Culinary Redemption: A Case Study of the Food Culture at a Faith-Based School

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Introduction

For my internship with the Ontario Program, I worked with Maleene Guida at Redeemer Lutheran School serving healthy food lunches to students. Maleene Guida and her husband own Graziano’s Italian Restaurant in Upland, California. Originally operated by Maleene’s father in law, the restaurant has been in the Guida family for 35 years. Five years ago, Maleene and her husband moved from Monterey, California to Upland to run the Graziano’s Restaurant business. When Maleene enrolled her daughter into a local elementary school, she was shocked by the food the school was serving its students. During the fall of 2010, Maleene decided to start her own catering business called Progressive Catering for Kid’s. The school’s hot lunch program is intended for small progressive and faith based schools, and is designed to serve healthy nutritious lunches to students. Maleene currently operates this business out of the kitchen at Redeemer Lutheran School in Ontario, a faith based school that serves preschool through 8th grade children. Maleene also provides St. Peter and St. Paul School and Montessori Progressive School with hot school lunches made at Redeemer.
When Maleene began working at Redeemer Lutheran School, she identified the need to build a garden at the school. Maleene brought the idea to Nicole Scheuneman, a Pitzer graduate who currently works for United Congregations for Change. Nicole Scheuneman referred me to work with Maleene Guida in order to help her start the garden project. In collaboration with Maleene Guida and Nicole Scheunemann, I helped create a Powerpoint presentation of the garden to present to Redeemer’s community members. This presentation was brought to the Church Board, which was given permission by Redeemer.

After receiving permission by the community, the garden underwent construction. Within two months, the tree to the garden was cut down, the grass was removed, mulch was placed in the garden, and twelve raised beds were built for the school to use. A grant was written to the Water-Wise Garden in Every School Garden Grant Program for funding for a drip system and fruit trees. We are currently working on filling the raised beds with compost and soil, and we
hope to plant beds for the summer time. We are also working on putting a white picket fence and painted stones in the garden.

Over the course of three months, I watched a grassy area transform into a garden with the help of the whole Redeemer community. I observed teachers, staff, church members and parents come together to make this garden project happen.

**Methods and Methodology**

For my research project, I wanted to understand a garden could be built in such a short amount of time. I started my research wanting to explore what aspects of the Redeemer community made the construction of this garden possible. I was enthralled to be a part of a project that came together so quickly and wanted to better understand its organizational foundation. As I began working at the school, I realized that I also wanted to document what the garden meant to Redeemer and how the garden connects to the school’s values.

The goal of my research was to understand what aspects of the community made the construction of the garden possible. I wanted to understand how the garden aligned with the values within the Redeemer community. This research project emerged from several conversations with members of Redeemer. After working at Redeemer Lutheran School, I brought the idea for my research to my internship director Maleene Guida and to the administration of the school. I explained my research project and my intent for this paper, and asked for suggestions on how to construct my project. Redeemer suggested that in addition to interviewing community members, I should create a focus group to help get teachers involved in the garden project and to build community interest.

For my project research, I interviewed parents, staff and church members about the lunch program and the school garden. In addition to interviewing community members, I created a
focus group comprised of teachers from Redeemer Lutheran School. This focus group was designed as a forum for teachers to discuss the community garden. The purpose of the dialogue was to help teachers feel connected to the garden. I began the focus group by asking teachers how they saw their own values and faith connecting the garden. The focus group also discussed what values the students would learn from the garden and how teachers could incorporate the garden into their curriculum.

I held the focus group and interviews at times that best fit everybody’s schedules. For the community’s convenience, I conducted the focus group and interviews at the school. I sent out e-mails to members of the people I was interviewing to inform them about the purpose of my project. A flyer was also sent to teachers and staff to notify them about the focus group. Before each interview, I outlined the goals of my research project.

While this paper is written for the purpose of the Ontario Program, I intend to share the findings of my research with the Redeemer community. This paper will be condensed into a smaller report for community members to read. Sections of my paper have been read through by members of Redeemer in order to ensure that information is accurate. Through interviews, I tried to document Redeemer from the community’s perspective. My discussions were intended not only to benefit my research interest, but to benefit the school’s interest as well. Conversations with Redeemer sparked a deeper appreciation for community values and for the garden. As discussed in the data analysis, connection these common values allowed members to unite and build a community garden.

By outlining characteristics of the garden at Redeemer, I hope to understand how other schools can successfully implement community based projects. After witnessing the efficiency of the garden project, I believe that certain aspects of Redeemer that I found in my research can be
replicated in other schools. By outlining these characteristics, Redeemer can serve as a model for other school and community gardens.

**Personal Background and Bias - Reflection**

I observed Maleene as she served the trays of food to the children, and noticed that she gave one boy less vegetables then the other kids. “He eats his food, he just doesn’t eat his vegetables. The day I get him to eat green, I am going to be like- wow,” Maleene explains. Each time Maleene talks about the boy who doesn’t eat his vegetables, I think about my own history and relationship to food. Like this boy, I never ate fruits or vegetables as a child. My diet consisted of mac and cheese, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and spaghetti. I grew up in a single parent household, and my father never had much time to cook. Always looking for a quick fix, my dad relied on restaurants and packaged food for dinner. I threw tantrums whenever my family tried to feed me something I didn’t like. My father came to the conclusion that I was just a picky kid, and gave up on feeding me healthy foods.

