In the summer of 2006, 3 nurses (Margaret Malnory, Administrative Director of women & children’s services at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare-All Saints (WFH-AS), Thelma Jones, Director of Community Education at the city of Racine health department, and Teresa Johnson, faculty member at UWM, CON) met to address the serious nature of infant mortality for African-American infants in the city. At that time the infant mortality rate for African-American infants was in the mid-20s and three times as high as that of white infants. During that first year, we assisted two legislators, Cory Mason and John Lehman in drafting legislation to provide prenatal care coordination and/or home visits for all eligible pregnant women. Other events that happened that year included: 1) safe sleep education for all staff at WFH-AS including physicians; 2) submission and subsequent funding of a Fetal and Infant Mortality Review grant from the Center for Urban Population Health, for Racine; and 3) beginning of the Racine Infant Mortality Coalition. Others in the state began to notice the alarmingly high rates of African-American infant mortality in Racine, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Beloit. Much work was being done by individuals and groups to address the disparities. Money was collected for Cribs for Kids by a city of Racine firefighter and a director of a child care organization. As work continued in many venues, WFH-AS supported additional time for T. Johnson to complete the FIMR review by 2010. There were also several UWM CON undergraduate and graduate students contributed to this work in the promotion of healthy birth and infant outcomes in ways that included but are not limited to: 1) drafting diagrams to help understand the magnitude of the program; 2) helping conduct literature reviews for projects; 3) completing IRB protocols; 4) interviewing women who experienced a fetal, neonatal, or infant loss; and 5) co-authoring manuscripts. The Racine Infant Mortality Coalition transitioned to the Greater Racine Collaborative for Healthy Birth Outcomes with support from the SC Johnson foundation, the Racine Kenosha Community Action agency and funding from the
Wisconsin Partnership program. During the last 5 years, much work continues. Some of this work includes expansion of Prenatal Care Coordination, expansion of the Racine-Kenosha Birthing project through the Professional Women’s Network for Service, implementation of the Centering Pregnancy model of prenatal care through Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare-All Saints, Fatherhood initiative through the YMCA, also supported through the Wisconsin Partnership Program, and many other programs too numerous to list. Opportunities are provided for women and men of childbearing age to prepare to parent, have a healthy pregnancy, improve their parenting, and develop healthy relationships with their partners. There have been some decreases in the African-American infant mortality rate, where it has gone from three to two times the rate for Caucasians; however we cannot declare victory or slow down the momentum until racial disparities are eliminated. In addition to infant mortality this is a community with severe unemployment and poverty, where there is still much work to be done to provide safe and affordable housing and jobs that provide families with a living wage. Additionally, the levels of obesity at the community level for individuals of all races/ethnicities have contributed to increased morbidity and mortality as it impacts community health. The Greater Racine Collaborative for Healthy Birth Outcomes continues to explore areas where positive interventions and collaborations can improve lives for individuals who live, work, worship and play in this community.