ABSTRACT

We Are One Body:
The Challenge of Envisioning and Sustaining Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools of the Twenty-First Century

by

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Abstract

More than four centuries ago, Christian explorers and missionaries brought the Catholic faith to the New World of the Americas and opened the door for what would become one of the strongest, most successful and most respected educational structures in the history of our nation – the American Catholic School System. In spite of decades of opposition from other religious denominations and civil authorities, the Catholic school system continued to flourish and deliver to its students a rigorous academic curriculum integrated with Catholic doctrine, moral values and sound discipline. These schools were able to withstand their struggles and thrive because they followed the mandate of Jesus Christ to “go and teach all nations.” Theirs was a sacred mission to which they dedicated themselves with a full heart, mind, body and soul.

Changes in culture and the secularization of Western society have reduced the number of Catholic schools in operation today, but they have not diminished their commitment to providing a faith-based education for their students regardless of their diverse religious traditions, races, ethnicities and academic aptitudes. Catholic education continues to thrive in America today because of the dedication of educators and parents who recognize its value and who work tirelessly to ensure its success.
This thesis will examine, then, the distinct nature of a Catholic school beginning with the unique identity which forms the heart of every school as a faith community that is dedicated to the spiritual, social and personal growth and development of the students and adults who gather there. Without a true sense of its particular identity and mission, no Catholic school can survive or succeed. What is meant by this “identity,” and what are the factors that contribute to or detract from its integration into the life of the school? These are questions that we will explore and seek to answer. Recognizing the importance of building a strong faculty who appreciates and accepts the responsibilities of their vocation and who are committed to being role models of faith and Christian values to their students, I have developed and included a six-month course of professional development which could be implemented in individual schools who desire such a program. This course comprises chapter four of this work.

In the completion of this thesis, I have done extensive research into the philosophy and practice of Catholic education, but I have also drawn on my own experiences as a woman of faith who is deeply committed to my vocation as a Catholic school educator. Personal insights which I have gained by teaching on both the elementary and secondary levels as well as through my own professional development have contributed to this work and may be found throughout. In the end, this thesis has been a labor of love through which I have learned a great deal about my own profession and faith; but it is my sincere hope that it has been much more. If the observations which I have made and the recommendations which I have set forth can inspire even one school
to carefully examine its own identity and recommit its collective energies to
strengthening the very character which makes it *Catholic*, then this work will be
successful far beyond its original purpose as an academic work.
To

my parents, William J. Wallen Sr. and Kathleen F. Wallen

who instilled in me an unconditional love for my faith

and

My dear friend Sue

who continuously encourages and supports me
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Introduction

Catholic identity forms the foundation, the very heart and soul, of the life and mission of each Catholic school and faithfulness to that identity is the ultimate criterion of the success or failure of its very existence. It is the lifeblood of any Catholic institution of learning and must be central in every aspect of school life. Without it, a Catholic school becomes just one more of the non-descript entities providing academic training to a range of students across the nation. With their Catholic identity flourishing, however, these schools become centers not only of academic excellence, but communities of love, relationship and service that provide their students with the ability to “critique culture through the lens of faith.”1 Whether the students are Catholic or non-Catholic, the environment found in these schools offers an inter-connectedness that provides support which reaches far beyond the academic atmosphere of the classroom. In many cases, the school becomes the family which may be lacking in the students’ lives. Students frequently turn to teachers for guidance and stability and to their peers as siblings who simultaneously stimulate and encourage growth and the pursuit of excellence. It is this quasi-familial relationship between administrators, faculty and students, based on the model of the Divine Trinity that creates the unique identity which should be evident in every Catholic school.

A school is authentically and distinctively Catholic when it a) fosters relationships that are both human and divine, and b) when

it inculcates awareness about how knowledge, culture, and faith of all people are interconnected and find their true origin in God. This model presents a special Catholic character and contribution that is relational, global, and sacramental.²

Maintaining this environment on a daily basis, however, is an ongoing conversation had by all schools who identify themselves as “Catholic.” Amid the multiple cultural shifts in today’s society, how can these schools insure the vitality and relevance of their unique identity as a Catholic school? This basic question will form the foundation of this thesis as we more fully investigate the meaning and importance of the term “Catholic identity” and consider the factors that both support and hinder a school’s quest to remain faithful to its Catholicity in an ever-increasingly secular world.

By nature, the mission of Catholic education flows from the mandate of Jesus Christ himself to “Go, therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt 28:19), a command which is sustaining to the Church at large as well. Catholic education has provided an integral thread to the fabric of American life since pre-colonial times, when the evangelization of Native American populations was its primary goal. Missionary priests accompanied the Spanish and French explorers on their earliest journeys to the New World in their ultimate quest for “God, Gold and Glory.”³ As a result, “Catholic education” was already established in an elemental form before the first mission school was formally established by Franciscan friars in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1606. In 1634, Maryland became the

² Ibid., 7.
first Catholic colony in the New World, but the widespread establishment of Catholic schools would take another century. The first all-girl’s academy, a forerunner of the type of school in which I currently teach, was founded in New Orleans in 1727 by the Ursuline Sisters, a congregation of religious women from France.

Such founding organizations imbued their particular charisms into their respective educational institutions, thereby establishing uniqueness into a system that may have appeared uniform on the surface. The word charism comes from the Greek word for “gift” or “favor” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2003). Saint Paul speaks in Scripture about the variety of spiritual gifts that are bestowed upon individuals for the sake of the building the Kingdom of God on earth (1 Cor 12: 4-11). Charisms are typically defined as gifts of the Holy Spirit used to build up the church and world in glory to God. All Christian denominations share a belief in charisms although the vocabulary they use is different. Protestants use the language of “spiritual gifts” while Catholics retain the Greek term of “charism.” In short, charisms are gifts we give away, not gifts we keep. In “Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith,” the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education states, “

Certain elements will be characteristics of all Catholic schools. But these can be expressed in a variety of ways; often enough, the concrete expression will correspond to the specific charism of the religious institute that founded the school and continues to direct it. Whatever be its origin – diocesan, religious, or lay – each Catholic school can preserve it own specific character, spelled out in an educational philosophy, rationale, or in its own pedagogy.4

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These unique charisms of the earliest Catholic schools in America manifested themselves in diverse and unique ways. Founders, locations and populations with whom they ministered may have been widely disparate; but, at their core, was a distinct mission which set them apart from their public counterparts: the teaching of the Roman Catholic faith. The Congregation for Catholic Education explains that,