My pallet changed after spending one summer living with my aunt. As a vegetarian mother of three, my aunt loved cooking for her family. I spent my summer evenings watching my aunt while she worked in the kitchen. Soon I learned basic cooking skills such as how to hold a knife, what temperature to set the oven at, and how to slice an avocado. While I still use these skills today, the most valuable lesson I learned in my aunt’s kitchen was how to try new foods. My pallet broadened and before the end of the summer, I was eating gnocchi, tofu, and spring rolls- meals I had never heard of before.

I choose this internship because I have an interest in food education and because I relate to children who struggle with their eating habits. Growing up with a single father, I understand the challenges parents face in their busy schedules feeding their kids healthy meals. One of my
personal goals for taking this internship was to learn how Maleene is able to operate her business because I hope to one day have a career feeding children nutritious school lunches.

As a researcher, I use an axiological assumption, in which I believe that a researcher has biases which can affect the research site and the research. I acknowledge that there are biases present in my research because of my background and because I have spent so much time with Maleene and her business. I try to constantly be aware of my own reactions and interpretations, particularly during interviews when I am speaking to community members. I focused on not letting my own biases hinder community input during interviews, and tried to create a space where members of Redeemer could share their own thoughts and ideas.

My work at Redeemer also required me to respect the faith values and religious teachings at my internship site. I grew up in a Jewish household which did not attend in many religious services, but went church with my extended family who practiced Christianity. Growing up, I assisted my grandmother in community outreach for her church in a Christian Resale Shop. I spent the past two summers working at a children’s art camp in a Presbyterian Church, which has given me exposure to working in a religious community. Growing up with exposure to different religious teachings, I felt that I was able to respect the values Redeemer practiced.

However, because my immediate household does not practice a religion, I had trouble understanding certain Christian structures at Redeemer. To confront this, I openly expressed my lack of religious knowledge, asking questions when I was confused at my internship site. My background came as a surprise to some of the community members, who initially assumed I was Lutheran. To my own surprise, lacking a faith background encouraged members of the community to share their stories with me. Many people enjoyed talking about their religion and
wanted me to understand the Lutheran teachings and values of the school. As a researcher, I realized that it was essential that I listened and respected these stories.

Another challenge I had at my internship site was showing members that I was an intern for the whole Redeemer community. After two months of serving students and teachers from behind a window in the kitchen, I sometimes felt that my extensive work with Maleene interfered with my connection to some of the members at my research site. I was often associated as an intern for the Progressive Catering for Kids Company, not for Redeemer. This was a very hard role to shift out of. When I began working on the garden, my role in the community changed. Staff and teachers began to see me as an intern working for the school. I built relationships with teachers, church members, staff, and church members through discussions of the garden. I was invited to church on Sunday, shared meals with parents, and spoke with teachers and staff about their backgrounds and families. I plan to continue developing these relationships as I go forward in my college career, and I will continue helping with the construction on the garden. I plan to revisit my research site in the future and keep in touch with many of the people I have met.

**Action Project**

My action project consisted of four assignments: creating a powerpoint presentation to present to the Church Council, assisting with plans for the garden, helping to write the Water-Wise grant, and conducting a teacher focus group. These four tasks are outlined below:
Action Project
Presentation:

Our Vision
- School garden outside of kitchen
  - The area to the west of the kitchen will be transformed into new
    learning and eating environment
  - Imagine: walk through arbor of bougainvillea, white picket fences, tree
    transformed into table (lunch/ work/ learning space); mulch pathways
    between raised beds, spicy aroma from an herb garden
- Incorporated into curriculum
  - Each class will have its own plot
  - Greater opportunity to incorporate healthy eating into student's
everyday lives
- Natural progression
  - Already have made huge commitment to student's health and well-
    being. This is an opportunity to bring this new program full circle.

Action
- First steps
  - Approval by school board and (parish council)
  - Ground breaking: Removal of grass, building beds, filling with
dirt/compost, mulch, cut tree,
  - Planning for watering system: sprinklers, drip?
  - Tool shed: shovels, seeds, dowels, gloves, etc.
- Start-up Costs

How this garden will transform the school
- Healthier Children
- Expanded curriculum
- Increased opportunities for partnerships
  - Pitzer College, local schools, and community gardens, nurseries, parents and
  teachers
- Added aesthetics to school

Long-term Costs
- Maintenance of the garden
- Replacing broken tools, buying seeds/ seedlings

Timeline
- February: Approval, initial planning stages
- March: Estimates for tree removal, watering system
- April: Ground breaking, first planting
- May: Prepare garden for summer

Desirability
- More support from parents
- Increased teacher involvement
- Bring public and surrounding community together
- Brings added interest to school
- Higher demand for enrollment
- Public interest in Redeemer Lutheran

Figure 2: In collaboration with Maleene Guida and Nicole Scheunemann, I helped create a
Powerpoint presentation of the garden. This presentation was presented to the Church Board for
approval. The garden was given approval by the Church Board and Church Council, as well as
given blessings from the Pastor of the Church.
Garden:

**Figure 3:** Sketch of the measurements of the garden. Sketch and design by Joe Bartholomy, Maintenance and Landscape Director

**Stages of the Garden:**

**Figure 4:** A week after the Church Board approved the garden, Joe Bartholomy’s landscaping company ripped out the grass and cut down the tree for the garden.
Figure 5: Mulch was put into the garden

Figure 6: Myself and the Redeemer community helping to build the raised beds for the garden.
Figure 7: Twelve raised beds were built in the garden for each of the different grades. Redeemer has begun plans for planting strawberries, pumpkins, tomatoes, carrots and herbs for next year.

