and 11.1% Hispanic[2]. Santa Fe remains mostly White (86.2%). In 2018, the SFISD had 4,585 students attending one of the two elementary schools [a third elementary opened in 2019], the junior high school, or the high school. The first SFISD high school was originally located in the heart of town along State Highway 6 and is now the SFISD Historical Museum. However, located 2.5 miles down the road from the original High School is the current High School, constructed in 2000.

Within the geographical school district lines, the population increases to nearly 30,000[3], yet the ethnic and racial diversity of the population barely changes (0.5% Asian, 0.6% American Indian, 0.7% Black, 21.8% Hispanic, 74.5% White, and 1.9% Other). 12.9% of individuals hold a degree higher than a high school diploma, 32.1% are economically disadvantaged, and 9.2% are under the poverty line. 8.7% of the population are veterans, 10.2% are disabled, and 0.7% are foreign-born. The gender divide is nearly 50/50, with 5.8% of the population under five years, 23.4% school-aged, and 17.9% over 65.

[2] Data is from 2010, 2020 data has not been released yet

[3] Estimate from SFISD School Board Member

Obtaining an accurate census for what the participants consider the "community of Santa Fe" was very difficult because it is essentially several overlapping governmental areas. Santa Fe's community incorporates the SFISD school district, which includes parts of the neighboring cities of Hitchcock, Dickinson, League City, Alvin, Texas City, and La Marque. Furthermore, large areas are in unincorporated areas that are within the counties of both Galveston and Brazoria. These areas do their records regarding demographics and economics; however, there is no record that I could find that combines the area as the participants see it. For the most part, I tried to use the demographics and the economic statistics put forth by SFISD, which would be the most accurate representation of "community" as the participants would define it; however, they do not always capture all of the data. For this reason, I included multiple sources for demographic data.

The name Santa Fe is Spanish for "Holy Faith," but the community was named after the Santa Fe railroad (now part of BNSF Railway), which traveled through the town since 1877 and continues to this day. While the area has roots going back to the 1870s, the first Santa Fe school was not established until 1928, and the City of Santa Fe was not incorporated until 1978, making Santa Fe a relatively young city. Initially, Santa Fe was three separate unincorporated communities, Algoa, Alta Loma, and Arcadia. When a neighboring town tried to annex Alta Loma parts, these communities' residents banded together to incorporate and create Santa Fe. Today, Santa Fe includes all of Alta Loma, Arcadia and most of Algoa. When speaking to the older generations, you will still hear these community names mentioned when they describe where something is or where someone lives.

After the turn of the century, citrus and fig farming were common in the area. By the 1920s, a large majority of the area comprised of dairy farms, which emerged as a major

economic base for nearly every family living in the area. By the 1950s, automation and higher-paying jobs in nearby urban areas led to the downsizing or closing of most dairy farms. However, today, most of the community continues to be agriculturally focused, with many raising livestock or having a neighbor or relative who does. With few city restrictions, people living in the city limits or even in sub-divisions are known to have chickens or goats in their backyards. Homes within walking distance to the schools have horses, cows, and free-roaming poultry.

Life in Santa Fe has maintained a rural atmosphere. While SFISD is the largest employer in the community, only a small percentage of people from Santa Fe work for the district. In 2018, SFISD reported 16% of their staff resided in Santa Fe. The majority of the townsfolk work in nearby cities in either oil and gas or medical jobs, two of the Houston-Galveston area's largest industries. As a result, Santa Fe is considered a bedroom community, meaning most everyone works, shops, and even plays outside of Santa Fe and only returns home to sleep.

Over the last few years, many elected officials have begun to advertise "shop local" and have invested in partnerships that promote more community engagement and economic growth within the City of Santa Fe. Although most citizens do not support growth and often only will go to city council meetings to protest taxes that would support development, city officials continue to look for ways to entice progression and improve the Santa Fe image. Changing the perception of a small town riddled with nationwide limelight over the decades has been be difficult.

In addition to the mass school shooting in 2018, Santa Fe has a sordid past, including two historic Ku Klux Klan rallies. According to the *Bulletin*, local paper, in 1981, the KKK utilized private property in Santa Fe "to make white people aware" that Vietnamese fishermen were "taking over the fishing area." The rally included lighting a 10-foot boat on fire as a "protest to

the continual influx of the Vietnamese" (LaCroix 1981). The Klan chose Santa Fe as a rally meeting place again in the 1990s, even renting a city-owned community space. In the early 2000s, city officials created a citywide campaign titled "Santa Fe is No Place for Hate" and had bright yellow billboard signs commissioned to be placed along the major thoroughfares into the city (Kolker 2000). However, the Klan once again made an appearance in Santa Fe, stopping at a roadside pitstop along State Highway 6, getting off of a bus to stretch their legs, dressed in full KKK robes, according to citizens of Santa Fe who witnessed this (Kolker 1995).

Around this same time, Santa Fe was thrashed into the national spotlight once again. By 1990, the population had grown from 5,413 residents to 8,628 residents and with it many of the church congregations grew as well (Colloff 2000). The Ministerial Alliance, a coalition of local church leaders, positioned themselves on the Santa Fe School Board to be warriors of faith (a play on words for the high school mascot the Indian[4]) and was a driving force in the push to keep prayer in schools (Colloff 2000).

According to the *Houston Press*, a string of changes occurred in a short time. Including Gideon Bible Day, a day where two tables were set up at Santa Fe High School and two "well-dressed gentleman" handed out Bibles to students (Kolker 1995). Other students taunted those that did not take a Bible as being "devil worshipers" (Kolker 1995). In addition to this was prayer at the high school's Friday night football games.

Seeing how the town was largely Baptist, those who did not identify with this religion fell into the minority and therefore felt excluded during this process and 25 families and teachers met with American Civil Liberties Union to discuss whether the school district was promoting

[4] Every few years there will be talk in the community about the high school mascot the Indian and if it should be changed. However, for as long as I can remember, residents have seemed determined to not have this change. For many residents, they see the Indian as a sign of respect and strength, and therefore, when it is suggested using the Indian, and even the word Indian, as a mascot is disrespectful, most reject that premise.

religion. In 1995, the ACLU filed *Jane Doe v. the Santa Fe Independent School District*, for two of the families, one Morman, the other Catholic, citing the litigation as a reminder to SFISD of the separation of church and state (Colloff 2000). One very outspoken school board member told the *Houston Press* (Kolker 1995) they were ready for the challenge because "how could anything of the earth rule over that which created the earth?" Fueled by the school board member and a $1 million liability insurance policy, the school district decided to take a stand and go to court.

The ACLU said that while a student-led prayer at school events seemed harmless enough, especially if no deity was mentioned, the series of religious exclusion prompted the ACLU to take the case. In addition to the yearly Gideon Bible day, the ACLU uncovered a note from a teacher to parents stating that "students with a strong religious background are the most likely to succeed in school" (Kolker 1995). Another teacher received permission from the majority of her students' parents to teach a Christian-based song in sign language and had those students who did not want to participate wait in the hall while the rest of the class participated in the activity (Kolker 1995). Even in the elementary school, the spelling list contained words such as "savior" and "resurrection" (Kolker 1995). In total, eleven infractions were cited against the school district, all which had the primary effect to advance and promote religion by SFISD (Colloff 2000).

The court issued an interim order stating that student-led prayer was constitutional at football games, as long as it did not mention specific deities. However, school officials can be quoted saying that these practices have gone on for generations and were upset with the outcome. They felt this was the court's way at censorship (Colloff 2000). The school district, looking for a loophole, held a campus-wide student election at the high school to vote on which prayer would be said before football games, graduation, and other school-sponsored events. The school then

held a second election to elect a student to oversee the prayer at the events (Kolker 1995). The presiding judge felt that this was Santa Fe's way of imposing the will of the majority on the minority and ruled in 1996 that the school had violated the first amendment (Colloff 2000).

In a unanimous vote the school board elected to appeal the decision and take the case to the Supreme Court. In 2000, the United States Supreme Court ruled in a 6-3 favor of the Does in *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, stating that school-led prayer was unconstitutional (Colloff 2000; Dow 2000).

However, to date, Christian-based[5] prayer is still a part of Santa Fe's Friday night football games, SFISD school board meetings, City of Santa Fe city council meetings, and other public community events – often led by an elected official or the Ministerial Alliance, who is still active in Santa Fe. The racism and religious overtones can still be felt by many in the community, and some would say that Santa Fe has remained largely unchanged despite the Supreme Court ruling and other legal challenges. However, when tragedy struck the community again and brought Santa Fe back into the national news during the 2017-2018 school year, many community members fell back into long-standing conventions of faith.

1.2 The Researcher

At this point, I feel I should back up a little. In the beginning, I used the word "we" when describing the community of Santa Fe. This is because I grew up in Santa Fe and still currently reside within the city limits, with my two young adult sons. My youngest son was a freshman at Santa Fe High School on May 18, 2018, and my oldest son had just previously switched to an online high school program after attending Santa Fe ISD from Kindergarten to that point. I

[5] By starting the prayer "Dear Jesus, we ask you" or by ending the prayer with "in Jesus' name, Amen."

currently do not work in Santa Fe but from 2006 to 2012, I worked at Santa Fe High School with one of the victims and the accused's mother. All three of us were deeply impacted by the shooting.

As a result of a deep love I hold for my community, I wanted to do what I could to help. I began by meeting with City of Santa Fe city officials to transform an underutilized park into a therapeutic garden for the community. The following year, I began a consultant position with the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center and through these projects I knew I wanted my thesis research to be centered around the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts in Santa Fe.

1.3 The Tragedy

Some participants, as I discuss later in Chapter 5, refer to other acts of violence and trauma in Santa Fe, such as the KKK and the Supreme Court case as a tragedy. However, many participants describe the Santa Fe High School shooting, only as the tragedy. As an insider researcher, I know that for many individuals in the community, the term "shooting" caused trauma reminders and therefore many in the community adopted the emic term "tragedy," when discussing the shooting.

Terminology around Santa Fe's racist reputation also caused some discomfort amongst those I spoke with. Recognizing the discomfort individuals still displayed more than two decades after the traumatic events in the past, made me realize that Santa Fe's ability to build resiliency would be difficult, especially when adding on layers of additional trauma and a community that still does not fully recognize diversity, especially within religion and race.

1.3.1 Prior to May 18, 2018: 2017-2018 Trauma

Located near the coast, Santa Fe has seen tragedy from hurricanes and flooding. Several hurricanes and tropical storms have dumped massive amounts of rain in the area over the years,

but none like Hurricane Harvey. Santa Fe received over 50 inches of rain throughout the four days in late August 2017. Hundreds of family homes were filled with water, and many lost everything they owned. Schools were closed for two weeks as families tried to rebuild their lives, only for it to be ripped apart again, months later.

On February 14, 2018, more than a thousand miles from Santa Fe, Texas, a gunman entered a high school in Parkland, Florida, and took the lives of 17 individuals. Many in Santa Fe were shocked and disturbed but had no idea how deeply connected we would soon become to this community so far away. Two weeks later, on February 28, 2018, Santa Fe experienced what many call the "test" or the "scare."

Someone reported hearing gunshots at the high school, and the school went on lockdown. Police and SWAT surrounded the building and went room by room, guns loaded and pointed, looking for the threat. According to my son, when SWAT entered his classroom, they had guns pointed right at them and asked them each to put their hands up. For many students, this is where their posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) officially started.

When no threat was found, the lockdown was lifted, and the students were released to go home for the day. Many news media made jokes of parents running towards the building, saying that it was probably just a car backfiring and hysteria caused by the Parkland shooting. To this day, officials do not know the source of the sound, nor is it talked about. However, at the community level, the rumor is that the accused was testing to see how long it would take before police would arrive on the scene.

1.3.2 May 18, 2018

On the morning of May 18, 2018, Santa Fe, Texas, was added to the list that no community wants to be a part of. That day a 17-year-old student entered the high school Fine

Arts wing. The accused shooter, armed with several weapons, including a sawed-off shotgun and a pistol, fired into an art classroom full of students (Hanna et al. 2018). Several students did not survive, others began to run and hide. The classroom was connected to an adjoining art classroom by a closet; several students and a teacher took cover in this space. Freshman student Christian Riley Garcia[6] held the door but lost his life, as did nearly everyone who went through the connecting closet. Another "closet" or the kiln room was also located in the art classrooms and hid several students. Two people in the closet did not survive, including one of the young men holding the door, Chris Stone[7], and several were injured. According to some accounts, when the accused left the art classrooms and enter the hallway, a substitute teacher, Ann Perkins, who had exited the building with her students, placed herself between her student and the shooter, taking lethal shots, as she yelled to her students to "Run."

All of this occurred in the first four minutes; then, an armed school officer arrived on the scene and began to engage the shooter. Taking hits himself, the officer nearly lost his life that day alongside the eight students and two teachers, who would never return home. Police arrived and engaged with the shooter for nearly 45 minutes before he surrendered and was taken into custody.

When the first shots were fired, a teacher several classrooms down pulled the fire alarm in the hopes of allowing more students to escape. Hundreds of students and staff members ran from the school while hearing and seeing things they will never forget. More than several dozen students and staff members were found hiding in various locations. Several were in a small space where they watched two of their classmates die; one continued to bleed out, not knowing if

[6] Garcia was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously on March 25, 2020. There has been a documentary made about his life titled "Love Thy Neighbor," currently nominated for seven film festival awards.

[7] Stone was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously on March 25, 2021.

they would live, and another watched their co-worker die while receiving life-altering injuries themselves. Gunshots injured twelve individuals, and another sustained a non-gunshot-related injury. All were transported to nearby hospitals via life flight or ambulances. Eight hours later, in a makeshift location by the school district called the Reunification Center[8], ten families were told their loved one did not survive. Lost that day were substitute teachers Ann Perkins and Cynthia Tisdale; 11th-grade students Chris Stone and Sabika Sheikh[9], a foreign exchange student from Pakistan; a special needs student Jared Conrad Black, and Shanna Fisher, both from the 10th grade; and 9th graders Christian Riley Garcia, Kyle McLeod, Kimberly Vaughan, and Angelique Ramirez.

1.3.3 Following the Tragedy

Santa Fe felt these losses deeply and initiated prayer circles and vigils, including a community-wide prayer vigil held in a large open lawn near the local Texas First Bank in the center of town. Within days, the town was covered in green and gold ribbons[10] , and by Day 5, Greg Zanis[11], a carpenter from Aurora, Illinois, arrived with ten white crosses, each adorned with a red heart and the name of one of the victims lost. Zanis placed each cross in front of the high school along State Highway 6 (Frankel 2018).

These marks of faith, familiar to Santa Fe's community, with 21[12] Christian churches

[8] Location selected by SFISD away from the HS in the heart of town. The location was meant to be away from where first responders needed to get to and easily accessible. However, many said the name "reunification" should have been thought out more, as ten families were not reunited.

[9] The Sabika Sheikh Firearm Licensing and Registration Act was introduced to Congress by Congresswoman Shelia Jackson-Lee on January 4, 2021

[10] SFISD school colors are green, gold, and white.

[11] An individual who started building white crosses for victims of mass tragedies after Columbine in 1999, driving hundreds of miles and placing the crosses at the scene of the crime. He died on May 4, 2020.

[12] Of these, most are largely White churches. One is a predominantly Hispanic church and offers services in Spanish. However, many of the church's youth groups are currently seeing more ethnic and racial diversity.

located within the community, were a welcome sight to many individuals who fell back on long-held beliefs to get through the first few days. Simultaneously, several faith-based organizations, including Aldersgate United Methodist Church, immediately responded to their community in need by doing whatever they could to help.

1.4 The Client, Aldersgate United Methodist Church

1.4.1 Background: How Aldersgate Got Involved with the Tragedy

After numerous local and surrounding emergency agencies responded to the incident, the chaplain of the Galveston County Firefighters Association called Aldersgate United Methodist Church (AUMC or Aldersgate) hours after the tragedy. He requested the use of Asbury Hall[13] within the church to provide emergency responders a place to meet with department chaplains and critical incident stress debriefing team members. The chaplain was familiar with the facility due to his previous involvement with the Boy Scout troops that meet regularly at AUMC, and the church graciously welcomed the chance to assist their community in such a dire time.

That same afternoon, a representative from the American Red Cross called the church office and requested an opportunity for a tour to determine if the facility would be appropriate to serve as the Family Crisis Assistance Center for the Santa Fe community. Church trustees accepted a contract proposed by the Red Cross to utilize the church's family life center[14], which met space and privacy requirements. Setup for the Family Crisis Assistance Center began that evening by the American Red Cross, who mandated a complete lockout of all church-related activities, traffic, or movement within the designated space.

[13] A large multi-use space with a small kitchen and closet, that can be secluded from the rest of the church.

[14] The Family Life Center includes Asbury Hall, another kitchen, the youth wing, containing many classrooms, a small library, and a large classroom/meeting space. This area also includes private entrances.

The following day, Saturday, May 19, 2018, the Crisis Center, organized and facilitated by the American Red Cross, opened at 9 am and numerous representatives were present to offer information and services from the following organizations: American Red Cross (mental health services); FBI, criminal investigation and Victim Assistance; area funeral homes; various therapy (comfort) dog groups; legal services, Galveston County Medical Examiner Office, Galveston County District Attorney Office; plus other assistance links. The privacy allowed the victims, including families of the fatalities and those wounded, physically and mentally, the opportunity to get the help they needed during a tough emotional time. To ensure this opportunity, the agencies' space expanded to include additional wings of the church. Aldersgate operated in this capacity through Thursday, May 24, 2018.

On Friday, May 25, 2018, the FBI staff departed, and the Red Cross reduced the members of the mental health services and closed their service that day at noon at AUMC. The following day, the American Red Cross temporarily relocated its counseling services to the Arcadia Baptist Church as Aldersgate hosted a memorial service for a youth member, Jared Black, who had been killed at the high school.

By Monday, May 28, 2018, the City of Santa Fe, along with the SFISD and Gulf Coast Center, began a partnership to offer assistance to those impacted by the recent shooting tragedy as the number of agencies started to decrease their presence in Santa Fe. Although no longer leading the effort, the American Red Cross continued to be involved and trained volunteers to assist in this effort at the church.

To provide a continuity of services to the community, at a meeting with officials from the agencies involved and support from the City of Santa Fe, Aldersgate United Methodist Church agreed to host the free resource services to the community until June 10, 2018, when the City of

Santa Fe would utilize the space for the Santa Fe Strong Resiliency Center, later named the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, and staff could be employed.

The City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, commonly known as the "Resiliency Center" or "the Center," remained at Aldersgate, seven days a week, from 10 am to 7 pm, Monday through Saturday, and 1 pm to 7 pm on Sundays, until November 1, 2019.

Through the Resiliency Center, a free mental health resource and assistance center, I was reacquainted with the client and had the opportunity to present this applied research proposal.

1.4.2 How Aldersgate Became My Client

Due to my volunteer work in the community, , connections to Santa Fe High School, and being the mother of an impacted teen, I was invited by the city manager to join the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center Steering Committee as a parent member in November 2018.

By February of 2019, I had learned a great deal about how the center came about, and I sat down with the city manager to discuss the possibility of the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center being my master thesis' client. The city manager enthusiastically agreed and offered me a consultant contract to start on March 15, 2019.

Under the City of Santa Fe city manager; the Resiliency Center director; the Steering Committee chair; and the guidance of the State of Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) Victims of Crimes Assistance (VOCA) director, I gave input on organizational and employee climate, community perceptions of center programs, and assisted with creating policies meant to increase user engagement.

While under contract with the City of Santa Fe, I was housed at the center at Aldersgate. Therefore, I got to see the inner workings of the church and the center, as well as the relationships between the multiple agencies that were involved in the everyday workings of the

center. I attended various meetings, including the City of Santa Fe city council, SFISD school board meetings, Santa Fe Non-profit Coalition, and the Resiliency Center Steering Committee.

During the summer of 2019, many changes took place concerning the City of Santa Fe and the Resiliency Center, starting with the new city councilmen's swearing-in, that changed the political climate and the opinions on the city's role in facilitating a mental health resource center.

One citizen and several city officials expressed the need for a new location of the Resiliency Center due to a few community members stating that they felt uncomfortable seeking assistance at the center while housed inside a faith-based facility. This led elected officials to seek guidance from the State of Texas HHS VOCA office, who initiated an audit of the center. It was inferred at a city council meeting that the state's recommendation illustrated a need for a relocation plan for the Resiliency Center in the near future.

Concurrently, the Resiliency Center steering committee held an all-day workshop in collaboration with trained facilitators from the local United Way on July 9, 2019, in an effort to provide the city with recommendations on the future direction of the center. Of the recommendations made, the suggestion for the City of Santa Fe to facilitate a plan for the evolution of the Resiliency Center into a new and permanently located community center by Year 5 was among those most extensively discussed[15].

Two days later, at the July 11, 2019, city council meeting, an elected official implied that Aldersgate was unscrupulously raising the cost of rent for the facility's use. Select members of the Aldersgate congregation addressed the city with financial documents, illustrating the implication was erroneous.

On the July 25, 2019, city council meeting, the mayor of Santa Fe brought forth a lease

[15] I was at this meeting and have copies of the meeting notes.

agreement with Galveston County to utilize a 75-year-old community building located within the city limits, to relocate the Resiliency Center from Aldergate to the community building facility at Runge Park. The council approved the move unanimously.

Members of the steering committee did not approve the selected location, as the facilities were outdated, needed many repairs, and lacked privacy, and they were located next to public communal space, including the little league baseball fields. Moreover, the space was not large enough to incorporate alternative group therapies and private counseling. Therefore, the two branches of the center would need to be housed at separate locations. The steering committee members, majority from Santa Fe, knew that this could confuse people and potentially lead those who were already hesitant about seeking mental health assistance to do so no longer. Additionally, as these facilities were rented for community use on the weekends, the Resiliency Center's hours would need to be changed to only Monday through Friday. With many alternative therapies taking place in the evening or on the weekends to fit around clients' work or school schedules, the committee knew this interruption of hours could impede or limit the number of people who would access the services provided.

Despite the steering committee's objections, the mayor and council continued forth with their plans to relocate the center to Runge Park. However, as noted, the community building at the park was not suited for everything. The counseling services were relocated to a small side room off the senior citizen's community building, the Thelma Webber Center, located down the street from the Runge Park location.

This resulted in three things. First, at the August steering committee meeting after these profound changes, the chair of the committee resigned. It was then up to the city to set the next steering committee meeting. This never occurred, and therefore the committee dissolved.

Secondly, the city cut my contract short, officially ending it four months early. This left me wondering where that left me, as they were officially my thesis client, and the emails I sent requesting a meeting to discuss this went unanswered. Third, due to the innuendos put forth from city officials that the center's location at Aldersgate United Methodist Church was a barrier, keeping people from accessing mental health services and receiving the assistance they needed to heal, the church trustees drafted a letter to the city manager requesting to discuss the city's intent to transition the center to a new location. This discussion never occurred, and the city officially relocated the Resiliency Center on October 1, 2019.

Changes continued to occur. The city manager, who had been with the City of Santa Fe for 23 years, announced his retirement to begin January 1, 2020. A military veteran with no prior experience in city administration was selected to assume the role on February 1, 2020. Six weeks later, on March 13, 2020, the Resiliency Center was closed due to COVID-19 concerns and counseling services were provided via teleservices.

The center remained closed, and a discussion concerning if the new city manager was qualified to oversee the center's management was discussed during an executive session per the city council minutes on May 28, 2020. Shortly after this session, the remaining staff and director for the Resiliency Center were terminated. With 13 months left in the VOCA grant funding from the State of Texas, the Santa Fe city council entered an agreement with a third-party mental health organization to assume the management of the counseling services and the grant for the City of Santa Fe on June 11, 2020.

Unsure what to do after so many changes in such a short time, I reached out and spoke to my mentor and friend, who was the former steering committee chair and is also a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church. We discussed the possibility of Aldersgate becoming my

client and looking at the church's role with the Resiliency Center. She connected me with the AUMC Board of Trustees chairman.

The chairman determined it would be beneficial in light of everything that occurred in the first year to evaluate the church's role in facilitating the location for the Family Assistance Center and the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center. Furthermore, they wanted to support a local graduate student's work with the hope that this research could be shared with other communities that may face similar challenges in the future. Therefore, my client officially became Aldersgate United Methodist Church in March 2020.

1.5 Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this research is to understand "what is the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community and how faith-based organizations can help build community resiliency" [research question]. Using ethnographic methods, this research examines the role of faith, rituals, language, and symbols in the trauma-affected community during the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts as perceived by the Santa Fe community and those impacted by the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School mass shooting.

After the shooting in Santa Fe, many faith-based organizations, including churches, mosques, and volunteer groups, offered assistance to the community. Aldersgate United Methodist Church provided the most and for the most prolonged duration in terms of aid through the facility used for the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center. Other organizations provided space, vigil services, offered donations, organized volunteer events to assist the community, and participated in a day of remembrance on May 18, 2019.

There are 21 Christian churches, one Buddhist temple, and possibly one Mosque located in the Santa Fe community. Many of the Christian churches are predominantly White. However,

nearly half of the church's youth programs are more ethnically and racially diverse, based on photos these organizations have shared on social media. One area church is predominantly Hispanic and offers services in Spanish. I was unable to find much information about the possible Mosque and those who visit the Buddhist temple are predominantly Asian or tourist.

With nearly 80% of Santa Fe's residents self-identifying as Christian, many of the events in Santa Fe (before and after the tragedy) were conducted in a Christian approach. This includes prayers at the start of both the city council and the school board meetings and crosses placed in front of the school with each of the murder victims' names encrusted upon the front. However, some victims and survivors do not identify as Christian, such as, one of the deceased who was Muslim. Others would not self-identify with any religion at all. Therefore, the research looks at the role of faith and, more specifically, faith-based organization's impact on social belonging and inclusion in a slowly but progressively changing, culturally diverse, and traumatized community.

Through ethnographic interviews, surveys, and observations, I also evaluated the impact faith, politics, and community culture have on inclusion and social belonging within Santa Fe. While speaking with participants, several themes emerged, including symbolism, the illusion of community, Christian privilege, and our most impacted group, our youth, feel muted.

One thing this research does not focus on is the tragedy itself. The focus is not about "gun violence," "mass shootings," or even "mental health stigma." While all those topics are admirable and did come up, while speaking with participants, at one time or another, those topics are not the focal point of this research. Rather, for this research, I wanted to better understand individuals' perceptions of their community and themselves after a mass tragedy and to see if their perceptions of their community culture have changed as a result of the response to the trauma the community experienced. I also wanted to reflect on the dimensions of the

vulnerability that tragedy invokes in the human spirit and advocate for the marginalized. More so, I want to illustrate how people may be unintentionally excluding others during times of trauma, when social belonging and inclusion is imperative to a person's ability to recover and build resiliency.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of my research, I reviewed and analyzed peer-reviewed academic literature from anthropology. However, due to the topic of my research, I also reviewed articles within the realm of sociology, theology, political science, psychology, and philosophy to gain deeper insights into subjects I was less familiar with. As a result, I was able to apply the theoretical concepts from each of these social sciences in the construct of my research framework.

Section 1 sets up the chapter's terminology to understand disaster vs. tragedy and an introduction to response, recovery, and resiliency. In section 2, I cover the foundation of my anthropological framework. The third section focuses on community, building on the anthropology of community, symbolism, and metaphors, to discuss the concept of solidarity and my own theory of community unity illusion. In section 4, I illustrate the religious responses to tragedy, emphasizing the concept of Christian privilege in the United States. The last section addresses community resiliency and how difficult it is to reach when many obstacles have been presented along the way.

2.1 Understanding Tragedy

On May 18, 2018, Santa Fe, Texas, experienced a horrific tragedy. This event is the baseline for my research; without it, this thesis would not exist. Therefore, I felt it was important to start this chapter with an overview of the emic term tragedy versus the anthropological term disaster. Each section from this point on builds on the foundation of anthropology of tragedy. This includes the response to tragedy and how communities learn to recover and build resiliency after such a tragic event.

2.1.1 Anthropology: Disaster vs. Tragedy

I thought it was imperative to begin this section with the "elephant in the room,"[16] i.e., what is the anthropology of tragedy, and how does disaster fit into this research? As mentioned in the introduction, Santa Fe is a coastal community and many individuals defined "disaster" as a natural disaster. After the shooting, community members began to use the emic term "tragedy" in relation to the shooting because the term "shooting" was deemed upsetting for many individuals in the community

Anthropologically speaking, there is not a lot of current research on the anthropology of tragedies, unless I was looking at tragedy from an English literature point of view. Therefore, I based much of my theoretical framework on disaster anthropology.

To begin, I noticed a difference in terminology between previous anthropologists and how the local culture uses the term disaster. Most scholars who study disaster anthropology agree that Samuel Prince's (1920) dissertation on the Halifax explosion was the first study of disaster. However, Prince (1920) starts by using the term "catastrophe"; in fact, it is the term he selected for the title of his dissertation, "Catastrophe and Social Change." Prince (1920, 11) uses the dictionary definition of catastrophe, stating it as "an event producing a subversion of the order or system of things," and such as "may or may not be a cause of misery to man." Prince (1920) also describes the word "crisis" and how it relates to disaster, especially on an individual level. However, today, we see the word "crisis" paired with an assortment of other things such as identity, mid-life, and crisis-related to war (Barrios 2017). In addition, COVID-19 has added public health crisis and financial crisis to our everyday lexicon. However, Prince's (1920, 12) best-known definition comes when he says, "the term covers the situation preceding change."

[16] Metaphoric phrase for an obvious issue that people often avoid discussing.

Prince (1920) believes crisis was a form of a disaster or catastrophe that occurred and then sparked great social change, whether from policy, institutions and organizations or within individuals and communities themselves. Slightly into Prince's work, he started using the word "disaster" more commonly and left both "crisis" and "catastrophe" behind and while Prince (1920) explained many concepts related to disasters, he never directly defined the term "disaster."

In 1932, Lowell Carr built on Prince's work; however, he argued that not every tragic event was a "catastrophe" and to be a true disaster, there would need to be serious injuries, death, or destruction of property. As we moved into the late 20th century, there still seemed to be a lack of consensus about what the word "disaster" means or which term is best used in research (Oliver-Smith 1999). Anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith (1996, 303) describes disaster as an "event involving the combination of potentially destructive agents" that can stem from an array of environmental, technological, or human-made instances.

Based on both Carr and Oliver-Smith, the Santa Fe shooting qualifies as a disaster. There were serious injuries, mass casualties, and property damage, as per Carr's description; in addition, the event stemmed from a human-made instance of destruction, as per Oliver-Smith. However, while I agree with their definitions, I still struggle with calling the Santa Fe shooting a disaster. Similar to many in Santa Fe, I view a disaster as destructive force of nature, like a hurricane. Building upon Carr's definition, I would say that if an event has property damage, serious injuries, and death, then it should also be classified as a tragedy in addition to a disaster. Therefore, I have applied the term *tragedy*[17] to this research.

[17] For that reason, I use the anthropological term 'disaster,' specifically in reference to the literature, and the emic term 'tragedy,' in reference to the Santa Fe shooting. In an effort to minimize confusion, I add a footnote if the term is used out of context.

However, Perry (2006, 12) reminds us that, no matter what term we use or how we define it; it is not about the event itself, or as he says, "it is not the hurricane wind or storm surge that makes the disaster; these are the source of damage." Rather, a disaster or tragedy is an impact felt by the individual and the community. The "inputs and outputs of the social system" and its the ability to cope and recover from that event is what we should be focused on (Perry 2006, 12). This is what the anthropology of tragedy is; the focus on how culture, in this case, a community culture, has been impacted by a tragic event.

2.1.2 Response, Recovery, and Resiliency

When I first began this research, I was stuck on the temporal phases of "response," "recovery," and "resiliency." I had heard mental health professionals and first responders use the terms so often they had become part of my lexicon. However, as I began to research the aftermath of mass shootings from the community's perception, I realized Quarantelli (1998) was right; depending on the perception of the individual affected, the expectation and meaning of response, recovery, and resiliency would look differently. Therefore, following Quarantelli's direction, I decided to have the participants define the terms response, recovery, and resiliency, instead of my defining these terms for them.

Scholars cannot agree on the problem within a disaster, and they have yet to address tragedy (Quarantelli et al. 2007). However, social science scholars seem to be moving in the direction that the need to define disaster terms matter less and that what needs our focus is the social setting a disaster or tragedy occurred in (Quarantelli 2005; Quarantelli 1998).

Disasters change a community by altering, sometimes temporarily, the way individuals relate to one another, social roles, the rules governing behavior, the social organization, and the allocation and use of resources, thus threatening the functioning of the community in the wake of

disaster or tragedy (Eränen & Liebkind 1993; Sjoberg 1962). Oliver-Smith (2006) wrote about the immediate responses that followed an avalanche and earthquake in Peru, stating that previously existing divisions between socioeconomic class and race can temporarily disappear for a short-lived wave of altruism, where neighbor helps neighbor regardless of race, sexual orientation, political, or religious difference. However, once national and international aid appears, old divisions can reemerge, and conflicts over access to resources can be exacerbated (Oliver-Smith 2006).

Unfortunately, these conflicts can have lasting effects on a community culture and directly impact community resiliency, which I address in the last section of this chapter. I would add that anthropologists should also look at how historical trauma, disasters or the prior vulnerability of a community impacted a specific social group. In addition, evaluating the impacts tragedy or disaster has had throughout the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts, as this research does.

2.2 Anthropological Framework

When I first began this research, I had not considered that much of my anthropological framework would stem from symbolic, interpretive, semiotic, or semantic anthropology. However, today, I do not know if this research could have survived without this major framework.

2.2.1 Symbolic, Interpretive, and Semiotic Anthropology

Symbolic and interpretative anthropology, in the most basic form, is the anthropological understanding of how a shared community perceives and interacts with their surroundings and their social group using symbols and rituals (Des Chene 1996). Semiotics is the analysis of those signs, symbols, and rituals (Moore 2004). To this day, the terms “symbolic” and “semiotic”

continue to have considerable overlap.

Two major theorists in this area are Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Geertz (1973, 24) once spoke of a "semiotic approach to culture" and urged that cultural analysis should consider political and social realities. However, due to this research, I would argue the importance of adding religion, community, and disaster to that list of semiotics analysis. Geertz (1973, 45) also believed symbols are "sources of illumination" so that people may become more familiar with a specific culture.

Victor Turner (1967) considered symbols similarly a "source of illumination" but within a social field. He wrote he could not analyze symbols without "studying them in a time series in relation to other events" (Turner 1967, 20). In other words, Turner believed that some symbols have different meanings depending on their context or the action they are used in, similar to the cross on the side of the road. An example would be the American flag; the flag is a very symbolic item for many Americans. However, this symbolism changes depending on if it is being flown at half-staff, laying over a casket, or being burned somewhere om a protest. Therefore, Turner (1974, 55) believes that symbols are "originating in and sustaining processes involving temporal changes in social relations, and not as timeless entities."

Symbolic and interpretative anthropology has two key points. The first is that "beliefs, however unintelligible, become comprehensible when understood as part of a cultural system of meaning" (Des Chene 1996, 1274). The second is that every action is guided by interpretation, which allows for symbolism to aid in the interpretation. Traditionally, this has been in the realm of religion, mythology, and even the performing arts (Des Chene 1996). However, in recent times, we see this same concept applied to politics, identity, community, and even disaster and tragic events like the Santa Fe shooting. This allows the researcher to evaluate the role of

symbols in an individual or a group of people's everyday life (Des Chene 1996).