Nurturing faith and maintaining a Christian presence in the academic world is a charism that all authentic Catholic schools share that distinguishes them from public schools. Perhaps the charism of any Catholic school, specifically, a secondary school is to send students out in the world to critically engage and transform society and to be countercultural. Catholics should serve the common good.\(^5\)

In a predominantly Protestant nation, the teaching of Catholic doctrine was not widely accepted – in fact, for the most part, Catholicism itself was not welcomed in early America. In the nineteenth century, historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed the prevalent mindset that “The Catholic religion has erroneously been regarded as the natural enemy of democracy.”\(^6\) Native-born Americans focused on the Catholic Church as the symbol of much that was wrong with the foreign immigrants flooding into the country. Anti-Catholic sentiments frequently led to organized violence; and attacks on the clergy and religious sisters, as well as Catholic churches, rectories and convents, were

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widespread. Philadelphia became a hotbed for such violence as riots engulfed the city in the years prior to the Civil War. Native-born Americans desperately sought ways to “convert” Catholics and transform them into “good” American citizens - and Protestants.

One such initiative called for the children of Catholic immigrants to attend what were known as common schools through which the “undesirables” would learn the American ways of thinking, acting and believing. The Bible was the cornerstone of the common school curriculum, and historian Timothy Smith notes that the readers used in the schools were “handbooks of common morality and testaments to the Protestant virtues which a half a century of experience had elevated into the culture-religion of the new nation.”7 Catholic immigrants agreed with the moral values being taught in the common school curriculum but strongly opposed the Protestant influence being instilled in their children. Stark differences in ideology arose between the two sides, particularly over the fact that the Protestant version of the Bible was being used in the schools. Proponents of the common schools had greatly underestimated the differences between themselves and the new Catholic population. In time, resentment grew on the part of Catholic parents who saw their children being “indoctrinated” into a new religious and cultural consciousness that separated them from their families’ heritage and traditions. It became clear to them that their Catholic children should not be educated in these common schools, and the Church argued that the schools presented “a usurpation of the

right of parents to choose schools that reflected their own moral code and culture.\(^8\)

Between 1829 and 1884, the Catholic Church undertook the serious work of establishing its own system of elementary and secondary schools across the nation and particularly in the large, well-established dioceses in the East. In cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, where Catholicism was flourishing, schools opened in spite of public disapproval, legal battles and outward violence. In 1884, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, which was comprised of American Catholic bishops, mandated that all Catholic parents were bound to send their children to Catholic schools unless they had a “sufficient cause approved by the Bishop”\(^9\) and called for a school to be built in every parish. They recommended that pastors who resisted this mandate should be removed from their positions.\(^10\)

Not all opposition came from outside the Church, however, as certain ethnic groups, in spite of being Catholic, gave little support to the idea of parish-sponsored schools for the education of their children. Riddled with dissention from inside and out, the fledgling Catholic schools struggled to establish themselves during the last half of the nineteenth century. Timothy Walch tells us that,

At the turn of the century, Catholic education was a patchwork of school experiments held together by a common belief in the value of daily moral instruction as part of the educational process. Beyond this broad belief, Catholics differed from one parish to the next. There seemed

\(^8\) Walch, 18. 
\(^10\) Ibid.
to be little order in Catholic education as it entered the twentieth century.\(^{11}\)

Out of this chaos, however, came a determined and concerted effort to institute a system of Catholic schools that was educationally and religiously superior to their public counterparts. Dioceses established school boards and national Catholic educational associations, hired superintendents and developed a uniform curriculum to be taught within the schools. Textbooks presented the history of America with an emphasis on the prominent Catholics who played a role in its founding and expansion. Above all, the Catholic Bible and Church doctrine were used as the basis of both the religious and moral development of the students. As a result, by the 1930’s, Catholic education was far more structured, more efficient, more organized and more successful than it had been in the previous decades.

While some schools were founded by religious orders of sisters, priests or brothers to teach the Catholic faith with an emphasis on a particular charism or spirituality (i.e. Franciscan spirituality focused a commitment to the poor and underserved). The majority of parish elementary schools and diocesan-sponsored secondary schools were a blending of ethnic cultures and attitudes. No group made more of a sacrifice or an impact on the Catholic school system in the United States than the religious sisters who staffed them. Often with little professional training or assistance, these women took on the task of educating the Catholic youth of America, frequently at

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 70.
the expense of their own comfort, health and personal choice. “They were a hard life marked by frequent illness and premature death, but a life made bearable by the strong religious faith of these women.” At times, there were 100 students in a class with an insufficient number of desks and available educational materials. The youngsters varied in racial or cultural origin, economic standing, educational background and, at times, even language. Their immigrant parents were predominantly illiterate and could offer no academic support to their children. They were likewise often ignorant of the doctrines of the Catholic faith beyond the basics; and, so, they relied completely on the schools and the teachers to provide for every aspect of educating their children and to insure the growth and viability of the Church for years to come.

In the early history of Catholic education in America, the uniquely Catholic identity of the schools was obvious, due mostly because of the women and men religious who staffed them and the parishes which supported them. From the late eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, there was a remarkable burgeoning of Catholic education in America. The Catholic population nearly doubled between 1940 and 1960 from 24 million to 42 million. Most were faithful to the doctrine and traditions of the Church and were determined that their children would receive a good Catholic education. In 1949, Catholic elementary and secondary schools had a combined

13 Walch, 24
14 Walch, 123.
enrollment of nearly two million students; but, by the end of 1950, the enrollment had exploded to 4.2 million and was still rising as the post-war babies reached school age.15 It was the Golden Age of Catholic education in America.

The years that followed, however, saw changes which created a perfect storm of decline for the system. Shifting demographics saw vast numbers of families moving to suburban areas and lowering the available pool of students from which the Catholic schools could draw because of strictly-enforced parish boundaries. This was coupled with a decline in the numbers of religious sisters and priests to staff the schools as well as the enactment of laws which forbade the use of public funds to support faith-based schools. This deleterious combination resulted in a dramatic decline in enrollment from an historic high in 1965 of approximately 10.1 million students in grade K-12 to slightly over 2 million students by current estimate.16 A contributory factor to this decline in numbers was the dramatic exodus of religious sisters from their respective orders in the early 1970’s. In 1920, religious men and women staffed approximately 92% of Catholic schools, both elementary and secondary. By the year 2000, religious men and women staffed a mere 7% of those same schools, and it is safe to say that the number is considerably lower today. This scenario places the future of Catholic education on the shoulders of dedicated lay teachers, both men and women, who continue to sacrifice the

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
higher salaries and benefits received by their public school counterparts in order to maintain the schools in which they believe so strongly.