Figure 8: Community members and students gathered on Earth Day to bless the garden. Each student brought seeds for the garden plots.
Water-Wise Grant:

In collaboration with Maleene Guida and Nicole Scheunemann, I helped create a document for the Water-Wise Garden in Every School Garden Grant Program. If the Water-Wise grant chooses to sponsor Redeemer Lutheran, Redeemer will be awarded up to $4,500, which will be put towards a drip system and fruit trees for the garden.

**Water Wise Garden Grant:**

**Describe how you intend to align your water-wise garden with curriculum and student/parent/community activities.**

- Each class will have their own plot. For instance, Kinder would have lettuce, 1st grade tomatoes, etc.
- Garden can be used for curriculum in history, science, math, art. In fact, we plan to have each class come up with their own mural to paint on the wood plot box.
- Parents will be volunteers both monetarily and with upkeep in garden.
- The gardens vegetables will be picked by the students and used in their hot lunch program. The extra food will be donated to” loaves and fishes”, the shelter Redeemer Lutheran helps.
- The partnership with Pitzer College community: volunteers
- Church community support/ seniors/ adults/ children: build more community engagement especially between the church and school. We see the garden being a central place for seniors to engage with the children and visa versa. We see this garden contributing much more than just vegetables…it will serve a a central location for fellowship.

**Identify # of students in school:** 70

**Class and students involved in installation:** ALL Kinder -8th grade

Classroom activities: science projects, art projects/ installations: murals on plots/ sketches of plants/ art using plant parts, growing historically significant foods/ learning about other cultures, learning how food grows, math

**Maintenance of garden:** classes, teachers, church community, Pitzer students, Director of Nutrition Services.

**Include:** map
dimensions, activities
*Sketch

**List three dates:**
Space is already prepared. We want the dedication to occur before the kid’s leave for summer vacation in June. We plan to have a day in May with parents, press, local officials

**Why is our school a good candidate for this garden funding program?**

**Will there be community and parent involvement?**

The community has already shown commitment by taking out a tree, removing grass, putting in the base of an irrigation system and laying down mulch. The school administration has sent out a
newsletter letting parents know about the garden and we have already received donations from parents. The church board and school board is excited and committed to making sure the garden is sustainable.

**Will extra funding be available through outside groups?**
Parents and church members will sponsor plots. Church/ school board has already contributed by funding removal of tree/ grass. Graziano's Restaurant in Upland, which is the restaurant the Nutritional Director owns, will contribute through fundraising events.

**What will make this program succeed?**
Support from community, enthusiasm on part of students/ teachers and the leadership of the Nutrition Services Director who has a vested interest in the health and well being of the Students. Her own children attend the school and she has started a home-cooked healthy food program at the school called Progressive Catering for Kid’s.

**Commitment of dedicated team:**
- Maleene Guida, Nutrition Services Director will be the lead coordinator.
- Joe Barthalomeu, Maintenance/ Landscape Director
- Greg Fye, Church Board Director, (Construction Company)
- Site prep: church board: Greg Fye
- Garden design: Farmscapes, Mr. Todd Fletcher
- Irrigation: Mr. Greg Fye, needs more work
- Work days: Each day of the week will be a different class working in garden for Science curriculum. School parents/ Pitzer volunteers, community volunteers, Ontario youth will all be involved in the maintenance.
- Planting days: Mon-Fri classes
- Outside funding: Maleene Guida, church donations, sponsorship by parents, grants.

**Main Contact:** Maleene Guida
Pitzer College volunteers have experience coordinating student run gardens and community gardens.
Parents and School Staff have experience gardening.

**Maintenance and Contingency Plan:**
- Work days: Each day of the week, Monday thru Friday will be a different class working in garden for Science curriculum. School parents, students and Church members, Pitzer College volunteers, community volunteers, Ontario youth will all be involved in the maintenance as will Redeemer’s school grounds maintenance.
Teacher Focus Group:

While interning at Redeemer Lutheran School, I was able to conduct a focus group with Maleene and the teachers about the Redeemer Garden.

The Goals of the Discussion
- Make sure the teachers feel comfortable with the garden and take ownership of the garden as a community project.
- Connect the garden to values of faith
- To find out how Maleene can assist the teachers with the garden
- Outline timeline of the garden for the teachers
- Discuss how the garden can be beneficial to the students of Redeemer
- Brainstorm how the garden can be implemented into the teacher curriculum
- Answer any questions or concerns of the teachers and community

Figure 9: Flyer for the focus group that I created with approval from Maleene. This flyer was distributed to the all of the teachers and staff at the school.
Notes taken from the Focus Group:
Wednesday, April 20th, 2011
3:30pm in the Staff Lounge at Redeemer

Structure of the Meeting: Teachers were broken into groups to discuss questions given to them. Teachers then came together as a group to share their responses. Thoughts and ideas of the teachers were recorded on the board.

Why do you think Redeemer started the school garden?
- Go Green
- Growing community
- Healthier diet for the students
- Students will have an appreciation for the garden
- Garden location is visible for publicity to the school
- Cost effective for producing food
- Students will learn responsibility in taking care of the garden

How do you see your own values and faith teachings connecting to the garden?
- God has commanded us to take care of the Earth.
- I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. Corinthians 3:6-16
- Life cycle of the plant connecting to the life cycle of the body.
- Watching God’s hand at work. Pastor Dan gave blessing for the garden.

What do you think children will learn from the garden?
- How things grow, how long it takes
- Patience
- Responsibility. As time goes on, the garden will need everyone to continue to care for it.
- Like faith, garden needs constant care in order to grow.