One of the main methods of this framework is something Geertz (1973, 3) called "thick description," in which he argues that culture consists of symbols and rituals that guide community and social behavior. Geertz believed that culture and community or social behavior were so intertwined that they could not be analyzed separately, something I strongly agree with. He wrote, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance, he has spun; I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973, 5). Geertz further illustrated this with the example of a wink versus a blink. He states a blink is just an involuntary twitch of the eye and means nothing more than your eye needs to clear the dirt away. He describes this as a "think description," whereas a wink is an intentional eye movement meant to convey a message to a friend or a loved one (Geertz 1973, 6). Now a wink can have a different meaning depending on the situation. If you are about to play a prank on your friend, you may wink to another friend to let them know it is time to go, but a wink to your wife or husband may mean, "I love you." Geertz's "thick description" comes in; as the anthropologist does ethnographic work and learns to watch the reaction of each wink, they can interpret the meaning of the different types of winks or if they are blinks. Geertz (1973) argues that ethnography is the object of the ethnographer, to decipher and understand the hierarchy of indirect communication through symbolism.

Anthropologist Roger Keesing (2012) argued that many symbolic and interpretive anthropologists apply an "overinterpretation" of cultural symbols. He was concerned that "much of the anthropological quest for meanings [was] a view of culture as transcending partial realizations in the minds of individuals that disguises the social and political contextualization and historical dynamics of knowledge in communities" (Keesing 2012, 407). Objectively

speaking, I agree with Keesing; however, I also believe that Geertz was correct and that with ethnography and participant observation, the anthropologist can often learn what is symbolic to culture and minimizes risks of overinterpretation. Although for much this research, followed Turner's "source of illumination," especially with how religious symbols and rituals are used after a tragedy.

2.2.2 Linguistic Semantics

In addition to the symbols and rituals associated with tragedy, I also noticed the immense relevance of language and what words were used, when, and for what purpose in Santa Fe. This led me to semantics, a subfield of linguistics, which attempts to understand the meanings of words, phrases, and larger units of discourse.

During one of the meetings I attended with counselors from the Texas Children's Trauma and Grief unit, we were instructed on which words to use and which to avoid; that was probably one of the first times I realized the importance of the words we selected when speaking. Even when I first started my research and wrote my interview question, my son told me, "Mom, you should change the word 'shooting' to 'tragedy' because some people may be uncomfortable." Before these moments, I had never really considered the language of disasters and tragedies, much less the symbolic nature of the words used. However, as referenced in the first section, the semantics of disaster versus tragedy is the foundation of this research.

According to Pike (1967), the use of disaster versus tragedy would be etic versus emic terminology, found within linguistic semantics. In the social sciences, etic is often described as the advanced understanding of a word by an outsider, and the emic word is the local or insider terminology (Zdenek et al. 2014). My research includes a tragedy that encompasses many professionals with their own etic terminology; however, when speaking with local community

residents, the terms the professional often used did not always translate and emic terms emerged.

Edward Sapir, who created the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, believed that languages and terminology are a mark of different systems of perception (Moore 2004). Sapir, who based much of his theory on Boas, was also a firm believer in participant observation and agreed with Boas that "much information can be gained by listening to conversations of the natives and by taking part in their daily life" (1911, 60).

For this research, not only was it important to understand the semantics of disaster versus tragedy, but it was also imperative to listen to the community to grasp the emic terminology for what they believed response, recovery, and resiliency meant. Without a proper understanding of how community members defined the temporal phases of tragedy, how would I as a researcher be able to interpret the results?

Furthermore, I was able to apply the same theoretical understanding of semantics to the post-tragedy metaphoric language and discourse that emerged in Santa Fe, similar to that of Turner's "source of illumination," especially as it related to the language we use, in association of tragedies. Through in-depth interviews and observation of the language used and how others in the community reacted to the language, I was able to have a better understanding of which terms the community of Santa Fe preferred when I sat down to speak with individuals.

2.3 Community Response to Tragedy

Building on the section before, this next section introduces the anthropology of community, which is heavily intertwined throughout the research. Using peer-reviewed literature, the section beings to analyze the latter part of the research question, "within a trauma-affected community," by looking at the community response to the tragedy. This section also

looks at theoretical frameworks that could be seen as helpful or harmful in the community's recovery process when applied to Santa Fe.

2.3.1 Anthropology of Community

Many anthropologists would argue that all anthropology is "community anthropology," and they are not wrong. However, in the way I am calling attention to it, I want to look specifically at the community's culture in a much more specific way and not use just use the term in a geographical sense. In preparing for this research, I came across and read the book, *The Trouble with Community* by Amit and Rapport (2002, 42); they write: "the most common appearance of community within the social sciences and especially in anthropological literature, has probably been in its most taken-for-granted and unexamined form as a unit of analysis, the location, rather than the object of the research." While my research question is about faith-based organizations, I would argue that a faith-based organization is a community, even a community within a community.

Cohen (1996) claimed terms such as community, nation, and culture invoke an assortment of meanings and images, and often, the word "community" tends to have a far more emotional response than the utilitarian "group" and can often stir "heartfelt responses and references from participants." Gerd Bauman (1996, 14) agrees that the term community is "generally tied to positive connotations of interpersonal warmth, shared interests, and loyalty." Raymond Williams (1976, 76) adds that the term "community" "seems never to be used unfavorably." However, these descriptions are not absolute, and there are exceptions to the rule.

Communities have traditionally been viewed as groupings of individuals who share an origin of history, culture, values, laws, and geographical area. Some communities are homogenous (very little to no diversity), and some are heterogenous (considerable diversity). In

an article on community resilience, the authors discuss all the resources, structures, and other things a community shares, such as health risks to natural disasters or other hazards, that bond individuals to one another (Norris et al. 2008). When looking at communities from a cultural perspective, Norris et al. (2008) also said that communities have a similar shared sense of belief, common perceptions, and attitudes that influence their collective behaviors and choices (2008). Pfefferbaum et al. (2008, 348) believed "the potential for interaction among [community] members is essential because, without it, values and norms cannot be shared."

Even within larger metropolitan areas, you frequently see smaller communities form, including communities of faith or specific schools forming mini-communities. These divisions within an area allow people to connect on more personal levels and create a unique culture that is more relatable to them (Moore 2004). These forms of community are created first and foremost by what is held in common with the individuals rather than oppositional categories between insiders and outsiders. Amit and Rapport (2002, 59-60) say it best, "that is to say such consociation and the identities deriving from it are built up through the shared experiences of participation in particular associations and events" and "what matters most, therefore, is what 'we' have shared, not the boundary dividing 'us' from 'them.'" In one definition, a community is a group of people who have a shared experience. The 2018 tragedy provided a shared experience like no other in shaping the Santa Fe community. However, a community's shared traits, beliefs, vocabulary, symbols, and rituals often reflect the dominant perspective which disguises deeper divisions and inequalities (Anderson 2006; Cohen 1998, 2013; Holellerer 2019). In fact, Cohen (2013) mentions that unity may be created through exclusion and the imagination or conscious choice of others in creating community boundaries. In a community like Santa Fe that appears united as a result of tragedy. I began to question community unity and

the illusion of solidarity.

2.3.2 Social Solidarity Theory and Community Unity Illusion

Durkheim (1995 [1912]) created a concept to examine how individuals of society stay connected and attached, despite their individual differences. He called this theory social solidarity (1995 [1912]). Social scientists today have found his concept of social solidarity important to the study of community disasters and tragedy. In a research paper on the South Korean ferry disaster, Hong et al. (2018, 3) state that "social solidarity serves as a protective factor for community members, which makes them come together to recover from tragic incidents." Virginia Tech survivors and sociologists spoke about not only the solidarity they witnessed within the school and the extended Blacksburg community, but even the rival university joined in their grief (Ryan & Hawdon 2009). Ryan and Hawdon (2009, 46) go on to express, "what often occurs when a mass tragedy strikes are the frame that is created to process the events at the individual level becomes social."

After 9/11, the U.S. saw a surge in social solidarity. Collins (2004) states that what constitutes social solidarity after a mass tragedy like 9/11 is the increase from individual-level sentiments to the collective, where large numbers of people focus their attention on the same event and are reminded constantly that others are focusing on the same event by the symbolic signals they are giving out, which then gets swept into growing a collective mood. Durkheim (1995 [1912], 375) also mentioned "symbolic actions" and the "collective" in relation to his social solidarity and went on to say, "the group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures."

However, not all tragedies evoke a strong social solidarity, in fact, some tragedies can divide communities. Those who do not feel any attachment to their community may feel

excluded and alone in their grief (Carroll et al. 2006; Quarantelli & Dynes 1976).

Communities are not static; they are made up of individuals of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations. Many communities in the U. S. include racial and ethnic diversity, multiple religious and political beliefs, and a socioeconomic spectrum. Regardless of the differences, everyone is often linked to others in the community in various ways (Murphree 1994). It is these links and connections that sometimes lead people to believe there is an "imagined unity" in the community or, as Agrawal and Gibson (1999, 634) show, a "papering over of differences" assuming "communities to be groups of similarly endowed (in terms of assets and incomes) relatively homogenous households who possess common characteristics in relation to ethnicity, religion, or language."

Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities*, shows how this imagined solidarity amongst nations and communities is politically constructed (2016). Anderson's work illustrates how nationalism could be compared to the religious constructions of identity and community as much as to other political ideals, which followed a similar foundation as my own. He states, "in an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2016, 5-6). Anderson further explains that these nations are considered "imagined" because members of the nation, regardless of size, most likely will never know most of their fellow-members, yet feel connected to each other (Anderson 2016). While Anderson uses the term "nations," in the above quotation he also goes on to say that, unless communities have face-to-face contact, they are also imagined, and even with face-to-face contact, he questions if communities are social constructions because of their "conceived horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2016, 7).

When select groups and forces (governing bodies, education systems, or religious

organizations) perpetuate homogenous views of the community they are serving, they can do more harm than good. Therefore, building on Durkheim, Agrawal, Gibson, and Anderson, I refer to what I call "community unity illusion," in an attempt to describe how the belief of community homogeneity and unity is often a result of a few privileged and powerful individuals and institutions pushing narratives, symbols, and metaphoric language produced to maintain the status quo.

2.3.3 Post-Tragedy Metaphoric Language

Keesing (1987) acknowledges that authors Lakoff and Johnson (1980) write, in the book *Metaphors We Live By*, that symbolic anthropology has been highly attentive to metaphor. Keesing (1987, 167) mentions, "metaphor is, symbolists tell us, a crucial source of insight into the subtle connections between cultural domains, the logics has otherwise hidden, the models of which words and practices, viewed separately, show only surface facets. Read deeply, we are advised, of metaphors and metonyms; [as] they lead to the heart of a culture." Keesing (1987, 161) believed in a theory called "reverberations" where anthropologists should look at culture, and in this instance a community, the same as reading a text, and apply a symbolic approach, like looking for "metaphor, in the meanings of everyday life."

James Fernandez (1986, 61) argues that research should focus on the way metaphors are used to transform vague social acts into cultural lexicons for cultures that "bring about significant conversions in themselves." Fernandez's (1986, 6) objective with this was to "expose the importance of the analysis of metaphors in the anthropological inquiry" and how a specific culture has adopted these metaphors. Fernandez's main theory for metaphors was his "play of tropes," which the Oxford English Dictionary describes as literally "a figure of speech which consists in the use of a word or phrase in a sense other than that which is proper to it" (Moore

2004, 295). In this sense, I would describe the metaphoric use of the word "strong" following a city or state name after a disaster or a tragedy to be a trope. For example, after the Boston bombing, people began to use the phrase and social media hashtag, Boston Strong. This was a play on the phrase LiveSTRONG from Lance Armstrong's organization. Shortly after, many other tragically impacted areas also began to use the word "strong" as a metaphoric symbol.

Sherry Ortner (1973) asserts that "key symbols," or phrases, behaviors, signs, or entire events are pivotal to understand a culture. She insists that anthropologists distinguish key symbols from other less fundamental symbols in several ways (Ortner 1973). First, informants may state that the symbol is important or may show expressed interest in or avoid it completely. Ortner (1973) then gives examples of key symbols versus non-key symbols, such as the American flag or Martin Luther King (MLK) being key symbols. Non-key symbols could be simple to understand symbols such as a stop sign. She writes that non-key symbols usually do not need explanations, whereas key symbols may need in-depth explanation such as with MLK. One may need to signify his relation to civil rights, violence in the U.S., and racism to illustrate his importance and, therefore, his marker as a key symbol in the U.S. (Ortner 1973). For example, in Santa Fe, the metaphoric phrase, Santa Fe Strong, is a key symbol, according to Ortner's categorization (1973). The phrase is a key symbol because it is not universally understood and would need to be explained, including what happened on May 18 and most likely the history of other towns that used the phrase previously.

Ortner (1973) also refers to a root metaphor, which can be both key symbols and elaborating symbols. These root metaphors "serve to sort out [an] experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think about how it all hangs together" (Ortner 1973, 1341). For example, "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" could be considered a root metaphor. This

common metaphor is heard after Texas's tragedies, emphasizing self-reliance without the aid of others. This has become a common root metaphor because of its implication that Texans are independent and do not need help from others. This image of Texans is one that many have been raised with, often leading those to not ask for help when they need it; therefore, creating an illusion that Texans are more independent and self-reliant, than others.

2.3.4 Community Symbolism and Rituals

I decided to include this sub-section on community symbolism and rituals to illustrate the community's non-religious symbols and rituals associated with tragedy. For example, when Santa Fe's community wrapped trees, light poles, stop signs, etc., with green and gold ribbons, it had no connection to religion; it was strictly a symbol of communal grief.

Theologists Farkas and Hall (2005, 14) report that communal or community rituals and symbols could help "remind individuals of other difficult times in which they were helped to cope and survived" and can help foster a sense of togetherness that ties the past to the present, brings people together, and "facilitates a more hopeful outlook on the future." Victor Turner (1968, 6) asserts that "[community] ritual is a periodic re-statement of the terms in which men of a particular culture must interact if there is to be any kind of coherent social life." Turner (1968, 23) goes on to say that, to him, a "concentration of custom, it is the place where a society's values, norms, and deep knowledge of itself are reaffirmed and sometimes, created." While Turner is talking about something drastically different than a small Texas town, the same logic can be applied, especially when considering how important rituals such as community potlucks and social gatherings are after tragedies and disasters to reestablish social norms and connect people with their community culture.

Emile Durkheim (1995 [1912]), known for his work on religion, also wrote about

something he called an "effervescent assembly," which later evolved into social solidarity. To quote Tim Olaveson (2001, 101), who researched Durkheim's effervescent assembly theory, he clarifies it as "characterized by intense emotion, and in which the outcome is uncertain and may produce new ideas, in which there is also intense emotion and excitement, and a bond of community and unity among participants, such that they feel morally strengthened." After a tragedy, especially one with mass casualties that greatly impacts a community, emotions run high to take this theory a bit further. Durkheim (1995 [1912], 382) believed that emotions, especially intense ones, could "spread to all the other mental states that occupy the mind." He further believed that emotions could contaminate objects, and thus an ordinary everyday object could symbolically represent intense emotion, essentially binding social groups to specific ideals (Durkheim 1995 [1912]).

After a traumatic event to any collective group of people and some initial shock has begun to subside, the need for social interaction increases. Individuals often seek out one another and come together. Since these social gatherings happen after tragedy and disaster events, I would qualify them as rituals. I define *rituals* as actions with symbolic meaning that are undertaken for a specific cultural purpose, and with that definition in mind, I would say the community fundraising, potluck socials, and the symbolic wearing of the school's colors would all be a signifier that a tragedy or disaster has occurred within a community.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that these symbols and rituals are not all-inclusive and marginalized individuals may feel excluded, especially if they do not share an emotional connection to the symbols or rituals utilized by a dominant entity or in the case of Santa Fe, a loose collection of individuals who overlap in various political, religious, volunteer, and business organizations and share a long connection to Santa Fe's centers of power. When I

say this, I am specifically speaking about the community symbols, especially those associated with community history and culture, like the symbolic representation of the school colors' green and gold or the symbolic representation of the school mascot being used to honor the victims. I believe community events like the potluck and fundraising are more inclusive; however, they can still feel exclusive to some. For example, in some cultures, it is deemed rude to bring food to an event you are not hosting, and some fundraising events can feel off-putting to the economically disadvantaged who may want to help but are struggling to help their own family.

After September 11, the United States saw a collective assembly of people wearing red, white, and blue. These colors have a symbolic representation in the USA, but during this time, Americans' emotions were impacted by the symbolic nature of the colors, and that emotion collectively passed from one person to another. For some Americans, this was an emotion of American pride. However, for others, such as American Muslims, emotions of exclusion and otherness were symbolically felt when those they knew would wear the colors, knowing they had been the targets of crimes. Depending on whom you ask about their perceptions of that time, one individual may reflect on moments of solidarity and national pride, and others may reflect on exclusion or sadness. In Anderson's *Imagined Communities* he further explained how dominant institutions within a nation can contribute to these exclusions and inclusions. His example illustrated how symbols and narratives produced by language, religion, media, and education, socially construct a notion of nationalism for which people are willing to die and lose their identity (e.g., the tomb of the unknown solider). This illustrates the theory of community unity illusion because often the dominant majority speak of the solidarity or the "positive" and rarely share the history of the marginalized, creating an illusion that the community is united.

2.4 Religious Response to Tragedy

The dominant religion in the U.S. is Christianity. According to Pew Research Center, more than 65% of Americans self-identify[18] as Christian. Therefore, many responses to tragedy are religious in nature. Frequently, communities hold mass prayer events and candlelight vigils in response to a tragic event. The cross has also become a symbolic marker of where someone died, and according to many survivors I have spoken with, the Holy Bible is among the most gifted items they receive.

Santa Fe is no different; however, as noted in the community section, communities are heterogeneous, including religious diversity. Even with the ten victims lost in Santa Fe, there was religious diversity. Yet, much of the response in Santa Fe had implicit Christian tones. This included memorials using the Christian cross, nights of prayer led by area churches, candlelight vigils, and more.

This section similarly follows the same pattern as the community section. I introduce some basic anthropological concepts, highlight how religious symbolism and rituals are positive for a mass majority of people, and then illuminate the harmful effects of religious responses on the minority.

2.4.1 Anthropology of Religion

As with the section on community referred to the latter part of my research question, this section reflects on the word "faith" in my thesis. I turned to the anthropology of religion for insights to understand faith and how it applies to culture and community.

Anthropologist Malinowski believed that religion had the ability to transform a person's

[18] http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/

life; in contrast, Radcliffe-Brown believed religion was part of the social structure that helped keep some sort of equilibrium in society (Bowie 2006). Bowie (2006, 5) provides insight into how Durkheim describes religion "not as an individual response to life crises but as the embodiment of society's highest goals and ideals." Of course, religion seems to be one of the most cultural topics, and therefore nearly every anthropologist has a description for the anthropology of religion.

Geertz, a known symbolic anthropologist, similarly agrees with Durkheim but states he would add that religion is a collective social act (Bowie 2006). Geertz never defines religion in terms of a belief in God, but rather as a symbolic system that can be interpreted and decoded (Geertz 1973). However, Geertz's definition has been heavily criticized by Asad (1993), who states Geertz's work is "too abstract" and assumes religion can be studied cross-culturally. Since most of my work is focused on symbolism, I would have to say that I agree with Geertz, and I believe that one can study the impact religion has cross-culturally.

2.4.2 Religious Symbols and Rituals

Historically, disasters and tragedies were seen as an Act of God, and as a result of these religious beliefs, communities believed the negative occurrences were punishments or tests by a supernatural being (Quarantelli 1998). Prayers, offerings, rituals, and even sacrifices were widely seen as ways to influence their God/s and bring goodwill in the future. While some researchers outside of anthropology view religious responses such as prayers and offerings as a passive response to the tragedy, Durkheim notes that:

> No doubt, when all we do is consider the formulas literally, these religious beliefs and practices appear disconcerting, and our inclination might be to write them off to some sort of inborn aberration. But we must know how to reach beneath the symbol to grasp the reality it represents and the gives the symbol its true meaning. (1995 [1912], 2)

One symbol that Durkheim (1995 [1912]) refers to often is the totem, which he believed could be

an animal, plant, celestial body, mystic being, or any other religious or communal sacred objects. Anthropologist Jerry Moore (2004, 57) claims, a totem's "sacredness is imparted to those things associated with it, [when] its loss is the greatest imaginable disaster."

These socially classified sacred items then become synonymous with both their religious counterparts and the item they are symbolizing. For example, after a tragedy such as a car accident in the U.S., you sometimes see a Christian cross as a marker of remembrance on the side of the road. Often people in the U.S. see this and know that someone died near that location and that the cross is a symbolic marker of respect[19]. There is also an unspoken sacred aspect of the symbol tied to the religion and respect to the dead.

Davis (1992) mentions the diverse way people mourn after war, famine, plague, or other disasters, including how they draw upon and find strength in culturally and religiously defined symbols. Influenced by Geertz, anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1973, 49-50) agreed that symbols could serve as "a guide, or program, or plan for human action concerning certain irreducible and recurrent themes or problems of the human condition as conceptualized in particular cultures."

Often after a tragedy or disaster, humans cling to symbols, especially individuals with strong religious identities. Often gifts of Bibles, crosses, rosary, angels, and other Christian symbolism emerge in response. Many faith-based organizations hold vigils and others offer prayer circles, both seen as religious rituals. As Davis (1992) mentioned, these acts can bring great comfort to some and therefore, the symbols and rituals can hold immense value to a community following a tragedy. "That is why we can be certain that acts of worship, whatever they may be, are something other than paralyzed force, gesture without motion," as Durkheim

[19] Recently it has been brought to my attention that not all people understand the symbolic representation of the cross on the side of the road, especially the younger generations.

recognized (1995 [1912], 227). Religious rituals and symbols are powerful for many people.

However, the issue comes when the majority impose their symbols and rituals, failing to recognize the minority that may not adhere to the same belief system nor hold the same totem as sacred.

2.4.3 Christian Privilege and Imposition

In doing this research, I came across a term I had never heard before, "Christian privilege," and as soon as I read about it, I instantly realized it fit my thesis. Originally based on Peggy McIntosh's (1988) concept of white and male privilege, Christian privilege is the similar invisible, unearned, and largely unacknowledged array of benefits Christians receive, often unconsciously and effortlessly (Blumenfeld 2006). The system of benefits is largely due to Christianity being the dominant religion, and its traditions often go hand-in-hand with American traditions in the U.S. For example, many American political traditions are heavily entrenched in the Chrisitan tradition. Take the White House Easter Egg Roll event, where children roll an egg across the White House lawn. The egg is meant to be a symbolic representation of the rock rolling away from the tomb of Jesus before the resurrection (Blumenfeld 2006). The event, which started in 1814, remains current today and is one of the ways that Christians see benefits that other religions in the U.S. do not. Another example would be that Christmas is a national holiday in the U.S. Therefore, all Christians would most likely be given this day off from work, most with pay. However, non-Christian Americans with a different faith and celebrate a different holiday would have to request a different day off from work; while they are protected from being fired, they would still have to utilize time off or possibly go without pay.

Blumenfeld (2006, 195) says this "system of benefits confers dominance on Christians while subordinating members of other faith communities as well as non-believers," thus creating

"systemic inequities throughout society." Clark et al. (2002, 4) assert, "the fact remains that all Christians benefit from Christian privilege regardless of how they express themselves as Christians in the same way that all White people benefit from White privilege."

Gramsci's (1971) concept of "hegemony" illustrates the way a dominant group, in this case, Christians, "dominate [the] social realities and social vision in a manner accepted as common sense, as normal" (Blumenfeld 2006, 196). Often this group imposes their belief system on others, leaving the marginalized feeling invisible, disempowered, or muted (Tong 1989). Relating this back to tragedy in general, when a tragic event happens and most of the healing responses are made in a Christian nature, then a group of non-Christian people is being excluded. This exclusion can have many negative psychological impacts on individuals trying to recover from trauma, but it can also impede cultural and community unity in the future.

2.4.4 Religious Discourse

Following a tragic event, religious language is often used in response. This can include the 21st century social media phenomena of "thoughts and prayers;" however, it can also include (mostly Christian) phrases, such as, "they are in a better place," "just give it to God," and "Jesus says you must forgive." Blumenfeld (2006, 196) states that the institutionalization of Christian norm often "perpetuates that all people are or should be Christian," which make these types of phrases common after a tragedy.

Concerning trauma and healing, these phrases can often do more harm than good; theologist Terri Daniel (2019) calls this "toxic theology." Daniel (2019, 12) quotes psychologist and theologist Daniel Schipani on toxic theology and says:

> Not all toxic spirituality is fundamentalist; all forms of fundamentalism sustain some form of toxic theology because they debilitate the human spirit. This is accomplished through policies that suppress critical thinking and forbid questioning, regard anyone

> outside the group with suspicion, and promote a vision of the future that requires the conversion of outsiders.

I cite Daniel not to suggest that all forms of religion are bad; in fact, for a great many people, religion can bring comfort in times of need. However, after a mass tragedy like the Santa Fe shooting, sometimes the thought of religion or God can be too abstract for the types of religious responses above, and when dealing with something so complex and deep, one may question their faith, adding layers of complexity.

On the other hand, sometimes trauma "acts to increase spiritual development if that development is defined as an increase in the search for purpose and meaning" (Decker 1993, 35). Some trauma literature states that "spiritual/religious issues [are] an important aspect of understanding psychological responses in trauma" and "these issues have often been indicated as major determinants in both the development of and recovery from, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Decker 1993, 35).

Scholars of Christianity, Maxwell and Perrine (2016, 179) describe the double-sided nature of post-tragedy religious support by writing:

> For some, God's presence brings various forms of positive aid to the process of grief… Yet, for others, God's presence further compounds difficulty and guilt. For some, sadness over loss is well understood, whereas, in others, it is perceived as a lack of sufficient faith in God… The danger of addressing grief with theology is that it can inevitably reduce a complex and often bewildering phenomenon to a constraining ideology that may even result in the imposition of harm rather than relief. The helpfulness of God for grief is therefore not uniformly felt.

As noted earlier, people believed that sudden loss or severe disasters were direct punishments from God in ancient times. However, even as recent as 2004, this sentiment still resonated, as an Australian disaster researcher noted that after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, stating many of the population seemed to believe the disaster was "sent either as a test of faith or as a punishment" (McAneney 2005, 3). Another researcher noted that "radical Islamists" mentioned

anything that "washes beaches clear of half-nude tourists is to be divine" (Neiman 2005, 16). In the United States, evangelical leaders spoke about how God sent Hurricane Katrina to New Orleans to wash away the sin (Cooperman 2005; Holcombe 2007). Daniel's book *God and Grief, When Religion Does More Harm Than Healing* (2019) is filled with similar instances of religious leaders offering harmful communication in the wake of tragedy and loss.

Theologists and disaster chaplains Farkas and Hall (2005, 10), who have studied disaster response, mention it was assumed that those who have had pastoral education would have training for disasters; however, "reality showed, that previous chaplaincy and/or mental health training did not necessarily make one an appropriate disaster chaplain. Although there are similarities, spiritual care in the context of disaster is different than spiritual care in a hospital or institutional setting." Farkas and Hall (2005) offer recommendations, including that many faith-based leaders are expected to preach and offer spiritual guidance daily. However, when a faith-based leader becomes a disaster chaplain, they should not be expected to preach, give answers, or use scripture (Farkas & Hall 2005). They also reference having to be the most effective and all-inclusive "knowledge of the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the impacted community" is highly important (Farkas & Hall 2005, 15).

Of course, religious leaders are not the only ones to push a religious narrative following a tragedy; political leaders do so habitually. Christian discourse in America goes back to early settlers in the mid-17th century. However, many Americans believe the U.S. constitution states there is a "separation of church and state," but this phrase is not actually found anywhere in the document (Blumenfeld 2006). This adds confusion when non-Christians cannot understand why political leaders in the U.S. continue to promote Christian ideology. For example, on June 10,

2000, George W. Bush, while governor of Texas, declared Jesus Day in the state via an official memorandum (Blumenfeld 2006).

This type of religious response from political leaders seems to be increased after mass shootings. Frequently, political leaders offer "thoughts and prayer" and do their ritualistic duty of visiting the scene or with families, but often that is the end; no policies or change is seen. In this next section, I talk about when political leaders do make change, they do so for an agenda, and how that impacts community resiliency.

2.5 The Quest for Resiliency

Following the response to tragedy, individuals and communities begin to look towards the road of recovery and building resiliency. However, understanding what resiliency looks like, let alone reaching it, is not always easy.

2.5.1 Politicization

In addition to the religious discourse, there is often political discourse after a tragic event or disaster. Sometimes, this can stem from a mix of politics and religion; sometimes, politicians use the event to move a political agenda. No matter why, politicization tends to damage a community's well-being and trust, often when the community is trying to recover and build resiliency.

Anthropologists have noted how tragedies and disasters can influence political organizations and power dynamics between individuals and their government. Disasters and tragedies may provide a kind of restructuring that allows people to review their political situation and their position of power, relative to that of the government, more clearly (Chairetakis 1991; Henry 2005). Chairetakis (1991) notes that these government or political parties can exploit a situation appearing to be a major player in relief, but these relief efforts can often bolster the

dominant political interests of those already in power. For example, a governmental group may join to help in the relief efforts after a disaster or a tragedy if they believe they can use the event to move their political agenda forward or possibly get personal recognition that will later help them win an election. Olson (2000, 167) notes that this is one of the issues with resilience after a disaster, "one of the major problems [is] that at heart, [they are] deeply political."

Some researchers criticized political organizations for failing to recognize skills from local individuals or organizations with the community that may assist with managing and recovering from the disaster. Some critics also noted, "biases which pathologize the victims or survivors and encourage aggressive, external interventions, or for the 'restricting logic' that relief bureaucracies impose on the recipients of aid, thus creating dependent, helpless, powerless populations" (McEntire 2007, 116).

The effects of politicization form in a few different ways. On the one hand, there may be a great willingness to implement changes, albeit it may be triggered to reach the top of the political agenda. Policymakers may also realize that it is time to act to prevent direct massive public outrage and media criticism or to show that they take public and political concerns seriously and to accept changes to restore confidence in their abilities and political offices (Boin & Hart 2000). In some cases, a process of politicization is welcomed by policymakers because it opens a window of opportunity to make previously unattainable changes (Klein 2007; Cortell & Peterson 1999; Keeler 1993; Kingdon 1995). This allows them to use political discourse to pressure their idea or party's idea into implementing changes.

On the other hand, bureaucratic rigidity and implementation are not always so easily done. In the wake of urgent and serious disasters and tragedies, dramatic changes can often be announced without consulting all parties. Thus, widening the gap between those on the top and

those doing the work generally leads to additional difficulties in the implementation process (Boin & Otten 1996). Especially when political attention has seemed to shift away over time, or when those who are supposed to implement the change or those it is supposed to help cannot see the benefit, the task may be extremely difficult to manage (van Duin 1992).

2.5.2 Muted Group Theory

Within this research the marginalized is anyone who does not fall into the dominant majority. The dominant majority of Santa Fe is conservative, Christian, middle class, heterosexual, late 30s to late 60s and White. I have repeatedly asserted the marginalized have been excluded in Santa Fe. These exclusions are a result of a combination of things; however, what I have not mentioned is that often the marginalized are left feeling like they have no voice. When a minority group or a lone individual speaks out, they are often ostracized by the majority and those with power. This is called muted group theory, and it originated within the field of anthropology in 1975 by Edwin and Shirley Ardener (Lee & Barkman 2018). The couple trying to understand why women's voices were not as notable in anthropology discovered that academia at the time felt that women were not as articulate as men, and therefore, their writings would be more difficult for the reader to understand (Ardener 2005 [1975]). However, they discovered "women are at a disadvantage in expressing matters of concern unless their views are presented in a form acceptable to men;" thus, women were not inarticulate, only muted by those in charge (Ardener 2005 [1975], ix).

Today, most everyone can share their voice in some form or another via social media. However, speaking out still has consequences, especially in small Texas communities where the illusion of unity and solidarity run strong and Christian politics dominate the landscape. An individual with "muted group status is not necessarily fixed but instead something that is

constantly reinforced, augmented, or challenged, through everyday discursive interaction" (Orbe 1998, 234).

Orbe (1998, 8-9) states there are normally several outcomes of an individual feeling muted by a dominant group:

1) The individual will downplay or ignore what makes them different from the dominant group and try to fit in; sometimes, they will even mirror the dominant group.

2) The individual will put on a positive face in public and will be polite and internalize how they feel.

3) The individual will remain completely silent when issues arise, even if inappropriate, insulting, or directly offensive.

4) The individual averts or changes the subject when topics arise that they feel they are in the minority of.

5) The individual does extensive preparation, mentally and academically, to be ready to engage verbally with the dominant group.

6) The individual disassociates with the dominant group, finds a new group, or in some cases, relocates.

When adding on the layer of tragedy or disaster, a marginalized individual who already feels muted may struggle and feel more alone than individuals connected to the dominant group. So, how does a community go from feelings of isolation and silencing to building resiliency?

2.5.3 Building Community Resiliency

Just like disaster, the term "resiliency" has also been debated and has a multitude of definitions. I share the one I came across that I believe offers the best description for resiliency as related to the Santa Fe shooting: "qualities or characteristics that allow a community to survive following a collective trauma" (Sherrieb et al. 2010, 228). Sociocultural anthropologist Roberto Barrios (2016), who studies post-disaster community resilience, argues the importance of understanding disasters from the eyes of the community and the individual. Barrios (2016)

mentions that while understanding the definition of resiliency is fundamental, the real concern lies with the reason why some social systems, communities, and individuals recover or even thrive in the aftermath of a disaster, whilst others continue to struggle, overcome difficulties, or altogether give up. However, he also notes that many critics argue that this line of thinking diverts attention away from the root cause of the disaster and the events that led up to or contributed to the disaster, specifically with vulnerable communities (Barrios 2016).

I concur with Barrios (2016) that researching the aftermath of disasters from the perspectives of those with lived experiences may be one of the most important things we as disaster anthropologists can do, especially in understanding community resiliency. However, I also agree with the critics who say that we cannot ignore underlining issues that may have always been present but may be exacerbated due to a tragedy or disaster that make building resiliency more difficult. For example, Jerusalem et al. (1995, 348) recognized, "social support can be mobilized or may deteriorate after a [tragedy or] disaster, depending in part on the characteristics of the community, its members, and the disaster [or tragedy] itself."

Community resilience is grounded in the ability of community members to take meaningful, deliberate, and collective action to remedy the effect of a situation, including the ability to interpret their environment, intervene with problems that arise, and more importantly, the ability of members not just to cope individually but as a collective unit (Pfefferbaum et al. 2005). The concept of resilience has since been applied to describe the adaptive abilities of individuals (Bonanno 2004; Butler et al. 2007; Rutter 1993; Werner & Smith 1982), human communities (Brown & Kulig 1996; Brown & Kulig 1997; Sonn & Fisher 1998), and large cultural societies (Adger 2000; Godschalk 2003). An article on community resilience stated that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, meaning that a resilient community cannot be

achieved with only a few resilient individuals or by catering to the dominant majority and ignoring the minority (Pfefferbaum 2008; Rose 2004). In another article, Brown and Kulig (1996, 43) mentioned that "people in communities are resilient together, not merely in similar ways," meaning that resiliency does not always look the same for each person.