In spite of the commitment and perseverance of these faculties and administrators, however, numerous challenges exist for Catholic schools today. Lack of external of funding; competition from public, charter and other private schools; and a lack of confidence by parents and students place ever-increasing demands on a system already groaning under the strain. The secular society of the twenty-first century does not encourage faith-based values, and a pervasive attitude of relativism draws individuals to make decisions based on more attractive, worldly pursuits rather than religious ones. More than ever, however, contemporary American culture needs Catholic education and the student-oriented, value-based educational environments they offer. This may be most true for today’s teenagers who contend, on a daily basis, with the distractions and temptations of drugs, alcohol, sex, and peer pressure. For this reason, and considering that my current ministry is as a theology teacher in an all-girls’ Catholic high school, the focus of this thesis will be on the importance of Catholic identity particularly in secondary schools, and specifically in the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware.
Chapter One

A Focus on the Hallmarks of Catholic Identity

“Let it be known to all who enter here that Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen but ever present Teacher in its classes, the model for its children, the inspiration for its staff”
- Anonymous

Introduction

At times, it is difficult to precisely assign definitions to abstract concepts. For example, attempting to define such terms as love, compassion, faith, empathy, or patriotism often falls short of reaching the depth of meaning intended when using these terms in conversation or writing. It is most often in the direct observation or experience of nebulous ideas such as these that one discovers not only their true meaning but also their significance and range of influence. Such is the case with the term “Catholic Identity.” What does that expression truly mean, what functions does it serve and what is its significance in the life and mission of educational institutions that bear the name “Catholic”? These are some of the questions we will address here as we attempt to plumb the depths of meaning and impact of the characteristics that lie at the very heart and soul of every Catholic school.

Because Catholic identity is the backbone of any Catholic school, it is essential that all members of the school community fully understand its definition; the role that it plays in areas such as policies, relationships, curriculum, activities and discipline; how each and every person reflects that identity; and how situations may arise which hinder
the school’s faithfulness to its unique identity. In this chapter and the ones to follow, we will explore each of these aspects in depth, examining first the deep meaning of Catholic identity as it is made visible by the school at large and then by each of the stakeholders in the school community. This chapter will lay the foundation on which subsequent chapters will expand, forming a complete picture of Catholic identity as the lifeblood of every Catholic school.

Growing up in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the 1980’s, the Catholic identity of the parish elementary schools and Catholic high schools was not something that I thought about. Rather, I should say, that it was such a part of my life both in and out of school, that it required little thought. It simply became who I was, what my family was, and what my siblings and I did every day of our young lives. It was very common for me to see symbols like crucifixes, statues and religious paintings in my home, to pray at meals and before bed, and to attend Mass every Sunday without fail. Instead of playing typical childhood games, my sisters and I “played Mass,” using candy wafers to simulate Eucharistic hosts. My friends were Catholic, and we all attended the local parish school located in our neighborhood with its accompanying rectory that housed our parish priests. We were educated primarily by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a religious congregation of women with an extensive presence within the Archdiocese; but the few dedicated laywomen on the faculty also exemplified what it meant to teach and live Catholicism. Here, we were surrounded by the same Catholic symbols that we had at home, were taught the elements of the Catholic faith, were
inculcated in the Catholic traditions, and were completely absorbed in our Catholic life and culture. No one questioned what it meant to be “Catholic”; what the mission of the school was; or if the teachers, parents, or students of the school lived and supported their Catholic faith either within the school walls or outside of them. Life revolved around the church, and families made it a priority to attend Sunday services, making sure that all other activities revolved around the Mass schedule. Growing up in a Catholic family, I learned that God and Eucharist were first and foremost, and everything else centered around my faith.

Catholic identity, then, was ingrained in me at such a young age even if I could not name it or know exactly what it meant. Years later, when I began to teach in a Catholic school, I more fully understood the meaning of what it meant to be Catholic and the role that Catholic schools play in the continuation of the faith for future generations. By beginning the doctoral program at Duke, however, and by combining it with the love I have for my ministry, I have had the opportunity to conduct research and to gain additional knowledge of, and an even deeper appreciation for, the importance of Catholic identity and what I can do to promote it in my current ministry. I am truly blessed to have such a strong and consistent foundation of faith, forged in my youth, strengthened through my ministry and deepened by my own education. It is a gift that I wish to share and promulgate through my life and service to the Church, especially as a teacher in a Catholic secondary school.
According to Catholic doctrine, the purpose of a Catholic school was, and continues to be to assist parents in the transmission of the faith and to help form a character within each child that is distinctly Catholic. The Code of Canon Law addresses this responsibility when it states,

Parents and those who take their place, have both the obligation and the right to educate their children. Catholic parents have also the duty and the right to choose those means and institutes which, in their local circumstances, can best promote the catholic education of their children.¹

Parents must work alongside the teachers and administrators in the development of each child. Because the development of Catholic identity is at the heart of our role as Catholic educators, administrators and teachers must not only insure that Catholic identity is integrated across the curriculum and continuously modeled in their everyday lives, but they are also responsible for insuring that the students’ parents grasp the importance of their role in sustaining the qualities that identify their school as uniquely Catholic in nature.

Although we have already discussed how the term Catholic Identity may be difficult to define, it becomes easier to grasp when placed within a specific context. Every Catholic institution (i.e. school, hospital, nursing facility, shelter etc.) will bear its own sense of identity, its own mission statement, its own ways of living that identity, its own place within the local community and its own vision for the future. Here, we will

limit our present discussion to Catholic educational institutions and, particularly, Catholic secondary schools.

Traditionally, there are four specific hallmarks that comprise a school’s Catholic identity: faith, community, academic excellence and service. These characteristics make a Catholic school distinct and set it apart from other educational institutions. We will now explore the ways in which faith, community, academic excellence and service have become pillars of Catholic education and serve to make each school’s identity tangible. These characteristics help to sustain the Catholic identity and integrate it into the mission of the institution and the lives of its members. Because they are key elements of every Catholic school, they are further developed throughout this project and serve as the canvas on which the true identity of the school is drawn.

**Faith**

From the very earliest days of Catholic education, the primary focus has been the sharing of the Catholic faith. Initially, this took the form of evangelization. Strictly speaking, evangelization is the way in which members of one faith seek to indoctrinate non-believers into their own system of beliefs and practices. In the New World, Native peoples had never heard of Christianity and were, to the early missionaries, an extensive audience for their efforts to spread the Gospel to other lands. Their message was well received in some instances but, in others, it resulted in the persecution and death of countless missionaries at the hands of the Native peoples.