How do you think you can integrate the garden into the curriculum?
- Leaf rubbings, arts projects
- Measurements and incorporate science and math.
- Maleene wants to create Garden Club
- Need to come up with a weekly schedule about who is in the garden.
- Garden day just like its computer day or library day. Ask for a garden parent to be there?
- Have garden t-shirts. Will teachers get a t-shirt? Working on getting aprons for everyone.
- Books- The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Tops and Bottoms
- Get workbooks and magazines
- Do another round table before the end of the year.

The meeting ended with a prayer for the Garden, led by the principle of the school, Marty Miller.
Literature Review

Federal and Local Roles of the National School Lunch Program

In June of 1945, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill for a law making school lunches a permanent feature of the national budget. Written into law, the 1946 National School Lunch Act declared that: “No physical segregation or other discrimination against any child shall be made by the school because of his inability to pay”\(^1\). The National School Lunch Act was designed as a homogenizing program that could help alleviate differences across students of different geographic regions, races, socioeconomic classes, and ethnic groups. Today, students attending public and nonprofit private schools are provided access to affordable and nutritionally specified meals through federal assistance. However, case studies have shown that poor meal quality and student perceptions of the program have lowered National School Lunch Program participation. While the National School Lunch Program provides food assistance to families, there is debate on whether the program helps to lower federal obesity and poverty rates. In order to fully understand the National School Lunch Program, issues of the program’s history, federal and local oversight, and poverty must be examined.

The history of the U.S Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program began after World War II, during the 1930s Great Depression when President Franklin Roosevelt and The New Deal implemented federal social welfare programs. The New Deal government assistant programs were designed to eliminate economic welfare and provide equal economic opportunities for families. Government mandated food was disseminated to families, which helped alleviate surplus crops and stimulate financial growth. Food aide became a responsibility

\(^1\) Lautenschlager, Julie L 2006.
of the federal government. On June 4th, 1946, President Harry S Truman signed into law a National School Lunch Act, which declared that students would be provided access to food and nutritional assistance. Partnering with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), The National School Lunch Act supported the agricultural industry by purchasing local and surplus commodities. In 1970, Congress amended the act and established a national criterion for federal free and reduced priced meals. This rate is adjusted annually according to federal poverty guidelines, and sets a national standard for schools to qualify for assistance.

The National School Lunch Program was designed as an aid to families who could not afford feeding their children school lunch. According the USDA, 95% of all public schools, and 83% of all public and private schools participate in the National School Lunch Program. The National School Lunch Program’s website describes itself as a federally assisted meal program which provides nutritionally balanced, low cost lunches to students in public and nonprofit private schools. The program also established a national standard for minimum nutritional requirements in school lunches.

Federal and local governance of The National School Lunch Program should also be examined in order to understand class structures within the food program. Guidelines of nutrition standards and eligibility requirements for free/ reduced prices are controlled at a federal level. To support agricultural surplus commodities, the USDA distributes surplus food for schools to serve. USDA reimburses schools at a fixed rate for the cost of meals and administrative support. At a local level, schools struggle to meet the requirements within a reasonable budget:

“Federal funds earmarked for free meals threatened to bankrupt school lunches. State subsidies

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2 Lautenschlager 2006.
3 Lautenschlager 2006.
4 Mary Story, Karen M. Kaphingst and Simone French 2006.
6 Mirtcheva, Donka, and Powell 2009
are rarely sufficient to pay for the expenses to meet federal free lunch mandate. As a result, school administrators raise fees for students who pay full-priced meal. Children who pay the full priced meals consequently drop the program, creating a substantial socioeconomic gap between students who eat federal lunches and students who don’t. In an analysis of the food gap, Mark Winne discusses how federal food programs make small gains closing differences between socioeconomic classes. Winne’s analysis argues that a privileged class widens the food gap by purchasing organic and locally produced foods. Meanwhile, lower income groups with access to federal assistance programs make very small gains closing the food gap. Federal money allocations can hinder schools at a local level, resulting in a lack of participation of students who buy full priced meals.

Using subsidized food surplus and the small amount of federal funds, arguments have been made towards the quality of lunch meals served in The National School Lunch. During a 1990s, a legislation to amend the National School Lunch Act established that USDA could partner with public and private corporations in order to “promote food choices for a healthy life.” Partnership with these organizations allowed schools to generate revenue by selling a la carte and catering sales. According to an article on obesity prevention, competitive foods sold within schools are used only for economic benefit, not for the health benefit of the students.

Case studies have been conducted on the socioeconomic class structures of The National School Lunch Program, arguing that federal nutritional standards provides low income students access to affordable and nutritious meals. During one study of The Texas Public School Nutrition Policy, nutritional intake was calculated among students of lower and middle economic

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7 Levine 2009  
8 Winne 2008  
9 Lautenschlager 2006  
10 Mirtcheva, Donka, and Powell 2009
status who participated in the food program. As a federally regulated program, The Texas Public School Nutrition Policy restricts serving sweetened beverages and sugar in snack food served at the school. The study found that students with low socioeconomic status consumed a more nutritious lunch in the federal program in comparison to the lunches of students with middle socioeconomic students who were not in the program. The lunch program provided students of low socioeconomic status access to nutritional meals\textsuperscript{11}. The article concluded that, “the school lunch environment can be a positive influence on both low and middle socioeconomic classes”\textsuperscript{12}. Support for a federal food program argues that a federal food program aids in eliminating class structures, boosting support for student opportunity and growth.