The concept of community resiliency involves a return to a pre-catastrophic state of affairs. Of course, communities are not static and unchanging, even before a disaster or tragedy. However, some anthropologists have noted that some communities have grown or have changed completely from a disaster or tragedy (Fortun 2001; Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 1999). Fortun's (2001) work in Bhopal has shown an emergence of activism, academics, and other consciously active citizens that were not previously found before the industrial disaster of 1984[20].

Fortun (2001) uses the term "enunciatory" to describe communities bounded together by their desire to respond to the tragedy or disaster and less about their shared culture. Furthermore, she believes that one of the main points to a resilient community is the capacity to have enunciatory groups that strive to address inequalities from sociopolitical circumstances unique to the disaster or tragedy rather than striving to return the community to the pre-catastrophic state (Fortun 2001). For example, after a disaster or tragedy, you often see many non-profits organizations or activist groups emerge. Based on Fortun's (2001) enunciatory logic, these groups are vital to building community resiliency. Fortun (2001, 52) goes on to state that enunciatory groups that "harmonize the diversity" among members may be better able to address the needs of the community in the face of future adversity.

In conclusion, the literature analysis provided valuable theoretical methods and concepts

[20] The Bhopal disaster was a gas leak incident on the night of December 2, 1984. This disaster is considered among one of the world's worst industrial disasters.

that helped frame my research. In addition, the insights I gleaned from the previous mass tragedies, marginalized groups, and community resiliency were comparable to the results in Santa Fe; and, therefore, aided in setting up the discussion, by pairing theoretical frameworks with the qualitative data from the results.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes an interpretivist framework and ethnographic research methods that are common in applied anthropology in order to understand the perceptions of the role of faith-based organizations in the trauma-affected community of Santa Fe, Texas and the feelings of social belonging and inclusion during the response, recovery, and long-term resiliency after the tragedy on May 18, 2018. The study design incorporated four stages:

- Stage 1: Approvals, research preparation, participant recruitment
- Stage 2: Data collection
- Stage 3: Data analysis
- Stage 4: Final reporting and publications

3.1 Stage 1: Preparation and Recruitment

3.1.1 Approvals: Client and IRB

The first step was to create a written proposal for the Aldersgate United Methodist Church (AUMC) trustees to review and accept. The proposal process outlined the history mentioned in the introduction and the research purpose, fully illustrated the research design, budget, and deliverables as well as provided the client a snapshot of my academic and professional history. The AUMC board trustee chairman reviewed and accepted the proposal in March 2020, and AUMC officially became the research client.

Once the research client was officially established, the next important step in doing research that includes human participants is to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a committee that ensures all ethical and legal procedures are in place to begin research. I began the IRB application process by creating an IRB account in February 2020 and

was given the study number IRB-20-141 by the University of North Texas.

After obtaining signed approval from the client in early March, I proceeded with the IRB application process. However, by March 15, 2020, everything in the world, including the United States, came to a screeching halt. A worldwide pandemic, the novel coronavirus-19, with a high contagion rate, prompted world leaders to shut down schools, business, and life as everyone knew it.

In the United States, stay-at-home orders and non-familial contact outside of the home were implemented by March 31, 2020. Due to the restrictions put forth by the United States government, the Centers for Disease Control, and the University of North Texas, face-to-face research and recruitment were prohibited. This led to innovative and out-of-the-box thinking when it came to business, education, and research. As a result, my IRB application and research were momentarily paused while investigating methods to conduct virtual and limited contact research.

In early May 2020, I worked out a plan to utilize web-based conferencing technology and made arrangements with Aldersgate for use of private rooms that would allow for the six-foot social distancing requirement for participant interviews that could not be conducted virtually. On June 19, 2020, I completed the IRB application and submitted it to the University of North Texas. The application was 38 pages long and comprised 19 attachments. The IRB application was certified by the principal investigator and thesis board chair, Dr. Andrew Nelson, on June 22, 2020.

Due to the research's delicate and sensitive nature and the fact that the research involveed a special population, minors, the IRB application was flagged to require IRB full board meeting and approval.

I met with the full Institutional Review Board on July 27, 2020. The 14-member Board comprised individuals from various university departments, including sociology, psychology, counseling and higher education; political science; rehabilitation and health services; and student health and wellness center. These various individuals asked rigorous questions to ensure that my research met both legal and ethical federal regulations. Two days later, the board approved the study, pending three minor edits. [See Appendix A for IRB approval.]

3.1.2 Research Preparation and Website Creation

During preliminary discussions on the route the research would take, the temporal words, such as "response, recovery, and resiliency," were consistently used by mental health professionals, state employees, and elected officials. The terms were applied so often that the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe ISD, Resiliency Center staff, the center steering committee, and Aldersgate United Methodist Church began to view every action through the temporal vocabulary lens.

The response stage has been defined as the initial stage following a traumatic event. This includes the traumatic event itself and lasts through the shock following the event. The response can consist of the media's response, funerals (as needed in Santa Fe), physical medical care, and the individual and community's initial response.

Recovery encompasses the stage of acceptance. At this point, the community has accepted that a traumatic event has occurred, and this is often when the emotional and/or spiritual healing begins. Additionally, recovery includes physical and mental medical care to individuals, as needed. Recovery can also include rebuilding or starting to make repairs to physical buildings if required.

Today, we see the word *resiliency* often. In some communities, resiliency is used to

define the community's ability to use resources to respond, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. In this research, resiliency includes these aspects and the individual's ability to respond, face, and recover from future adverse situations.

To further identify and analyze the temporal terms from the perception of the Santa Fe community, each participant was asked to define these terms in their own words. Additionally, participants were asked what types of responses, recovery, and resiliency efforts they witnessed after the tragedy to identify their definitions of these terms better and put examples with the terminology.

Through this project and working closely with decision-makers from Aldersgate, it was asked what role a faith-based organization should play during these stages. As a result, the research question was formed with the client, Aldersgate.

Furthermore, in preparing for participant recruitment, I created a research website. The thought for this website was to have a central location that was easily accessible and mobile-friendly that people could find out more information about the research, why I am conducting the research, and about myself. I also wanted to ensure there was a place for anyone who may have trauma reminders due to my research that there would be a resource available to them. The website, www.sftxstudy.info, contains an About Section on the research and me. There are copies of all the consent forms for the interview, survey, and minor participants. The survey link was housed here while available and multiple mental health resources, including phone numbers and hours for local and national helplines and an assortment of apps that an individual can download on Apple or the Google Play Store.

3.1.3 Participant Recruitment

Recruitment was conducted through snowball sampling via my social media accounts and

email to accommodate the COVID-19 restrictions. I utilized a specifically designed flyer and social media graphic to draw interest from potential participants. [See appendix B for recruitment flyer.]

Recruitment occurred mostly within the Santa Fe community. However, the family of the foreign exchange student killed in the shooting was invited to participate. Additionally, participants who assisted the Santa Fe community after the tragedy, who do not live in the community, were invited to participate. Of the mental health professionals that have served the Santa Fe community and were invited to participate, 98% are female, and 85% are White. Both the City of Santa Fe City Council and the Santa Fe ISD School Board elected officials were invited to participate. At the time of this research, all 13 elected officials were male, 12 were White, and one was Hispanic. The majority in these last two categories are in their 40s with one member of the school board and one member of the city council over the age of 60.

Minors who were students during the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School shooting had the opportunity to participate with at least one parent or guardian's consent. The youngest student who had the opportunity to participate was 16 years old. It was important to include students in the research as many had voiced that the tragedy most impacted them, yet no one would ask them their opinion. For this reason, I included students ages 16 to 18 years of age.

During the recruitment process, I offered a debriefing statement, which let participants know what the research was about and that there could have been trauma reminders and would include personal questions about faith. However, I also reminded them that there would be no identifying information presented in my research publication without permission. I actively recruited participants to provide the most accurate representation of the Santa Fe community [see debriefing statement in Appendix C.]

3.2 Stage 2: Data Collection

3.2.1 Archival Research

Data collection essentially began before the conception of this research project. As a member of the Santa Fe community, I grew up with the local knowledge of the area's history, geography, and politics. However, soon after the IRB was approved, I officially collected documentary research that would be utilized later to triangulate my data.

This included attending public meetings such as the City of Santa Fe City Council and the SFISD School Board meetings. Many of these meetings were held virtually via Facebook or YouTube live due to COVID-19, which allowed me to observe meetings and make detailed notes all from the comfort of my own home. However, much of my historical research from previous governmental meetings came from minutes available to the public on the entity's websites. Since this information is public information, no request to obtain it was required.

Additional archival research came in the form of a visit to the SFISD historical museum. Here I visited with the curator, viewed maps, historical documents, and visited the new memorial area dedicated to the tragedy victims.

3.2.2 Observational Site Visits

During the observation period, I drove around Santa Fe, and I took photos and notes of churches and faith-based organizations, including Aldersgate United Methodist Church. I visited public healing spaces, including a therapeutic garden, a painted mural on City Hall, the Santa Fe Ten memorial's future location, several memorial locations (including a local memorial on the Maranatha Church property in Sante Fe), and the Santa Fe Resiliency Center locations. The observations included minor details about what it was like to visit, but no identifying information about visitors was collected, and no photographs included people.

Observations were conducted throughout August and were intermingled with other data collection, including interviews and the digital community survey. However, additional photographs and visits were made during the writing process as was needed for further clarification.

3.2.3 Participant Observation

Throughout the research process, I engaged with participants through a technique called participant observation. There are four types of participant observations; although, as a member of the Santa Fe community, I most easily used the participant as an observer technique. With this, the participants knew I was doing research; however, they treated me more as a friend, colleague, or neighbor than as someone who was studying them.

However, due to COVID-19, there were very few chances to engage in participant observation. I was invited to a group chat via Zoom once and observed several participants interact with one another, and I did have the chance to observe several participants at the local therapeutic garden on several occasions. Other than that, participant observation opportunities did not present themselves as I feel they may have had there not been a worldwide pandemic.

3.3 Digital Community Survey

The community survey was available to everyone living within the Santa Fe school district boundaries, those impacted by the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School shooting, those that attend a faith-based organization in Santa Fe, Texas, and all those that provided assistance after the shooting. The survey was open to ages 16 and older.

The survey consisted of an informed consent question and 18 other questions divided into three categories: demographics, scaled answers, and open-ended questions.

The survey started with a summary of the debriefing statement to remind participants of

the risks and to once again provide the mental health resources. The first question and only question that required an answer was the informed consent. Due to the survey's electronic nature and anonymity, obtaining a signed informed consent was not feasible. Therefore, participants were asked to review the electronic consent form in its entirety (participants could print a copy of the consent form housed on the research website, www.sftxstudy.info.) From this point, participants were asked to either select if they agreed or did not agree; however, instead of selecting "Do NOT Agree," participants were instructed to exit the survey if they did not agree.

The first section of questions comprised eight demographical questions, including asking the participant for their zip code. The purpose of this question was to understand better where the participants came from and if they live out of or within the Santa Fe community. Further questions included race, gender, education, age, and religion. All questions in this section, except for age and zip code, were multiple choice.

The second section contained one scaled question that was further divided into eight topics. Participants were asked to select how often they engaged in the topics of faith-based activities, school board meetings, city council meetings, politics, the news, and social media. Choices included *never*, *sometimes*, *about half the time, more than half the time*, and *always*. The purpose of these questions was to gain a deeper understanding of the community and where they spend their time. Since the tragedy is so intertwined with faith, politics, and media, these insights proved valuable during the analysis portion.

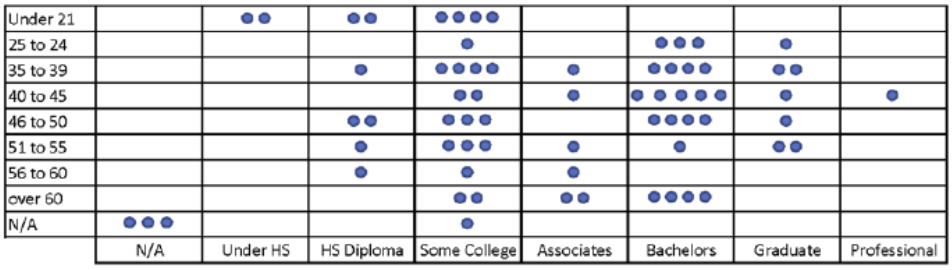
The last section of the survey had nine open-ended questions that asked participants to type in a response. Questions included an assortment of questions revolving around the response and recovery events after the shooting. Some questions were asked in their entirety to interview participants and the survey participants, such as "what is the role of a faith-based organization

after a mass community tragedy?" [See Appendix D for a full list of survey questions.] The survey ended with a final statement including where to find mental health resources and how to learn about the research results.

The survey opened on August 17, 2020, and remained available until August 30, 2020, when the survey was officially closed. During this time, 68 people participated in the survey. Of those, 53 are female, 12 are male, 1 identified as other, and 2 participants chose not to answer the gender question. Of the survey participants, 56 are White, 6 are Hispanic or Latino, 2 are Asian, 1 is Black, and 2 individuals opted not to answer.

Survey participants ranged in age from 17 to 68. Eight participants were under the age of 21 at the time they took the survey. Five were between the ages of 25 and 34, twelve were between the ages of 35 and 39, and nine were between the ages of 40 to 45. Eleven individuals were between the ages of 46 to 50, eight were between the ages 51 and 55, three were between the ages of 56 and 60, eight individuals were over the age of 60, and four participants opted not to answer this question.

Table 3.1: Survey participants' education in correlation with age



Three survey participants did not answer the question about educational level. Two have not yet finished high school; 8 have a high school diploma, 20 answered they have some college coursework completed, 6 individuals have an associate degree, 21 have a bachelor's degree, 7 individuals responded they have a graduate-level degree, and 1 said they have a professional degree.

To better understand the survey takers' background, each participant was asked to divulge their occupations. As a result, many occupations were listed, including students, stay-at-home parents, educators, nurses, first responders, and business owners. Several participants said they worked in the foodservice industry, and several more said they are currently retired. Other occupations included office administrators, managers, artists, engineers, a clinical researcher, a librarian, church employees, and individuals in finance, real estate, insurance, and the judicial system. Nine respondents chose not to answer this question.

A large portion of this research revolves around religion; therefore, survey participants were asked what religion they self-identify, as if they belong to a specific branch within that religion, and if they are a member of a faith-based organization, which one. Of the 68 survey participants, 4 respondents opted not to answer any of the above questions. Fifty-three respondents identified as Christian, three as agonistic, three as atheists, two as Muslim, and two as other. Of the 53 that identified as Christian, 6 respondents identified as Baptist and 3 said they were Southern Baptist. Five individuals identified as non-denominational, four as Catholics, two as Pentecostals, and one Episcopalian, a Lutheran, and a Methodist. One individual clarified they grew up Catholic but did not identify with a religion now, and another individual said they are questioning their faith. Respondents were also asked if they are a member of a faith-based organization. Two did not answer the question, 28 answered yes, and 38 said no they are not a member of a faith-based organization or church.

3.3.1 Interviews

Following the recruitment of interview participants, I provided each person with the informed consent documents. Then I went over the possible risks and benefits associated with the research with each prospective participant and their parent if they were a minor. Participants

were notified that possible risks might include trauma reminders or some discomfort during the study. Other risks reviewed, included a conversation about myself, a member of the Santa Fe community. Therefore, I spoke with participants and shared, I may be someone they may have a chance of seeing in public after the research was completed. Furthermore, I went over the potential loss of confidentiality, which included the same risks as everyday internet use if the participant engaged in the online virtual interview.

Participants were also reminded that at any time they experience a trauma reminder or discomfort and want to skip a question or withdraw from the study, they had the right to do so at any time without penalty. To minimize risks associated with trauma reminders, participants were provided a copy of the mental health resource flyer during the informed consent and again at the end of the interview, and they were directed to the website www.sftxstudy.info for additional resources.

The mental health resource flyer reminded participants if they are experiencing trauma reminders, depression, PTSD, or other life disturbances as a result of the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School shooting or the study, to call the Santa Fe Resiliency Center, Monday through Thursday 10 am to 7 pm, or on Fridays from 10 am to pm at (409) 218-7129 or utilize the 24-hour the Santa Fe Support Crisis Hotline at (800) 595-0869. Participants were also provided other crisis hotlines that may be of assistance, including Gulf Coast Center Crisis Line (866) 729-3848, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, The TREVOR Project LGBTQ Crisis Hotline (866) 488-7386, and the Safe Call Now (for first responders) (877) 230-6060, all of which were 24-hour hotlines. To further minimize risks, participants were made aware that no questions would be asked about the tragedy specifically and only about the participant's perception of the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts after the tragedy. [See Appendix F

for mental health resource flyer.]

Due to COVID-19 regulations, all interview participants had the option to meet virtually utilizing web conferencing technology. Participants also had the choice to be interviewed at a public location (such as a park) but out of hearing range of other visitors or in a private room at Aldersgate United Methodist Church (the client).

However, for any in-person meetings, both the participant and I had to agree on a location that we felt safe and could accommodate the six-foot social distancing requirement. Furthermore, for in-person interviews, we were required to wear a mask, as mandated by the Texas governor. Aldersgate United Methodist Church permitted me to utilize a private room within the facility for interviewing, which was most commonly used when a participant could not meet virtually. [See Appendix G for an approval letter from church.]

Semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with half the participants via video conferencing software, Zoom, to accommodate the participant and the researcher's geographical distance or in an effort to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread. The remaining participants either did not have the technology or did not feel comfortable utilizing the interview technology. Therefore, I met with them at a mutually agreed upon location that accommodated the six-foot social distancing requirement.

Interviews consisted of a base set of questions but allowed for the open-ended questions' flexibility to lead to a discussion. All interviews started with basic demographic questions and led to questions on faith, faith-based organizations, the response, recovery, and resiliency after the tragedy. [See Appendix E for the full list of interview questions.]

During the interview process, I took notes and used an audio recording device to document and transcribe during the analysis portion. On average, the interviews were completed

in one sitting and took an hour to an hour and a half to finish. However, several participants gave permission to be contacted if I needed additional information. As the writing portion commenced, this offer was acted on to follow up and clarify a few finer details.

In total, 32 interviews were conducted from August 7, 2020, to August 30, 2020. One couple completed the interview together. However, two sets of husbands and wives and two parents and children took part in the interview process. Twenty-one of the interview participants were female, and 11 were male. Of the interview participants, 29 were White; however, three specifically mentioned being Italian. Two were Hispanic, and one identified as Asian.

Table 3.2: Interview participants' education in correlation with age

	Under HS	HS Diploma	Some College	Associates	Bachelors	Graduate	Professional	Ph.D
Under 21	●●●		●					
25 to 24			●			●		
35 to 39					●	●	●	
40 to 45			●●		●			
46 to 50			●					
51 to 55	●	●		●		●●		
56 to 60	●	●●	●		●			
over 60		●			●●●●●	●●		●

Interview participants ranged in age from 17 to 84. Four individuals were age 21 and under at the time of the interview. Two individuals are between the ages of 25 and 34. Three interviewees are between the ages of 35 and 39, three are between the ages of 40 and 45, and one individual is between 46 and 50. Six participants were between the ages of 51 and 55, five participants were between the ages of 56 and 60, and eight interview participants were over the age of 60.

The educational diversity between interview participants was evenly dispersed. Five respondents said they had less than a high school diploma at the time of the interview. Four respondents are high school graduates, six have completed some college coursework, one individual has an associate degree, and eight individuals have a bachelor's degree. Five

respondents said they had received a master's degree; two said they had received a professional degree, and one individual has a Ph.D.

The interviewees' occupations covered various occupations, including business owners, school employees, church employees, pastors, students, educators, mental health professionals, accounting, first responders, and city employees. Several respondents held elected offices, yet they were all unpaid for these positions and worked in other occupations, as well. One respondent worked as a researcher, and one respondent worked as a historian for a government agency. Other respondents said they are retired but had worked in some of the previous jobs before retirement, and two said they are currently unemployed due to COVID-19.

When it came to asking participants to what religion they identify, the responses were more diverse; five participants said they were Christian but did not offer a sub-branch of Christianity. Six participants identified as Methodist, five as Catholic, three as non-denominational, two as Baptist, with one additional person saying they are Southern Baptist, one Protestant, and one Church of Christ. Two participants identified as agnostics, one as Wiccan, one as Muslim, and one as Jewish. One individual said, "they do not identify with organized religion," another said they follow a "nature-based spirituality," and the last said they believe "the author controls everything." When interview participants were asked if they are members of a faith-based organization, 45% answered yes, and 55% answered no.

Most of the participants live in the Santa Fe area. Four interview participants currently live outside of Santa Fe, and two individuals have different time zones than Santa Fe. However, all had close connections to the Santa Fe community or the tragedy on May 18, 2018.

3.4 Stage 3: Data Analysis

Each interview recording was downloaded and transcribed in its entirety to Microsoft

Word, minus names and identifying information, by only myself. The total number of minutes for the 32 interviews was 1,363.17 or 22.72 hours. The average person takes four hours to transcribe one hour of audio. Unfortunately, I cannot accurately account for that, as the topic matter was a bit intense at times, especially when listening so closely. Therefore, when transcribing, I took breaks often for my mental health, and it took me closer to a month and a half to complete the transcription process.

Each interview was labeled with a pseudonym. The master key linking the interviewee's actual names with pseudonyms is maintained in a separate and secure location. The interviews were recorded for research purposes only. After the interview transcription was made with the participants identifying information removed, the audio recording was destroyed.

The transcribed interviews were then uploaded to MAXQDA Analytics Pro (with SPSS) for coding and to identify emerging themes. The survey was created using Qualtrics and was uploaded to MAXQDA. MAXQDA Analytics Pro (with SPSS) allowed me to add quantitative codes such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and more to the interviews and merge those responses with those of the surveys. The software also allowed in-depth qualitative coding to be done to the surveys, a feature that is not easily done in the Qualtrics software itself.

3.5 Stage 4: Final Reporting and Publications

On Monday, February 8, 2021, I met with Aldersgate United Methodist Church to present my findings on an ethnographic evaluation conducted for the church as the applied portion of my master's thesis. The report titled, "The Role of a Faith-Based Organization in a Trauma-Affected Community: An Applied Anthropology Ethnographic Evaluation on the Role Played by Aldersgate United Methodist Church following the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School Shooting" was presented to Aldersgate Board of Trustees chairman, the new Aldersgate pastor,

Resiliency Center Steering Committee chair, and the first Resiliency Center director, the latter two, both also members of Aldersgate.

The 20-page personally designed evaluation report included a summary and answered questions such as "what is an ethnographic evaluation?" History and background information on how Aldersgate got involved was also included if Aldersgate wanted to take the publication to the larger Methodist organization in the future. I explained the data collection methods and the demographics of both the interview and survey participants. Then I took the time to showcase the community's religious demographics and shared what those who live in the area perceived the role of a faith-based organization to be after a mass tragedy. I shared lessons learned through the participants' eyes and ended the document with my findings and recommendations.

The report contained photographs taken while at Aldersgate, the Resiliency Center, or in Santa Fe and graphs to fully illustrate the data. I had the report professionally printed, and each copy was placed in a protective cover. Each meeting attendee went home with a copy, the church received a copy, and after the evaluation was approved, a pdf copy was added to the research website. [See Appendix H for evaluation.]

In addition to my applied project, I also filed my academic thesis with the University of North Texas. Upon acceptance of the academic thesis, I will provide the client with a full printed copy and digital copy for the church's records. Each participant has requested to receive a copy upon acceptance of the academic thesis, and it will also be housed on my research website. Furthermore, results may be presented at conferences or in publications.

Lastly, all efforts have been made to keep all participant's personal information private, including signed consent forms, which were limited to people who need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study have been stored in a secure

location on a secure UNT server, where it will stay for at least three years past the end of this research. The file has been password protected and secured.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter discusses data collected through archival research, participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and a digital community survey. My findings are separated into four sections with several sub-sections. The first section covers the history and culture of Santa Fe and how recent trauma has collectively built on past trauma. The second section covers the community, non-religious responses after the tragedy. This section illuminates the metaphoric language of Santa Fe Strong and the symbolic representation of the colors green and gold from the eyes of the participants. The third section covers all the religious responses, including ritualistic events like candlelight vigils and prayers and presents how the participants feel about these items.

The last section addresses the ways the community tried to recover and move towards resiliency. It showcases the participant's emic terms for response, recovery, and resiliency and discusses religion as a means of resiliency for some individuals. This section also shows that some individuals felt excluded from the community and religious responses after the tragedy. Others felt true admiration for the faith-based organizations that assisted the community on the road to resiliency.

4.1 History and Culture

Before I sat down with my first interview participant or released the community survey, I decided to begin with some preliminary research. Santa Fe has been my home for the last 26 years of my life, but sometimes when you live somewhere, you stop paying attention to things you drive by every day or have heard a million times before. Therefore, I wanted to start with getting reacquainted with the community on a more personal level. I wanted to relearn the

history, drive around, observe the community, and visit locations that I would be asking my participants about. I hoped to observe residents, gain insights into the community's culture, and learn how past and current trauma impacts a community.

4.1.1 Santa Fe's Historical Trauma

I decided to start with a visit to the local Santa Fe ISD's Old School Museum. Upon walking through the doors, the first section I saw in the museum was dedicated to the tragedy. In this location, SFISD selected a small sample of the outpouring from around the world to document the tragedy. There are photographs from May 18, 2018, and shortly after, news clippings, art, poems, and other personalized gifts. There is a photograph of each victim on a main table near the main entrance, and in front of each photo sits a single vase, each a single yellow rose.

While the museum is said to be for the school district, I found it to have a wealth of information about the history of Santa Fe including several large maps and photographs that cover the last several decades. The curator, who also serves as a member of the Santa Fe Historical Commission, was very knowledgeable and able to tell me about when Algoa, Alta Loma, and Arcadia became Santa Fe and the history of the Santa Fe school district. What I did not see in the museum was the racial history of Santa Fe and the traumatic events of the past that impacted much of the community. The topics of race and trauma are something one-fourth of the interview participants brought up. One participant went as far as mentioning that they would not have moved to Santa Fe if they had known about its past.

> I was horrified one day when I saw a KKK bus drive down the road with people cheering, and that really took me aback. Because when I moved to Santa Fe, I really didn't know about the racist history that it had here. If I had known, it probably would have kept me from moving here. (Alice)

Another participant mentioned that they did not believe that the racial hate groups were people

from Santa Fe. “At some point, people came in from Cleveland, a KKK group, and of course the news media said, ‘Santa Fe has the KKK in a roadside park,’ but the reality was that it wasn’t Santa Fe, it was another organization that came in and invited them.” Another participant shared that they did not feel the historical racial past to be true, “that whole KKK crap is stupid, it’s not true, and people assume that it is. At least from my research, it is not true.”

Unfortunately, as noted in the introduction, much of Santa Fe’s history of racism and the ties to the KKK is true. My archival research and talks with a city official uncovered that the KKK even “came in and rented the Community Center [in the late 90s]. And that kind of caused quite a stir; people really didn’t want them there.”

When I spoke with a mental health professional, who lives in Santa Fe, she mentioned the racism in Santa Fe’s past as trauma in its own right: “Well, there is a lot of racial history; a lot of racism from Santa Fe, and that is trauma; that is violence.”

According to the research participants, much of the issue in Santa Fe currently is not blatant racism as it was in the past. In fact, 19 of the 32 interview participants described Santa Fe’s racist past as trauma in the community. Of those who did not disclose Santa Fe’s racism as a form of historical trauma, most do not live in Santa Fe or did not live in Santa Fe in the 80s and 90s. The exception is two elected officials who identified as growing up in Santa Fe but did not bring up Santa Fe’s racist past when asked about previous trauma to the community.

Santa Fe’s racist history has led to decades of less diversity living within the community and therefore less diversity in leadership. This lack of diversity in leadership created a homogenous illusion of the community that was somewhat shattered after the tragedy, as people began to learn of the diversity just among the ten victims. Even during one of the interviews a participant said, “I did not know one of the victims was not from Santa Fe for a very long time.”

However, this appears to be changing. Through participant observation, I noticed many of the youth in the community participate in programs through faith-based organizations, school clubs, or volunteer activities that are ethnically and racially more diverse than Santa Fe as a whole. When speaking with Gary, a white man who grew up in Santa Fe, he shared that Santa Fe is less racist than in the past, "I don't think it's the issue like it was 30 years ago, we have evolved at least some in the right direction." However, the continued racial homogeneity of leadership produces a context in which racism may not have disappeared or even necessarily declined as some participants claim but has been silenced or erased. Unfortunately, due to the small percentage of Black residents living within the community, I was unable to inquire if these residents agree or disagree, that racism within Santa Fe has decreased.

Thirteen of the 32 interview participants talked about hurricanes and specifically Hurricane Harvey, and how traumatic that was for the community of Santa Fe. Like Joann, who shared, "Trauma? [Hurricane] Harvey was very traumatic for people." One participant gave a few more details into just how traumatic the storm was.

> I'm not sure what really affects the whole community. Oh, well, of course, the flooding. I mean, that, you know, one of the members at [my] church flooded three times in the term of two years. So that is traumatic. You have tornados coming through, and that is traumatic. But the flooding was a big thing, so many on the other side of the [railroad] tracks and even those in subdivisions in town flooded. But weather-related things are traumatic. (Joyce)

Other participants brought up traumatic community deaths that impacted the entire community in the past. One young man said he thinks the town was "cursed" when I asked about past trauma. He added, "yeah, the random one person passing away. Mark Kilroy, [and] final Destination type crap happens here. Some Native Americans cursed our land or something." While this young man did not explain what he meant, another participant filled me in on some of the traumatic details during their interview.

> Trauma, yes, lots. We've had a large number of young people die, and crazy accidents happen in this town. I feel like I've been to more funerals than any of my other friends in [other] larger cities, like Houston. I don't know if it's because everyone knows everyone that it makes it feel like more. But it's the freak accidents that stick with you. One of my students was killed when another student stole a stop sign as a senior prank and was fleeing when they struck my student, nearly decapitating him. Another one didn't happen in Santa Fe, but a young man [Mark Kilroy] from Santa Fe was in Mexico and was used as a human sacrifice. Also, one of the 12 that died in the Texas A&M bonfire collapse was a Santa Fe graduate. I could go on. It just seems like Santa Fe has had a lot of death and a lot of traumatic deaths in connection with our small town. (Rose)

She continued to mention several of the things that the other participants raised and ended with, "like I said, we've seen our fair share of deaths around here. In a way, I fear that it is making us numb, or at least the kids. My youngest has now lost six classmates and nearly a dozen he went to school with, and he hasn't even graduated [high school]."

It is hard to imagine how past trauma coupled with the tragedy is not impacting people in the community collectively. Therefore, part of my research set out to ask how tragedy, such as a mass shooting, impacts a whole community.

4.1.2 Collective Trauma

One thing that came up in my research were the terms *disaster* and *tragedy*, so I knew before I could find out how tragedy impacts a whole community, I needed first to understand how the community defines tragedy. I asked Gloria, a woman who has lived in Santa Fe her whole life and whose child was highly impacted by the tragedy to define the two terms for me:

> A disaster is an event or series of events that have a lasting impact but can be overcome, such as Hurricane Harvey. A tragedy is an event that impacts a person, family, or community on a level that will impact those it affects for years to come while changing those directly impacted forever, such as the school shooting.

I asked Blake, a local teenager; he shared that a "disaster is like a natural disaster, like a hurricane. But a tragedy is more personal. It normally means you lose someone." Otto shared, "the shooting was a tragedy; Hurricane Harvey was a disaster." When directly asked, several

participants listed other events as a tragedy, such as Santa Fe's racist past and the numerous natural disasters. However, when speaking freely most of those events were spoke of by name, whereas, at the point of this research, two and half years after the shooting, many participants still did not appear comfortable with the word "shooting" and often used the word "tragedy" or the date when speaking about May 18, 2018.

Once I understood how participants defined tragedy, I asked, "How does tragedy impact a whole community?" Most participants looked at me blankly and stated, "How does it not?" Ruth noted how this traumatic event brought many families together and created lifelong bonds between many community members.

> Many of the families grew closer because they shared that experience. I'm sure with the injured as well and the other students as well, I'm sure, even if they were not physically injured, because this mentally impairs you, and not just you, your entire family. It was like a ripple effect through the whole community.

Most participants related the question to the community's small-town feel and that there are generations of families still living in the area that are connected to someone from the event in one way or another. Richard, a man in his 70s, shared this feeling.

> Well, this trauma impacted everybody because you have those in the school and their families, but especially in a small community like Santa Fe, families are large, and everybody knows somebody that is connected to the school. I actually knew one of the teachers that died, which that was an impact on me, so yeah, it impacts everybody because you know somebody that has been affected.

Vernon specifically touched on how a tragedy like the one Santa Fe experienced impacts a small community.

> Well, the smaller the community, the higher the impact because everyone is connected here, whether you are related to someone or went to school with someone. If you are a larger town, you may have a lot of transient people, but I think with a smaller community, everyone is impacted because you are all connected, especially when it happens at a school, especially a school that people went to, graduated from and had kids there or grandkids there. Then you have volunteer firefighters, police officers, first responders, all who also live in Santa Fe, so there is somebody, some connection.

> Whether it is a spouse or something that works for that school, or a neighbor that goes to the school, everyone knows someone who went to that school or who has a kid that goes to that school. I think everybody in this town knows someone.

Joann, a stay-at-home mom, mentioned that sometimes, it impacts you because there are people you see every day that were affected by the tragedy that you may not have realized.

> Everybody knows somebody that was there that day. Or you may or may not have known someone, but everybody was affected in some way, the students that were there, you may not have known them before, but they work at the grocery store and after you're checking out and a balloon pops and they drop to the ground. It's things like that. You don't perceive that coming; the effects on everyone are everlasting, it feels like.

For some, they mentioned they could feel the trauma "in the air," "feel the sadness," and "could not escape it." Katie said, "Everything got really weird; I don't know if it was fear or if people got scared. But the energy in town is different, still is." Alexis, a local teen, shared in the statement that things are still different, stating that "I just [have] noticed everything looked a lot grayer, and everything still looks like that shade of gray to this day."

Claire, a mental health professional who came to Santa Fe to assist after the tragedy, also said she could feel the sadness in the air, almost from the moment she crossed the city lines.

> It's in the air almost; you can't escape. I mean, for how long was it before you could drive through town and not see the ribbons? I mean, I don't live in town but just driving in and crossing the town lines. You know you are now in this community that is suffering, and you can feel it and see it.

Gary, a first responder, told me that even when you leave Santa Fe and try to escape it, you cannot. He commented, "I mean, I could have gone anywhere for like a year and said I was from Santa Fe, and I would kind of get that look. [pause] I knew what they were thinking, and most of the time, they said it. But I knew they were thinking; you were from that community where the shooting was." So, I turned back to Claire to get some additional insight into what community trauma looks like from a psychology standpoint. She explained,

> Well, it's infectious. Emotions, like grief and trauma, just like joy and happiness, are

> infectious. We are made as social beings to connect to other people, and in those connections, we pick up on those emotions. If you think about it like a sub-conscience thing or because we pick it up in the language we use. What we say is going to influence us. You know, it's really hard to walk around and be happy when everyone around you is grieving, so how wouldn't it spread through a community?