As the Catholic population of the New World gradually grew, however, the emphasis of education shifted from the evangelization of non-Catholics to developing a
stronger faith in the next generation of baptized Catholics. The strengthening or deepening of Catholic doctrines in those who are already members of the Church is known as *catechesis*. Today, in many areas of the country, the increasing number of non-Catholic students enrolled requires that Catholic schools fulfill that dual role of evangelist and catechist. In both cases, the Catholic faith has both an academic and social dimension. In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, the Magisterium states,

> Together with and in collaboration with the family, schools provide possibilities for catechesis that must not be neglected … This refers especially to the Catholic school, of course: it would not longer deserve the title if, no matter how good its reputation for teaching in other areas there were just grounds for a reproach of negligence or deviation in religious education properly so-called. It is not true that such education is always given explicitly or indirectly. The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the overall education of the students”

It is not a requirement that students be members of the Roman Catholic Church to gain admission to a Catholic school. However, in cases where the student is not Catholic, both the parents and the child must agree to participate in religion classes and all faith-based events and activities. So strong is the school’s conviction that faith is the central component of our identity that every student is give the opportunity to know and

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experience Christ through teaching and witness. In his address to the bishops in May of 2012, Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the nature of the Catholic school:

“First, as we know, the essential task of authentic education at every level is not simply that of passing on knowledge, essential as this is, but also of shaping hearts. There is a constant need to balance intellectual rigor in communicating effectively, attractively and integrally, the richness of the Church’s faith with forming the young in the love of God, the praxis of the Christian moral and sacramental life and, not least, the cultivation of personal and liturgical prayer.”

Community

The study of the unique identity of a Catholic school, and in this case, a Catholic secondary school, must begin with the examination of the environment of the Catholic school. Frequently, terms such as “environment,” “atmosphere,” “culture,” “climate,” and “ethos,” are used interchangeably in discussions regarding the characteristics or attributes of a Catholic school, but the National Catholic Educational Association makes clear distinctions as to their meanings and implications:

Climate is more general than culture. School culture refers to the common set of values, beliefs and practices held by various groups within the school. In addition to its culture, a school’s climate includes its ecology, milieu, and social system. Ecology refers to the school’s physical and material traits, such as its size, the features of its building, and its facilities. Milieu pertains to the characteristics of the people in the school…and the social system denotes the relationships among [them]…The factors that contribute to the establishment of the school’s ethos are its

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Although each of these attributes is a vital component of a school’s Catholic identity, our primary focus here is on the establishment and importance of *community*. Community is a trait that is more elusive and difficult to define, but it has a positive effect on the quality of life for both teachers and students and clearly distinguishes a Catholic school from all others. A Catholic educational community is comprised of members who share faith, hope and love – one which offers acceptance and encouragement to all – and which provides for the spiritual, physical and emotional growth of each of its members. The love of God and the compassion of Jesus Christ unite the members of the community together and enable each to simultaneously receive and extend these gifts to others both within and outside of the school.

The Second Vatican Council described the distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic school in *Gravissimum Educationis, the Declaration on Christian Education*, as follows:

> the influence of the Church in the field of education is shown in a special manner by the Catholic school. No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through Baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally order the whole human culture to the news of salvation so that the

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knowledge that the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus, what makes a Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, which is found in the educational climate, the personal development of each student, the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith. In 1972, the Bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter entitled, \textit{To Teach as Jesus Did}. In it, the bishops outlined a four-fold purpose of Catholic schools: message, service, worship, and community. The bishops indicated that the building of, and the living of, community must be explicit goals of Catholic schools\textsuperscript{6} and that community is not just a concept to be taught, but a reality to be lived.\textsuperscript{7} For the bishops, community is a necessary condition for, as well as goal of, Christian education.

Thomas Groome, has written extensively about the nature of a Catholic school. Groome described what makes a school Catholic as follows: \textquote{the distinctiveness of Catholic education is prompted by the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself, and these characteristics should be reflected in the whole curriculum of a Catholic school.}'\textsuperscript{8}

In a real sense, upon entering a Catholic school, it should be obvious that one has come into a Catholic environment. As stated in \textit{The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Context, Identity, and Diversity}. London; Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press, 1996.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., §106.
Catholic School: “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics.”\(^9\)

A Catholic school by its very nature should have a distinct Catholic culture. As an educator, I find it imperative that a good Catholic school must have a strong sense of community which ultimately will have a positive effect on not only the students but all those who are welcomed into the community. We must share in the commonality of values, mission and ideals not only in academics but in our way of life. This leads each of us who works in a Catholic institution to be part of, and promote, a faith community. Each time I enter my classroom, or even the building, I should understand and know what the teachings of the school are and how they are incorporated into the community. In Catholic education and doctrine, there are many outward signs like the crucifix, posters, prayers and photos that symbolize to us the life and values in the community.

The school’s faith community is a functional community that produces interpersonal relationships and is a major contributor to the effectiveness of the school. It is the faith community of the school that “constitutes an integral part of the school’s Catholic identity.”\(^10\) The Church calls Catholic schools to be faith communities, dedicated to fostering both social reform in light of Christian values and the personal

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sanctification of the students. The major documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education from 1977 to 1997 emphasized the importance of the faith community in the Catholic school. *The Catholic School* (1977) states that the Catholic school “must be a community whose aim is the transmission of values for living.”\(^{11}\) *Lay Catholics in Catholic Schools: Witnesses to the Faith* (1983) specified that the educational community of a Catholic school “must be in the process of becoming a Christian community and a genuine community of faith.”\(^{12}\) Finally, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) describes the Catholic school as a place “in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony.”\(^{13}\)

**Academic Excellence**

Academic excellence has been a hallmark of Catholic education almost since the founding of the earliest Church-supported schools in America. Today, class sizes are traditionally smaller than their public counterparts, and the service of dedicated religious and lay teachers assures a more caring rapport with students and the ready availability of academic assistance for struggling students. In such an environment, students typically thrive and excel both personally and academically. In the Catholic Church’s *Code of Canon Law*, Catholic schools are called upon to ensure that “the instruction which is

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given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area” (canon 806 §2), but Catholic schools have traditionally excelled far beyond the standards accepted by the public schools in the same geographic region. According to the non-profit College Board Organization, students in religious schools, of which Catholic schools comprise nearly half, scored significantly higher than the national mean for public schools on the 2016 version of the SAT. The SAT Program assesses students’ reasoning based on knowledge and skills developed by students in their course work and uses a 200–800-point scale in three categories: math, reading and writing. National Catholic Education Association President and CEO, Thomas W. Burnford, D.Min., stated that “These scores show that students in Catholic schools demonstrate higher academic achievement than similar students in district-run schools.”