Other case studies, however, argue that the school lunch program creates stigma across class groups. A study by Mirtcheva, Donka and Powell examined the effect of stigma, neighborhood food environment and demographic characteristics among students who participated in the National School Lunch Program. Data was collected for student grade level, lunch program eligibility, and restaurant availability in the school zip code. The study found that fast food restaurant availability in the neighborhood of the school decreased free/reduced lunch participation. Results also showed that there was a positive association between school lunch edibility and participation; students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch were more likely to use the program\textsuperscript{13}. The article suggested that these results stem from stigma as the main reason for not participating in the National School Lunch Program\textsuperscript{14}. Lack of appeal to the program, poor food quality, and low participation among students who are not eligible for the food program raises questions over the quality of the food served in schools.

\textsuperscript{11} Winne 2008
\textsuperscript{12} Cullen, et al 2009
\textsuperscript{13} Mirtcheva, Donka, and Powell 2009
\textsuperscript{14} Mirtcheva, Donka, and Powell 2009
Critics of the food program debate power dynamics between local and federal legislations, arguing a large failure on both anti-poverty activists and conservative leaders. Scholars critique the National School Lunch Program for being economically driven. As a governmental program designed to serve food to all students, scholars such as Susan Levine argue that the priority of the program should be given to the health of students. Several suggestions have been made in order to help improve the National School Lunch Program. In addition, economic improvements need to be made to the National School Lunch program; developments should be placed on funding instead of reimbursements: “Federal reimbursement rates are typically nine to ten times higher for free meals than for reduced priced or paid meals” 15. Other scholars point to political action, arguing that policies should be created to regulate the federal program” “[There is a] need to build a political coalition committed to link child nutrition to agriculture, food policy and social welfare. [There is a] need to fix lunch for all children, not just those who attend schools with private benefactors”16.

Although food intake and nutritional status of low income families has improved with participation in the school lunch program, scholars such as DeVault and Pitts argue that the food program is only a partial solution to a larger problem of poverty. While the National School Lunch examines only the effects of hunger in families, the food program does not address the social conditions of poverty which produce hunger17. Federal funding and use of surplus commodities push schools to serve food at a lower quality. Locally, schools have partnered with corporate companies in order to earn money to support the school. To improve the National School Lunch Program, DeVault and Pitts argue that leaders should examine the social ramifications of the program.

15 Story et al 2006  
16 Levine 2008.  
17 Mennell et all 1992
In order to address the debates behind a National School Lunch Program, motives of the program should be closely observed. Studies of the National School Lunch Program have been essential to economic, political and social developments; however, there are limited anthropological and sociological data on school lunch programs. While qualitative data has been gathered on socioeconomic status and school lunch participation, there were limited studies conducted on beneficial school models and the social effects of lunch programs. Studies need to be conducted on the health of students who participate in the school lunch program. Merging quantitative and statistical data with sociological data can better benefit school lunch programming. By understanding models that work in local schools, federal legislations can work collaboratively with local governments to help support local school lunch programs.

**The History of Redeemer**

After presenting my research project to the administrators of the school, I was given two documents in order for me to write on the history of Redeemer. The first was “The 20th Anniversary of Redeemer”, a document typed on May 24th, 1964 which compiled documents, stories, and church programs of the first 20 years of Redeemer. I was also given “Redeemer Lutheran Church & School: The First Fifty Years,” a booklet which cited the first fifty years of Redeemer’s history. Within this booklet, I was able to read stories and letters, as well as look through early photos of the church.

When I asked community members about Redeemer’s history, I was often told to refer to the “Redeemer Lutheran Church & School: The First Fifty Years,” booklet. “I saw a brochure not too long ago about the history,” one member of the school board told me during an interview, indicating that he had remembered the document. An administrator explained that the booklet was given out to the community a few years ago in celebration of Redeemer’s 50 year
anniversary. I had no trouble recovering these two documents, and was given permission by the school to use the documents for my paper.

In addition to the two pamphlets I received, an extensive knowledge of Redeemer’s history was evident from the stories the staff told. Many people who attend Redeemer are from families who have attended Redeemer Lutheran Church for multiple generations. A few community members recalled stories from when the church was originally located on Euclid Avenue. One administrator explained: “I was born in 1962, and my mom lived in a house behind the church on Euclid. That was how we came to be here. It was the closest church she could walk to when she was pregnant with me.” After attending the school as a child, the administrator registered her two children into the Redeemer School after they were born. Several of the staff and administrators I interviewed had attended the school when they were children, and now have children who go to Redeemer. With several generations of families having been a part of the church, there is a sense of pride when some administrators talked about the school’s history.

The history of Redeemer Lutheran began in June of 1942, after a sermon on Mission Work was preached by Rev. L.E. Faasch, Pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Pomona, California. A man by the name of W.H Sauter was inspired by the sermon to start a mission in Ontario, California. After getting approval from the St. Paul’s Congregation, W.H Sauter gathered a committee to investigate the Ontario area and start a mission. On November 28, 1943, a mission was built at Memorial Hall at 209 East “I” Street, in Ontario California. There were 101 people who attended the opening ceremonies. The mission established the name of Redeemer Lutheran Church on December 12, 1943.

One year after the Redeemer Church was established, the congregation discussed having a parochial school. A Sunday School opened on December 5th 1943 to teach Bible Studies to the
children that attended the church. During the early 1950s, ground work began on an elementary school. Desks and playground equipment were ordered and teachers were placed in classrooms. Priority for admitted students was given to families who attended the church. The school opened in 1952, with 28 students in grades 1-6. Three years later, grades 7 and 8 were added to the school. In the year of 1956, the church decided to expand and relocate. The church purchased a five acre plot located at 904 West 6th Street in Ontario, California, and completed construction in the spring of 1960. In 1953, a committee agreed that the school should relocate to the 6th street site in order to maintain efficient costs, and to keep the church and school operations together. The school later added a kindergarten and a preschool. Today, the current school enrollment is approximately 70 students.

