‘Faith-based Organizations and Evangelical Churches in Romania:

An investigation of partnership in reference to children and youth in crisis between

1990 and 2004’

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of the relationship between selected Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and Romanian evangelical churches as revealed in their action for children in crisis in the time frame 1990-2004. The analysis describes missional assumptions, activities, and patterns that characterized FBO-church partnership. A qualitative mixed-method approach was followed; 116 individuals from churches and FBOs were interviewed. Eleven cases were selected for comparison, factors were identified that enabled and hindered collaboration. Following the collapse of Ceauşescu’s government in 1989, more than 100,000 children were living in state institutions. In the early 1990s, international FBO response was largely reactive and at times disempowering towards evangelical churches. This led to a ‘division of labour’ as FBOs responded to human, physical, and psycho-social needs of children and churches provided what they understood as ‘spiritual’ care for children. Evidence supports the claim that whilst much positive work was done with children, FBOs and churches gave minimal attention to intentional theological integration of eternal and human concerns. FBOs and churches intervened on behalf of children but tended to ignore the child as a ‘language of God’, that is, the child did not serve as a theological pointer. The terms ‘holism and transformation’ are examined in light of the present pain and suffering of children. It was established that the imposition of short-sighted agendas of the church on the FBO or of the FBO on the church undermine collaboration; such actions often neglect the concerns and voices of the children. These approaches also limit space for open dialogue about what God intends when he places a ‘child in the midst’. Children in crisis may serve to open new horizons in missiology and theology in working towards partnership that honours God. ‘Embracing tensions in partnership for children’ is discussed as the core category to aid in the integration of eternal and human concerns and how the ‘Evangel’ might be more fully discerned in FBO-church partnership.