While a number of studies over the years have shown that Catholic school students, and particularly secondary-school students, outperform their public school peers, these findings have often been contested by public school districts both on the local and national levels. Regardless of the research, however, academic excellence remains a “distinguishing characteristic of Catholic schools [and] one that is central to the mission and identities of these schools.”

16 Ibid.
But what does academic excellence really mean, and how does it play a role in the Catholic identity of individual schools or for Catholic education broadly speaking? To begin, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops affirms the message of the Congregation on Catholic Education that states that “the intellectual development of the person and their growth as a Christian go forward hand in hand.”\(^{17}\) They mandate that Catholic schools “must provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education.”\(^{18}\) In 2012, the Center for School Effectiveness at Loyola University, in partnership with the Roche Center for Catholic Education at Boston College, published the National Standards for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, which still guide the planning and direction of Catholic schools in America today. Their publication emphatically stipulated that each Catholic school must have “a clearly articulated rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21\(^{st}\) Century skills and Gospel values and which is implemented through effective instruction.”\(^{19}\) Catholic schools of the twenty-first century must prepare their students to meet the ever-increasing challenges of the world through technology, science, and mathematics but also through the arts and extracurricular activities. Through formal religion courses and a strong religious program that integrates Gospel values across the curriculum, students learn to face the world with loving inclusion and to interact with


\(^{19}\)Ibid., 11.
others in a spirit of peace. While the academic program in each Catholic school retains enough flexibility to meet the needs of their particular student population and geographic area, every school strives to insure that its program provides opportunities for the students to “further identify and develop their gifts and talents and to enhance their creative, aesthetic, social/emotional, physical, and spiritual capabilities.” In these ways, then, Catholic schools are renowned for educating “the whole child” in ways in which other schools do not.

The academic program, then, offers a solid foundation from which the students can succeed in their current studies, in their future academic endeavors and also in their adult lives as informed members of society. In this way, the academic program of every Catholic school fully supports the essential identity on which the school is based. Academics and faith go hand in hand to help each school fulfill its particular mission and, in doing so, clearly strengthen its uniquely Catholic identity.

Service

In all things, Catholic schools follow the example of Jesus Christ, who came “not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Throughout his public ministry, Christ modeled our responsibility to care for the most vulnerable among us. The poor, the infirmed, the social outcast, the lonely, the sinner all received Christ’s care and compassion. Likewise, many holy people through the ages, particularly our school’s patron, St. Francis of Assisi, 

20 Ibid., 12.
serve as exemplars of caring for those in need. For this reason, service is an integral component of a school’s Catholic identity.

Most Catholic schools, specifically in the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington, require every student to complete a specific number of service hours per academic year. Usually the service is completed through volunteering in their communities at homeless shelters and food pantries, centers for women and children and geriatric centers, to name a few. Each of their requirements of service embodies the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, who dedicated his life to the service of humanity. This philosophy of service leadership is at the core of Catholic education. Each school seeks to cultivate in their students a desire to become servant leaders while addressing the core elements of Catholic Social Teaching, such as recognizing the life and dignity of each human person regardless of their race, sex or religion. Direct service in the community, as well as financial support through fundraising, helps all of the students to promote the good work of local nonprofit organizations while also understanding the importance of actions as a reflection of faith. This kind of exposure to those on the margins who are easily overlooked can teach students how to further develop skills that they have and how to work on areas where they struggle. In addition to benefiting others, service can give students a sense of leadership, help them to work on their communication skills, show them how to work well with a team and also can encourage them to find solutions for problems that are inherent in our local and global communities. Many students can find that service in their school or civic communities makes them more aware of, and interested in, issues of
social justice. By providing opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in helping the less fortunate and to accept the call of Jesus Christ to be the servants of many, service becomes an integral aspect of a school’s Catholic identity. In this way, members of the school community understand deeply that the work we do is God’s work.

Now that we have established the framework of what Catholic identity looks like, it becomes critical to explore the layers of responsibility that are necessary for a school’s Catholic identity to be present and visible. It is understood that all members of the school community bear responsibility for maintaining and witnessing to the school’s Catholicity, but each does that in a particular way. Administrators, faculty, parents, students, and alumni all bring individual gifts to bear and contribute in distinct ways to the school’s identity. Understanding these roles both separately and communally will help to better visualize the unique dynamic at play in a Catholic school.

**Administrators**

Within the American public school system, operational authority generally resides with the school district superintendent, assisted to varying degrees by an appointed or elected Board of Trustees. For Catholic schools, however, the Archbishop or bishop of each diocese holds the responsibility to oversee all schools within his particular diocese. This gives an automatically accepted imprimatur to all such schools under his jurisdiction. Because the bishop’s spiritual and administrative responsibilities and duties are extensive, authority over the Catholic schools in a diocese is usually delegated to a superintendent with the assistance of an appointed support staff. Policies for the schools,
as well as responsibility for their enforcement, rests with the superintendent, although his or her direct involvement with each individual school may vary depending on need. The superintendent’s role in the establishment of a truly Catholic identity in every school is one of overseer. The delegation of this responsibility to local principals is common. While authority over the Catholic schools of a particular diocese officially rests with the bishop, it is the school principal who spearheads the integration of Catholic identity within the school community. In some instances, particularly in secondary schools, the administration may include a vice-principal, dean of students, academic dean and disciplinarian who may share this responsibility.

Each individual professional within the Catholic school system, as part of their public ministry, must embody the Catholic mission through their words, actions and their way of being. Scripture reminds us to convey faith by our behavior: “You have faith and I have works. Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.” (James 2:18). To put it more simply, actions speak louder than words, especially when it comes to our faith. Modeling our faith must be an integral part of who we are as Christians. Jesus taught us by the way he lived and asked his disciples to imitate him through his call to “follow him” (Matt 4:19). At vibrant Catholic schools, students will experience role models of faith among their administrators, faculty and staff. The students look to adults to show them how to relate and interact in a Christ-like manner. If students are treated with love, kindness and patience, they will then, in turn, treat others the same way. The bishop, diocesan leaders, and school administrators
must model this through their support and encouragement of the teachers. When students observe that the leaders of the diocese, the school administration and the teachers are working together, they are able to better understand the everyday operations of the school while also recognizing the importance of the conditions which affect the environment of the school. If teachers are undermined, disparaged or made to appear unimportant, students will recognize such inconsistencies and take advantage of those conflicting images. If, however, it is apparent that teachers are valued and respected, students are more likely to mirror that same esteem.