Tyler, a young man in his 30s, expressed a very similar sentiment as Clarie. He stated,

> Well, we're humans, and we are affected by our environment and the people we hang out with and our culture. All of those things have an influence on us, and because those do have an influence on us, it also has that impact on how we see ourselves and how we feel. You know, we are human, we aren't inevitable, we have feelings. As much as we don't want to admit it, I think that this tragedy has affected us all and collectively changed us all in some way.

With the historical trauma, collective trauma, and the trauma living in the air, as several participants suggested, it was easy to understand how the tragedy was impacting the community collectively. However, for many participants, I noticed their individual emotional well-being still seemed at-risk.

4.1.3 Individual Well-being

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, I took great care to frame questions that did not ask participants to relive May 18, 2018, specifically. Questions were asked about the community's past culture, the response to the event, and the recovery efforts the individual witnessed. However, when trauma such as a mass school shooting occurs, it can deeply impact individuals' sense of emotional well-being. Often questions, that I sometimes did not expect to have strong emotions attached to them brought forth a wave of emotion from the participant.

With one participant, Barbara, I asked about community events after the tragedy and if there was a specific event she had attended that had the greatest impact on her. She works at a local church but did not mention a community event in the way I thought when I framed the question; instead, she said this:

> I went to one of the victim's services, which was held here [at my church]. That was

> about it. It was very emotional for me. A lot of Sundays, even probably a couple of months after the service, when anybody would bring up the shooting, I would get very emotional. And nobody was talking about it in-depth, just maybe a prayer request would come across, and that was surprising for me.

As we continued to talk, her voice cracked, and I could tell she was becoming emotional. I asked if she needed a break, but she just shook her head. Of the 32 interview participants I spoke with, 22 needed a moment to recover themselves or became emotional during the interview. Female participants appeared to become more emotional during the interviews; however, several men also became emotional. For example, when I spoke with a local pastor on how the faith-based organizations assisted the community after the tragedy, he began to respond, then took a long pause and began to tear up. He commented:

> Wow, this is a lot more emotional than I thought it was going to be. That was just weird; I just got... I just don't really think about all of those things at the same time. Um, wow, I wasn't expecting that. (Scott)

Participants in their late 30s to 50s appeared to become the most emotionally upset when interviewing. When looking back, most of these respondents appeared to be parents of teenagers or community members who may be suffering from vicarious trauma due to repeated empathic engagement with others in the community, such as local clergy, mental health professionals, or first responders.

Other participants, like Rose, whose children were highly affected by the tragedy, face continued emotional distress from the tragedy. During her interview, I asked about the first few days after the tragedy, and she mentioned how her emotional well-being has changed and how that is impacting her and her children's interactions with life.

> It was a dark time in our household. While everyone has started to move past it, we've all drastically changed. And well, all I still think about every single day is losing my kids. I constantly worry about it; it keeps me up at night, gives me panic attacks, and my every choice in life and what I let my kids do now revolves around it.

She went on to tell me a little later that "it is hard to be around people and pretend to be happy. Plus, sometimes, I think if I tell people how afraid I am for my children's lives, people will make fun of me – even people in my own community."

For the most part, outwardly, Santa Fe has started to move on, and those that were highly impacted or continue to suffer like Rose feel excluded or forgotten. However, most participants I spoke with, even two years after the tragedy, shared similar sentiments of extreme grief and fear. I believe these feelings may have impacted the way each person has interacted with one another and how they perceived their community culture, the response after the tragedy, and efforts towards resiliency.

4.1.4 Community Culture

Many of the interview and survey participants noted that past and present trauma has contributed to the community's culture. For example, when I asked Joann, a stay-at-home mom, to describe the culture of Santa Fe, she said, "I would describe it as a close-knit community that supports one another in crisis." School employee Meredith called Santa Fe a "village" others used the word "tribe" as a play on Santa Fe's school mascot, the Indian. Meredith shared:

> We are all very close. Everybody knows everybody and in a way that when somebody hurts, somebody else hurts with them, together. And just everyone comes in and helps each other. We like to call it a village, a village for sure; no one can do it by themselves. There is always somebody, especially for our kids; there is always someone who is going to pick them up or help. You know this is especially true with my kids.

A survey participant divulged in his survey that his family member was injured in the shooting, and since the tragedy, he has seen a "caring and compassionate culture" emerge from Santa Fe. He went on to share:

> The community overall has a good heart and cares about what happened here and about the Victims; there was a huge outpouring of LOVE from so many, and I would like to thank everyone from the bottom of mine and my family's hearts.

Others mentioned how the "caring" community culture is changing, especially as the town grows and new people move in. Joyce elaborated,

> For the most part, I think it is a caring culture. It's a tight-knit community, maybe not as tight-knit in these later years. Because I've been here since 1979, so that's 49 years, and it doesn't seem as tight-knit because the community has expanded. There are more people that live here but still, for the most part, a tight-knit community.

A gentleman who has lived in Santa Fe his whole life also mentioned the changing culture, especially related to socioeconomics:

> It has a blue-collar culture mostly, but that has been changing. There are a lot of people moving in here wanting to get away from Houston and other nearby cities. These people are wanting to come to a more rural area, and when those people are doing that, they're bringing some professionals. You still have your low income; I mean, you still have your extremely low income that is in Santa Fe. The sad thing about it is those guys kind of get weeded out, for lack of better terms, because as taxes go up and they can't afford to live here. (Paul)

He stated the difficulties some families and individuals face with rising costs, such as not being able to afford to live in Santa Fe. During my documentary research with one of the churches that provide 125 elementary students with food for the weekends, I learned that 42% of students are considered disadvantaged and are on the free and reduced lunch program at the school. Therefore, added food insecurity for many students and families, in addition to worrying if they can afford to keep their homes, are additional stressors while already living in a trauma-affected community.

Some participants noted the community is growing, like Paul, but many still called the community a "small-town." Of the 100 respondents (68 survey takers and 32 interviewees), 20 mentioned that Santa Fe has a "small-town culture." In addition to this, several participants complained that "there is nothing to do in Santa Fe," that "many buildings are empty," or that Santa Fe has "too many donut shops and nail salons." One survey participant mentioned that "the kids are growing up different and they will leave [Santa Fe] for inner cities because there is

nothing to keep them in Santa Fe; the next five years will tell the tale."

Jackie, who has lived in Santa Fe for nearly a decade, mentioned she feels the town has a "cliquish" and "close-minded" culture, "which makes it hard for people to want to stay." Gloria, who grew up in Santa Fe, disclosed that she feels the small-town culture is not inclusive and has gotten worse since the tragedy.

> It's very small-town kind of cliquish. I don't think it's very inclusive. I think it's more of if you grew up here and you have family here; you almost have an automatic pass. Otherwise, you have to work for it. And this probably got worse after the shooting.

When chatting with Margaret, a woman in her 60s, about the community culture, she noted, "we may not want to accept it, but the community has changed. I think the realization is, and that's hard to accept, is that the normal is gone, whatever the normal was it's gone." After speaking with several participants, and as someone who has grown up in Santa Fe, I can somewhat agree with Margaret that the community culture has changed or that parts of it have changed. There are still many people in Santa Fe who believe every individual bleed green and gold, but mass tragedies have a way of changing the cultural landscape. Specifically in Santa Fe, the tragedy broke the illusion of an all-homogenous united community.

To further complicate Santa Fe's ability to build resiliency, historical racism in the community has led to less diversity in adult leadership. The lack of diversity in leadership created an illusion that everyone in Santa Fe held similar values and beliefs. When all 13 elected officials are male, all but one is white, all are Christian, and nearly all graduated from Santa Fe High School, you begin to have a homogenous narrative of the community portrayed that may not accurately represent the people that live within the boundaries. While Santa Fe has had female elected officials in the past, the community has never had a female Mayor, nor has it had a Black or openly non-Christian elected official.

In summary, Santa Fe has seen a lot of historical trauma; it is hard to become resilient when you have compound trauma[21] on compound trauma.

4.2 Community Response

Response to trauma looks different for many people. Frequently, communities, organizations and governmental entities are part of the response. These responses can be anywhere from a community coming together to share a meal to policy change at the national level. Some responses are positive and help individuals on the road to recovery; however, sometimes, a response can be perceived as a barrier to one's healing.

4.2.1 Community Fellowship[22] Perception

Following the tragedy, there were many responses from the community. Some were mentioned earlier, such as the green and gold ribbons, murals, and memorials. However, one of the most talked-about community responses that many individuals perceived as assisting in the community's recovery was just general neighborhood fellowship. A month after the tragedy, a local woman started pulling together resources to put on a free quarterly potluck lunch in town. While everyone was asked to bring something if they could, the main dish was routinely donated by a local business. Other area businesses provided drinks, and some local organizations would come with games for the kids.

The first potluck was held in September 2018 and went quarterly until the pandemic made the gathering of large numbers impossible. When doing this study, 27 respondents[23]

[21] Compound trauma, is the build-up of multiple traumas in a person's life.

[22] I use the term "fellowship" here in the non-religious form; however, throughout this section fellowship meanings: companionship, company; community togetherness. Sometimes this happens in a religious format and sometimes religion is not relevant.

[23] This includes all 32 interview participants and all 68 survey participants.

specifically spoke about the potlucks and how coming together for nothing else but companionship and food were very good for the community's morale (see Fig. 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Residents Attending the Santa Fe Community Potluck

A staff member from Santa Fe High School who mentioned she had been diagnosed with PTSD, brought up the potluck lunches several times throughout her interview. She said it is "sad that the pandemic has stopped them" because she believes "they helped the community."

> The most impactful were the ones where we got together and had people bring food, and I was actually meeting people that I didn't even know lived in this community. And meeting new people [that] was a great impact on me, and I think that helped people feel like they could get out and talk to people about what happened. (Helen)

Speaking with a mother whose child was highly impacted by the tragedy, I asked what she believed was helpful to the community's recovery, and she also mentioned the potlucks. She claimed, "Even when they started the community dinners and potlucks to get the community together, that was good for people to come together and support each other."

A survey participant whose child was in the art room the day of the shooting said that an event put together by a non-profit from a neighboring town, Chef's Table Charities, held at Gulf Greyhound Dog Track, that was specifically for the students at Santa Fe High School and their families, was particularly impactful for her family. The survey participant went on to state, "The

one at the dog track impacted us the most because my son wanted to see his friends. He didn't know which ones were still alive. He had been stuck in a closet, and he did not have his phone anymore." Another survey participant also mentioned this event as one of the most impactful events for the community but noted how they liked that the media was not allowed to attend, so that the event stayed private for the students and their families, and that the event was filled with "Free food. Fellowship. Friendship. Love!"

Some survey participants brought up a community kickball tournament created by a teacher at Santa Fe High School to allow students a place to go on the first anniversary instead of sitting at home reliving the tragedy. The event quickly took off, and other staff members joined, and the group soon turned it into an event under its own non-profit, It Takes a Tribe. One survey participant wrote, "One of the most important events for our community was the It Takes a Tribe Kickball Tournament. This event was a way of making sure there was a day we could all be together for support, fun, fellowship, and family." Another survey participant mentioned how any event for the community to come together that was free was impactful for them:

> Anything that brought us closer together helping each other without worrying about how much it cost / who it was for or how we felt about any one event or circumstance - simply the fact that people were hurting and needing help and that we could be together and share in that time.

This comment reiterates the socioeconomic imbalance in Santa Fe and how important it was to have community events that allowed everyone, regardless of the cost, to attend and share in their community's companionship. Like 15 other participants, Meredith mentioned "food" and "together" when asked about the community's response to the tragedy.

> There was an event that was created by one of the alumni classes that were at Jack Brooks Park, that was really neat. And it was meant to just bring all ages together. They had food, things for kids, and there was even a band there. Even if you weren't able to stay too long but just showed up to be there for a little bit and see everyone, that was

> great. And then everyone had shirts to show their green and gold pride. I really liked that event for our community.

Vernon expressed that not only "coming together" after the tragedy helped but mentioned when the town went "green and gold" with all the "ribbons" that were "put up within 24-hours" "helped a lot" because he believed it "showed the families and the students that the community cares about them." Richard, a man in his 70s, noted there were a lot of "public gatherings and prayer services." He also brought up the "bows and ribbons that were placed all over the city, that painted the town in green and gold," and "of course, then Santa Fe Strong came out.

Figure 4.2: **Welcome to Santa Fe Sign with "Santa Fe Strong" on back and Santa Fe High School painted with "Santa Fe Strong" in Green and Gold**

The capitalized word "Strong" following the city name has been used after many tragedies. However, I was interested in how people in Santa Fe felt about this phrase and specifically what it meant to them. I asked Alice, a high school teacher, what "Santa Fe Strong" meant to her. She responded,

> It really doesn't mean anything to me. I just feel like words are so cheap. But from the family's standpoint, it was important to have that symbol; it was important at the

> beginning for the community to have that symbol. And it was important for the families that the community show their support, and this was a visible way to show those families that support by having those bracelets and those ribbons.
>
> But there comes the point in time when words don't mean anything, and it just becomes another event that goes into history and gets recorded in the annuals somewhere, with no consequential decisions coming out of that, and I think that is where we are now. When you see that the result, the only visible result, is to arm teachers and nothing else, and no bigger discussion on how do we prevent this from happening again other than more guns... I don't know.

Sally shared the difference between hearing the word "Strong" concerning a disaster and in relation to the tragedy.

> I think of people helping each other, Texas pride, digging in your heels, and making the best of your situation. But when I see or hear #SantaFeStrong, I get a sick feeling in my stomach and a sadness in my heart. I know we all came together that day and the weeks following, but my heart still hurts [two years later] for the students, parents, and staff at Santa Fe.

I spoke with several of the students that said the phrase "means nothing" to them and that they "don't like it." One mother who has pulled her child out of Santa Fe ISD since the shooting shared via the survey, "I don't like the 'Santa Fe Strong' saying. I don't like all the green and gold or all references to the Indian either. It is like everything is tied back to the school, but I feel like they failed my kid that day."

It seems there is a divide between those who were more impacted by the shooting and those distantly impacted. Those directly impacted, those with loss, who were a student or teacher at Santa Fe, or those who have a child that was impacted, were more likely to be disconnected from the phrase Santa Fe Strong. In contrast, those who were distantly connected to the tragedy though living in the community, felt more symbolically attached to the phrase[24].

[24] Due to Santa Fe's relatively small population, I opted to not be more explicit with identifying attributes, in an effort to further protect the identity of the participants.

4.2.2 Perception of Santa Fe ISD's Response

Of the 100 participants, 68% mentioned the school district in their interview or survey, even though the school district was not directly brought up in any questions. Most of these comments came in the form of deep-seated emotions towards Santa Fe ISD's response or lack of response as many participants viewed it. Even two years after the tragedy, participants still used strong emotional language to signify how they perceived Santa Fe ISD did not help the community heal from the tragedy. For example:

- From my perspective, it is hard to see where responsibility has been taken up from the school for the situation and for healing.
- Many of our school leaders did not sympathize or help in caring ways-they just wanted to forget and move on.
- Santa Fe ISD did more wrong than right. The school district did not allow for proper healing.
- SFISD has caused so much anger and hatred towards them that it will never go away. No one knows the best way to handle this kind of tragedy, but this is a great example of how not to handle it.
- The school was horrible; they never NEVER called or tried to check on my son. He was almost murdered, and the only ones from the school that I feel cared for him were a couple of his teachers and his counselor.

A survey participant who identified as a teacher at Santa Fe High School also expressed that the "lack of response" from the school district led her to have an emotional breakdown.

> I think the school could have helped during the [20]18- [20]19 school year by having subs [-titute teachers] ready for when a teacher was having a breakdown. There were many times that I would be triggered by a door slam down the hallway, a surprise knock at the door, a book landing loudly on a table...I ended up having to have a breakdown in front of my students.

Some participants argued that they believe the school district did the best they could or that "they are damned if they do and damned if they don't."

> I felt bad because no matter what the school officials did, it wasn't good enough for

> anyone and some people criticized the school way beyond what they were even responsible for governing.

I spoke with a mental health professional who assisted Santa Fe after the tragedy, who mentioned, "I know the school got funding to hire additional support [counselors] and Texas Children's [Hospital Trauma and Grief Unit] was able to come down and provide support in the schools. I think that was helpful for some individuals." One of the students that sat down with me also believed the school tried to help, stating, "I think that the school kind of tried, they did the therapy dogs for a week whenever students went back, and they had the extra counselors." However, other participants were quick to point out that even the school's help, like the counselors' location, created extreme barriers for some. For instance, one person explained,

> The school had grief counselors and comfort dogs that went a long way to bridge the gap for my kids to feel comfortable walking back into school. What was done wrong is no admission of responsibility by the school superintendent or board. No public apology by them. Two years later and still no memorial, and the counseling hallway is down the hall where the shooting took place, which is completely insensitive. The school started back with so many new rules and restrictions that the kids who were heroes for willing to walk back into that building and attempt to finish their education were treated like criminals. Not because of the extra metal detectors or extra police on hand, but the attitude of those in authoritative positions. They were not greeted happily every morning but rather assessed as if they were the criminal and judged. So much that I feel has gone wrong is all ties to the school, the school board, and the superintendent.

Although the school is often one of the first places people turn to for a response after a mass school shooting, oftentimes, the next place people look to is their politicians.

4.2.3 Perception of the Politicization

Politicization of a disaster or mass tragedy is not uncommon. Knoll stated that politicians often try to oversimplify mass shootings and rarely is there a productive solution to come from the tragedy (2016). Furthermore, a political entity often uses the event to further a political agenda or just do their ritualistic political duty to meet with the families, take photos, and leave. Some felt that a few local elected officials did not meet this stereotype in the early days. Several

participants mentioned that the City of Santa Fe seemed eager to assist the community in any way they could. Others noted that "the Mayor had just been elected right before the shooting, yet he was heavily involved from day one." John said, "the Mayor, I saw that guy at everything, like everything, everywhere I turned, the guy was there." Gloria mentioned that every event she went to, she saw representation from the City of Santa Fe. Margaret, however, acknowledged that somewhere down the line, she saw a change.

> There was a lot of enthusiasm from the Mayor and deep-seated passion to help his community; there really was, in the beginning. He knew his community was hurting, and I think he was close to a lot of the people that had a personal loss. He took on a lot of responsibility even before he was officially installed into office because it was during that transition period. I do believe that everything he said at the start, he meant from the bottom of his heart. Somewhere down the line and the next two and half years, he realized it was hard. There were a lot of agencies that had to come together to work together. He didn't have the experience to lead that, and the advice he was getting from the different agencies didn't equal the plan he wanted. You know, his goal was to show the world that Santa Fe could pull their community back together stronger and better than it was before this tragedy happened. This, "we're going to create a new model to do that, and we were going to show them how it worked." And I basically agree with that; I thought that is what this community could do. I mean, I can't answer what happened because I'm not him. But I can tell you that the leadership fell down; what I watched was hard. It would have needed somebody with a lot more experience dealing with a multifaceted operation. The Mayor does not have that experience; he may think he did, but this is people's kids and emotions, and passions and people were hurting, and the expectations were all over the place.

Overall, the major response that participants acknowledged from the City of Santa Fe was the Resiliency Center's opening (addressed later in this chapter). However, like Joyce, some participants felt that a few of the local elected officials used the tragedy to move a political agenda, something seen in many other areas. Joyce stated:

> Even in Santa Fe, I think some of the people that served on the committees were doing so for their own political agenda, and I think they were looking out for what was best for them. That is all the way from the Santa Fe level and up. And I think all those that flew in and did their "photo opp" and then flew back to their safe world and didn't make any changes in gun control or laws... I think it was just a photo opt. I don't think they care; I think we were very let down by that. It should have prompted change, and here we are,

> two and half years [later], and there is still no change. So, it is very likely that the same thing will happen again tomorrow.

Of course, with a mass school shooting, it is not only local politicians but also state and federal politicians who politicize a tragedy. A survey participant shared, "When the President came to meet with us, I knew it was just for show. He didn't even want to interact with the kids. He was horrible."

It is also important to note that my research was also conducted during a presidential election year when American political beliefs were divided and tensions were high. However, several participants mentioned how these national politics created barriers within the community of Santa Fe, making some members feel excluded when they felt their neighbors and friends should have been more loving and supportive towards one another. Interview participant Alice expressed, "I do think the current political climate has changed some of the landscape of Santa Fe. So that the friendly stuff is on the surface but not necessarily deep down." When asked to explain the second portion of that comment further, she responded, "Well, people act nice, but then you learn that some people don't feel that way deep down, makes it hard to stay connected to some people."

Along with Alice, other participants expressed an increase of partisanship in the community, and 20% of the survey and interview respondents directly used the word "conservative" when describing the culture of Santa Fe. Rose, whose child was highly impacted in the tragedy, revealed, "We don't think like a lot of the town, politically, and this has made us feel so alone like we have no one to turn to." When I asked what she meant by "she doesn't think like a lot of the town," she explained, "Well, I guess, to put it bluntly, most of the town supports Trump, and I do not."

When driving around Santa Fe, collecting observational notes, I noticed nearly 35% of

homes had a Trump flag out front, and another 30% had Republican signs in their yards. Out of the hundreds of streets I drove down; I only came across four homes with a Democrat sign in the yard. Ruth, a soft-spoken woman, who asked to meet me at her church, also brought up politics when I asked her about Santa Fe's culture. She commented, "I don't know; currently, the culture seems to be disruptive, I guess by politics. I think, more than ever before, and it may be that it's always been that way, but it's kind of been an eye-opener for me lately."

The mixing of politics and religion seemed to be a barrier for several participants that was mentioned a number of times. When conversing with Jane, a Santa Fe Catholic resident, I asked her if she had seen any forms of exclusion since the tragedy. She reiterated the sentiments about politics and mentioned how politicized her own church has gotten, stating:

> Absolutely!! This whole political climate. I have even questioned my own religion. For those who are not of the same political orientation... With Santa Fe being ultra-conservative, ultra-right, the church, the church I belong to, tends to be ultra-conservative as well. There is a lot of patriarchy, male privilege... I think in the extremes, it pushes people away. Unless they are like-minded, that is.

During my drive around Santa Fe, I came across a sign [see Fig. 4.3] outside of one of the local churches that illustrated what Jane mentioned about the overlap of politics and religion in Santa Fe. Interview participant Katie mentioned that this specific sign made her and her family "uncomfortable" when I asked if she has noticed any forms of religion and politics overlapping in Santa Fe. She elaborated, "We have a lot of discussions every time we drive by it. Because I could be wrong, but I thought that there was supposed to be a division of church and state. Between church and government. I don't know what I thought that meant growing up, but I don't see it now." Other participants also brought this up; one young man mentioned, "I guess I don't really know what separation of church and state means because they don't separate nothing in Santa Fe."

Figure 4.3: **Political Sign at Calvary Crossroad Church in Santa Fe**

Alice, a teacher at Santa Fe High School, expressed concern that due to the right-wing orientation of the churches, she fears that the community was impeding activism from students who may have needed that as part of their healing process.

> I think we impede kids from becoming community activists here. One of my students, the night of her graduation, received a death threat because she was not on the same side as some people in the community. And I don't know if it was the church or the community, but I don't think that the church helped because the churches are such a big part of the community. So, I feel like we allowed the political divide to... Well, we didn't try to heal that political divide; we didn't try to cross those lines and say this is not about politics. So, I really felt bad for these kids that were trying to make a difference, and their hearts were in the right place, but because our community is so conservative, I don't feel like people like these kids got the support and help they needed to heal, and I think that the churches could have really helped with this.

Alexis, a local teen, mentioned, "people [are] blaming it all on their belief systems, and I'm like dude, you don't have to be so toxic," in response to how religion and politics impede healing. Several participants felt this overlap of politics and religion made them feel excluded, not only from their community but also from their church. Some mentioned that they had "hopes this would pass once the election was over," and others worried that this might be the "new standard"

for a while. In response to a question about religion and politics, several survey members brought up the overlap or feeling that the local government pushes religion. For instance,

- Maybe if our local leaders didn't push religion so much, then the churches wouldn't push politics.
- I don't know; I just feel like I see a lot of the local pastors at and well invited to city governmental functions by elected officials. It almost feels like the city is pushing Christian beliefs.
- Not that I see an issue with it, but I see Pastors in/near Santa Fe on a lot of the city boards or other stuff like the city's chamber.

I sat down with an elected official and asked their views on religion and politics; I specifically was curious about their thoughts on prayer before government meetings, such as city council and school board meetings in Santa Fe. They explained,

> I think it's fine. Actually, I think it's great; we have a majority of Christian-based people here, and those that don't want to participate, they can say they don't want to participate now. But we fought the supreme court, we lost, but we fought for prayer in school here. That's kind of one of those Santa Fe things that should tell you a lot about our community that we fight to have prayer in school.

A few participants brought up the Supreme Court case[25]. However, like the individual above, those who brought up the case perceived it as the community of Santa Fe fighting to keep religion in the schools. However, the case was largely established because a few individuals felt excluded and felt a state establishment was forcing a specific religion.

Unfortunately, one of the more politicized maneuvers taking place in the 21st century is exploiting religion by offering "thoughts and prayers" after a mass tragedy, from the national level down to the local level[26]. For example, politicians in the United States often post on social

[25] See Chapter 1 for more information

[26] "Thoughts and prayers" was very common in Santa Fe, however, I have seen this phrase shared by politicians after other mass shootings or violent acts, such as when a young black man is shot by the police, via their social media accounts or on the news.

media that their thoughts and prayers are with the traumatized community. However, when it comes time enact policies to prevent mass tragedy, those same politicians often take no stance.

Figure 4.4: **Santa Fe Business Signs Displaying "Pray for Santa Fe"**

Locally, "Pray for Santa Fe" was seen everywhere, from businesses in town that had the phrase on signs to the viral social media postings. Similarly, to the metaphoric language used with "Santa Fe Strong," I wanted to understand how participants felt about "thoughts and prayers," and many participants brought up that it seems to be an "automatic and meaningless" phrase from politicians following a tragedy. Interview participant Numa explained this best:

> Right after every mass shooting, you do see a huge emphasis, and I'm talking categorically of people who are elected for their policy ideas, but right after a mass shooting, you have these people who are elected, to the highest offices of the nation, really trying to emphasize the point that their "thoughts and prayers are with the families." It's just so reoccurring that it loses meaning at a certain point. And as someone who is a victim of this tragedy, I was really struggling with the validity of these organizations' religiosity with politics. I was really desperate for some really tangible policy opportunities. Things that could actually save lives. But when I hear leaders repeat this one-liner again, and again, and again, to the point where it loses its meaning. It would be so devasting that you would, on the receiving end would feel like you have absolutely nowhere to go. So, when someone in those offices would decide to exploit religion, how do you navigate that because religion is that absolute institution, that for so many around the world, is unquestionable. So, you could basically be just saying anything, doing anything under the ambulant of religion; you could literally be exploiting religion. I'm kind of struggling to frame it correctly, but I think it is a very precarious road when religion and politics overlap and especially when it overlaps in the hands of individuals that are there to exploit that relationship.

Several participants mentioned they feel that politicians often use religion to justify their politics and how they vote on public matters. Gary shared:

> I did have contact with an elected official, I won't tell you their name, but they did tell me that their plan was to look for how to vote in the Bible. And I actually asked him, I said, "what if it's not there, you know?" and they said, "well, it is, I just have to find it." Talking to that person, I shook my head and said I appreciate your faith, but I didn't feel like their faith should drive their public service.

In summary, after a mass tragedy, the responses seen are far and wide, just as are the perceptions by the respondents. Many of the participants in Santa Fe felt connected to the symbolic and ritualistic events the community did, like tying green and gold ribbons around trees or the social sharing of food and company with the community potlucks. However, many others that were closely connected to the tragedy felt nothing towards the metaphoric phrase "Santa Fe Strong," and those that blame the school were less connected to symbols that involved the school's Indian mascot.

Others talked about the divide between their political beliefs and that of the communities and how the community's conservative politics have made their way into the churches. Thus, making individuals feel isolated for their minority opinions in politics, now not only in their community but also in their churches and during the times they need their church the most as they are still trying to heal.

4.3 Religious Response

As noted in the methodology section, Santa Fe has a large faith-based community, with 78% of the 100 participants (survey and interview) self-identifying as Christian. Furthermore, within the community of Santa Fe, there are 21 Christian churches. This meant that a large amount of the responses following the tragedy were conducted in a Christian nature.

4.3.1 Prayer

However, some participants noted that some responses could sometimes come from religious leaders who do not know how to handle the trauma and therefore used what they knew, religion.

> I really feel like the church does not know how to handle trauma. They say things like, "I'll pray for you" because they don't know how to deal with it, and they don't want to deal with it because it makes them feel uncomfortable. Ugh, the worst thing someone can tell me is, "I'll pray for you." (Tyler)

Alexis, a teen who mentioned losing close friends in the shooting, said, "All they would say is 'thoughts and prayers,' and yes, thoughts and prayers are nice, but personally, I don't really think it helped. To me, people would be saying, 'I'm praying for you,' and all it did was make me more depressed." Gloria, whose child was severely impacted in the tragedy and had marked cases of people telling their child she would be better if she gave it to God, shared:

> I think that depending on a religion's beliefs, I think that could impede or limit someone's healing because you hear frequently you have to let it go, give it to God and sometimes that is not enough. And sometimes that seems to be the only answer for some people, if your faith is stronger, you'd do better, and that is not true.

John, a self-identified Catholic who has traveled to several towns to assist after tragedies, stated he had seen the "Give it to God" response all over the nation.

> You know, look, I believe in God, and for me, I feel as though God wants me to do the work I do. But yes, there are some faiths, and I don't like their phrase, "Just give it to God," because that is not going to help you. We've all been born with the ability to do just about anything, and the ability to get through some sort of PTSD or some sort of hurricane, faith along with other things combined, is what will get you through. But your faith alone is just not going to get you through something like a mass shooting.

I sat down with Jackie, a victim from the shooting, who shared she has struggled with trying to process and understand everything that has happened, but that the "religious narrative" has not helped her heal.

> Well, those words are very overused words. I've gotten resentful of them, actually. I even

> have a hard time considering myself a Christian. I have a hard time with everything that happens and thinking that it was "God's plan" that gets really, really upset. It's very, very hard to grasp all that. I think there needs to be something else, more tangible. A way to reach out to people. But that stuff, just give it to Jesus; I don't even know how to do that. I mean, I don't even know how many bibles people gave me. It was very kind, but... If you are too deep in [your] trauma, someone can't give you a simple answer like you lost your job or something... [shakes head in disbelief]

One of the participants who self-identified as Muslim and shared that these types of religious sentiments are not just a Christian stance but also part of the Islamic faith as well:

> To my surprise, I thought this was just an element of the Islamic faith, but I also saw that come across from the Christian folks that I talked with, in the aftermath of a tragedy, especially in a tragedy that involves human life and not a natural disaster, something like a shooting. I've seen a lot of religious folks across the board put in a huge amount of emphasis on God's will. So, they would frame it and say, that was God's will, and maybe it was their time to go and stuff like that. For me, I can acknowledge the significance of "thoughts and prayers," but I also want to move beyond that to actually getting down to promising change. I think that "thoughts and prayers" should have something tangible behind it as well. So, I think that perhaps that would be the only instance where I have seen lots of religious folks and maybe a disproportionate amount of emphasis. I essentially know they are coming from a good place which makes me feel better about the whole thing. But they are putting an emphasis on the eventuality it like it was meant to happen, it was God's will and really discrediting that a lot of human inventions could prevent a lot of wrong and that is very important. (Numa)

In summary, many participants felt that the use of phrases such as "my thoughts and prayers are with you," "give it to God," "it was God's will," "it was their time," "it's part of God's plan," "God just needed another angel," and more, discredits the real emotions people are going through after such a horrific tragedy. Some individuals noted that they felt these words were offered with good intention, but many more said these phrases caused them to feel "alone," "sad," or even "angry with God." Of the 32 interview participants, all but three said that the phrase "thoughts and prayers" does not hold any value to them, and 68% of survey takers implied the use of religious language and phrases that were harmful to their mental health.

4.3.2 Rituals

Rituals are important to religion and are often used in tragedy response, such as

candlelight vigils and funerals. For many people, these rituals can be very comforting. Yet, when dealing with a diverse crowd, even if only slightly diverse in religious identity, these rituals can make some feel excluded.

One instance that seemed to emerge was surrounding the one-year remembrance event and the candlelight vigil that seemingly turned into a sermon by a group of local pastors. Every interview participant who attended that event seemed to get angry or rolled their eyes when the one-year remembrance event was brought up, regardless of their religious self-identification. Several participants agreed that the activities throughout the day were great but often said that the ceremony in the evening "did little to help heal their heart," and they left feeling "disappointed." Others noted that "it went too long" and "felt more like a saving ceremony than a remembrance about the victims." Interview participant Tyler stated one of the biggest reasons he wanted to do the interview is because he wanted to share his thoughts on the event held in remembrance in 2019. He explained:

> This is the whole reason why I wanted to do this interview. Because you know, shame on those spiritual leaders. They are spiritual leaders; they are supposed to be able to deal with other people's trauma. I mean to just go up there and preach a sermon and check it off your list and totally abandon and neglect your sheep. I just feel like, man, there is this quote I love, "the easiest sin is to do the right thing for the wrong reason," and I feel like they tried to do the right thing by making this about God, and I do feel like God is the right thing, but I feel like they did it for the wrong reasons. I feel like they did it because they didn't know how to deal with this. So, let's just bring Jesus into it. And what they did that day was so selfish, and it makes me so angry, and I get teared up just thinking about it; how they turned this whole thing into a church service. And like I said before, they did it because they didn't know how to deal with it. I wish they would have had some people brought in, more people that knew how to deal with this situation, like even a behavioral pastor or people that have dealt with this before. Because for that one-year memorial, they needed help with that, they missed the mark completely.

I asked Mike, who is not from Santa Fe but was in attendance for this event, his thoughts. He responded,

> Well... [laughs] I mean, look, I thought it was ok. I think it could have been more about

> the kids and teachers and not so much about the establishment that led the event. Because I felt it was more about their group than it was about the, I hate calling them victims, but more about the angels that were taken. I think it was more about the, I guess it was a Baptist Church that ran it, I'm not sure, but I felt it was more about them and not so much the other way.

When I spoke with some of the pastors about the event, one pastor mentioned in their interview that "because the churches controlled and steered the narrative in Santa Fe, the community was able to heal faster." Another pastor said, "the fact that the faith community was able to redirect the narrative in Santa Fe is one of the reasons our community did so well."