**Mission of Redeemer**

The Redeemer Lutheran Church is united by Christian teachings and faith beliefs. Members see Redeemer as a faith based community devoted to teaching and worshiping God.

Redeemer’s Mission Statement:
Redeemer Lutheran Church is a family of believers united by faith in God’s love through Jesus Christ, equipping believers through the gospel to be committed disciples of Christ, and winning to faith in the community and the world who do not know of the triune God.

As a ministry faction of the Redeemer Lutheran Church, the Redeemer school strives to promote teachings of faith to its students. “The first goal is to let them know about Jesus Christ. We want kids to leave here with a faith in God,” one school board member tells me during an interview. “The biggest advantage of going here is that we can talk openly about our faith. And that’s, that’s very important to us.” Students are required to attend chapel, and bible lessons are taught within the school. Through these teachings, Redeemer strives to be a community that provides support to Christian values and faith.
Data Analysis

After conducting the focus group and interviews, I noticed several different aspects which contributed to the garden at the food program. Below is a compiled list of themes that I believe substantially helped support the garden’s construction:

Full Community Support

Redeemer involves many different people, each with their own interest group and role within the organization. The school garden first required approval from larger power structures within the Redeemer Community. The Redeemer Lutheran School was created as a ministry faction of the Church. One of the main purposes of the school is to bring faith outreach to youth; students are given faith teachings and are required to attend chapel every Wednesday. A presentation of the garden was given to the School Board, which is a committee that oversees decisions of the school within the Church Council. After gaining support from the School Board, the garden proposal was brought to the Church Council for approval. The Church Council oversees and maintains the decisions of the factions of the Church. Within the Church Council, factions of the church are represented by different committees, such as the School Board. These committees are brought together once a month to vote on decisions for Redeemer. After the Church Council convenes, decisions are brought to the congregation for a vote.

The Church Council functions as a way for community voices to help make decisions for the Church. The decision by the School Board and the Church Council brought awareness and interest to the Redeemer community, which then allowed people to get involved. After the project was presented to Redeemer, the garden began pulling valuable resources from community members. Upon hearing about the garden, one member from the church brought in
fifty concrete stones that will be placed around the raised beds. Communication about the garden project allowed people to be involved, ultimately creating a sustainable garden supported by the full community.

*Property and Space*

The garden is located in the center of the school, surrounded by the classrooms. Questions were initially raised about the students causing trouble in the garden because the garden was so close to the classrooms. A white picket fence will be built around the garden so that students can be monitored in the garden. In addition, windows of the classrooms and the kitchen face the garden, which will help Maleene and teachers watch over students while they are in the garden. The location of the garden is described below from field notes:

I walk through the back doors of the office, and across the lawn to the building with the kitchen. The school is small but well kept, with different buildings for the different classrooms. As you look through the windows, you can see children sitting at their desks and teachers doing their lesson plans up on the board. The school buildings are set in a square shape, with a large grassy courtyard in the middle. The white exterior of the buildings brings a very calm feeling to the place. There are benches around the school, with trees providing shade. An old statue of Jesus stands in the middle of the courtyard central to the school next to the flag post. Bent forward, Jesus stares down at the ground. I walk past him, and look to the right, where the school will put their garden. The garden is located next to the kitchen, in the middle of the school. Across from the garden is the church. – Field notes from March 18, 2011

According to a School Board member, a proposal was brought to the Church Council two years ago to build a garden in the back of the school. The Church Council approved the project, but the garden lacked momentum because the garden was not visible to the community. Another staff member commented about the garden that was planned for behind the school: “We had talked about putting in a garden a couple of years ago back here, and either we didn’t have the right people in place, or there were too many things behind the scenes.”
Maleene wanted to put the garden in the center of the school so that everyone in the community could be aware of the project. As the garden began construction, teachers and students were able to see the progress on the garden and build interest in it. Redeemer also hopes that the garden’s location will bring awareness of the garden project to the outside community. During the teacher focus group, Marty Miller, the principle of the school, expressed how he wanted the garden to “bring publicity when people visit the school.”

Having the space to build the garden was essential for this project. The garden’s central location was symbolic of how important the garden is to the school. People are able to see the garden and feel that they have ownership of it. Furthermore, its location next to figures such as the church and the statue of Jesus helped to connect the faith values of the garden to the community.

*Faith Values*

While Redeemer is comprised of many people with different interests, each member is connected to Redeemer by common Christian values. The garden was able to be implemented by Redeemer because people felt connected to these common values and felt a sense of purpose to the project. Teachers, parents, church members and staff were asked about the importance of the garden at Redeemer, and every member responded using Christian religious teachings. Faith was a value that all of Redeemers members were able to connect with, which helped to encourage the development of the garden. The following themes were expressed amongst the faith teachings in relationship to the garden: The life cycle, God’s commandment, body’s connection to mind and spirit, and care for student and family health.

1) *Life Cycle*
Community members of Redeemer related the garden as a connection to the body in terms of our life cycle. Teachers saw the growth of a plant as a metaphor and symbol for the growth of the human body.