Good administrative leadership is paramount for the success of a school. Effective Catholic school leaders must personally exemplify in their daily practice the core values and traditions of the institutions they serve. As such, Catholic school leaders must always exude and honor the school’s mission which is the abiding spiritual platform from which all aspects of school life emanate. They also know, however, that mission alone, while critical, will not sustain the school into the future. Certainly, factors can always interfere with the successful and efficient operation of a school, but effective Catholic school leaders are adept at finding creative ways to overcome obstacles and renew the spirit of the school’s identity. They can internalize the significance of being the chief executive officer of their institutions and the ones whose decisions can lead them into the future.

Administrators within Catholic institutions should be humble, Christ-centered servant leaders who walk the corridors and playing fields, gradually getting to know each
of their students and teachers both in and out of the classroom. Preeminent expert on servant leadership, Robert K. Greenleaf, suggests

> a servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one of the ‘top of the pyramid,’ servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.  

They are able to address each of the students by name and be empathetic to the personal situations which may affect their school performance. An effective Catholic school leader needs to be fiscally responsible and to know well the best practices of both teaching and learning, the mission and ministry of a community infused with faith and values, the students and their family dynamics, the faculty and their sense of purpose and passions; and they should value good governance as well as family engagement in their faith community. Strong administrators will then empower their teachers to convey these same positive attributes in their instruction and interactions with their students.

**Teachers**

Academic instruction is one component of the vocation of a Catholic school teacher, but mission and charism must penetrate classrooms in meaningful ways if a school is to fulfill its purpose and make a difference in the lives of students. For this to happen, individual teachers must make a personal commitment to integrate mission and ____________

charism into classroom rituals and norms, teaching practices, curriculum content, and assessment. This must be done despite all the other demands and priorities jockeying for attention.

A truly Catholic school is more than just a safe place where students can be free to grow spiritually and personally through religious instruction, the entire curriculum must communicate the Christian worldview. Whether it be history, science, music, math, or literature, the teaching of these subjects should be noticeably different at a Catholic school than at its public counterpart. The faith should be incorporated into every academic area in addition to the curriculum standards required by each state. Furthermore, the Church explicitly rejects the notion that the faith is taught only in religion class. In the document the *Religions Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Roman Curia states

> The world of human culture and the world of religion are not like two parallel lines that never meet; points of contact are established within the human person…Anyone who searches for these contact points will be able to find them. Helping in the search is not solely the task of religion teachers.\(^{22}\)

With regard to the Catholic school curriculum, the Church requires a systematic presentation of knowledge that is faithful to the Catholic doctrine. This is increasingly difficult to achieve in a climate where the state requirements are not based on Catholic

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values and dogma. It creates an added burden then on teachers who must remain relevant in today’s society and at the same time continue to focus on the faith. This certainly calls for very careful planning on all levels of curriculum development.

In a Catholic school, the teacher actually plays a more important role in transmitting the faith to students than even subject matter or methodology. The teachers are the ones who, on a daily basis, fill a school with the Christian spirit and make it truly a Catholic school. In order to set this tone, Catholic school teachers are called to a sanctity of the highest order. The nobility of the task to which they are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the one true Teacher, they carry the Christian message not only by word but also by action.

Teachers must be trained in both the Catholic faith and their respective subject matter. Each diocese requires new teachers to participate in a mentoring program through which both of these aspects are addressed. Although teachers are not required to be Catholic in order to teach in a Catholic school, they are compelled to adhere to Catholic teaching and participate in the school’s religious activities and events. Even though Church documents cite professionalism as one of the most important characteristics of a Catholic educator, qualities such as expertise and mastery of subject matter are not sufficient to recommend a teacher for the Catholic school. Candidates must also possess and manifest a strong Catholic identity, for “if there is no trace of Catholic identity in the education, the educator can hardly be called a Catholic educator”
It is expected that the Catholic faith will permeate every aspect of a truly Catholic school, religious education holds pride of place:

The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the overall education of the students.

The religion classes at Catholic schools should be faithful to the teachings of the Church as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and should present the faith "systematically and in a way that is suited to young people today." Obviously, there are many specific topics and themes that should be covered in religious education – the centrality of the Bible in understanding salvation history, the importance of Christian anthropology in understanding the human person, the place of sacraments and devotions in the life of the Church, ecclesiology, eschatology, the creed and so forth. Those are all essential, but the primary theme of religious education in Catholic schools is the student's personal encounter with Christ. While many subject areas emphasize the facts – dates and battles in history, formulae and equations in mathematics, for example – religious education must never become an intellectual exercise of the mind only but must also involve the student's heart and will. Many schools find their niche in having a great sports team, or an award-winning theater program, or a beautiful campus, but that all becomes irrelevant if Christ is absent. Jesus is the true center of gravity for any Catholic

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school, the ultimate Role Model, the primary Teacher, and the focal point of all the school's activity.

For the teachers and administrators of Catholic schools, a school is Catholic not because of its name, or the presence of crucifixes, or because it has a course in religion, or the percentage of Catholic students, but rather because its Catholic ethos and its faith community, are manifested in what is taught, how people relate to one another, and the overall environment of the school. The vocation of every Catholic educator or educator in a Catholic school must include the work of ongoing social development to form the young men and women who will one day take their place in society. We, as educators, must prepare them in such a way that they will make the kind of social commitment which will enable them to work for the improvement of social structures, making these structures more conformed to the principles of the Gospel teachings. Critical to the achievement of these goals is the cooperation and support of the students’ parents.

*Parents*

Being a parent can be a daunting task, even in the best of situations. In today’s society, a parent has to deal with many challenges such as consumerism, technology, the media and many other issues that past generations did not have to encounter. Parents are responsible for the moral and faith formation of their children, but some parents seem unaware of their duties as teachers and models of faith within their homes. Often, parents seem to think that their role in the faith formation of their children is to take their children to church for the sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation –
and to relinquish the rest of their responsibility to the priest, the religious sisters, or the catechists who instruct their children on basic Church doctrine. However, we know that nothing and no one can replace the influence that the example of a parent has on the spiritual life of a child.