While the candlelight vigil held on the one-year remembrance was not talked about fondly, on the flip side, 23 people (out of all the survey and interview participants) mentioned the candlelight vigil held the night of the tragedy as having the most impact on them or their family. Participants spoke about lighting the candles, holding hands, and praying, all as part of a religious response ritual to help heal after an unspeakable tragedy. A teen who participated in the digital survey said, "the candlelight service made the most impact because it helped me let go." Another survey participant shared:

> The vigil held the night of May 18th was the most impactful for me because of the raw emotions and how everyone came together at once to show support. There were smiles and tears all the way around. Seeing the students smile when they saw their friends (realizing their friend was okay) or running to their friends to hug them was very touching. Communication was sketching that day, and some students had to leave their phones behind in the school, so some students hadn't heard from their friends until at the vigil.

Emma, who is in college now, but was a student during the shooting, reflected on the first candlelight vigil. She commented, "I think the thing that stood out to me the most or what I remember the most was whenever we did the candles, and we lit candles, and all prayed together. They also had a picture up for each of the victims, and they lit a candle in front of their picture. That was pretty powerful!" Rose, a self-proclaimed agnostic, attended the events as well. She

said she did not go for the religious aspect but more to be with her community. However, she found beauty in the vigil, as well, stating,

> The part I remember the most was the candle lighting. Everyone shared their flame with total strangers to light all the candles, and it gave me goosebumps. I remember a kid turning to an elderly woman behind him to help light her candle, and I remember men going around to help others light their candle. I can't really explain it, there was just something beautiful and heavenly about this ritual, and I would not call myself a Christian, but I could see how it helped.

Five participants brought up another religious event that was held five days following the shooting at the Jr. High football stadium, where several area churches brought in a stage and held a massive prayer service. The event was well attended. The stadium was full, people were standing along the fence line for the field, and several brought chairs and sat near the stage in the middle of the field. Blake, a young man who attended this event but also self-identifies as non-Christian, explained his thoughts:

> We did not go to the vigil the night of the shooting; we knew one of the victims. So, I guess we were processing. But yea, we went to that prayer thing. I honestly don't remember any of the religious stuff. I just remember all the people. How sad everyone was. [He looks down and gets quiet]

Ten percent of the participants[27] mentioned the funerals in relation to questions about religious rituals they witnessed. One survey participant said, "I attended several of the individual funerals as a teacher at the High School. I would say there were a lot of ritual practices involved with those to help one process their grief and say goodbye." Claire, a mental health professional, provided her thoughts on religious rituals concerning community healing:

> I think that rituals are really important for the community's healing and bringing people together for a candle lighting and their communal grief. That is helpful. I mean, even experiences like funerals are rituals that are part of our social structure that are important. I think the challenge for communities is that not everybody has the same rituals. And so,

[27] Total includes 8 survey participates and 2 interview participants, which equals 10% of the 100 total participants (68 surveys and 32 interviews)

> having events where there are different traditions included is really important, so that people don't feel left out when there is a community tragedy.

Clarie hinted at something that several participants brought up: not all of the Santa Fe victims, survivors, or community members are Christian. For Numa, a Muslim woman, she said she "really did not get much from Santa Fe." However, she recalled a visit to an Islamic funeral home where one of the victims had been taken to be washed and shrouded after she died:

> So, yeah, a couple of things impacted me. We visited the funeral home where she was given the *ghusl*; it is kind of like a path, a symbolic thing which any Muslim that has passed away is given, where you wash their body. So that process was done at that funeral home. We visited there, and you know, sitting down with the formal person there, we heard numerous stories about Muslims who went there because that was the only place that did that service for Muslims in that area. And we heard stories of individuals passing away and of the families coming to that space, and it was absolutely, for me, it was dark, but I couldn't believe how a place like this, on a very deserted street, in an abandoned place, could hold so much value to the community. And you wouldn't have, I wouldn't have thought that a place like that, that just washes off bodies could hold so much significance, so much symbolism for communities. That was relieving; that was telling for me.

In summary, the vigil on the night of the tragedy seemed to be the most positively talked about the religious event by the participants. However, even so, not a single participant mentioned religion; each mentioned seeing their friends, students, or others in the community, as the reason that made that event impactful. Regardless of how a participant religiously self-identified, they seemed to be upset with the candlelight vigil held for the one-year remembrance. Many individuals felt "let down" and felt that the event should have been more about the ten and less about religion at that point.

4.3.3 Symbols

Symbolic responses to tragedy are common. These can be like the ones the community of Santa Fe utilized with the green and gold ribbons, or it can come in the form of a religious response, such as the Maranatha Church's memorial set-up with the ten crosses. Santa Fe had

several instances of the symbolic Christian response, but I only asked respondents to articulate how they felt about the ten white crosses that went up shortly after the high school's tragedy and about the memorial at Maranatha Church, knowing not all the victims were Christian. I wanted to understand how the community perceived these symbolically Christian responses to the tragedy.

The first set of crosses appeared at Santa Fe High School within four or five days, when Greg Zanis[28] drove down from Illinois, with ten white wooden crosses, each bearing a red heart and a victim's name. These crosses stayed in front of Santa Fe High School for several months until school officials requested that the families come and collect the crosses and all the items that had been left. Whatever was not collected by the families was picked up and taken to the Resiliency Center to be housed until the family was ready to take it home.

For many of the participants, they acknowledged that they "had not stopped to think" that the memorials were the Christian cross and that one (if not more) of the victims was not Christian. Many felt that the "intention" behind the memorials was done with a "good heart." One participant went as far as saying, "Oh! I thought selfishly! I thought this is a place for our community to go, for us to show them we care. But I did not even click that they were all crosses or think about the individual's faith." Jackie, who was injured in the shooting, said, "It was made out of kindness, so I would hope [the families] took it that way as well." However, Katie, an individual who self-identifies with a more pagan "nature-based" spirituality, shared:

> I don't think that it was appropriate at the school. A cross doesn't represent something for everyone. And to make that assumption on the school grounds... I don't know if it was a bad decision, I'm sure it was well-intended, but I don't think that should have been done.

[28] Mr. Zanis has driven across the country and placed similar crosses in numerous locations including Columbine, Colorado; Parkland, Florida; and Las Vegas, Nevada. He mentions in a news report while in Santa Fe, that he has made, "22,569 give or take one or two" since he began this journey in the late 90s.

Several participants said they do not view the cross as a Christian display but rather a symbolic marker of remembrance. I spoke with Leah, a person I knew to be a member of the Maranatha Church, to get her opinions on the memorials. She commented:

> Well, I thought the crosses were great. The guy that did it at the high school does it all over the United States. I think that, in general, people view the crosses, not as a display of their faith per se, but I think they have it as a respect thing. That's how I feel about the high school ones. I don't know if it was a Christian thing as much as it was a remembrance. But at the church, that was a Christian display. And that is something that they wanted to do, that he, the pastor, wanted to do for the community to have a place where they could go and heal and maybe bring them closer to God in that way.

However, after mentioning this, Leah informed me she "no longer attends Maranatha Church" because going to church every Sunday and seeing the memorial was "bringing her too much sadness."

The crosses at Maranatha Church were built and opened on October 20, 2018, as a permanent display for the community when the ones at the high school came down. I asked a local pastor his thoughts of the memorial crosses when not all the victims were Christian. He responded,

> That's an interesting question. I personally appreciated them greatly, and I appreciated the effort and the expense that was incurred so that people would have a place to mourn and process. As far as people, the victims being from diverse backgrounds, I think that the people who presented those did from a pure heart. So, I don't think, in this community, I don't think it was a detriment. (Scott)

When speaking with one of the teens, Blake, they mentioned, "I don't know how I feel about them. I mean, I feel it is rude to not respect [all the victims] beliefs, but I also think it is those people, that religion, showing that they miss them too and well the cross means something to them." College student Emma shared similar perceptions as Blake:

> I think that they show support, I think that even if you aren't Christian. I've never really thought about how some of the victims weren't Christian and how there was a cross for them, but I think that more than anything, it's a showing of unity, and so even if you are of a different faith, Christians will support you.

When I asked Jane about the crosses, a large smile came across her face and she said, "I go by there all the time just to I look at it. I think it is absolutely beautiful." Kathleen shared that her and her daughter "find peace at the crosses" and that they both go and spend time there.

Eleven interviewees mentioned they felt the cross was a sign of remembrance. Ruby, a mother who lost her child in the shooting, mentioned how the cross is used to mark tragedy in the U.S.

> I feel like the cross is a symbol for a lot; even if you don't participate in that religion, I feel like probably 99% of the world knows what a cross is. You know, it's like, well especially, like everyone who has a wreck on the highway, they put a cross out there, to you know, mark where they were. To me, it was, I mean, I don't think it was meant to cause harm.

Twelve interview participants said they believed the church should have consulted with each family first. However, seven felt both memorials were done with good intention. Two participants were upset with the memorial, and one participant said they did not have feelings one way or another.

To get a better understanding of how a non-Christian, who was deeply connected to this tragedy, felt about the memorials, I decided to get Numa, a Muslim woman's perspective. She explained,

> I absolutely, not absolutely like that; I try to avoid words like that. But I loved them. I don't mind that. If you don't take an issue with symbolism, I think I find it a symbol of solidarity. I'll give you a quick example, I was in a Christian church (not in Santa Fe), and we were at this annual get-together where we remember victims of shootings across the country. And we were inside a church, and a bunch of Muslim children was brought in, they were singers, and they were brought in to recite the *Azan*, which is the Islamic call to prayer, and that was incredibly significant and symbolic for me that I could not envision being in that setting, of being in a church and hearing the *Azan*, that the juxtaposition of both of those things was absolutely remarkable to me. So, I do not at all take issue with crosses being there. I think I meant that, as I just see that as perhaps the community in Santa Fe taking ownership of all of the victims' identities, and I don't mind that at all; I see that coming from a very good place.

However, one of the survey participants who identified as Muslim said that the symbolic

planting of an olive tree at the US embassy in Pakistan had more of an impact than the crosses and wished that the Maranatha Church would also plant an olive tree even if behind the cross, as a symbolic connection between the two countries.

Figure 4.5: Santa Fe Ten Memorial at Maranatha Church in Santa Fe

During my observations and drive around Santa Fe, I visited Maranatha Church's memorial. I saw ten white crosses, each bearing a green plaque with the victim's name engraved on the front. The crosses were arranged in a semi-circle and face a small, covered pavilion with several benches for seating. When I arrived, I noticed a few things. First, each cross was representative of ten unique individuals and the love the community and their families have for them. Some of the crosses were decorated for the holiday or the victim's birthday that was approaching; some had what I would presume to be the victims' favorite drink sitting nearby. Others, like the cross representing the foreign exchange student, had a Pakistani flag wrapped around it. The other thing I noticed was that this memorial was directly across from a horse enclosure and smelt strongly of manure when I arrived. It was also near a busy road, and while it was placed as far from the road as possible, I did not feel that I had much privacy while there.

Despite the fact that the location is near the horses, the pastor of the church made the memorial without consulting the families, and that it is a Christian display, the majority of the participants I spoke with were grateful for this memorial in town. Many individuals, regardless of their religious self-identification, explained that it is on church property; therefore, they understand the religious connection and that the memorial has either helped them with their healing or has helped someone they personally know.

4.4 Road to Resiliency

Following a tragedy's response, the individual and the community start to look for ways to recover and build resiliency. In this section, I discuss how participants define the temporal terms of "response," "recovery," and "resiliency," and I introduce the Resiliency Center and highlight the perceptions of this resource from the opinions of the participants, both interview and survey. I ask, "what is the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community?" and "how the faith-based community can help the community at large build resiliency?" Finally, I interpret the participants' emotional well-being and how this impacts resiliency.

4.4.1 Response, Recovery, and Resiliency Terms

Before anyone can begin to move into resiliency, the first step is understanding the term from those who lived the trauma. Therefore, one of my questions to all 100 participants (32 interviews and 68 surveys) was "what does 'response,' 'recovery,' and 'resiliency' mean to you?" A survey participant who identifies as working in the medical field defined the terms as follows.

- Response - What is the immediate response? What is the needs NOW?

- Recovery - What are the long-term needs (day, months, years)? What can the community provide to those who in need?
- Resiliency - How well the community comes together to show support to all those in need. An abundance of support in multiple avenues.

However, all but one of the teen participants said, "I do not know what those words mean," or "they mean nothing to me." Emma, a current college student, articulated her response saying:

> If I'm gonna be honest, it kind of just feels like baggage. I think that having gone to Santa Fe and hearing all those words, it loses meaning. It's like with the "strong," how people are tired of it. It's just after a while it doesn't mean anything 'cause you just hear it so much. And it's kind of like you can remember the victims and stuff like that, and you can have your moments where it's hard. But when I hear people talk about those words, I think they're just trying to be fancy, and they're trying to take what's happening and make it more like scientific or fix it or something like that... When you just kinda have to let it run its course, if that makes sense?

Alice, a high school teacher, gave a well-thought-out answer for each of the terms.

> So, "response" that is almost self-defining; that is how you respond to anything. It doesn't mean that there is thought put into how we respond. And we do that all the time like if we're in a bad mood or something and we snap at someone, that is a response but not a thought-out response. I think a response is how you respond to any event.
>
> "Recovery" that is something that requires thought. Recovery is going to happen in some fashion regardless. But you can either recovery in a way that makes you feel full again, or you can recovery with lots and lots of splinters because you either ignored it or you took something down the wrong path, or you thought it was natural and didn't get any help. So, recovery takes time and lots and lots of thought and probably some money.
>
> "Resiliency" that is a hard word because people use it all the time. They say we are resilient, and we are resilient. I mean, resiliency, I think, is built through hard things that happen to you and some people get stronger because of it. I mean, everyone has things that get them down or drag them back from time to time, but you don't stay there; you don't let it hold you back or send you in a reverse. So, I would say resiliency is learning from the trauma to a point where you can learn how to become whole and not let the trauma be a thing that defines you.

A crisis responder and mental health professional provided a slightly different understanding of the terms.

> Organizationally as a mental health responder, I think of official disaster and crisis management. So, response is what happens in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy or

> disaster, and I think typically, it goes up to 7 or 10 days. I don't know, but I think there are formal time frames where you talk about it, and then recovery is the process, and it is often long-term. The idea used to include that things would get back to normal, but people don't talk about it that way anymore. It's more about establishing a "new normal." Um, rebuilding, so to speak, life, in a way that it goes on. And that recovery from trauma, that whole idea that you can heal and find again a new normal; a way of finding a way to keep going. Resiliency for me isn't really a phase but more a characteristic of an individual or a community that has the energy or force that helps with recovery. It gives people the strength to survive. (Clarie)

> So, I do crisis response, and in that, response means that people are responding to the crisis at hand. So that is primarily about safety, saving lives and safety. Recovery is, well when I think about recovery in Santa Fe, I think about that whole first year that those kids went back to school, and how decisions were made and those reactions. To me, all of that was part of the recovery. Then the resiliency part would be, I'm trying to think of an example of resiliency... I know resiliency means to bounce back, but I was trying to think of an example. It is when you aren't just trying to survive every day anymore. I mean, in that first year, you are just trying to get through the day-to-day. So, I don't know; I don't really know if that has happened yet. We still have the trial and everything. From a crisis intervention model, the resiliency probably doesn't even start until after that trial. (Jane)

Like Jane, I agree that healing and community resiliency is hard before the trial. As of today, the accused has not been deemed mentally capable of standing trial and is being held at the Texas state mental hospital. Every year he is reevaluated, and it rips open old memories as news media everywhere shares the story. This makes it difficult for many community members to be resilient.

Other participants explained what the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts looked like for their own families. Nearly a quarter of the survey and interview participants felt that "Santa Fe never reached resiliency," whatever they believe that to be, and another 20% said that "Santa Fe will be recovering for a long time." Others believe that resiliency comes from a person, and recovery can help someone build resiliency.

4.4.2 Ever-Changing Resiliency Center

One of the strategies employed to help the community with resiliency was the

establishment of the Resiliency Center by the City of Santa Fe. I am a bit luckier than most researchers because I not only got to visit the Resiliency Center while it was at Aldersgate, but I also got to work there for six months and see the inner workings first-hand. This was extremely beneficial when it came to starting observational site visits, and the center had relocated due to the city saying a new location that was not a church would be more inclusive to all community members. Therefore, one of my observational site visits was to the City of Santa Fe's senior citizen community space called the Thelma Webber building. I had been to this space before but never as it was currently being utilized – to house the Resiliency Center's counseling portion. Unfortunately, when I arrived, all the doors were locked, and there were signs on the doors and windows that, due to COVID-19, the counselors had moved to telehealth and could be reached via a phone number they provided. All the window blinds were drawn closed, so I could not see what the inside of the building looked like. However, it appeared that the counseling section of the Resiliency Center used only a small portion off the back of the community building. The door was unmarked, except for a small sign, and it did not appear that even when operational, great care was taken to make clients feel welcome when they entered.

Figure 4.6: **Counseling Entrance at the Thelma Webber Center**

Upon leaving this location, I drove by the second location, where most of the group therapy classes were held. This location is at a community building owned by Galveston county at Runge Park. The Runge Park complex houses the Santa Fe Little League baseball fields and a horse arena. The location is often rented out for community events, birthday parties, and weddings due to a large, covered pavilion, in addition to the community building and abundant parking.

Figure 4.7: **Runge Park and the Community Building when Housing the Resiliency Center**

After leaving these locations, I reflected on when the Resiliency Center was at Aldersgate United Methodist Church. Upon parking, you walk through the front doors of the church. On your left is a small hallway that leads to the sanctuary; straight ahead is the church secretary's office, and you can see the pastor's office through hers. On the left is a set of double doors leading to a large, open space utilized by the Resiliency Center. In the church's main entryway, near the hall towards the sanctuary, a few pamphlets were on a table about the church and a bulletin board posted to let church members about upcoming activities. If you headed to the right through the double doors, you could tell the church had taken the effort to remove religious items from this space.

Figure 4.8: **Resiliency Center when Housed at Aldersgate United Methodist Church**

Upon entering, there was a bulletin board with flyers that talked about all the different programs the center offered. As you continued to walk, you approached a desk with a Resiliency Center staff member. There was a makeshift temporary wall sectioning off the space. The temporary walls were sent from another location; they had the words "God Bless Santa Fe" across the top and were filled with signatures from people all over. Behind the wall was a small "waiting room" style area with couches, books, puzzles, and snacks. On the other side of another wall, counselors from several different agencies had workspaces set up. However, they saw clients in individual rooms down another hallway in the church. Heading down the hall towards the individual rooms, there was a large Christian mural in the hallway. The individual rooms, minus the one room, which was a small library, were all Sunday school classrooms.

I asked participants who had been to several of the Resiliency Center locations to

compare the locations. Rose, a self-proclaimed agnostic, compared her visits to the Aldersgate location and the Runge Park location.

> Honestly, at first, I was a bit worried because I am not a Christian, but I knew my family needed services. So, I made an appointment to just go and get a tour and talk to counselors about programs. However, those feelings quickly vanished because the staff was very welcoming and informative about services. When we started utilizing services [at the center when at Aldersgate], I did notice all the Christian murals, but the more often we went, the less I noticed them. But I did not like the Runge one at all. The facility there is next to the little league baseball fields, and the building had lots of windows and was one big, huge open room. So, people would see the lights on in the building and would come from the baseball fields looking in the windows or walking in and asking about a bathroom or something. There was no privacy at all.

Gloria also mentioned the "lack of privacy" and how the large space made "you lose some of that intimacy of the group environment," but she also acknowledged that having "counseling housed at a church led to some people not wanting to seek help, maybe because it wasn't their church, or they weren't a believer so that environment wasn't always comfortable for everyone." Kathleen said that she "never felt uncomfortable" when the center was housed at the church, but that "God was mentioned one time, just to get a feel for where people were with their faith."

However, one survey participant said they felt uncomfortable when the center was located at the church due to their desire to let their anger out at the situation and felt disrespectful to do so in a church.

> I was so glad that [the center] was relocated. I attended counseling myself in a group and personal counseling services. I also had two children who attended while it was located within the church building. It was uncomfortable for myself and my children. We are not Methodist, and there were times when they would be trying to carry on their regular church duties, and you felt like an imposition. Also, you were surrounded by biblical posters, books, and other materials in the counseling sessions-which felt quite strange. I don't know how open and honest one could really be about how they were feeling and their experiences. Sometimes I wanted to shout with anger or curse but felt disrespectful in a church.

A few respondents questioned if maybe those who said they "didn't feel comfortable utilizing services at the church" were more because "they just were simply not ready for therapy and

needed an excuse." Others felt the second location's lack of privacy and poor communication from city officials led to confusion, and people did not know where to receive assistance anymore. In fact, 65% of the interview and survey respondents who said they visited the center while it was housed at the church said they never utilized services when the center moved to the Runge park location. Another 15% said they did not know that the center was no longer at the church, even though it has not been at that location since October 2019, and the interviews and survey were conducted in August of 2020. In March 2020, the Runge Park and Thelma Webber locations were temporarily closed; however, in July 2020, the City of Santa Fe terminated all remaining Resiliency Center staff. Shortly after, it entered into an agreement with a professional mental health organization to facilitate the center going forth in yet another location. Some participants brought up these changes in their interviews and surveys.

Jane, a mental health professional, questioned the city's partner choice and felt that the mental health organization's values were like that of any church, which led, in her opinion, to counseling going to Thelma Webber location, which was similar to putting counseling in the basement. Jane stated:

> I think it is important that people know that [the mental health facility facilitating the center] is a Christian organization, and there was so much flak about the center being at the Aldersgate Church. And that led to that move, and that was a horrible move. I mean, it was just horrible; it was like putting the kids in a closet or in the basement.

Others mentioned how when they call the new facility, they hear that the "group programs have been canceled" or that "it will cost money" now, whereas before, it was completely free for Santa Fe residents. Some participants shared how hard it is to open up about trauma, and the constant changing of staff and counselors make building resiliency difficult due to repeating your story over and over. Joyce shared a little bit about the impact the loss of the staff would have on the community:

> I think, number one, you lose continuity when you remove the staff that had been placed to start with. When you take away of the leadership, and when that leadership was a part of our community and has a vested interest in our community... You know, to these other people, this is just a job. And I don't fault, and I don't doubt their abilities, but they don't live here, and they don't have a vested interest in the overall well-being of our community.

To understand the governmental side, I asked an elected official what they thought about the city's changes with the Resiliency Center. The official shared, "I don't think the City of Santa Fe had any business in that. They don't have any ability; they don't have any training or any of that. In my opinion, it should have been given straight to Gulf Coast Centers[29]. It should have. That's what they do, they know how to do all that."

Margaret mentioned that "the move [of the center] by the city leaders to transfer the operation to another location, was done, without a plan. There was just; we're going to do this, without a study, without anything." As a result, "of the ever-changing recovery plan," she believed "the community never made it to resiliency ... despite best efforts by some in the community" who were "actively trying to build a community resiliency program."

In summary, the ever-changing resiliency plans led to more confusion than help from the perception of many of the participants. While many felt the city tried to help in the beginning, they could not understand the ongoing changes with the center location. Some, as was mentioned in the community response section, felt the changes had more to do with political agendas and less to do with community resiliency and helping the community.

Currently the city supported the Resiliency Center by contracting with a mental health agency in a rented facility in Santa Fe. It is the third location for the Resiliency Center and the

[29] Gulf Coast Centers is one of 39 community centers in Texas and provide a range of services and support related to mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability needs for residents located in Galveston and Brazoria counties. Santa Fe Police Department and Santa Fe ISD currently work with and refer individuals to Gulf Coast Center, who require mental health assistance.

fifth location for counseling services for Santa Fe residents, in two and a half years.

4.4.3 Feeling Forgotten or Muted

With the ever-changing resiliency plans and some of the aforementioned responses, some participants felt forgotten or alone in their recovery efforts. The teens who participated in the interview seemed more distant and reserved, somewhat withdrawn at times until the topic turned to feelings of exclusion. One participant mentioned that "as time goes on, I do feel that it is going to be forgotten, that we are going to be forgotten." Another participant who was a freshman in 2018 shared, "They forget about my class. The class of 2021 has always been forgotten, even though most of the victims were freshman and they didn't even get to live to even see the first day of senior year, and yet we are forgotten, and that really sucks." Blake, a current senior, had strong feelings on the subject:

> I feel like ... the whole city of Santa Fe didn't care too much about it. After the first two and a half years... After the first two years. No really, after the first year, people stopped caring about it besides the students. The school board didn't care that people had to go back into the same school where people died. The school board didn't care how it was going to have a mental toll on most students. The school board didn't care that a lot of kids dropped out or a lot of kids went to online school, or a lot of kids moved. They didn't really care about that. They expected you to go back into the school and have passing grades and be perfectly fine with sitting inside that place. And the mayor and city council and all of them, it didn't really seem like it mattered to them either. All they wanted to do was make themselves look better. They didn't really care about the people they were affecting with all these changes at the center.

Emma, who was a senior in 2018, feels like her senior class is more forgotten and stated:

> I feel like whenever the shooting happens, it was just a rollercoaster of distractions, and they were just shuffling us on buses and taking us to do these different things like how we went to the Rockets game and the Astros game and our baseball game right after. It was nice to get your mind off of it, but then after that and after we graduated, it's just kind of like it stopped. And especially for my grade, there wasn't any support because we weren't going back to high school. It was kind of like, oh here's this, and now you're done. And then, whenever the year went on, around the world the school, they were talking about how resilient all of the students were who went back to high school. But I kinda feel like my grade was kind of forgotten.

Others mentioned they really felt like they had nowhere to turn after the tragedy. Teen Alexis shared, "I didn't really feel like I was wanted in church; I always felt like an outcast." She goes on to mention that after the tragedy, this was made more difficult because she no longer felt she could go to the church when she needed help. One of the mothers I spoke with said she attended church with her husband, and she felt "very excluded. I think that may have contributed more to why I am not more involved with organized religion. I find it to be very inclusive to the long-time members, but for many people, I find it hard to become a new member or a part of a group." This seemed to be particularly true for the Catholic church. Most participants who spoke about exclusion or feeling forgotten from their church after the tragedy came from the local Catholic church.

Numa mentioned that she had also heard from several community members in Santa Fe that also felt excluded and that their voices were not heard.

> I do know, speaking of the Santa Fe tragedy, that there are survivors out there, families out there, that do not identify as being religious. Like people that are from the Santa Fe community, and they really struggle with this sense of identity. Their struggles have not really stemmed from them not being overly religious; it stems from the community being such [inaudible] in religion. I think these specific individuals, well, I can't speak for them, but I can speak from what I know from speaking with them, that the community could have done a more decent job in including these individuals in the process of recovering. I think these individuals felt, in more sense than not, left out. I just think the community could have been more accepting and perceptive about these things.

Not only were some participants not perceptive or accepting, as Numa mentioned, but some participants also shared outright racist, homophobic, or borderline exclusionary phrases during their interviews. Such as, one participant shared that all are welcome at his church except homosexuals. Another participant mentions they believe they think they would be nice to Muslim people, and another says they believe the community would have an issue with Muslims in town. One participant said that they believe those who say they are not Christian are less

likely to be accepted. Helen shares, "Well, I think that if you believe or if you are Christian, that you're more accepted than not. Because if people go around and say they do not believe in stuff, then there are not going to be a lot of people who want them around their kids. You know, teaching their kids something different than they believe in."

This belief seems to be prominent in Santa Fe, and it is very hard to find those who are not Christian to speak up. In fact, I had no less than six individuals tell me that they could not participate in this interview because they are not Christian, or they are struggling with their faith and "no one would want to hear what they have to say." However, they were not the only ones; several teachers also mentioned they did not want to do the interview because they were scared that if they spoke, people would be able to figure out it was them, and they would get fired. One teacher I spoke with said that she tried to bring up that the school or community needed to offer Spanish-speaking services and how she felt her opinion was dismissed.

> I know that at one point in time, I asked if we could start a Spanish-speaking service, and the response was that there just wasn't enough interest in something like that. But I don't know how they would know that if they had never asked, and as a teacher, I would disagree and say that it is needed in this community. (Alice)

In summary, those most impacted by the tragedy, the students, their parents, and the teachers, seem to be some of the most excluded and muted group in Santa Fe, a direct barrier when trying to build resiliency in a trauma-affected community.

4.4.4 Healing Spaces

As the community sought to recover and build community resiliency, one idea that sprang forth was the idea for memorials and healing spaces. During my observational drive around Santa Fe, I visited many of these healing spaces.

A mural painted by a local artist that graduated from Santa Fe in the 1970s, Doug Hiser and several of his art students from Houston, is located on the Texas State Highway 6 side of

Santa Fe City Hall. The painting is titled *Ten Feathers* and depicts the Santa Fe High School Indian mascot on the back of a horse, holding a spear that has ten feathers, each bearing the name of one of the victims from the Santa Fe Tragedy.

Figure 4.9: **Santa Fe City Hall Mural, *Ten Feathers***

Figure 4.10: **Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden**

Upon leaving the mural, I visited the Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden located directly behind City Hall. The garden's conceptional plan[30], developed one month after the tragedy,

[30] The Therapeutic Garden was one of the pre-selected interview locations. This is addressed more in the personal reflection section of the discussion chapter.

transformed an underutilized city park into a serene and healing location for the community. Once city council approved the project, a local non-profit, Keep Santa Fe Beautiful oversaw the site's management and construction.

When speaking with Alice, she shared that the community has made efforts towards recovery with the construction of the Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden. She shared:

> I think we made some [recovery efforts]. I mean I don't know how the garden is directly related, but I see it as related. When I walk in there, I mean I don't know what it is, that is in the back there, but it's an amazing smell, and then you have the benches there and the gazebo. It is really a calming place. I do feel like those that need a quiet and calming place for healing, and not everybody needs that, but for me it is important to have places like that.

Otto, a current college student, also mentioned the healing spaces and benches as part of the recovery efforts in Santa Fe; "well there was this like park and these benches that were kind of cool."

The garden has several picnic tables, a gazebo, and a walking trail that leads to a fountain. On-site is a 6-foot by 4-foot fabricated heart, welded by three boys in the Santa Fe High School Agricultural Mechanics class. The heart, which has wire on two sides so you can see inside, contains probably upwards of 100 pounds of plastic lids. The lids are leftover from a community recycling project, gathering thousands of pounds of plastic to make ten memorial benches in honor of the victims. Two of the benches are located in the garden.

The other eight benches are at Santa Fe's only other city park. Four are located near the basketball court, two near the playground equipment, and two near the entrance to the town's library, which is also located at the park. Also at the entrance of the library is a plaque with the victims' names. When I left the park, I drove toward Santa Fe's edge, where one of the Galveston County buildings is located. I had heard there was another memorial located there, but I had not seen it. When I arrived, it was not hard to miss, as it is located right next to the

front door. It is a large sheet metal Texas with the victims' names cutout in the panhandle, the date to the side, and "SF Strong" taking up most of Texas's middle.

Figure 4.11: **SF Strong Sign at the West Galveston County Building in Santa Fe**

As I specified in the introduction, the Santa Fe community extends well past the city boundaries. However, all these memorials are in the city limits and make memories hard to escape. One survey participant explained it like this:

> For me, it was in your face every time you turned the corner. The murals on city hall, painting the town green and gold, road signs in memory of those who died, the mayor and city council members speaking about it consistently on social media, mural at Runge baseball park, etc. Months later, it was still the same. People were NOT moving forward, not healing, because they were constantly reminded of the shooting and those who died. It was like we weren't able to live because they died. You couldn't move forward because it was in your face ALL the time. Healing cannot start when there is a consistent reminder at every single turn. This led to our family moving from Santa Fe. It was too much. We didn't want to forget but wanted to move forward.

This individual went on to say that "Santa Fe did right by setting up the resiliency center, the therapeutic garden, and the memorial at Maranatha Church so people could have a place to heal."

Another memorial in the works is proposed to be at the high school, but there has been

some conflict over the location. A project of the Santa Fe Ten Memorial Foundation, a large memorial which features ten 14-foot origami feathers memorializing the ten victims. The conflict is that some individuals are uncomfortable with a memorial at the school. When driving around Santa Fe, I visited the high school and saw the sign for the proposed location off to the left in the front and tucked away between the main building and the property line. Ten trees were planted as a memorial on the one-year remembrance by the school. One of the participants I spoke with who works at Santa Fe High school said, "We are supposed to be building something here at the school, we do have something, but we are supposed to be building an open space out in the back for the kids to go to with trees and benches." She went on to mention how she feels symbols like that are important to have in the community.

Figure 4.12: **Santa Fe High School and Proposed Location of the Santa Fe Ten Memorial**

Building resiliency is difficult, and for some, healing spaces aid in their recovery efforts. While some individuals think there are too many memorials[31] within such a small area, others

[31] One week before submitting this thesis, another mural memorial, #RenewalSantaFe was created in Santa Fe by Tyler Kay. The mural is located on the side of an Allstate insurance building and includes 10 blue roses and three rosebuds, for those lost or severely injured.

would argue that there is an array of healing spaces depending on what best helps each individual.

4.4.5 Religious Self

Sometimes the ability to get through hard times comes from yourself, and for many of my participants, they attributed this to their faith. Numa, a Muslim woman I spoke, shared:

> I think religion and faith are perhaps the strongest elements of identity for a lot of people. You could try to talk to people about their ethnicities, you could try to talk to them about their personalities, you could try to talk to them about the town that they belong to, and I have not seen any of those, give as strong of a reaction as it does if I talk to them about identity in respect to religion and faith. I think for me, the significance of belonging to a faith would essentially come from my [cultural] upbringing and not just my family, but I am talking about society as a whole. You end up becoming conditioned to a point that you can no longer see yourself in isolation. So, my religion and, in essence, my identity comes from my experience with my culture.

She goes on to mention that her faith was a strong driver for getting her through this tragedy. Another participant, who traveled to assist Santa Fe, talked about how his faith gives him a "sense of worth" and how his faith has directly impacted what he does for others.

> Well, I mean, with having faith, you have a sense of worth, in my opinion. And having faith teaches you that it is about people, about living here and being here on this earth, about looking out for each other and taking care of each other. And that alone gives people self-worth. You know, by trying to live in that manner, I know who I am. (John)

A few participants took the time to illustrate how their faith helped them stay strong throughout the tragedy. A survey participant who mentioned they work in the medical field stated, "Without God giving me strength, I would not have made it through that tragedy." When speaking with one of the mothers who lost her child in the tragedy, she mentioned how important her faith has been for her, not only because it helps bring her comfort in her loss but the faith-based community has provided her a support group. She explained:

> Your faith helps you understand, really, what you believe in. So, with this, I have a firm set of beliefs and who I believe Jesus Christ is and what the afterlife is. And because even though our loved ones are gone, and we miss them, we know without a doubt that

> we will see them again. And where they are, they are comfortable, they are happy, they aren't having to deal with anything that they were dealing with when they were here. And in an instance, it brings comfort because you do know that you are going to get to see them again. And with faith, you also have a support group that helps you solidify your identity because you have other people that are around you, supporting you, and that is important. (Ruby)

When speaking with these participants, it was evident that for some, their faith aided in both their recovery and in building resiliency through their faith-based community.

4.4.6 Faith-based Organizations

In a community with 21 Christian churches, a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, and possibly one Mosque (I saw a sign in possibly Arabic, which, when translated via Google translator, indicated we might also have a small Mosque in town), it goes to mention that the faith-based organizations can play a vital role in building community resiliency.