One seed, that seed takes the body of a whole. You take that metaphor as a person and as a child, and that they are the same way. If you take that value that they are a growing living thing just like these seeds, you tend to them, just like you tend to your care and your integrity. It’s valuable. – Teacher

Members of the community related the metaphor of the seed to express the growth of the students. One staff member discussed the life cycle by telling the story of the seed, explaining how the life cycle directly relates to the lives of humans:

I think that it’s a wonderful blueprint for our children to see the cycle of life. Even just, how we are as people. How we are born from a seed, and how we are nourished and loved by our parents, and how we grow and we blossom as a flower, and then, you know, we all get to a point where we age and we die. And so, I think it’s kind of neat thing in that kind of way. – Staff member

The teachers, parents and staff expressed that they wanted the garden to teach the students about the life cycle, using the garden and the seeds as a way to implement these teachings into the curriculum.

2) God’s Commandment

“God has commanded us to take care of the Earth,” is a passage that I often heard during my interviews about the garden. At the end of the teacher focus group, the principle of the school gave a prayer to the teachers on the garden. The prayer discussed how the garden will assist in glorifying God in his name: “And most importantly, for all that is going on which you will be glorified, your name will be glorified. And, all praise and glory will be given to you.” Faith teachings about God’s commandment were referenced because Redeemer members felt
connected to God’s work through the garden. The garden will allow people to work with the land and take care of it, helping members to feel linked with God and Christian values.

3) Body connected to Mind and Spirit

Redeemer’s garden also connects the idea of self care to God. “Our body is our temple,” is a passage that was referenced by many teachers, staff and parents of the school. Members of Redeemer expressed caring for the human body as a way of connecting themselves to God. The garden is seen as a way for students to care for themselves and to produce a healthy spirit.

I think that that’s God’s garden. And God wants you to eat those vegetables and take care of your body. Because he gave you this body to take care of. Your body is your temple. You know, I think that this is a wonderful thing for these kids. They need to learn how to take care of themselves and their campus. – Redeemer Parent

To nourish the body, the soul, and the mind. And I think that we do all three of those aspects very well here. You know our bodies, it’s important that we nourish our bodies. And what we put into our bodies is a big part of that. And I think of all the things that I have done in my life for my child, and I think that’s probably the best thing that I have ever done for her. – Member of Redeemer Community

The connection of the body, mind and spirit is an important value within the Redeemer community. Taking care of the garden can help students to learn how to take care of themselves and to develop their own spirit. Growing and eating nutritious foods allows students to develop and connect to healthier lifestyle choices. Christian values teach that this process of self care can build a healthier human spirit.

4) Care for Student and Family Health

Members who work at the school expressed the importance of the garden in helping to care for the lifestyles of the students and their families. Teachers and staff want to instill healthy habits for their students as they grow into adults. When the children learn to eat nutritious fruits
and vegetables from the garden, staff and teachers want families to also learn healthy eating habits.

There is a genuine care for these kids and for their well being. Both body, mind, and spirit. And care for their families. A genuine love and concern for these families. I think our staff really tries hard to make it work. However we make it work, God will provide the rest. –Member of Redeemer Staff

In addition to Christian faith teachings, staff and teachers expressed that they want the students and families to feel connected to other values such as patience, responsibility, and making healthy choices. Staff and teachers feel that the garden is a great way for students and families to learn these lessons. These lessons reflect the care Redeemer has for its students and the larger community.

Through these common values, members of Redeemer were united together to help build a garden. Redeemer saw a deeper meaning and purpose to the garden, which allowed for members of different interest groups to come together for this project. Values and faith teachings became essential in motivating people for this project.

Publicity/ Economic Benefit

Because the hot lunch program is privately funded by individual families, Maleene can afford food to support the hot lunch program. Maleene partners with Graziano’s Italian Restaurant in order to bring in food to the school. However, during the teacher discussion, one teacher spoke about the rise in the cost of food. Because organic food is expensive, creating a garden could elevate expenses of buying nutritious food:

To go out to the market and buy organic anymore is ridiculously expensive. And if you are growing it already, not only the school benefit, and the kids benefit, but the church and staff benefit as well. – Teacher
While the costs of organic foods are not a major concern for the school, Redeemer recognizes that food affordability is important when serving several students. Through creating a sustainable garden that brings in food for its students, Redeemer can serve as a sustainable model to help elevate food costs.

Due to shifts in the economy, teachers and staff have also expressed that Redeemer is struggling with enrollment. Private schools have become competitive for increasing their student enrollment and have begun looking at progressive programs to appeal to parents. “I think that it’s a good selling point to our school to let parents know that we are committed to feeding the children in a healthy manner,” the school’s secretary explained to me. Community members see the garden as a way to generate parental support and publicity to the school. The staff has expressed hope for the garden to bring in media and other outside members in the larger Ontario area.

*Individual Community Leaders*

Maleene Guida, the woman I worked with throughout this internship, played a large role in the construction of the garden. As the director of Progressive Catering for Kid’s, I began working with her in the school’s cafeteria, helping Maleene prepare and serve healthy hot lunches. Below are my field notes describing my working with Maleene in the kitchen:

Around noon, Maleene and I get excited for the children to come eat the food. “Where are those kids?” she asks me, pacing back and forth. I comment that I couldn’t wait for them to try nutella. Maleene knows all the names of the children who come to the window. “Princesses first,” she says to the kindergarteners, making sure that the girls receive their trays of food first. Maleene talks to each kid, asking them how their day is going. She often uses words like “sweet heart” or “sweetie pie” when addressing the students. After each child comes over to the window to get their food, Maleene asks them about what they think about her food. One student commented that a food looked yucky, and Maleene responded by asking the student to try it first. – Field notes from March 18, 2011
Through her lunch duties serving food to the students, Maleene was able to connect to the teachers, staff and children at the school. After working at Redeemer for several months, many of the community members respected and appreciated Maleene’s work. “Maleene is wonderful. She’s so motherly with the kids, and she has a genuine affection,” commented one of the staff members. Maleene’s character and passion was essential in the garden project. Members of the school relied on Maleene to lead the project. During one of my interviews, a staff member described Maleene:

“When Maleene came, she was like a breath of fresh air. I just felt like she was what we needed here. You know, her enthusiasm, her excitement, her desire to nourish the children in a healthy way.” – Staff Member

Maleene was respected by many staff, students, teachers and parents. During the presentations of the garden project, Maleene expressed her enthusiasm for building the garden. As a point person and leader of the project, Maleene was able to bring people together in order to organize the garden. Questions and ideas about the garden were usually brought to Maleene. While members associated Maleene as the head organizer of the garden project, the garden was never referred to as Maleene’s Garden. Members of the community saw Maleene only as the head organizer of the project, not as owner of the garden. Maleene felt that it was important for the garden to be a community garden, and relied on the whole community for support.

Joe Bartholomy, a masonry contractor for Redeemer, also played a huge role in the physical construction of the garden. Joe’s knowledge and expertise comes from his experience working with his company doing hardscape, measuring, building block walls and constructing buildings. Because of his background knowledge, Joe Bartholomy was able to sketch out measurements for the garden and the twelve raised beds. Volunteers from the church and school were able to come out and donate their time to building the garden. Joe’s expertise and access to
equipment helped with the physical labor of the garden. Joe oversaw cutting the tree, taking out the grass, and building the raised beds for the garden.

**Funding Source**

Building a school garden required funding to alleviate expenses for tools, labor and garden equipment. Various funding sources were used in order to cover the cost of the garden. A grant to the Water-Wise Garden in Every School Garden Grant Program was written in order to cover the cost of the drip system and the garden supplies. The construction of the garden was organized by Joe Bartholomy, who helped gather volunteers to work on the physical labor of the garden. Mulch and stones were donated by church members, and individuals sponsored the expenses for the raised beds in the garden. Because of the overwhelming support by the whole community, funding for the garden was able to come from many different sources. Volunteer work, individual donors, and grants were essential in helping to build this garden.

**Research Limitations**

For my research project, I struggled to get perspectives of parents. All of the parents I interviewed were either involved in the administration work or served as a teacher’s aide; I was unable to get perspectives of parents who did not work at the school. After speaking with staff and parents, I noticed a lack of communication between Redeemer and parents of the students. Staff commented that fliers and newsletters were distributed to parents every week; however, there was little parental involvement in school activities and the garden projects. From my research, I gathered that lack of direct parental involvement in the Redeemer community resulted from parental faith beliefs. Staff commented that many parents attended another church. However, further research needs to be conducted in order to fully understand parental perspectives at the school.
Conclusion

On my last day at my internship site, I visit Maleene in the kitchen. As I walk into the school’s office, Maleene greets me with a warm hug. Maleene is wearing her bright neon green Progressive Catering for Kid’s shirt. “Wait until you see what we did for the garden,” Maleene tells me, as she grabs my arm and leads me through the office doors to the center courtyard of the school. As we walk towards the garden, I admire the mulch and the twelve raised beds that were put in. Soon, there will be a table and the raised beds will be filled with soil for planting. Maleene leads me into the kitchen, and points to two egg cartons sitting the sink. As I look closer, I notice each egg shell is filled with dirt and small sprouts. “The students planted cucumbers,” Maleene says. On Earth Day, each student brought in seeds for the garden, and the pastor of the church came to the school to bless the garden. Maleene used these seeds for the egg carton project.

Maleene and I take the egg cartons into a classroom for the students to look at. As we enter the class, wide eyed children immediately recognize the egg cartons and run over to Maleene. “Wow,” one student gasps, “the plants are really cute.” A teacher comes over to the edge of the class, and looks at the sprouts. Maleene then begins her lesson about composting and fertilizer. When Maleene asks how the egg shell helps the plants, one boy jumps up and down. “I know, I know,” he says. Several students ask which plant is theirs. “That’s not the point,” Maleene responds, “the plants are for the whole community.”

While my research project focused on the parents, staff, and teachers of Redeemer, I feel that I must conclude with a note about the enthusiasm of the children. During the time spent at the school, I witnessed how students are affected by a school garden and healthy lunch program. As the children came to the kitchen during lunch time, their faces immediately lit up when
Maleene served them food. Students have already started talking about a garden club, and many kids are asking when they will get to plant in the garden. During an interview, one parent commented that the food program changed the diet of her children, as well as her family:

[My child] comes home and goes, “do you know how to spell jicama?” And she was so excited over this. In fact, tonight I am making vegetable soup. They are involved and they want to try all this stuff now. – Parent at Redeemer

The enthusiasm and excitement behind the garden project encouraged me to do this research project. As a researcher, I learned the how a localized organization can effect larger social movements. After witnessing the efficiency of the garden project and the food program, I believe that certain aspects of Redeemer can be replicated in other schools to help shape a healthy school lunch movement. Using Redeemer a model, school gardens can be built using aspects such as full community support, individual leaders, funding, available land, economic benefit and common values of the community. While some schools are not unified by religious or faith values, garden projects can stem from common values of children’s health and wellbeing. Today, with rising obesity rates, health and nutrition of children needs to be a priority of our federal and local government. Using this research, Redeemer can serve as a model for other schools and community gardens, helping to reform school food programs.
Bibliography