Many parents feel inadequate to teach their children religion primarily because of a misguided presupposition that “religion” is just a course in the curriculum and not a lifestyle. It is true that what we call “catechesis” is a process of instructing people in the knowledge and practice of the faith. It includes the teaching of specific content involved in the creed we profess, prayers we recite, the concepts of moral teachings and the practice of the sacraments. Religion, however, is much more than just a school subject. By taking the time to pray at home, parents show their children the importance of maintaining a Christ-centered life. The decision of parents to take their children to Church every Sunday demonstrates to them that life is more than just sports or hobbies. Participation in mass each week communicates the belief that we are worth more than what we do, that in Jesus we have someone who loves us unconditionally and will be by our side with total forgiving mercy and eternal life. The essence of who we are as Catholics is all about our relationship with Christ and his Church. The experience of being a member of a family, with Christ as the center, is something every parent can provide to their children free of charge. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their
children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.²⁶

The family, which has the primary duty of imparting education, needs help from the whole community. Since parents have given their children life, they share in God’s creative work and are bound by the most serious obligation and responsibility to educate their children and assume the role of primary and principal educators. In giving life, parents cooperate with the creative power of God and receive the gift of new responsibility not only to feed their children and satisfy their material and cultural needs but, above all, to pass on to them the lived truth of the faith and to educate them in love of God and neighbor. This is the parents’ first duty in the heart of the “domestic church.” With this right and responsibility, the role of education becomes extremely important and is a time where the children come to understand the values and mission of the church through their love and respect for one another. The family is the first place where students begin to understand who they are and the vocation to which they may be called in life. They begin to understand the knowledge of God specifically given to them in their Baptism, their participation in the sacraments, and their love for their neighbor. Parents must recognize and live a truly Christian life in order to model this to their children. They must continue to support and promote the mission and policies of not

only the Church but also the Catholic schools. The Congregation for Catholic Education reminds parents that 

While the Bishop’s authority is to watch over the orthodoxy of religious instruction and the observance of Christian morals in the Catholic schools, it is the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained in practice. This responsibility applies chiefly to Christian parents who confide their children to the school. Having chosen it does not relieve them of a personal duty to give their children a Christian upbringing. They are bound to cooperate actively with the school – which means supporting the educational efforts of the school and utilizing the structures offered for parental involvement, in order to make certain that the school remains faithful to Christian principles of education.27

The parents and the Catholic school must be collaborators in the faith, which requires full and active engagement from the parents at all levels. The most important contribution parents can make to the life of the school and the children is to know, live and practice their faith. With such a deep and manifest commitment, parents fulfill their obligation to collaborate with the school and bring into full bloom the greatest gifts God has entrusted to them – their children.

**Students**

In our role as educators, we must focus on the whole person, recognizing the connection between each of our lessons and that of the students’ minds and hearts. We

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must teach the curriculum while understanding that each student is different and made in the image and likeness of God, especially those who struggle, who fight the daily norms of the classroom environment and those who refuse to walk in the light of faith. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, a Roman Catholic saint who established the first Catholic girls’ school in Emmitsburg, Maryland, gave the following advice to Catholic educators in the 1800s: “Set your gaze on the future and always strive to fit your students for the world in which they are to live.”

Does this not remain good advice for today? Schools whose charism enriches the personal lives of the students each day can make it possible for them to live the Gospel values in their everyday lives outside of school. Teachers and administrators must look at the school culture and mission effectiveness through the eyes of the very young people whom they serve. The school communities can and should ask, “what impact does our charism have on a student’s experience at our school?” and “how does our charism make a difference to our students and the world in which they live?”

Looking at school identity through the eyes of our students’ lives forces each Catholic school to translate their school’s characteristics and ideals into human experience. It stands to reason that the true effectiveness of a school’s mission can be measured by checking to what extent the students make it their own and incorporate it into their own lives. The students help to fulfill the Catholic identity of the school through their

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interactions with each other and their teachers, the acceptance of their responsibility as
learners, and their contribution to good sportsmanship in athletic events. Young people
are certainly a wonderful source of creativity, so involving them in making changes to
school culture or communicating and sharing its charism increases not only meaning but
ownership. The students, then, can be active participants not only in forming a solid
Catholic identity during their school experience but one that will remain with them
throughout their lives.

Catholic schools must present chances for the students, throughout the academic
year, to grow in their personal relationship with God, to serve others and to learn about
the Catholic faith. Most Catholic schools encourage and provide opportunities for the
students to receive the sacraments and worship together through the participation in
weekly/monthly masses or prayer services during the liturgical calendar. Students in
secondary schools begin to put their faith in action through events and activities that are
sponsored through their Campus Ministry program. This program helps the students to
discover where they can collaborate with teachers and their peers in order to lead and
participate in community outreach, service projects and retreats. The students understand
that each of these circumstances unite and strengthen their class communities and provide
creative breaks to explore their spiritual relationship with God.

The Catholic school and its religion program has the primary role to enhance the
spiritual lives of young people whether they are active participants in the Church,
uncertain about their role in the Church or are indifferent to a formalized religion. No matter what the final religious affiliation of those who leave Catholic schools, a Catholic school education should help them to become more aware of the spiritual and moral issues that infiltrate life and help them learn how to think in a critical and informed way about these issues. For a significant proportion of young people, their Catholic schooling may be their most significant period of contact with the Catholic Church. The idea of meeting the students where they are on their faith journey may well be the best one to present to young people the option of becoming an active member of a faith community.

**Alumni**

One of the primary functions of the Catholic school is to build relationships. In the tradition of Jesus himself, our goal is simple: to build relationships with our students so that they might see the face of God in their lives. Every Catholic school must have strong relationships with their alumni in order to maintain a strong Catholic identity both within and outside of the school community. Each time an alumnus of a Catholic school succeeds, so, too, does the whole system. The hundreds of Catholic schools around this great nation and the thousands of students entrusted to our care are part of a wonderful tradition. Whether in Delaware, Florida, Maine or California, the success of one is the success of all. Rest assured that, when young people go into the world prepared for work and excited about social responsibility, they will often mention their Catholic school as a place where their success began. Combined with the small world in which we literally now live, the networking that takes place with these alumni cannot be underestimated.
While conducting research on several public high schools in the area, I noticed that none of them have development offices, school advancement offices or Alumni Directors. However, in the Catholic schools, each of these offices, including that of an admissions team, are crucial to the viability of their institutions. Certainly, we connect each of these offices with the financial support of the school, but they also contribute something much greater than money. Their financial contributions are only a small part of their role as alumni.