When speaking with one of the participants about the faith-based organizations in Santa Fe and if they could be of some help to the community, she said, "Goodness knows we have enough churches. I mean, we even have a Buddhist temple down the road. So, yes, they should be." When talking with another participant, they mentioned the types of religions they do not see represented in Santa Fe. The interview participant shares, "there aren't any Jewish temples here. I mean, there is a Buddhist Temple, and I feel like we'd be nice to them if we saw them in HEB. But there are no Jewish Temples here, and there are no Muslim Temples here." While it appears there may be a Mosque in Santa Fe, I am not certain many people know about it, as the sign is very small and it sits very far off the road. However, the Buddhist Temple is well known; it is large, sits on a major thoroughfare and has many gigantic statues, which makes it hard to miss.

Each participant, regardless of if they participated via the survey or in an interview, was asked, "what do you believe is the role of a faith-based organization after a mass community tragedy?" Of the 100 survey and interview participants, 14 mentioned specifically that they

believe the role of a faith-based organization is to continue to do what they have "always done," have "open doors," and "love thy neighbor." One of the survey participants said the role of a faith-based organization is to "support their fellow human beings whether they are part of your 'group' or not and to have compassion for others in their time of need." Gary acknowledged that faith-based organizations need to be available for all, but also for their congregation and that they have a responsibility to do so:

> I think that the faith-based organization has the most responsibility or duty to not only help its membership because its membership is touched in one way or another and that membership has got to get through it but also expand it to the rest of the community. To let the community know that there's somebody that cares about you even if they don't know about you. I also think the faith-based community, I think, has a responsibility, maybe more than a responsibility; I think they have a desire to do it. Because they are faith-based, it is natural for them to want to help when they need to help.

One of the local pastors I spoke with said, "Number 1, the role is to just being present. But ultimately offering hope and a real relationship with God." One of the survey participants who self-identified as Pentecostal stated, "The role of a faith-based organization is to help remind people of the love and celebration of the life of Jesus Christ because people of faith have been given the opportunity to go out and evangelize to those in need." However, a self-identified 19-year-old atheist who participated via the digital survey, argued that the role of a faith-based organization should "be only for those in their organization, to offer uplifting words and be there for those struggling." One survey participant who identifies as atheist added, "their role is to offer support at their locations without being on public (school, library, parks) grounds." Most of the participants who described themselves as atheists believed the role of a faith-based organization should be limited to their congregation members. Whereas respondents who said they are agnostic were more likely to expand that view and say they believe that a faith-based

organization should support and assist all the community members, mimicking some of the sentiments above.

A few participants took this moment to describe how they saw faith-based organizations assisting after the tragedy and how that has influenced what they believe the role of the faith-based organization is. For example, one survey participant whose family member was injured in the shooting said they believe the role is to "help fill the gap financially when the government can't." Nine other participants also mentioned "fundraising" or "financial assistance" as part of the role of a faith-based organization after a mass tragedy. Blake, a teen who was impacted by the shooting, informed me that many churches assisted, stating, "The Cowboy Church helped a lot of us out that others wouldn't have thought of helping." Another teen, Alexis, shared, "I was personally really happy because the Clear Creek Church donated to get my friend her headstone. That just made me really happy because they had gone over a year without one. So, it's just good to see one out there now." Others mentioned how grateful they were that a faith-based organization offered to help them meet ends during the hardest times of their lives. A mother who lost her child mentioned how "Clear Creek Church helped me financially; a couple of times, I got behind on my car payment. Obviously, I couldn't work." Another mother mentioned how "the Chocolate Bayou Cowboy Church, repaired the a/c in my car making the Texas heat bearable as I often was called to the school and had to wait outside to pick up my child, due to their PTSD." Dolores said their child was injured in the shooting and a church "bought them a laptop and paid the internet for a year so that they could stay connected."

One mother recalled with tears how appreciative she was of an organization (that she later learned was a faith-based organization) that came out to the reunification center[32] with cold

[32] The name Santa Fe ISD gave to the location where parents went to pick up their children. However, for ten

bottles of water to give the parents as they waited to find their children or hear what had happened to their loved one. The organization made no mention of religion, gave out no pamphlets, had no religious signs, nor did they offer to pray with those waiting, yet the simple act of offering a cold bottle of water on that hot day in May made the most impact to some of these families. Gloria mentioned to me through tears, "I just thought that it was amazing that in literal chaos that someone had the forethought to think of that. I don't know that I would have, now I will, but I would not have thought that something so small could have made such a big difference." One of the first responders also mentioned how a small gesture left a lasting impact:

> There were a lot of responders, and when you have a lot of responders at the facility, everything goes on, such as, these people have to eat, they have to rest. And there were groups that were providing to everyone. They set up places to cookout in the parking lot. I don't really remember the name. But I know that it was very welcome because when people were there, they were exposed to a lot and to have something a little bit more normal to go sit down someplace and have a nice meal and in some cases chit chat with those people... They weren't, they were not invited into the facility, it's very, very closed off inside the building, but you walked outside to sit down outside. Which I headed out there, and we set out there, and we talked about everything, except why we were there. You know, it was just something new, and those were faith-based people that provided that. (Gary)

Numa mentioned her views have changed since the tragedy and seeing other tragedies and that she believes one role faith-based organizations can offer is the ability to mobilize volunteers.

> I think their role can be particularly important. My views have changed substantially over the last few years because I saw how significantly faith-based organizations have been, and not just in the Santa Fe tragedy but across the world. I saw this after the shooting at the Pittsburg at a Synagogue, and I saw how the Jewish community came together. I think that is [because of an individual's] religious identity and how absolute and strong that is. I think that is essentially why faith-based organizations, in my view, have been able to mobilize and not just the funds, not just the monetary capital but also the social capital; also, you have volunteers that are able to mobilize generally. So, in my experience, I think a lot more people, a lot more young people, but also non-youth individuals, who are more likely to volunteer their time, their efforts, and even their money to any faith-based organization versus volunteering their time to any non-religious organization that is trying to do collective action on an issue that impacts the whole

families, this is also where they found out they would not be reunited.

> community. I think that more people are likely to come together under the roof of a religious setting or religious institution.

Emma added that faith-based organizations often have the ability, "the size, and the capacity" to assist the community by offering space for "meetings or gatherings." Ruth took this a little further and said she believes "being such a small community, a church was really the only resource the community had." She added, the event here "has opened the eyes to the other surrounding communities as well, to prepare for what we experienced."

In conclusion, the community has struggled to build community resiliency even two years after the tragedy. Ever-changing resiliency plans and a highly impacted group that feels forgotten or muted are directly impacting how individuals recover and build resiliency. Collective action in creating healing spaces for the community has aided in recovery for some. Others have found hope in their faith and their faith-based community. In a community where 78% of respondents identify as religious, and there are 23 faith-based organizations located, these organizations have the ability to play a crucial role in building community resiliency in the trauma-affected community, from rounding up volunteers, providing space as a community resource, or offering charitable contributions.

Many respondents spoke of the appreciation they have for the faith-based organizations that have been able to offer assistance without religious ties attached, and many believe that the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community is to open their doors and be a valuable commodity to the community as it tries to recover and build resiliency.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

From day one, this research has been evolving. Often researchers go into their research thinking one thing but throughout the process come to recognize challenges and advantages that may have been hidden without extensive qualitative research. This project is no different and has been largely participant and results-driven.

In this chapter, I couple the participant's insights with peer-reviewed literature to interpret and discuss the findings. In continuing the balance of analyzing the research from every angle that has been relevant throughout this thesis and has showcased a divide within Santa Fe, this chapter does the same.

Furthermore, in response to the challenges and advantages of faith and community, I offer several recommendations on the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community. In conclusion, I discuss the limitations of this research through the topic of a future study.

5.1 Challenges

5.1.1 Challenge 1: A Community Divided

Baumann (1996), Williams (1976), Cohen (1996) all agreed that the term "community" is rarely used unfavorably and often invokes positive heartfelt responses. While this was true for some of the Santa Fe participants, others used negative connotations in relation to the word community. Gloria and Jackie described Santa Fe's community as "cliquish," and both believe this divide was exacerbated after the tragedy.

However, other participants such as Vernon and Richard acknowledged that Santa Fe is what some would call a "legacy town," where families have lived for generations, and where

many residents have either graduated from Santa Fe High School or have children attending Santa Fe ISD.

As a result, so many in the community are attached to the town's traditions and symbols due to attending Santa Fe ISD. Most of the community knows the Alma Mater by heart, and an emic term used for the community is "tribe," a reference to the school's mascot, the Indian. The school's colors are also very prominent in town, and years ago, when City Hall got painted and was not painted in the school colors, green and gold, there was an uproar from residents, causing the city to repaint the building.

These symbolic instances drastically increased after the shooting, as many participants referenced with the green and gold ribbons. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) believed that intense emotions could easily contaminate ordinary objects; thus, symbolically representing intense emotion and essentially binding social groups to specific ideals. This was evident in Santa Fe following the 2018 mass shooting when community members made a symbolic connection between a mural an Indian headdress that was painted in the 1970s on the back of an old school gym that was used as the Reunification Center following the shooting. After the shooting, someone noticed the headdress had ten feathers, the same number of victims lost in the shooting. Another individual recreated the mural, added the victim's names to each feather. This became a "key symbol," as Ortner called it (1973); a representation to honor those that were lost. This was seen everywhere, on shirts, decals on cars, paintings at the school, and so forth. When participants spoke of seeing the decals or the shirts, this was often one of the symbols they spoke of. The other most commonly utilized symbol was the phrase Santa Fe Strong.

I believe that if Santa Fe did not already have a community culture built around the symbolic representations of the school, these key symbols would not have taken hold so easily.

For some of the community, these symbolic representations aided in their recovery. It helped community members feel not alone when they would see others wearing the shirts or see a car with the decal in another town.

This is an example of what Virginia Tech sociologists, Ryan and Hawdon (2014), described as social solidarity. They illustrated similar instances of social solidarity in Blacksburg after the shooting there.

> The fact that Virginia Tech is ritualistically celebrated at every sporting event, symbolically represented with tokens and emblems on everything from bumper stickers to flags and buildings, and has a clearly established, legally defined membership makes it an entity that already exists in the public mind. (48)

Many small Texas towns already have this type of "community" built around the high school football team and school, and Santa Fe is no different.

However, as both interview participants Paul and Joyce mentioned, the town is growing, and people have moved in from outside cities, which has somewhat divided the town. For those who moved into Santa Fe and did not graduate from the school, they did not already have that established connection to the school, so these symbolic references sometimes did not hold the same meaning to them. Some parents who lost their children or had children who were highly impacted by the tragedy mentioned they felt "the school failed their kids." For these individuals to see the school symbols or the green and gold colors, it reminded them of the entity they deemed responsible and thus made them angry. Carroll, (2006) Quarantelli, and Dynes, (1976) mentioned individuals who are not attached to their community culture might feel more excluded and alone after a tragedy.

While some community members, like Meredith, believed that Santa Fe was a village or a tribe that comes together to help one another, others like Rose expressed feeling like an outsider in her own community. Anderson (2006) described an imagined community as a

horizontal camaraderie that erases differences. I called this the community unity illusion which illustrates how narratives of community unity serve to disguise class differences, racial injustice, and religious discrimination.

In the case of Virginia Tech, you have students who applied, were accepted and chose to go to that school. Therefore, buying into the school culture and community prior to the shooting was a positive choice for many students. However, in Texas, students must attend the public school where their homes are zoned. This means that in Santa Fe, you have half the town that has decided to stay or move back to the area and raise their families in the Santa Fe ISD to continue the generational legacy. Then you have half the town that lives in the area for any number of reasons, which is just zoned to Santa Fe ISD and has no prior attachment to the school district.

This has created a divide in Santa Fe, and it was felt in my research and when speaking with participants. Those who felt more positive about the community, the local institutions, and the individuals who live in Santa Fe had stronger attachments to the community and were more often included in the dominant groups. In contrast, participants who did not grow up in Santa Fe, have recently moved to the area, or those who have had little to no attachments to the community described Santa Fe as not very inclusive.

I add this divide as a challenge because often, those not originally from Santa Fe did not go to Santa Fe or did not feel comfortable with the symbols used for the tragedy feel into a minority group in the community. For the most part, the dominant group was unaware that others felt differently than they did, they just assumed everyone loved Santa Fe, and everyone loved the Santa Fe symbols. I even once heard someone say, “well, if they move to Santa Fe, then they need to adapt to our ways.” This is also a common thought in town and has often led

those in the sub-dominant group to remain silent for the most part.

5.1.2 Challenge 2: Muted Voices

As noted in the literature, a muted group is a group whose voice is often ignored, dismissed, or silenced (Lee & Barkman 2018). In American, it has become socially acceptable to dismiss teenage views and opinions. However, when it comes to teenagers who are most impacted by a traumatic event, should we not encourage our youth to advocate for change and not silencing their voices?

As a mother of two teenagers from Santa Fe, I heard many of their friends say no one would listen to them. As a result, this was one of the main reasons I was so adamant about including minors' voices in my research. As I began my research, I heard many students repeat phrases such as, "no one listens to us," "we are forgotten," "no one cares what we say," and "my opinion doesn't matter."

Emma mentioned being frustrated as a student because the adults just made all the decisions on what would be best for them without discussing it with those who would be directly impacted; the students. She went on to discuss how the adults selfishly talked about how the tragedy impacted them but failed to ask the kids how they were impacted. Other teens like Blake felt that no one cares, that the school expected them to return to school as if everything was fine; and, the city kept changing the Resiliency Center as if they did not care how the kids felt. All the teens mentioned that they did not feel heard.

The students were not the only ones feeling this way, unfortunately. Often, I heard similar sentiments from high school teachers who wanted to advocate for their students and themselves but feared losing their jobs if they spoke against their employer. Several individuals even refused to interview because they were so worried that it would somehow get out that they

disagreed with the majority of Santa Fe, and it may cost them their jobs. Those who did speak up said they felt what they said was dismissed without anyone even looking into what they suggested. For example, Alice suggested the school district look into offering Spanish-speaking therapy sessions for students, their parents, and hourly employees. She mentioned the district, said there was no need without any study or any further discussion.

Oliver-Smith (1999) noted one major challenge with mass tragedies and disasters is that they are often deeply political. Some scholars believe that political entities fail to recognize individuals or organizations within their communities that possess the skills to assist or have valid suggestions that can aid in recovery. Thus, creating a bureaucratic bias that restricts voices and creates dependent, helpless, powerless populations (Harrell-Bond 1993; Adams & Bradbury 1995; De Waal 1997; Platt 2000).

One muted group that is not clearly identified in the results is some of those who were directly impacted, such as those who lost a family member, were injured or were a student who witnessed unimaginable things. After the shooting, altruism was high, and the community rallied together to help these individuals. Some of these individuals have become advocates for policy change. However, some of these individuals' policies are different from the conservative majority of Santa Fe, and the individuals have been threatened for their beliefs. For instance, one student who has advocated for stricter gun laws was sent death threats on their graduation night, as noted in the results, and one survey participant has already moved away from Santa Fe as a result of intimidation from community members. Jerusalem et al. (1995) recognized that the social support that often mobilizes after mass tragedies or disasters could deteriorate depending on the community's characteristics and its members.

However, politics has a large part to play in this as well. Chairetakis (1991) mentioned

that political entities could exploit tragic situations appearing to offer relief but instead bolstering the dominant political parties' interest more than those who need the help. Some participants believe this was the case when SFISD offered new wellness counselors and the City of Santa Fe opened the Resiliency Center, as neither entity got much if any, input from the students and staff at Santa Fe High School on these two important matters. One survey participant shared that the school's wellness center is located "down the hall where the shooting took place, which is completely insensitive." Interview participant Margret shared that when the city decided to make changes, they did not do a survey or talk to anyone.

Valenzuela (1999) illustrates the act of authentic caring of youth versus an aesthetic caring. With aesthetic caring, adults focus more on institutional priorities, rules, and accountability mechanisms. However, in authentic caring, the adults, teachers, school administration, and community leaders, are youth-centered and focus on the students individual and collective needs, cultures, and opinions. In Santa Fe, a few teachers at the high school practiced authentic caring and therefore, were in solidarity with the students and their families, thus putting them in the marginalized group, along with the teens.

In building resiliency, especially from a school shooting, it is imperative that institutions and adult leaders take the time to practice authentic caring of the youth that was so highly impacted. This means including youth in all resiliency planning and utilizing student's specific skills and suggestions without dismissal or prioritizing other agendas over the student's needs to reclaim their school and feel safe again.

When the City of Santa Fe first opened the Resiliency Center, the location was named the Santa Fe Strong Resiliency Center. Nearly every respondent I spoke with said they did not like the metaphoric phrase "Santa Fe Strong," especially the teens. Many shared the phrase meant

nothing to them, and others shared that they would get upset when they would hear this phrase. Fernandez (1986) believed metaphors could transform vague social acts into significant conversions in oneself. I believe the word "strong" was supposed to have this connotation, but it came across as someone else suggesting you need to be strong instead of it coming from within. Eventually, the city renamed the center to the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, but the phrase on signs, shirts, and decals in town remained.

Some scholars believe that politicians elect to act on small changes to restore confidence in their abilities after mass tragedies or disasters (Boin & Hart 2000; Hart 1993). Others use the moment as a "window of opportunity" to push a political agenda (Klein 2007; Cortell & Peterson 1999; Keeler 1993; Kingdon 1995). Joyce mentioned in her interview; she felt many politicians at every level only assisted for photo opts or for their own political agenda, and many believe the relocation of the Resiliency Center from Aldersgate to Runge Park was a political move.

However, based on this research, I believe the city made accurate statements when they said there that the center's location at the church was impeding some individuals from getting assistance. With that said, I also believe the city used the "window of opportunity" to try and gain control of a piece of property that is within the city's limits but not owned by the city. Therefore, in this instance, I believe that voices that would normally be muted were used for political reasons, and in the end, the Resiliency Center location did not work because it was not a beneficial location for the residents of Santa Fe and was relocated, yet again.

Furthermore, Orbe (1998) mentioned several outcomes that could occur from an individual feeling muted by a dominant group. This includes feelings of mental exhaustion from preparing to engage or feeling so excluded and silenced that the individual eventually leaves the community. One survey participant noted that the kids would grow up and leave Santa Fe

because nothing is keeping them in Santa Fe. I would add that it is hard to want to stay living somewhere where your opinion and voice do not matter. Besides, it challenges the future culture of Santa Fe if students no longer feel a connection to their community and school and do not return and raise their children in the town as many generations have before.

5.1.3 Challenge 3: Christian Privilege and Imposition

Santa Fe is largely a faith-based community. As a result, many of the events held after the tragedy was conducted in a Christian tone. For the vast majority of the community that self-identify as Christian, this was not an issue. In fact, many did not even realize the ritualistic events held or the symbols used may have excluded those who were not Christian until it was pointed out. Even then, most followed up with phrases such as "well it was done with good intentions" or "well, our community is mostly Christian."

Blumenfeld (2006) and Gramsci (1971) stated the concept of "hegemony" illustrates when a dominant group, in this case, southern conservative Christians, believes that what is good for the majority is good for all. Tong (1989) shares when groups do this, they often impose their belief system on others without their permission leaving the marginalized feeling invisible, disempowered, or muted. Several participants mentioned instances of feeling muted as a result of different belief systems. Rose mentioned feeling like an outcast and that she felt like she could not share how she felt with her community. Katie mentioned that she could not share her belief systems with those she worked with.

However, the imposition of the Christian belief was strongly felt on the one-year remembrance event. Nearly every participant felt that local faith-based leaders used the event more for a religious sermon than remembering and honoring the victims. When speaking with religious and political leaders in town, they believed this was ok because the majority of the

community self-identifies as Christian.

Blumenfeld (2006, 195) says this "system of benefits confers dominance on Christians while subordinating members of other faith communities as well as non-believers," thus creating "systemic inequities throughout society."

Many of the participants who identify as Christian also felt that the event was not inclusive and felt uncomfortable. Tyler mentioned that his sole reason for participating in the interview was to discuss the one-year remembrance event. He was so upset with the religious leaders who lead the event that he said it brings tears to his eyes to just think about it.

Of course, I have to say I was a bit shocked when I sat down with local faith-based leaders, and they mentioned they controlled the narrative in town and directed it to a Christian narrative. Others mentioned in their interviews that other faith-based organizations were considered for the Resiliency Center location; however, the location came with stipulations that all counseling had to be conducted in a Christian-based approach. Furthermore, one participant shared that the faith-based organizations' role after a mass tragedy is number 1 to offer a relationship with God.

However, theologist Maxwell and Perrine (2016) share that faith and grief are not uniformly felt for everyone after a mass tragedy. For some, God's presence brings comfort; others find confusion and anger. Therefore, addressing complex trauma, grief, and loss with theology can often result in imposition and exclusion rather than assisting.

In Santa Fe, religious and political leaders assume the community is homogenous and often "papers over the differences" (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Thus, allowing instances like the one-year remembrance event hosted by the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center and the Resiliency Center originally being housed in a church to occur.

5.2 Advantages

5.2.1 Advantage 1: Fellowship

When speaking with participants and again when analyzing the survey responses, large social events that were free, open to all, and included food were some of the most treasured memories from after the tragedy. As I noted in the results, one-fourth of the respondents talked about how good the community events were for them and their families.

However, what was not clearly mentioned in the results was that even the religious events held in the days that followed the tragedy, respondents often talked about just being with others or seeing friends. Even when the candlelight vigils or the night of prayer were spoken of positively, not a single person mentioned the event's religious aspect.

Participants referred to fellowship to mean coming together and sharing in the company of one's neighbors and friends. For many participants, the ability and desire to gather and hold these events made a tremendous contribution to the healing of many in Santa Fe. In a community where 42% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and several respondents mentioned the community events' free food element, it goes to mention that these events help in more ways than just social bonding.

Fortun (2001) used the term "enunciatory" to describe communities bounded together by their desire to respond to the tragedy or disaster and less about their shared culture. Fortun also believed that these enunciatory groups could assist with community resiliency in ways that others may not. These groups can address the inequalities of the religious division by removing the religious element. The potluck lunches also have the ability to create long-term community resiliency by addressing food insecurity that was present before the tragedy.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic events, such as the community potlucks and the It

Takes a Tribe Kickball Tournament, have been paused. If these events can return and can be woven into the community's culture in the future, they could contribute to the building of community resiliency in an inclusive way.

5.2.2 Advantage 2: Volunteers and Charity

Yoo Jung Hong et al. (2018) stated that social solidarity, or in this case, the ability for community members to collectively come together to volunteer and fundraise, serves as a protective factor to aid in recovering from the tragic incident. In doing this research, the participants' appreciation for the faith-based organizations was deeply felt during each interview and survey.

Faith-based organizations often have the capacity to pull more volunteers and donations from their congregations; as Numa mentioned and as Gary and Eva noted, they often also have the desire to do so. Joyce mentioned that faith-based communities are often mission-based and want to help others. Bowie (2006) described these instances not as life crises within the individual but as embodiments of society's highest goals and ideals.

While Ruth recognized that in small communities, a faith-based organization is also normally the only place that has a facility with the space to be converted into a resource center, such as Aldersgate did with the Resiliency Center. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) noted the "symbolic action" of the "collective" in relation to his social solidarity that could be applied to Aldersgate "symbolically" and literally opening their doors collectively be whatever the community needed them to be. Every respondent who mentioned Aldersgate's role with the Resiliency Center did so with admiration to the Church. Most respondents appreciated the church's willingness to have a counseling center within their facility, including those who believed the center should have never been located at a church, to begin with.

Others were touched too nearly tears at recollections of the faith-based organizations helping community members with no strings or religion attached, sometimes even in small ways that had big impacts. For instance, when Gloria mentioned how impactful it was to receive bottles of water while she waited to find out what happened to her child in the hot Texas heat; or when Gary mentioned the church group that provided food for the first responders and offered conversation but never asked the first responders why they were there or to share details. Both Gloria and Gary mentioned they would not have thought of doing these things before but will think of adding these communal rituals in the future to help others. Theologists Farkas and Hall (2005) reported that communal rituals such as these could help remind people that they made it through hard times before with others' help. In essence, this allows one to heal by connecting their past to the present and facilitates an outlook towards the future through helping others.

Therefore, the faith-based organizations assisting the community were a major benefit to the recovery and resiliency of Santa Fe.

5.2.3 Advantage 3: Healing Spaces

Durkheim (1995 [1912]) believed any communal object could become a totem if a group of people believes it to be sacred. Moore (2004) took this further and said a totem becomes sacred when its loss would be a great devastation to a community. In Santa Fe, many of the healing spaces have become these sacred symbolic totems for Santa Fe's community.

For example, schoolteacher Alice mentioned that the Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden had become a major part of her healing and recovery. For many others, the ten memorial crosses at the Maranatha Church have become a sacred totem. Katleen mentioned that for her and her daughter, this is where they find peace. Numa mentioned she absolutely loved the crosses. She felt that they were a symbol of solidarity in the community. Jane mentioned she felt the crosses

were absolutely beautiful. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) recognized that if all we do is look at religious symbols literally, we may write them off. However, he encouraged anthropologists to reach deeper than the symbol's face value and grasp the reality that it is truly representing (Durkheim 1995 [1912]).

I took Durkheim's advice when looking at the Maranatha memorial because I only saw religious imposition and exclusion when I first approached the memorial. However, after speaking with participants, I could see how the memorial offered peace, beauty, community, comfort, and more.

Furthermore, after visiting both locations and seeing visitors utilizing both spaces, I believe having multiple types of healing spaces is beneficial for diverse communities. Sherrieb et a. (2010) described community resiliency as traits that are built that allow a community to survive following a traumatic event. I believe creating the healing spaces is a step in that direction.

5.3 Recommendations

In reviewing the challenges and the advantages that faith and community had on Santa Fe, I have concluded several recommendations may assist in minimizing the challenges and maximizing the advantages in other trauma-affected communities.

5.3.1 Recommendation 1: Understand the Community

Farkas and Hall (2005, 15) urge that "knowledge of the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the impacted community" is a must for any faith-based organization working in a trauma-affected community. I would take this further and encourage anyone working with a trauma-affected community to also learn about the community's historical trauma that could

compound current trauma. I believe this is one of the areas that Santa Fe's faith-based organizations greatly lacked.

Many faith-based leaders catered only to the faith-based community they knew, failing to recognize or trying to understand the diversity among the victims and the community. Several participants mentioned that their faith-based organizations often hold community events such as Vacation Bible School, movie nights at the park, or Bazaars. However, these events only draw a select group of people. During a tragedy or a disaster, faith-based organizations need to keep in mind that the community extends well past those who attend these events. Take note of who is at the grocery store or gas stations in town, or get a copy of the area's demographics from the school district and city. These will help faith-based organizations know if they are missing a demographic when they are offering assistance.

5.3.2 Recommendation 2: Recognize Diversity

However, understanding the community can only go so far. A faith-based organization has to be willing to recognize and accept diversity as well. Interview participant Numa mentioned that religious identity is the strongest of identities for most people, often invoking the strongest reaction. Otis (2004) likewise said that religion is one of the most powerful forces for social belonging and identity. Often after a tragedy, when altruism is high, all identities are blurred into the victims and the survivors. Most do not see race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious identity.

However, with a mass tragedy that involves so much loss of life and so many victims, the recovery and healing phase can last a long time. This means that differences not only reemerge but are often exacerbated from the tragedy (Barrios 2016). Therefore, faith-based organizations can recognize these different identities and include them. One of the survey participants said, "If

we can respect that not every victim or person affected is of the same religious view and opinion, I believe that it is enough."

Taking the effort to recognize that others believe differently and are loved can go a long way. For example, several ways of incorporating this in Santa Fe would have been inviting religious leaders from multiple faiths to speak at the one-year remembrance event. Another example would be for pastors at local churches to have names and numbers for leaders of other faiths in case they come across someone in the community looking for guidance outside of their knowledge of spiritual assistance.

5.3.3 Recommendation 3: Set Aside Religion

Farkas and Hall (2005) mentioned that people turned to faith-based organizations for solace and compassion after the World Trade Center attack, but some were angry and expressed outrage with what happened. They said others were outright confused. They mention that a "crisis of faith" is common, especially for mass tragedies or disasters that involve loss of life (Farkas & Hall 2005).

They share that many religious leaders who have had pastoral education lack training for disasters and mass community tragedy. Many religious leaders often feel the desire and need to help, but the only way they know how is to do what they do daily; that is, preach or offer spiritual guidance through scripture.

However, as was evident in my research, Farkas and Hall (2005) are right; post-tragedy aftermath is often a time to set aside religion. Many participants became very upset when talking about the one-year remembrance ceremony led by religious leaders in Santa Fe. Tyler mentioned that that event was the sole reason he agreed to do the interview and went as far as to say, "shame on those leaders." Mike said he would have preferred the event to have been more

about the victims and less about religion. Others brought up how uncomfortable they were with the location of the Resiliency Center at a church. One survey participant mentioned they wanted to "cuss and yell" but felt disrespectful to do that in a church. Some of the participants who identified as Christian and noted they attend church services every week also shared these sentiments; therefore, it was not just those who were not of the Christian faith.

Mass tragedies involving the loss of life, specifically those involving children, are complex and hard to process. While religion may help a person on a case-by-case basis, the recommendation for a faith-based organization would be to set aside religion and look for abstract ways of embracing the teachings of faith without outright pushing scripture.

5.4 Future Studies

The future of anthropological studies is endless. Presented in the literature chapter, I illustrated the importance of understanding the difference between tragedy versus disaster and discuss reasons why anthropologists should consider specifically looking at a tragedy and how it impacts community culture in the future. I also wrote about the anthropology of community and the need for looking at communities beyond a geographical location or boundary limits for participant recruitment. I encouraged anthropologist to fully immerse oneself in understanding what community means for the participants and how that emic term impacts social culture.

However, one area I did not have the chance to discuss is the need for more anthropologists to study the anthropology of American Christianity. In my literature research, I noticed that many anthropologists write about non-Christian religion. I leaned on anthropologists such as Talal Asad, who writes on the anthropology of Islam, and Jeffrey Feldman, a semantics scholar who researches Jewish culture, to gain deeper understandings about the Muslim and Jewish faith, as some of my participants self-identified as those religions.

However, I struggled to find literature on Christianity, specifically American Christianity.

In the literature I did find, I noticed that there is little in the way of anthropology of American Christianity unless the anthropologist is Christian, and therefore all the literature had a clear bias written for only the positives of Christianity. Interestingly enough, I did find several articles and several books written by theologists that covered all aspects of Christianity, including "toxic theology" and "when religion does more harm than good," yet they rarely spoke about how religious symbols and rituals impact culture or how these symbolic representations were used after tragedies, topics on which anthropologists could give expertise.

Most of what I came across seemed to be how religion cultivated culture throughout history, and more modern anthropology of religion rarely included American Christianity, with the exception of Mormonism and Quakers.

Furthermore, it has been difficult for researchers to understand the importance of religion in one's life over the past few decades. Often, too simplistic of terms or phrases have been used, like "does the individual believe in God" or "do they attend church." However, this does not equate to those who have outlining ideas of faith, like, for example, one of my participants who believes an "author controls everything" or those who grew up with faith but now may be struggling to find their faith. Wortman and Park (2008, 210) agree, "It has become increasingly clear to researchers that simple global conceptualizations of religion do not adequately capture the complex nature of religion in people's lives." This is where in-depth interviews and ethnographic work can help further identify and explain religion's use in everyday life of the person anthropological speaking where other researchers could not before.

Therefore, I would recommend that anthropologists continue to further evaluate how individuals self-identify religiously and look at how symbols and rituals of American

Christianity and are impacting the culture of life in the U.S.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community is a complicated question to answer. In meeting with my client and presenting my evaluation of Aldersgate United Methodist Church's role following the Santa Fe shooting, I learned that each of the three individuals I met with embraced a different piece of my evaluation [attached in appendix].

I met with the church's pastor, the Board of Trustee's chairman, and the church's liaison to the City of Santa Fe and steering committee chair when the Resiliency Center was located at Aldersgate. My recommendations for the church were slightly different from the ones above and particularly pointed to Aldersgate. However, I found it interesting that each person picked up on different parts of the recommendations.

If I were to bet, I would say this thesis will have similar results, where each person who reads it will walk away with something different from it. Honestly, I am not sure how I feel about that. I am not sure if that means I could not collectively rally people around a consensus or if I was just successful in getting people to think further on the conversation about the role of faith-based organizations in trauma-affected communities.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL REFLECTION

This chapter may be one of the chapters I have been most looking forward to writing, and I get to share a piece of me with all of you. I want to share my story and how I am connected to Santa Fe and May 18. I discuss how this research impacted me in ways I never realized it would and exactly why I selected this topic. I also want to share experiences I learned as an ethnographer, which I was not prepared for as a master's student.

6.1 Personal Story

As an anthropologist doing research in my community, I decided to include a little bit of my history and share how I came to do this research on something that heavily impacted my family and myself. Both stories are quite personal and not so applicable to other anthropologists; therefore, I have a second section that gives reflections that may be useful for other anthropologists who work in their communities.

6.1.1 My History with Santa Fe

I have noted this many times throughout the thesis, but to call it out specifically now, I am from Santa Fe, Texas. I graduated from Santa Fe High School in 2001 and raised my children in Santa Fe. From 2006 – to 2012, I worked at Santa Fe High School and was over several student programs and large community events during this time. My children grew up playing sports in the community, and I served as team mom and on the PTO.

On any given day of the week, you could see any member of my family wearing green and gold and representing the Santa Fe Indians. We were firmly rooted in the Santa Fe culture. Our community had seen many adversities over the years, and I had witnessed strength and resilience. I had seen neighbors help one another after each storm and after each tragic death. At

one point, I was asked if I would ever leave Santa Fe, and I responded with a firm no, because I knew without a doubt that if something ever happened to one of my children or me, my community would be here to help pick up the pieces.

I absolutely loved my community. I believed we had the most caring individuals steeped in community tradition. I am not sure if I was young and naïve, if the community changed as several of my participants had mentioned, or if I was so intertwined into the dominant group that I failed to recognize the sub-dominant struggles. Regardless of why, for most of my 20s and 30s, I saw Santa Fe as a great community to raise my children.

Fast forward to 2018. For us, this is where life drastically changes. My youngest son was a freshman, and my oldest was a junior in high school. My youngest had class down the hall from where the shooting took place. For some reason, on this day, his girlfriend, who had never missed class, asked my son to skip, so he was not there. On a normal day, he and his girlfriend, who were always late, would have been entering the hallway about the same time the shooter entered the hall. This is a thought that still haunts both of us to this day. Without getting into too many details, he suffered immense survivor's guilt as a result and was in intensive therapy for a year.

My oldest, who is autistic and dyslexic, had attended Santa Fe his whole life. However, high school was a little much for him. He spent every lunch break of his freshman and sophomore years in the library, and every morning was a fight to go to school. He was slightly behind on credits, and the public school system was not working for us. So, for his junior year, we decided to enroll him in an online homeschooling program, where he had more flexibility, fewer social interactions, and I was able to assist more. Therefore, he also was not at school that day. However, with that said, he was also highly impacted. He had grown up with both the

accused and one of the victims. He went through a period of extreme anger, especially with himself; he felt he should have recognized clues that the accused had these types of thoughts and he could have done something.

However, both boys are doing well today. My oldest finished high school and was accepted into college to begin studying psychology this coming fall. My youngest has decided to enter the Army for one tour, then go to college and become a homicide detective. I firmly believe their career choices, like many of the students that were highly impacted, are a direct result of May 18, 2018.

6.1.2 Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden

It cannot go without mentioning that this tragic event deeply impacted me as well. I am a very empathic and take-action type of person. Not only did this happen at my children's school, but it also happened at my alma mater, somewhere I had worked for many years, and as I mentioned previously, I was firmly connected to the community culture.

I personally knew one of the victims, we had worked together at the high school, and she assisted on several of the large projects I did. Her loss hit me hard, but seeing the grieving parents, some I had gone to high school with, was much harder.

Seeing my community-at-large in pain drove me to act. My undergraduate degree is in environmental science, and after leaving Santa Fe ISD, I began working for an environmental non-profit in Houston. I used the knowledge gained from these areas and approached Santa Fe City Council with an idea to transform an underutilized city park that sits directly behind City Hall into a therapeutic garden to help the community heal.

I had my first meeting with the city manager in late June, only one month after the shooting. When the idea looked like it would move forward, I contacted each of the families,

many I had never met before. I wanted to let them know about the project and see if they had any objections, questions, suggestions, or wanted to help.

With the city's support and no outward voice contesting it, I moved forward with the project. I partnered with an award-winning landscape architecture firm in Houston, whose co-founder was a Santa Fe graduate, Beth Clark. We designed a conceptual plan valued at a quarter-million dollars.

With the Santa Fe city manager's guidance, I revitalized Keep Santa Fe Beautiful, a 501c3, to oversee the project and raise funds. We broke ground in October 2018 and began the first phase of construction; clearing the land, building a fence, and refurbishing a gazebo on the property. Today the garden features sensory plantings, walking trails, a water fountain, and several art pieces. It is currently open to visitors, however, due to the pandemic and a massive winter storm that killed many plants, a grand opening and ribbon-cutting have not yet occurred.

6.1.3 Why I Selected This Research

The garden project has been incredibly important to me and to many individuals in Santa Fe and I could have easily selected it to be my master thesis project. However, I decided that I wanted to do more. I knew shortly after the shooting took place that I wanted to use my academic pursuits to help my community uniquely. In the beginning, I was not quite sure how that looked.

I only knew I wanted to better understand how we could build resiliency in our community. I initially started with the City of Santa Fe to work with the Resiliency Center as a client. At first, this was the plan; however, city politics and changes both on city council and the city manager led to a pivot, and I reevaluated my research.

As noted throughout the thesis, Santa Fe is largely a faith-based community; the

Resiliency Center was housed in a church, and yet the community has some diversity in religion, and some felt uncomfortable with the Resiliency Center being at a church. After discussing the pros and cons and meeting with Aldergate United Methodist Church Trustee's chairman, looking at the role of faith made perfect sense as a research topic. Thus, my topic was born.

6.2 Reflections as an Anthropologist

Many anthropologists travel to remote areas and look at cultures unique to the Western world and their communities. Some stick closer to home yet still try to apply an individualistic lone culture aspect to the group of people they are studying, yet they have been heavily criticized for it. However, even those who have studied their communities have rarely looked at their community after a mass community shooting, let alone a school shooting that was so deeply intertwined into their personal life.

6.2.1 Checking Bias

Overall, this process has been enlightening as both a researcher and an individual, and I knew that I had to approach this research with my eyes wide open. However, there are quite a few things I was surprised to realize are a little different when you are an ethnographer in your community, and not only the place you live but the place you grew up and are attached to or were attached to (I get more into that later).

First, I have been academically trained to set aside my bias, evaluate, and interpret a situation. I have done this on numerous occasions through course projects with school and with some consulting projects my last few years of grad school. However, at the end of the day, I am still human, and bias exists, especially when you are researching the town you grew up in. A town you went to high school in, where many people you went to school with also still live in the town.

Like any person, there are people I do not like for numerous reasons. Of course, just because I personally do not like a person does not mean they would not make an excellent candidate to interview. Therefore, I had to set aside those biases to ensure I spoke to everyone regardless of any personal opinions. For most ethnographers, this is easy and has been for me in the past, but I think when there is a long-established connection to a person, it makes it more difficult. With that said, throughout the entire process, from recruitment, interviews, interpretation, to writing, I would pause, reflect, and ask myself, Is this true? Can I support it with multiple points of data? Or is this just because of how I feel about this person? Sometimes, taking a hard look at yourself and checking your bias is hard, but it is an absolute must for the good of the research.

6.2.2 Secret Keeper

In researching my community, I also noticed a marked difference from research I had done outside of my community. In previous research, other participants were slightly more reserved; they answered the questions they were asked and over time would open up, but still, it never felt like they were 100% honest, and that is often where participant observation helps.

However, in Santa Fe, I was shocked at how open and honest people were. I do not know if it was because they felt like I was like them. After all, I was from their community, and for the vast majority, I looked like them (white). I say this because some participants made references that implied, they saw me as similar to themselves, with terms like “we” or “people like us.” It may also have been that some of these individuals felt somewhat protected to say anything because they knew their identities would be protected. Whatever the reason, I was not prepared for some of these individuals who openly shared with me.

I had mentally prepared myself before I began my research for the possibility that

someone may share details of what happened to them on May 18, as many did. I began seeing a counselor through Texas Children's Trauma and Greif Unit shortly after my son did and asked her to help prepare me for what I may hear in my research in addition to helping my family.

While I cannot say I was 100% prepared for everything I heard, I feel I handled most of these relivings quite well and compartmentalized. There is still one story that every time I think about it, I cry. There is one family that I did not know before the tragedy but have gotten particularly close with, and the story pertains to this family.

However, I had not prepared for hearing open words of hate, racism, and deceit from people I had grown up with, people I looked up to, those in powerful positions, and those I believed the community respected. At times, I was shocked and would have to keep a straight face and keep going, act like what they just said was completely normal.

Afterward, I realized that some of the things that were said, especially in the realm of dishonest behaviors, were their way of passing their secrets on to someone who would not be able to share their identity. I essentially became their secret keeper without even realizing it nor fully accepting that responsibility. Some of the things made me see these individuals differently, which is difficult when you live in the same town and two cases were directly related to someone, I would call a friend, so they put me in a moral obligation without my permission.

While there are benefits to doing ethnography in your community, this is not one, and one I would strongly advise anthropologists considering it in the future to think about. This is one of the strongest reasons I have decided that moving away from my community, a community I have lived in for 26 years, is probably in my best interest.

6.2.3 Benefit vs. Flaw

There are many wonderful benefits to doing ethnography work in your community. For

one, I believe I had a much easier time with recruitment than I have ever had with any other research I have done. I believe this is largely because many in the community like to help others in the community, that feeling of solidarity, and this was their way of assisting a fellow person from Santa Fe.

To give an example of just how powerful this is, I got my IRB approved at the end of July and started recruiting by the start of August. Within a week and a half, I had already confirmed more than 45 individual interviews. Eventually, some had to cancel, but most met with me within two weeks of setting the interview time. I do not believe this would have been as easy if this was not my community.

Of course, besides, I was not just any community member. I was an active community member, who had been recognized by the school, the city, Galveston County, and both state and national organizations for the work I had done in Santa Fe over the years. Furthermore, I had been on the news and radio many times, been interviewed by local newspapers and was in USA Today, NPR, and the Texas Tribune. Many people in Santa Fe had seen my name and therefore felt a symbolic connection to me. My social media connections were vast, and therefore when I asked for assistance, many offered to participate without hesitation. Looking back, I do not know if this was a benefit of me doing research in my community or if it was a flaw in my research design that I was not fully aware of. Regardless, finding participants did come easier.

Growing up in Santa Fe, I also knew the area. I knew where everything was located, knew the history well, and I knew the system. I not only knew whom I needed to contact at the schools and the city, but I knew the best ways of reaching these individuals. Furthermore, my work on the Therapeutic Garden connected me to many new people and allowed many of my participants to have a location site for interviews that they knew in town and felt comfortable in.

However, I do not know if a participant's connection to me or sitting in the garden contaminated their response when they mentioned the garden specifically as a positive response they witnessed in the community.

6.2.4 Ostracizing Yourself

I have always advocated for the minority and spoke up when I felt that a specific group of people was left out. I have also always questioned things and wanted to understand better why people perceived things the way they do. So, anthropology was a natural choice for me. However, there is a difference between speaking up for those in matters you are somewhat removed from and speaking up in matters where you live.

Publishing this thesis, highlighting the voices of the minority, and exposing some of my community's less favorable traits is not going to be looked upon favorably. Many people in Santa Fe will choose to ignore the results or will be upset with me for writing this. In speaking my truth, that is scary. Many anthropologists can do these things then retreat to their own communities, but I have no retreat. I most likely will lose some I believe to be friends, and some of those same people who were so willing to participate in the research will look at me differently. Many people have had similar experiences for very different reasons, but each must decide; is it worth it?

6.2.5 Mental Health Matters

Lastly, the biggest piece of advice I can offer a fellow anthropologist or researcher who engages in research involving tragedy is to take care of yourself. I am an advocate for both self-care and professional mental health care. While doing this research, I had to be very in-tune with myself. This research took me longer than those of my peers because I often had to take breaks. Listening to trauma over and over is mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting.

Despite taking breaks often, the toll wore on me, and I developed vicarious traumatization, coupled with anxiety of publishing this research, and insecurities that resulted from harassing behaviors of a dominant few. Therefore, I am still in counseling today. For the most part, I am currently doing well. I think this is because I took my mental health seriously and listened to my body when it told me it was time for a break and ask for help. So, number one piece of advice, remember to take care of yourself; your mental health is just as important as the work you are doing.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL WITH CONSENT WAIVER AND MODIFICATION APPROVAL

UNT | DIVISION OF RESEARCH & INNOVATION
Research Integrity & Compliance

July 29, 2020

PI: Andrew Nelson, PhD
Study Title: Mandy M. Jordan Applied Anthropology Master's Thesis: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Trauma-Affected Communities
RE: Human Subjects Application # 20-141

Dear Dr. Andrew Nelson:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled, "Mandy M. Jordan Applied Anthropology Master's Thesis: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Trauma-Affected Communities."

This protocol is approved contingent upon addressing the following stipulations:

1. Please add the hours of operation for the mental health resources given to participants with the informed consent and immediately after the interview.
2. Listed in the mental health resources, include a 24-hour hotline (such as SAMSA) to be utilized by participants when physical mental health offices are not open.
3. Participants are to be notified, through the informed consent, that Mandy Jordan, an interviewer in the study, is a member of the community. The informed consent should be edited to list the potential risks associated with this relationship. The informed consent electronic notice needs to be updated to match the UNT Electronic Consent Notice template provided on our website.

Full protocol approval must be received before conducting recruitment and data collection at each pending site. During the course of your conditional approval, any changes or modifications to your study must be submitted to the UNT IRB. A final approval will be granted when the aforementioned contingencies are satisfied.

Please contact the UNT IRB at 940-565-4643 or untirb@unt.edu with any questions pertaining to your study.

Sincerely,

Gabe Ignatow, Ph.D.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS®
1155 Union Circle #310979 Denton, Texas 76203-5017
940.369.4643 940.369.7486 fax www.researchunt.edu

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS®

Institutional Review Board
Request for Waiver or Alteration of Consent Process

In most cases, written or electronic informed consent must be sought from each subject before research procedures begin. However, per HHS regulations, the IRB may approve research where investigators leave out or alter elements of informed consent if the research meets all the applicable regulations in 45 CFR 46.116(f).

Justification: To approve the waiver request, the IRB must have sufficient justification for ALL of the following criteria per 45 CFR 46.116(f). **For each statement below, check "yes" or "no" to determine if your study fulfills the requirement**. If the study cannot provide sufficient justification that the regulatory criteria are met, a waiver or alteration of the required elements of consent is not possible.

1. The research in its entirety involves no greater than minimal risk*. ☑ Yes ☐ No
2. The waiver of consent will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects. ☑ Yes ☐ No
3. If the research involves using identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens, the research could not practicably be carried out without using such information or biospecimens in an identifiable format. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☑ N/A
4. It is not practical to conduct the research without the waiver/alteration. ☑ Yes ☐ No
5. Whenever appropriate, subjects or legally authorized representatives will be provided with additional pertinent information after their participation. ☑ Yes ☐ No

**Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.*

Request for a waiver of documentation of written consent (no physical or electronic signature)

- Will you require this waiver for all subjects in the study, or only for some subjects (describe groups)?
  The wavier only applies to survey participants
- Indicate your method of obtaining Informed Consent without a written or electronic signature, i.e. verbal or passive consent.
  Survey particiapnts must read the consent (first question) and actively

Justification: To approve the waiver request, the IRB must have sufficient justification for AT LEAST ONE of the following criteria per 45 CFR 46.117(c). **Describe how your study fulfills at least one of the requirements below.** If the study does not meet at least one of the criteria, a waiver of the written or electronic signature is not possible.

1. The only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject (or legally authorized representative) will be given the option to take a copy of the consent form, and the subject's wishes will govern.

   By requesting signatures of each participate in the online survey, confidentiality

   OR

2. The research presents no more than minimal risk* of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

   OR

3. If the subjects or legally authorized representatives are members of a distinct cultural group or community in which signing forms is not the norm, that the research presents no more than minimal risk* of harm to subjects and provided there is an appropriate alternative mechanism for documenting that informed consent was obtained.

**Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.*

DIVISION OF RESEARCH & INNOVATION
Research Integrity & Compliance

August 17, 2020

PI: Andrew Nelson
Study Title: Mandy M. Jordan Applied Anthropology Master's Thesis: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Trauma-Affected Communities

RE: Human Subjects Application # IRB-20-141

Dear Dr. Andrew Nelson:

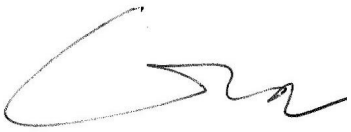
The UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB) has received your request to modify your study titled "Mandy M. Jordan Applied Anthropology Master's Thesis: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Trauma-Affected Communities." As required by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects, the UNT IRB has examined the request to change survey questions and to revise the informed consent documents to reflect these changes. The modification to this study is hereby approved for use with human subjects.

Attached to your Cayuse application in the Study Detail section under the Attachments tab are the consent documents with IRB approval. Please copy **and use this form only** for your study subjects.

Please contact The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (940) 565-4643, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Note: Please do not reply to this email. Please direct all questions to untirb@unt.edu

Sincerely,



Gabe Ignatow, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board
GI:jm

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

UNT
University of North Texas

Department of Anthropology
College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

Volunteers needed for research on the role of faith-based organizations in trauma-affected communities

Do you want to help create inclusion and social belonging in a cultually diverse community?

You may qualify for this research if:

- You live in the Santa Fe ISD boundaries
- Have a relative that attended or worked at Santa Fe High School during the 2018-2019 school year
- Are 18 years or older
- Are 16 or 17 with parent consent
- Attend a faith-based organization in Santa Fe or one that assisted during or after the tragedy
- Assisted with any of the response, recovery, or resiliency efforts
- Are not affiliated with any faith-based organization

Participation Involves:

- One or more of the following:
  - answering questions with the researcher in an interview format (either in-person or virtually)
  - fill out digital survey

Potential Benefits:

Participating in this study may help faith-based organizations create social belonging and inclusion in culturally diverse and traumatized communities.

*Participation is voluntary, therefore, you will not be compensated.

For more information or to find out if you qualify, please contact the lead researcher, Mandy Jordan at [redacted]

**This research is part of a Master thesis in Applied Anthropology*

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Interview Debriefing Statement

This research is about faith and faith based-organizations in trauma-affected communities. Therefore, you will be asked personal questions about your faith and how you view faith-based organizations in the community. You may also experience trauma reminders as there are questions concerning the events after May 18, 2018.

With that said, I do want to let you know ahead of time, I will not be asking any questions about what you or your loved one may have experienced during the tragedy and your participation will be confidential.

As with any research, you can skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and may opt to end the interview at any time.

Survey Debriefing Statement

This research is about faith and faith based-organizations in trauma-affected communities. Therefore, you will be asked personal questions about your faith and how you view faith-based organizations in the community.

You might experience trauma reminders and discomfort during this survey. If you at any time experience a trauma reminder or discomfort and want to skip a question or withdraw completely exit the study, please remember that you have the right to do so, at any time.

If you are experiencing trauma reminders, depression, PTSD, or other life disturbances as a result of the May 18, 2018, Santa Fe High School shooting, you can call the Santa Fe Resiliency Center at (409) 218-7129 or the Santa Fe Support Crisis Hotline at (800) 595-0869. Other crisis hotlines that may be of assistance: Gulf Coast Center Crisis Line (866) 729-3848, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, The TREVOR Project LGBTQ Crisis Hotline (866) 488-7386, Safe Call Now (for first responders) (877) 230-6060.

APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Questions

Demographical Questions (open answers)

1. What is your zip code?
2. What is your gender identification?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. How old are you?
5. What generation do you self-identify as?
6. What is your highest level of education?
7. What religion do you self-identify as?
8. Are you a member of a faith-based organization? If so, which one?
9. In what way are you connected to Santa Fe, Texas?
10. How would you describe the culture of your community?

Often to Not Often Questions

1. How often do you attend faith-based services?
2. How often do you follow local politics?
3. How often do you attend your local city council meetings?
4. How often do you attend your local school board meetings?
5. How often do you watch the local news?
6. How often do you engage on Facebook?
7. How often do you engage on Instagram?
8. How often do you engage on Twitter?
9. How often do you engage on Snapchat?

Open-ended Questions

1. How does tragedy impact a community?
2. Of the community events held after the shooting, which had the most impact on you and why?
3. Did you attend the one-year remembrance event? If so, what do you remember the most?
4. Why do you believe people turn to faith or turn away from faith after a tragedy?
5. In which ways did faith or a faith-based organization help you after the shooting?
6. In which ways did faith or a faith-based organization impede or limit healing in Santa Fe?
7. How do you feel about the prayer at public events?
8. We are seeing trauma and violence on a large scale in our nation right now. What advice would you offer a faith-based organization during these times?
9. What role do you believe politics play in the response, recovery, and long-term resiliency in a trauma-affected community?
10. What do you believe is the best way for elected officials or community leaders to communicate to a diverse and multi-generational group?
11. What role do you believe the media should play in the response, recovery, and long-term resiliency in a trauma-affected community?
12. What role do you believe social media can play in the response, recovery, and long-term resiliency of trauma-affected communities?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Demographical Questions

1. What is your zip code?
2. What is your gender identification?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. How old are you?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. What is your occupation?
7. How would you describe the culture of your community?
8. What religion do you self-identify as?
9. Are you a member of a faith-based organization? If so, which one?
10. In what way are you connected to Santa Fe, Texas?

Faith-based Questions

1. What does it mean to belong to a faith community?
2. How can faith help individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging?
3. In which ways did a faith-based organization encourage inclusion from members outside of their congregation or religion?
4. Have you noticed any forms of exclusion from a faith-based organization?
5. Why is it important for you to be a part (or not be a part) of a community of faith?
6. How can one church encourage other churches to collaborate and work together as one for the good of many after a mass tragedy occurs?
7. What are the challenges of working with multiple faiths or those with no faith?
8. What type of faith-based activities did you engage in before the tragedy?
9. What type of faith-based activities did you engage in after the tragedy?
10. In what ways did see a faith-based organization helping after the shooting?
11. In which ways did a faith impede or limit healing in Santa Fe?
12. We are seeing trauma and violence on a large scale in our nation right now. What advice would you offer a faith-based organization during these times?
13. What was your opinion of the white crosses at Santa Fe High School and the memorial crosses at the Maranatha Church?
14. What was your opinion of the night of prayer after the tragedy?
15. In what ways, could these crosses or events impede social belonging and inclusion in a culturally and religiously diverse community?
16. How can we move past a nation that offers “prayers”, to a nation that gives help in the wake of a tragedy?
17. What do you believe is the role of a faith-based organization after a mass community tragedy?
18. What do you believe was the community perception of faith-based organizations offering assistance after the shooting?
19. What are the limits that a faith-based organization should go to help during a crisis?

Trauma & Healing Questions

1. How does tragedy impact a community?
2. Which community events following the shooting had the most/least impact on you and why?
3. Did you attend the one-year remembrance event? If so, what activities had the most impact on you and which ones had the least impact on you?
4. How do you feel that there was no memorial event planned for year-two, even before COVID?
5. Has Santa Fe seen trauma or acts of violence and hate in the past? If so, what kinds and how did the community recover?

Temporal Questions

1. We often talk about response, recovery, and long-term resiliency in trauma-affected communities, but what do these terms mean to you?
2. When you hear "long-term" resiliency, how long would you identify long-term?
3. Directly following the tragedy in Santa Fe, what are some of the responses you witnessed?
4. What helped you most in the first few days following the tragedy?
5. What do you believe helped the community the most in the first few days following the shooting?
6. After the tragedy in Santa Fe, what recovery efforts were made?
7. What do you believe has helped the community the most on their road to recovery?
8. In what ways, have you seen long-term resiliency being implemented in Santa Fe?
9. How can faith-based organizations create long-term resiliency in trauma-affected communities?
10. What role do you believe the news and social media can play in the response, recovery, and long-term resiliency of trauma-affected communities?

Political Question

1. How do you feel about the public prayer at the City Council and School Board meetings and before community events?
2. What is your opinion of the separation of church and state?
3. In what ways do you see elected officials using faith?
4. What is your perception of our elected officials and community leaders in terms of how they help the community?
5. In what ways did our elected officials and community leaders help the community heal after the tragedy?
6. Religion and politics often seem to overlap, what ways have you seen this happen in Santa Fe?
7. The Resiliency Center was originally housed at Aldergate United Methodist Church, my client, yet was run by the City of Santa Fe. After a year, the Center moved to Runge park and less than a year after that the City terminated staff and transferred services to another organization, despite having 13 months left on the funding. Can you tell me your thoughts on this?
8. What do you believe is the best way for elected officials or community leaders to communicate to a diverse and multi-generational group?

Generational Questions

1. How do you identify generations and what generation do you believe you are a part of?
2. How do you perceive people your age?
3. How do you perceive people in a different generational group?
4. How do faith-based organizations create inclusion for people your age?
5. How do you believe each generation interacts with faith-based organizations?
6. Do you believe there are generational gaps, if so, how?

Final Questions

1. Can you think of anyone who you recommend I should reach out to and speak with?
2. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me or talk about that I may have not asked?
3. Would you like to have a copy of the research findings in the final thesis publication emailed to you? If so, what is your email address?

APPENDIX F

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE FLYER

In the event of an emergency

Need Additional Help?

- City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center (M-T 10am to 7pm): 409-218-7129
- Santa Fe Support - Crisis Hotline Number, 24/7 - 1-800-595-0869
- Gulf Coast Center Crisis Line, 24/7: 866-729-3848
- Crisis Text Line: Text 741741, free 24/7 (Text START to 741741 from anywhere in the USA, anytime, about any type of crisis)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 24/7: 800-273-8255 (TTY: 800-799-4889)
- Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio, 24/7: 1-888-628-9454
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ suicide help): 866-488-7386 (text 202-304-1200 or Trevor Project online chat)
- Veterans Crisis Line, 24/7: 800-273-8255, press 1
- Safe Call Now, 24/7 (First Responder Specific): 1-206-459-3020 OR 1-877-230-6060

For additional resources and links please go to: SFTXStudy.info

The researcher is in no way a mental health professional and recommends anyone experiencing distress from participating in this research to utilize the resources provided on this document.

**This resource document is provided in goodwill as part of a thesis project researching the role of faith-based organizations in trauma-affected communities - Mandy M. Jordan, University of North Texas, Department of Anthropology .*

APPENDIX G

LETTER FROM ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ALDERSGATE CHURCH
· UNITED METHODIST
Rev. Yohan Baek

June 18, 2020

To whom it may concern:

Mandy Jordan has permission to use an available room at Aldersgate United Methodist Church to conduct interviews and/or focus groups as needed for her academic work for University of North Texas. She has agreed to make arrangements for use with the AUMC Ad · istrative Assistant.

George Creighton, Chair
AUMC Board of Trustees

APPENDIX H

APPLIED PROJECT: EVALUATION FOR AUMC

FEBRUARY 2021

The role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community

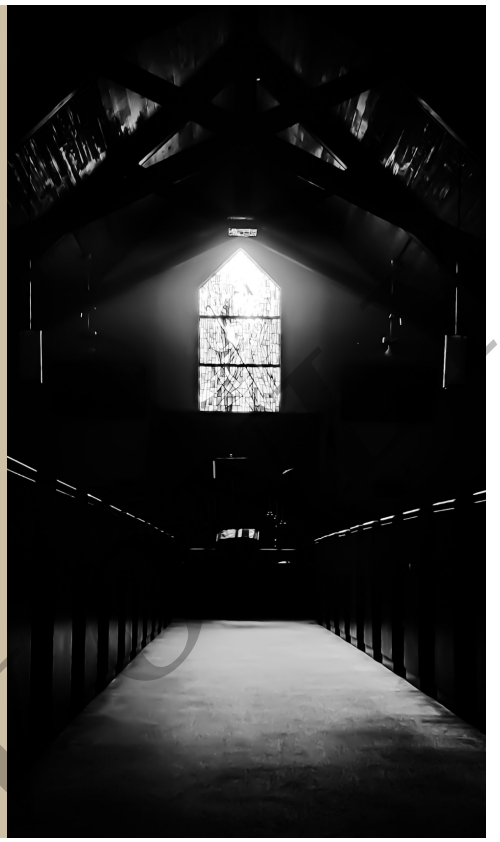
AN APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION ON THE ROLE PLAYED BY ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FOLLOWING THE MAY 18, 2018, SANTA FE HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

BY: MANDY M. JORDAN
GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

Table of Contents

Summary

On May 18, 2018, Santa Fe, Texas, was spotlighted in the news as a lone student shooter entered Santa Fe High School killing eight students and two teachers. Within hours, the local Methodist church, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, had opened their facility as the hub to the FBI, American Red Cross, and Family Assistance Center operations. When these organizations began to leave, the City of Santa Fe took over and entered into an agreement with Aldersgate United Methodist Church to continue to utilize the facility to house the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, a free resource assistance center for the community of Santa Fe. This agreement was maintained through October 2019, until the City relocated the Center. This evaluation will use ethnographic data from members of the Santa Fe community and those impacted by the Santa Fe tragedy to assess the role of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts to the community of Santa Fe. The evaluation will include background information, data collection methods, demographics, community perceptions, lessons learned, evaluation findings, and recommendations.



WHAT IS AN ENTHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION?

Ethnography is a study of culture from a holistic sense, meaning it examines all the parts of the whole and examines people and their relationships to cultural systems. This includes processes and meanings within those systems, such as customs, behaviors, interpersonal relations, and relations to space.

For many years, data was looked at strictly on a quantitative basis. However, an anthropologist can further examine a situation through ethnography, collect qualitative data, analyze said data, and then report the data findings to stakeholders. This approach gives a more holistic assessment and is being used to evaluate programs, organizations, responses, and much more.

This report will use ethnographic data collected to evaluate the role Aldersgate United Methodist Church played in the response, recovery, and resiliency efforts to the community of Santa Fe, Texas following the May 18, 2018 Santa Fe High School Shooting.

WHAT IS AN APPLIED PROJECT?

As part of the master's program in Applied Anthropology from the University of North Texas, a portion of the research project must be applicable and presented to a client. For this project, Aldergate United Methodist Church in Santa Fe, Texas, agreed to be my client. This evaluation is a snapshot of a larger research project I am working on for my master's thesis; however, this report will present the reader with a summative understanding of the role AUMC played after the Santa Fe High School tragedy. Sections will include information on participant and religious demographics, the community's perception of Aldersgate's response, lessons learned, and recommendations.

WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the study of humans. It is a social science that looks at aspects of human culture, society, biology, and the environment, in both the past and the present. Anthropology is broken into four main subfields: cultural, archeology, linguistics, and physical or biological anthropology. Several smaller subfields are emerging in more recent years, such as environmental, medical, educational, organizational, business, design, and user experience.

Cultural anthropologists specialize in studying peoples' culture, beliefs, practices, and the perception of identity and social belonging amongst their groups. Cultural anthropologists examine how people who share a common cultural system organize and shape the physical and social world around them, and in turn, how they are shaped by those ideas, behaviors, and physical environments.

Most anthropologists are trained to use the same rich qualitative and quantitative methodology, including observations (often called fieldwork because it requires the anthropologist to spend an extended period in a research location), interviews, and surveys.

A letter from the researcher

Hello.

I want to take this time to thank Aldersgate Methodist Church for allowing me to work on this project, welcoming me not only into your church but also into so many of your lives.
I have been a member of the Santa Fe community since 1994. I graduated from Santa Fe High School in 2001, and I have raised my children here. After the shooting, in which both my children were highly impacted, I threw myself into helping not only my family recover but also my community. In June 2018, I approached the City of Santa Fe with an idea to transform an underutilized city park into a therapeutic garden for the community, known today as the Mae S. Bruce Therapeutic Garden. I also worked with the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center as the Community Engagement Specialist for a short time.

However, my research on this project taught me a great deal more about my community. I learned more about compassion, grief, trauma, tribulations, and faith. I learned from those I spoke with what it means to be from Santa Fe, to be a survivor of a mass school shooting, and I learned what it means to be a Christian in a way I would have never considered before. As a result, I discovered just as much about myself in this process as I did about the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community.

Research like this changes you; it leaves a mark on you, lives on within your soul. If only a small part of this can translate into these next few pages, then I will feel that I have done my job.

Regardless, my appreciation and admiration for Aldersgate United Methodist Church will live on forever.

Sincerely,

Mandy M. Jordan

A Brief History of Santa Fe & the Tragedy

Santa Fe is a small rural town in south Texas, roughly 30 miles south of Houston and less than 20 miles north of Galveston Island. Santa Fe is located in Galveston County with a population of 13,509 citizens living within the city limits and more than 30,000 located with the Santa Fe Independent School District boundaries.

The name Santa Fe is Spanish for "Holy Faith," but the community was named after the Santa Fe railroad (now part of BNSF Railway), which has traveled through the town since 1877 and continues to this day. While the area has roots going back to the 1870s, the first school was not established until 1928, and the City of Santa Fe was not incorporated until 1978, making Santa Fe a relatively young City. Initially, Santa Fe was three separate unincorporated communities, Algoa, Alta Loma, and Arcadia. When a neighboring town tried to annex parts of Alta Loma, these communities' residents banded together to create a petition to incorporate.

The history of Santa Fe includes a historic Ku Klux Klan protest and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the Santa Fe ISD's policy permitting "student-led " prayer at football games and other school events violated the Constitution's prohibitions against the establishment of a state religion.

WARNING – This section contains sensitive and upsetting information.

On May 18, 2018, the community's sense of safety was shattered when a 17-year-old student entered the high school, armed with a sawed-off shotgun and a pistol. He opened fire in an art classroom, and as students began to run and hide, a teacher pulled the fire alarm in the hopes of allowing more students time to escape. The shooter fired through a door held shut by Freshman student and AUMC youth visitor, Christian Riley Garcia, and entered an adjoining art classroom. He then took aim for a closet, where Junior Chris Stone had his back against the door, hiding several of his classmates. As students tried to escape the building, the shooter entered the hall, where substitute teacher Ann Perkins placed herself in front of a student, pushing the teenager out of the way.

All of this occurred in four minutes; it was then a school officer arrived and began to engage the shooter. Taking hits himself, Officer John Barnes nearly lost his life that day. Police engaged with the shooter for nearly 45 minutes before he surrendered and was taken into custody. In the end, hundreds ran from the school while hearing and seeing things they would never forget. Twelve individuals were injured by gunshots and transported to nearby hospitals. Eight hours later, in a makeshift location by the school district called the "Reunification Center," ten families were told their loved one did not survive. Lost that day were substitute teachers Ann Perkins and Cynthia Tisdale; 11th-grade students Chris Stone, and Sabika Sheikh, a foreign exchange student from Pakistan; a special needs student and AUMC youth member, Jared Conrad Black, and Shanna Fisher, both from the 10th grade; and 9th graders Christian Riley Garcia, Kyle McLeod, Kimberly Vaughan, and Angelique Ramirez.

The community of Santa Fe felt these losses deeply and initiated prayer circles and vigils, including a community-wide vigil held at the local Texas First Bank on the evening of May 18. Within days, the town was covered in green and gold ribbons (SFHS school colors), and by day five, Greg Zanis, a carpenter from Illinois, arrived with 10 crosses, each bearing a heart and the name of the victim, and placed the crosses in front of the high school. Simultaneously, several faith-based organizations, including Aldersgate United Methodist Church, immediately responded to their community in need by doing whatever they could to help.

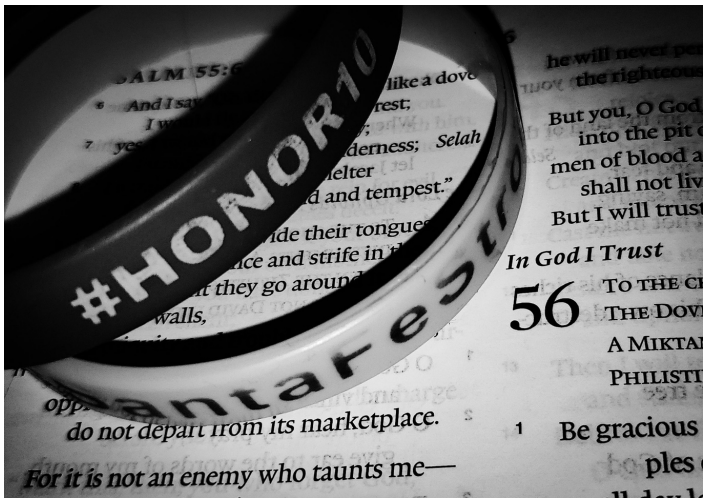
How Aldersgate got involved?

After numerous local and surrounding emergency agencies responded to the incident, the chaplain of the Galveston County Firefighters Association called Aldersgate United Methodist Church (AUMC) hours after the tragedy. He requested Asbury Hall's use within the Church to provide emergency responders a place to meet with department chaplains and critical incident stress debriefing team members. The chaplain was familiar with the facility due to his previous involvement with the Boy Scout troops that meet regularly at AUMC, and the Church graciously welcomed the chance to assist their community in such a dire time.

That same afternoon, a representative from the American Red Cross called the church office and requested an opportunity for a tour to determine if the facility would be appropriate to serve as the Crisis Assistance Center for the Santa Fe community. Church trustees accepted a contract proposed by the Red Cross to utilize the Church's family life center, which met space and privacy requirements. Setup for the Family Assistance Center began that evening by the American Red Cross, who mandated a complete lockout of all church-related activities, traffic, or movement within the designated space.

The following day, Saturday, May 19, 2018, the Crisis Center, organized and facilitated by the American Red Cross, opened at 9 am and numerous representatives were present to offer information/services from the following organizations: American Red Cross (mental health services); FBI, criminal investigation and Victim Assistance; area funeral homes; various therapy (comfort) dog groups; legal services, Galveston County Medical Examiner Office, Galveston County District Attorney Office; plus, other assistance links. The privacy allowed the victims, including families of the fatalities and those wounded, physically and mentally, the opportunity to get the help they needed during a tough emotional time. To ensure this opportunity, the agencies' space expanded to include additional wings of the Church. Aldersgate United Methodist Church operated in this capacity through Thursday, May 24, 2018.

To provide a continuity of services to the community, at a meeting with officials from the agencies involved and support from the City of Santa Fe, Aldersgate United Methodist Church was set to host the free resource services to the community until June 10, 2018, when the City of Santa Fe would utilize the space for the Santa Fe Strong Resiliency Center, later named the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, and staff could be employed. The City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, commonly known as the "Resiliency Center" or "the Center," remained at Aldersgate United Methodist church, seven days a week, from 10 am to 7 pm, Monday through Saturday, and 1 pm to 7 pm on Sundays, until October 1, 2019.



Data Collection Methods

This research utilizes ethnographic research methods common in applied anthropology to understand the perceptions of faith-based organizations' role in the trauma-affected community of Santa Fe, Texas.

Documentary research – is analyzing existing research, documents, and other sources of textual documents such as media reports, legislation, governmental or organizational meeting minutes, and graphic documents such as photographs or maps. Document analysis can provide useful background information to the study while also providing insight into how participants view themselves.

Participant Observation – is done by joining in with the activities and making mental, then written, theoretically informed, observations. So, joining in, being there, and experiencing life as it is lived through the participants' eyes. For this evaluation, this method was easily accomplished as I also live in Santa Fe.

Snowball sampling – is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. Due to the research's sensitivity and to ensure there was a true representation of Santa Fe, most participants were asked to participate by the researcher directly.

Semi-structured interviews - is a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. These are an effective method for data collection when the researcher wants: (1) to collect qualitative, open-ended data; (2) to explore participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic; and (3) to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues.

Surveys – are a great way to capture quantitative data such as gender, age, religion, occupation, education, and more. Surveys have predetermined questions and often like the interview questions. Likert-scale questions, open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and close-ended questions are common types of ethnography survey questions.

Reflexivity – has come to have two distinct meanings, one that refers to the researcher's awareness of their relationship to the field of study and how their mere presence can impact responses, and the other that attends to the ways that the researcher involves their consciousness and commentary in the findings.

Coding – is a process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items (photograph, image) and identifying concepts and finding emerging themes and relations between them. For this research, I utilized MAXQDA, a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis.

Triangulation – is a technique that facilitates validation and understanding of data through cross verification from two or more sources.

Interview Demographics

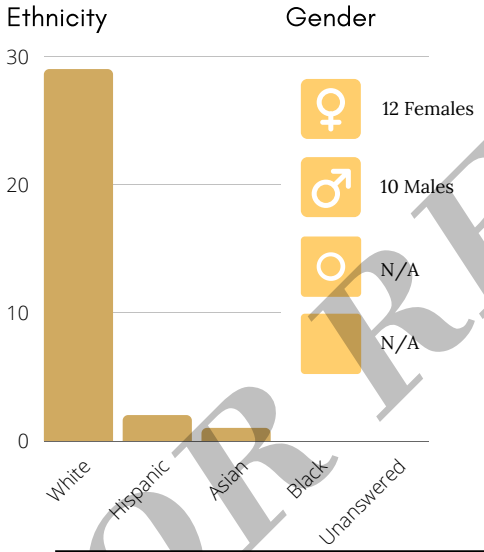
The proposal to the church was created in 2019 with hopes of completing the evaluation by April 2020. However, by March 2020, COVID-19 had put the United States under strict restrictions, and engaging in face-to-face research was impossible. After a brief hold, the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board granted research to resume in the fall of 2020 with minor adjustments, including incorporating optional web conferencing interviews via Zoom.

Most interview participants were directly asked to participate by the researcher. However, some participants opted to do an interview rather than the survey, and other participants recommended some individuals. Interviewees had the option to meet via web conferencing technology, Zoom, at a public location, or Aldersgate United Methodist Church. For the last two options, respondents had to maintain six feet or wear a mask due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half on average and comprised semi-structured open-ended questions. All interviews were recorded for transcription purposes only, and all participants were given a pseudonym. Participants came from three different time zones; however, most participants live in the Santa Fe area, and all participants have a connection to Santa Fe or the Santa Fe High School tragedy.

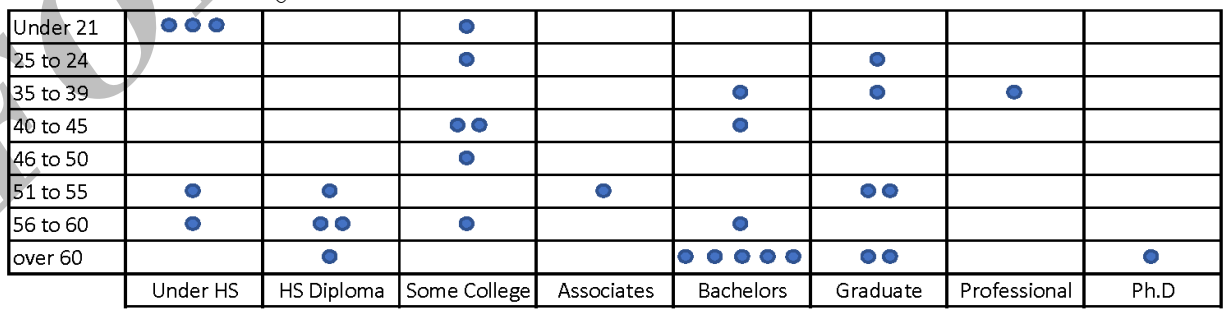
Participants were asked a series of demographical questions at the start of the interview to break the ice and collect information to couple with the survey data; some of this data can be seen below.

In the end, 32 individuals were interviewed during August 2020.



Occupation

The interviewees' occupations covered various occupations, including **business owners**, **school employees**, **educators**, **church employees**, **pastors**, **students**, **stay-at-home parents**, **mental health professionals**, **first responders**, and **city officials**. Several respondents said they are now **retired** but had worked in some of the aforementioned jobs before retirement, and two are currently **unemployed** due to COVID-19. One respondent works as a **researcher**, one is in **finance**, and one respondent works as a **historian** for a government agency.



Education and Age

Survey Demographics

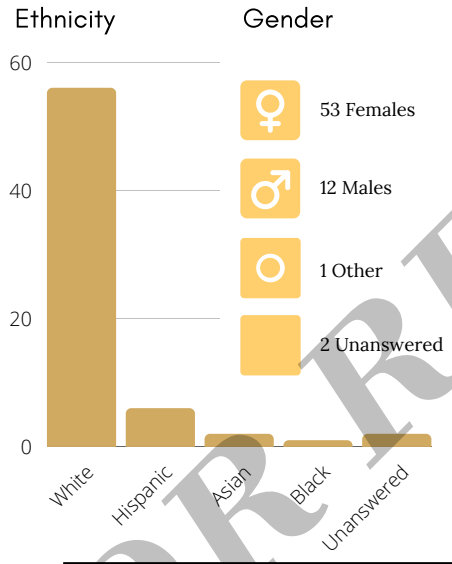
Survey recruitment occurred mostly on social media through direct contact by the researcher. However, several respondents also shared the survey with individuals they felt would add valuable insights. This technique is known as snowball sampling. The majority of the participants live in the Santa Fe, Texas area; however, all of them have a connection to Santa Fe or the Santa Fe High School tragedy.

The survey was created through a survey software called Qualtrics and was housed on the researcher's website, www.sftxstudy.info. This website also contained printable consent forms for participants and phone numbers, addresses, and web links for mental health resources.

The survey was 100% anonymous, and as a result, a signed copy of the consent form was not obtainable. Therefore, participants were required to review the consent form and confirm if they agreed before proceeding with the survey; this was the only mandatory question.

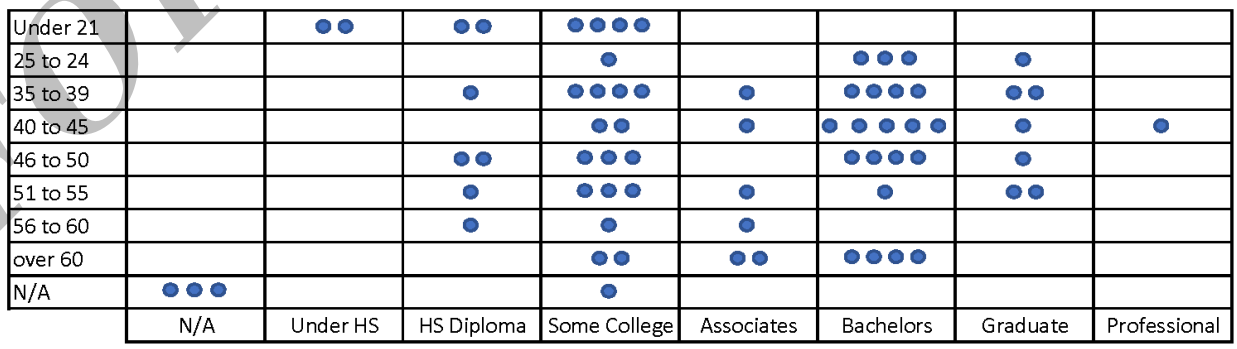
The survey consisted of 19 questions plus the consent form. Eight questions contained demographical inquiry; some of that data can be seen below. Other questions such as, "what is the role of a faith-based organization after a mass community tragedy?" will be addressed further on.

In the end, 68 individuals completed the survey during August 2020.



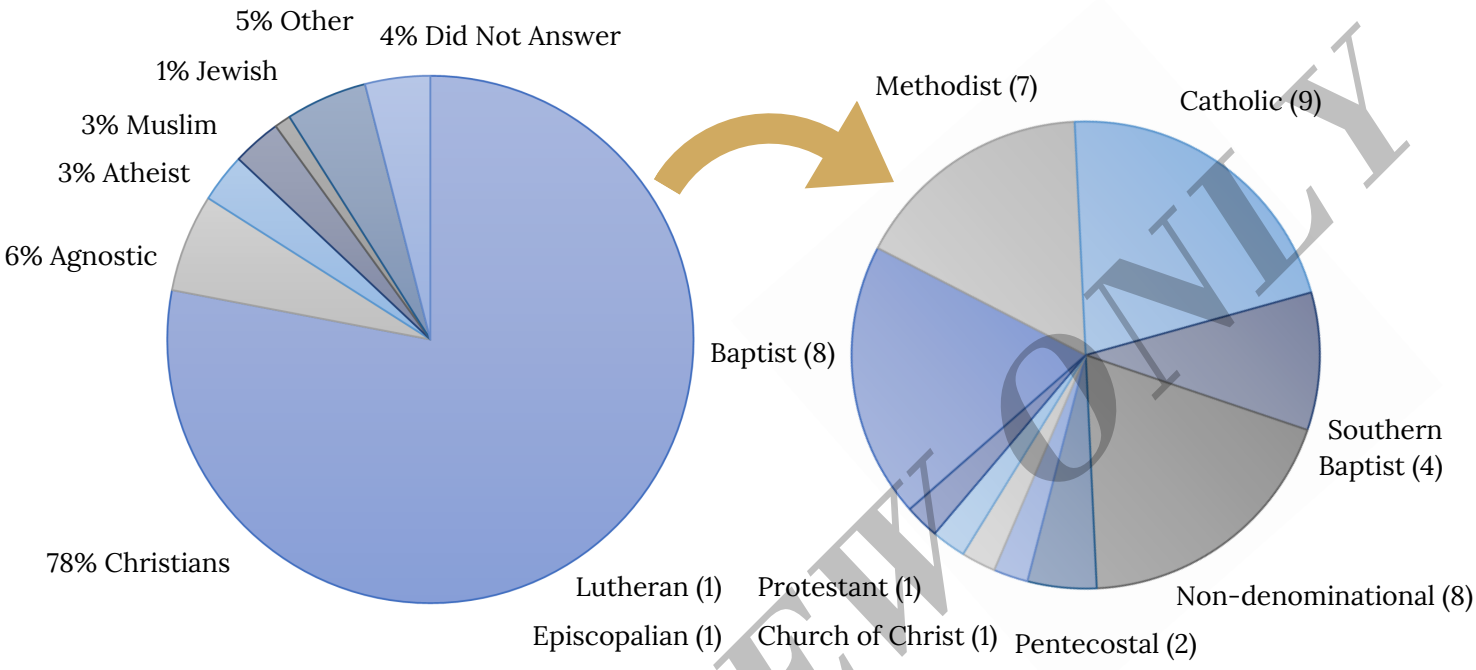
Occupation

To better understand the survey takers' background, each participant was asked to divulge their occupations. As a result, many occupations were listed, including **students**, **stay-at-home parents**, **educators**, **nurses**, **first responders**, and **business owners**. Several participants said they worked in the **foodservice industry**, and several more said they are **currently retired**. Other occupations included **office administrators**, **managers**, **artists**, **engineers**, **a clinical researcher**, **mental health professionals**, **health care professionals**, **a librarian**, **church employees**, **pastors**, and individuals in **finance**, **real estate**, **insurance**, and the **judicial system**. Nine respondents chose not to answer this question.



Education and Age

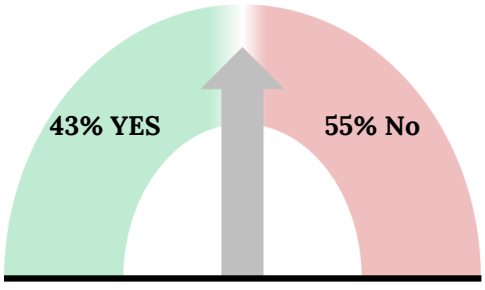
Religious Demographics



A large portion of this research revolves around religion; therefore, all 100 participants (68 survey participants and 32 interview participants) were asked what religion they self-identify as and if they are a member of a faith-based organization. In the graph above, you will see what each of the 100 respondents answered for religion and then a select few who identify as Christian, further sub-identified into a specific branch of Christianity, which is seen in the smaller pie graph. Below, notes those who said they are members of faith-based organizations.

In reviewing current research, I noticed that it was difficult to measure the role of religion in one's life because for the last several decades, researchers have used traditional or simple terms, such as, "do you believe in God," and "how often do you attend church," to equate the role of religion in one's life. This type of research does not allow for gray areas. For example, one of the research participants in this research said they believe "the author controls everything," and another said, "I was raised Catholic, but now, I am unsure what I believe." Previous research models would not be able to quantify these individuals and their responses and would possibly be lost.

Through these ethnographic interviews and surveys, questions on the topic of religion were able to bridge some of the previous research gaps. This includes identifying those who believe in God, identify as Christian, but do not attend church. In Santa Fe, 78% of individuals said they are Christian, but a little more than half said they do not attend church. Furthermore, there was no specific branch of Christianity that appeared to attend church more than another.



Are you a member of a faith-based organization?

Role of a Faith-based organization

The main research question is what is the role of a faith-based organization in a trauma-affected community. This single question was asked in its entirety to all 100 participants. The word cloud to the right identifies the 40 most frequently used words to answer this question, with the word "**people**" mentioned **49 times**, "**help**" mentioned **33 times**, and "**community**" mentioned **32 times**.

The comments below were selected as unique representations of the question and to give further thought to the role of a faith-based organization after a mass tragedy occurs, like the one that Santa Fe experienced.

"I think its role, well what Aldersgate did, that is a good example of what a faith-based community should have done. They opened their facilities up; they allowed the FBI, whoever needed a central location. They allowed people who needed someone to talk to, somewhere to go." – Interview Participant

"They need to be available and accessible. They need to be a participant, need to be involved, and they need to take leadership, especially when resources are not available someplace else. It becomes the community before self, and that, what can I do to help is definitely a tenant of the Christian belief. Look for ways to help those in need and look for ways to help before people ask. So it is, I want to say compulsory, but it should just be a natural reaction that we ask, "what can I do to help," and at the same time, we should be asking, "what could I do as a faith-based organization," you should be figuring it out because that is what we are here for." – Interview Participant

"They have the biggest roles; they should already be involved in the community and should play a role in supporting people no matter who they are or what they believe." – Survey Participant

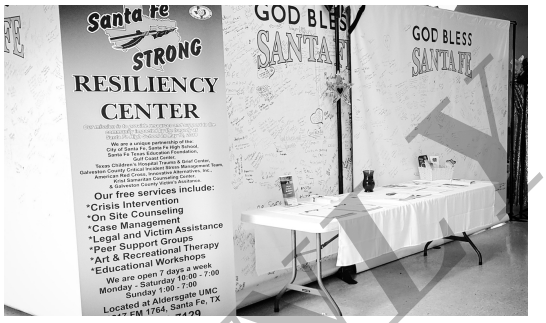
A teenager who identifies as agnostic had this to say: "They should always reach out, and they should always try their hardest to help. Unless they get told they don't want their help, then they are not needed – Interview Participant." One participant took this a bit further and said, "They should offer support at their locations without being on public (school, library, parks) grounds." – Survey Participant

Another participant mentioned, "I mean everybody feels so different, and you don't know what level they are on. And I think people automatically want to blame and ask why and that they may be somewhere they don't want to be with religion. So, I think the first thing a faith-based organization would need to do is capture that person so that we're not here to just throw religion on you; we're here to help your heart and heal your hurt. And then you can move on from that." – Interview Participant

One interview participant mentioned how in addition to support, the role of a church "is not only to be a place on Sundays but to be a place that people can go to whenever there struggling. Also, a lot of churches are usually, well they have the size and the capacity to let people hold meetings there even if it's not a church meeting. So, I think that they also are great for meetings or gatherings." This is a great reminder that there are not many facilities available to house resources in many small communities when tragedy strikes, and the role of a faith-based organization can be to fill that need as well.

Perception of AUMC's response

During this research, the participants' perception of Aldersgate United Methodist Church's response to the Santa Fe High School tragedy was overwhelmingly seen as positive for Santa Fe's community. The comments below and on the following page describe the participant's perception of the Church's response to the tragedy in the facilitation of the space that was utilized to house the FBI, Red Cross, the Family Assistance Center, and later became the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center.



"This church has very much been a mission-based church. And even though we didn't go off somewhere to do something, I believe we took that mission belief, and we used that after the shooting. Because we made the support that needed to be done in the community, our mission and our calling and what we needed to do." – Interview Participant

"No one ever said 'I don't know if we want to do this' or 'are we sure we want to do this' or expressed anything like that. I mean, it wasn't even like anyone asked if this going to cost a lot of money and no one asked, 'who is going to pay us?'. It was basically, let's just do it.' – Interview Participant

"I mean, if we didn't have Aldersgate, then I don't know where the Resiliency Center would have gone, and I think that if it had gone somewhere else right away, then it would not have been the necessary size. So, I would say that the faith-based organizations really helped and stood up." – Interview Participant

"I don't even really know Aldersgate; I had never been there before. And I don't even know if I know the whole story, but they opened up, made room, cleared stuff, and made space. And even like the yoga class, it had to move a couple of times, and they always accommodated it. I never did feel that religion in any way was a part of the Center. They made this great central place, easy to accommodate everyone, including parking. They eliminated barriers to help this entire community!! And I don't even know Aldersgate or anyone affiliated with it. I don't!" – Interview Participant

"I was glad that the church and the community were united in the effort to serve the community for a while. I was sad to see it end. Aldersgate had a pretty good space and was used for Lions club and Garden club, so that caused some cross exposure that was good for the resiliency center and the clubs. I think that the arrangement was mutually beneficial for the entire community." – Survey Participant

"I did hear from some people, some of the older members, that they did not think that we should have been facilitating the Resiliency Center. And I disagree. I think we did what every church should have done. We opened up and made ourselves available, and I was very proud of our church for doing that. The majority of the time, the rooms and building sit empty, and the fact that in my opinion, we were doing God's work and we were providing for people in need, a community in need, for kids in need... I thought that was a good thing." – Interview Participant

Perception continued

"I think Aldersgate stepped up and did the best they could in a bad situation. We threw people into a situation they didn't know anything about and expected them to figure it out. I think they were responsive to comments made. For instance, when I first started going to the center, I mentioned zero privacy, I mean it really was bad, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who mentioned it. But in response, Center staff and church officials did kind of cubicle it off and made it a little more closed where if you were waiting for an appointment, you weren't just out there where anyone walking in the door of the church could see you. They changed the egress in how people flowed through the church to give people a little more privacy at the center. Obviously, it's a church and wasn't designed as a counseling center, but I think they tried. I mean, for as quickly as they had to throw it together, I think they did a good job." – Interview Participant

"Everyone I met at Aldersgate was very kind and helpful. They took in all the letters and gifts and everything that was sent in from all over the place for the victims and the survivors, and then they tried very hard to reach out to everyone to make sure we got everything. Actually, my counselor from the Family Assistance Center would meet me there so I wouldn't have to go far. So, that was really nice that the church would open their doors for counseling and things like that too." – Interview Participant

"Some people thought that because the location of the center was in a church, that the church was going to try to convert them or force them to attend (furthest from the truth). Others found comfort knowing they could enter and find the peace that churches offer." – Survey Participant

"Honestly, at first, I was a bit worried because I am not a Christian, but I knew my family needed services. When we started utilizing services, I did notice all the Christian murals, but the more often we went, the less I noticed them." – Interview Participant

"I believe that more young people would have sought counseling had the resiliency center not been placed in the local church at the beginning. However, that said, I believe the church should be commended for doing their best to separate their religious views from the counseling offered on their premises. They filled a gap that was needed at the time, even if it made some feel uncomfortable, there was no other place that stepped up to offer the counselors a place to operate out of." – Survey Participant

Lessons Learned

From the time Aldersgate opened their facility to house the FBI, Red Cross, and the Family Assistance Center through the duration of the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, many lessons were learned along the way. Participants shared some of these lessons, including why Aldersgate was selected, some of the hardships the church endured internally, and even externally and politically, as well as other unforeseen circumstances that emerged.

"Well, the reason I think Aldersgate was chosen because it had what they were looking for. I don't know who told the Red Cross about us or how they became aware of us. But I think it's natural for the Red Cross to look to churches for that. For two reasons, one we are likely to meet their requirements and number two the churches are likely to allow it. So, I think that's why they were coming to our church. I don't know why they chose us other than they had to have private rooms and had to have a facility to cook, they had to have the ability to store stuff and have areas where the people that were working there could have privacy. So, there were a lot of things that they were looking for." – Interview Participant

"I had heard that there was another church that had opened up and offered them to be there, but the condition was that they were going to preach to them and hand out flyers about God and religion and all that. That was a condition for them." – Interview Participant

"Right after the tragedy, Aldersgate opened for the use for the resiliency center. We knew there would be, or we recognized that the possibility existed that there would be both good and bad risk involved. As this discussion evolved, we reminded each other that the church was not built to be a building, the church was built and the facilities there were built to do service in the name of a Lord, and that this was a way to be able to do that and open the doors to serve our community. The church had been in existence for over 60 years in that location, and we had a large facility, multi-use facility that was perfect for what was needed for that time. So, it seemed just to be the obvious choice to move forward on that. We knew it would be exactly what we should be doing in meeting our mission and that we were there to serve, to do service in the name of the Lord, and do service in that community. The risk that we took would be that when people would come in, and there would be an issue that could happen as part of what the Center was doing, or the Red Cross was doing or anybody, and that it would not be those agencies, being the reason, it would be that 'AT THE church' this happened. So, the church would be deemed the cause or the responsible party, and then we would have to figure out how to deal with that as a community. So, we know we took a risk that we could lose in that regard, but we believe that it was the right thing to do to offer the facility and the church in any way that we could during that time." – Interview Participant

Lessons continued

"The church was supportive, and the church made a lot of decisions based on what would be good for the Center. The congregation supported it, but in all groups of people, there weren't exactly happy. They were good, but after a year or so, it became, 'well, how long are they going to be here?' And while it wasn't bothering anyone that they were there, it was just the fact that there was no plan again. So, then it became, 'well is the City working on a plan?' That was asked a lot. 'Is the City going to do something permanent?' It wasn't an aggravation to them that the Center was there, that it was more, what's next. There was always this open end. But for the most part, the congregation supported and accepted; I'm going to use the word, was inconvenienced at times. It isn't like we didn't have the space to do what we needed to do, but people had to shift." – Interview Participant

"Well, I think in moving the Resiliency Center from the church to Runge Park to fit their agenda and what led up to that with the City Elected Officials. It was like all of a sudden they turned, and they were attacking the church. Like we were in some way profiting from allowing them the City to be at the church. I think that was a very disgusting implication and very sad. I expected better of the people who are supposed to be looking over what is best for Santa Fe." – Interview Participant

"I was so glad that it was relocated. I attended counseling myself in a group and personal counseling services. I also had 2 children who attended while it was located within the church building. It was uncomfortable for myself and my children. We are not Methodist, and there were times when they would be trying to carry on their regular church duties, and you felt like an imposition. Also, you were surrounded by biblical posters, books, and other materials in the counseling sessions-which felt quite strange. I don't know how open and honest one could really be about their feelings and experiences. Sometimes I wanted to shout with anger or curse, but it felt disrespectful to do that being in a church – Survey Participant."
"I think the big reason was, real or perceived, was that there were certain people that didn't want to come to a church or be in a church building dealing with the mental health issues they were dealing with." – Interview Participant

"I think I would just share, the idea of mental health recovery and the connection between getting mental health support in Santa Fe is something that was almost contradictory. People seemed to understand that this tragedy was going to have a huge emotional impact and damage to the community, but the commitment to bringing in the resources in a way that was long-term and supported by the whole community was, I feel it was really difficult. I'm not sure it was connected to faith, but I feel in some cases it most defiantly was. The message was if you believe in and practice your faith that you shouldn't need mental health support, and that isn't unique to Santa Fe that happens in certain communities. I think, however, in Santa Fe, there was this overlap between politics, religion, and social need or community needs, I guess. That created some challenges for really offering the ongoing support from mental health resources, especially for the long-term.' – Interview Participant

"What I saw over time was different expectations of what people did to heal or expecting their community to heal. No one knows; I think one statement that most people can agree on is no one knows what it takes to heal a community after a tragedy like this because every community is different. And I think one lesson we learned is, it is hard." – Interview Participant

Evaluation Findings

Through triangulation of ethnographic data, personal observations of the workings of the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, and meetings such as City Council, Resiliency Center Steering Committee, Santa Fe School Board, and other various community meetings in Santa Fe, from October 2018 through October 2020, I was able to compile this evaluation.

As many reports noted, Aldersgate did their best to provide for their community in a time of need. However, being the upstanding respectful organization they are, they never came out and said that this came with some loss to their organization by filling this need for the community.

When Aldersgate opened Asbury Hall for the FBI, Red Cross, Family Assistance Center, and eventually continued to use that space for the City of Santa Fe Resiliency Center, one thing that no one would have imagined emerging would be the impediment from other faith-based organizations. Throughout the two years of research, one piece of information was repeated, and that was that other faith-based leaders told their congregants not to visit the Resiliency Center because it was "at the Methodist church" and "if they need counseling, they could come to them."

After speaking with several Methodist members, they confirmed over and over that they did not offer their facility to "fill their pews" nor were they "looking for a pat on the back." The members I spoke with repeated the Methodist church is a mission-based organization, and they felt this was a way to fulfill their mission and help their community. Many felt that their church sat empty most of the time, and this was a perfect solution for the community and did not think, at the time, that others would imply differently.

Deciding to go a step further, I spoke with each participant and asked if they had ever visited the Resiliency Center while it was housed at Aldersgate and for those that said yes, I asked if any member of the church or the pastor had ever invited them to church services on Sunday or spoke to them about Christ; each participant said "no." One participant mentioned that an employee at the Center mentioned God once to gauge where they were with their faith, but it was never mentioned again.

The Methodist church was trying to be as inclusive as possible without ostracizing its members by relocating many of their church marketing materials and crosses from the church's front entrance. As requests came through, that poster and other religious materials hanging on the classroom walls made some visitors uncomfortable, the church attempted to cover these items or relocate them. The church has several large Chrisitan murals, which were left untouched as they are part of its identity. This may have been some of what people complained about; however, it was never going to be a perfect situation as the church was not built to be a counseling center, despite the congregation's valent efforts to help the community.

Unable to overcome the stigma of counseling located in a church and therefore people may be pressured to come to religious services or could not fully express themselves, the City of Santa Fe relocated the Resiliency Center to another location. The location, while in Santa Fe, is owned by Galveston County. It is the perception of several participants that local elected officials used the Resiliency Center to eventually transfer this property from the county to the City.

Unfortunately, because of this political agenda, the Methodist church was further criticized for helping the community. In a public City Council meeting, implications were made that the church used the Resiliency Center for profit. This was absolutely not true. The church's invoice to the City barely covered the extra electricity and water cost, used by operating the facility seven days a week, ten hours a day. This did not mention the additional amenities such as utilizing a coffee maker, copy machine, dishes, refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave, oven, stove, first-aid kit, cleaning supplies, art supplies, audio/visual equipment as needed, and more. Aldersgate also provided all the tables and furniture that was used in the counseling rooms and workspaces, a storage closet, and several classrooms and space in their youth room that was converted into full-time office space for the Resiliency Center staff. During the summer of 2019, the Resiliency Center housed the Boys and Girls Club and the Region 4 counselors (those with victims of crimes assistance funding at the elementary and jr. high) to see clients at the Center while the school facilities were closed for the summer. This meant that for the summer of 2019, nearly every inch of Aldersgate was occupied by the Resiliency Center. Furthermore, AUMC supported all of the Resiliency Center's outreach projects by providing additional parking, outdoor space, and additional storage in the parsonage garage. While church members mentioned being inconvenienced at times or having to shift, all said they would do it again.

Despite the church liaison's continuous efforts, a lack of inter-agency communication with the City of Santa Fe and the other agencies that engaged with the Center seemed to be a core issue. This led to difficulties answering questions from the congregation when church officials were kept out of the City's purview regarding their plans for the Center. When the Center was relocated, communication and marketing to the community about the move were not well informed to further complicate matters. This left several participants mentioning that they "did not know the Center had relocated," several more mentioned they "went to the church looking for assistance only to be told a new location," and another participant mention the "whole situation was confusing and they could not figure out where they were supposed to go after the Center left the church." This left the church in a delicate situation, as it was the City's responsibility to educate the community of the change, but the church's compassion for their community drove them once again to try and help. Members of the church created a newsletter with information on the change (which was provided to other agencies), added information to the church website, and the church secretary helped each person who walked through the doors of the church looking for the Center with directions and more if the person needed it.

The church gained much from this experience too. They fulfilled a desire to help their community and learned that they could come together to make great strides for the good of many as a congregation. One participant noted that the pastor often leads the church's mission, and any means to help the community normally comes in the form of a pastor-led effort. However, at Aldersgate, it was members of the congregation that decided to lead the charge to facilitate the space for the Center. This could be a result of several reasons; however, the most likely is that Santa Fe is home to most of the congregation members and they felt compelled to help. Regardless, this flipped type of member-led mission could be developed for other communities.

In the end, I found that Aldersgate United Methodist Church led with their hearts to help their community during this time of suffering and hurt. The church removed pieces of their own identity to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible while also trying not to be offensive to their members. No other location was available to the community at the time, that did not also come with stipulations. For this, I believe Aldersgate should be commended for the work they did in Santa Fe, Texas, and their role in helping the community after the tragedy.

Recommendations

After completing the research and the evaluation, I have a few recommendations for Aldersgate United Methodist Church and some thoughts for future studies. Furthermore, these can be suggestions to other faith-based organizations should they ever be placed in this situation.

1.) The number one recommendation that I feel greatly lacked at AUMC was the direct aid for the congregation members. Participants mentioned that the pastor at the time did not talk about the shooting and only visited with the families after being asked to go and sit with them. The congregation lost two youth members and opened the facility to the entire community that was hurting, essentially taking on the entire communities' hurt and pain. While members of the church were aware, they could go to the Center; they may not have felt comfortable going for several reasons. One person told me, "I guess I did not think about it, but if I did, I probably would have thought we did this for the community, not for us." Therefore, my recommendation would be that in the event AUMC opens the facility again, there is a plan to ensure church members are engaging in self-care and have access to mental health services and faith-based counseling.

2.) The second recommendation includes a chance for future studies for AUMC. In speaking with a member from AUMC, they shared with me; they worry the church is not always as inclusive as it can be. They mentioned the church motto is "open hearts, open minds, open doors," yet they worry that people may not always feel welcome at the church because they may not always come across as having open hearts and open minds. This comment stuck with me, and as I was analyzing the research, I noticed 34% of the participants mentioned that the role of a church after a mass tragedy is to open its doors. My first question was, "shouldn't their doors already be open?" However, when asked, 34 out of 100 people specifically said, "open their doors," meaning they perceive churches in Santa Fe as not always being open or welcoming. So, I believe a recommendation for Aldersgate would be to engage in future studies to understand better what this means and how AUMC may grow and learn from this.

3.) Throughout this evaluation, I spoke a lot on inclusion; however, one large barrier that emerged was exclusion, especially concerning religious identity. It is important to remember that identity is very strong in most individuals, not only for religion but also race, culture, and even community. Although, religious identity seems to be one of the strongest identifiers for most people. It is something that most people can usually find like-minded people to share a conversation with and had often it has been a part of the person's life since childhood. For a faith-based organization that may offer space for community healing, keeping an open mind that there may be people in the community that identify as non-Chrisitan or non-religious, and some of these people may feel very strongly about these identities is imperative. If they feel these identities are being threatened or excluded, it can very well impact their healing. To use the words from one of the participants who is of the Muslim faith and lost their family member in the tragedy: "Right after the tragedy, you need to remember all identities, you need to invoke a sense of belonging in people. By talking about a variety of identities, because the victims could be across the board and the victims could come from a different set of identities, the message you would be sending would be more inclusive." So, a recommendation to all faith-based organizations would be to recognize and respect everyone's differences and honor those differences. This same interview participant mentioned being at a Chrisitan church honoring victims of mass shootings in America, and the church brought in a youth choir to sing and recite the Azan, which is the Islamic call to prayer. The participant shared how this "was incredibly significant and symbolic" for them, they "could not envision being in a Christian church and hearing the Azan, the juxtaposition of both of those things was absolutely remarkable." Unfortunately, in Santa Fe, those who did not identify as Chrisitan often felt left out; worse, one of the victims who was not of the Christian faith rarely had their religious identity mentioned or honored. Therefore, I believe it is important for faith-based organizations to take time, especially during trauma and loss, to acknowledge that there are those who do not identify as Chrisitan and help them feel welcomed, loved, and accepted.

Resources for additional information

I will not pretend to be an expert in theology, nor will I claim to know what is best from a psychological standpoint. However, through my research for school and my family, I have come across many resources. These are a few that may be helpful in the future.

The first is my research website, ***https://www.sftxstudy.info***. Here you can find links to mental health resources and additional information about the research and myself. Once my thesis is published, and this report is approved, both documents will also be located here.

https://www.samhsa.gov/dbhis-collections/faith-based – Is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and is a branch of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; this link contains resources that focus on how spiritual leaders and faith-based communities can support their communities after disasters and tragedies.

http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/ndin_tips_sheets_v1208.php – This link is a set of tip sheets for faith-based organizations that may open up their facility after a disaster or tragedy.

The Calvin Institute of Chrisitan Worship offers a list of wonderful book recommendations for faith-based leaders to become a better trauma-informed faith-based community - ***https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/becoming-a-trauma-informed-faith-community/***

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
--Margaret Mead (anthropologist)

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