There can be no doubt that alumni donations, annual giving and capital campaigns are an integral part of the relationship formed between Catholic schools and their graduates. Due to the lack of funding for Catholic schools, a significant amount of funding comes to us in the way of endowments, private scholarships, graduation awards and personal gifts. Each school maintains a strong connection with their alumni in order to encourage them to assist current students with financial aid so as to make certain that the Catholic education they once received is alive and well for the children of the future.

Another way in which alumni contribute to the Catholic identity of the school is by being one of the most important recruiting tools we have. While the term “recruit” often has a negative connotation in the world of athletics, it is, in fact, the term we use when we talk about admission into our schools. After all, Catholic schools, by their very nature, must recruit students. Recruitment is the process by which we present our product to the public and hope that what we have to offer appeals to their needs as a family. It is the alumni, especially, those who live locally, who serve as our front line salespeople.
when it comes to recruitment. With the help of social media and the power of word of mouth, many schools are reaching far more perspective students, advocates and donors than ever before through the efforts of alumni.

Finally, it should be noted that Catholic school alumni have a critical role in the future life of the Church. As Catholic educators, we proudly anticipate that each of our students will succeed in life. Their success is part of our success. We believe that many of our graduates give back to their schools and their church in many ways, including volunteering, mentoring, service to others and financial contributions. I can attest with confidence that we strive to build a life-long bond and relationship with each of our students, both men and women, which reflects who we are as educators as well as the dynamic of our faith community. We welcome the ongoing support of our alumni and their continuous connection within the faith community. Alumni must play an important role in maintaining and contributing to the Catholic identity of their alma maters beyond their years as students. They are ambassadors for Catholic education in their own communities, around the country and around the world.

**Conclusion**

Catholic identity can only be truly evident if it is sustained throughout all facets of the school. A school’s faith community possesses certain attributes that help to sustain its uniquely Catholic identity. This chapter has identified the four primary qualities on which schools must focus in order to maintain a strong Catholic identity: faith, community, academic excellence and service. These attributes have been the hallmarks
of Catholic education from its inception and remain the cornerstones which help Catholic schools distinguish themselves as institutions of learning and active members of the Church and society.

Foremost among these is faith, for it is the primary function of a Catholic school to both strengthen the faith among its baptized members and also to evangelize those who have yet to belong to the Catholic Church. Because of its preeminent role in the mission of Catholic schools, it becomes crucial that each member of the school community understand and fulfill his or her role in the faith formation of both the students and adults associated with the school.

If the faith is actively promoted and lived, a true community based on the teachings of Jesus Christ will become evident and will offer welcome, acceptance, support and compassion to all. A genuine spirit of care will permeate every aspect of school life and will influence such areas as relationships, instruction and discipline in positive ways. Such a Christ-filled community is an essential goal of every Catholic school.

Throughout the history of Catholic education, academic excellence has been an identifying characteristic and desired outcome of Catholic school. This chapter has illustrated statistics which show how Catholic school students have excelled academically and surpassed national standards with regard to standardized test scores, graduation rates and college acceptance levels. It is often this high quality academic program that attracts
both students and their parents to Catholic schools, but it is the responsibility of the school staff to insure the integrity of their scholastic expectations and outcomes.

Finally, we have seen how Catholic schools continuously bring the love and compassion of Jesus Christ to those in need on both local and global levels. It is an essential part of Catholic education that students comprehend and willingly accept their responsibility as Catholic Christians to care for others, particularly the most vulnerable in our world. Students learn the importance of their contributions not just in the classroom but through active, hands-on opportunities for service and charitable fundraising. It is a goal of Catholic school that their students will continue their philanthropy as they enter the adult world.

In addition to highlighting the four essential pillars of school’s Catholic identity, this chapter also explored the unique ways in which this identity is promoted and supported by various members of the school community. As the spiritual and instructional leader of the school, principals must generate a spirit of renewal, be servant-leaders who demonstrate Christ-centered lives, focus on meeting the students’ needs and understanding the impact that faith has on their everyday lives. Every adult in a Catholic school is called to be a steward of mission and a model of Catholic identity. School leaders, teachers, and parents must demonstrate personal witness by modeling Christ-like behavior, being willing to speak about their faith, committing to daily conversation and dialog with each other, and helping to entrench the mission and Catholic identity into the the school’s environment and culture. Teachers, administrators and parents must pledge
a commitment to student learning and to encouraging each of the students to learn more about the school’s heritage and purpose while engaging themselves and others in advancing the mission and Catholic identity of the school. Each adult involved in the education of children must be creative in finding ways to advance the mission and Catholic identity of their school.

There is something truly unique and special about Catholic education, and those of us who serve in this ministry are constantly striving to share what we have with those we serve. Our task is to communicate effectively to our students and their families, in ways that makes sense for them. In spite of life’s challenges, we turn to the Church and our faith, often seeking comfort as well as encouragement and support along the journey. Faith must be an important aspect of who we are and, as educators, we must mindfully and intentionally teach the faith to our students as well as to those colleagues who do not share the same faith but work in Catholic education. Young families understand and crave community. They belong to school communities, athletic teams, and neighborhood groups. With each event, activity, struggle and change, we must strive to make a warm and safe environment for each of our students and faculty members in which the Catholic identity can thrive. In reality, however, situations do arise which challenge our best efforts to maintain and project a strong Catholic Identity. In the chapter which follows, we shall explore some of those circumstances and point out how various members of the school community may contribute to the hindrance of the healthy identity within the school.
Chapter Two

Factors that Negatively Affect Catholic Identity in Schools

“When people are faithful and give good witness, they lead people to Christ. But when we give bad witness, we can lead people away from Christ.” – Donald Cardinal Wuerl

Introduction

In the previous chapter of this work, we sought to more clearly define the term Catholic Identity and highlight the primary pillars on which a school’s very distinctiveness depends. We concluded the chapter by recognizing that, although ideal practices may be hoped for and pursued within a school, situations may arise that thwart even the best efforts to make these ideals a reality. No school, whether Catholic or not, is perfect. Every institution is staffed by and serves everyday human beings who are subject to circumstances, preferences or tendencies which may divert them from faithfulness to their given vocation. At times, administrators, teachers, parents or students allow personal biases or opinions to influence their decisions and actions, and sometimes they unwittingly fall prey to the social demands of our postmodern age. In either case, their choices may directly affect the school’s Catholic Identity in a negative way and make it more difficult for the school to clearly manifest its Catholicity.

This chapter, then, traces the factors, both internal and cultural, which have influenced the decline of Catholic primary and secondary education and examines the major social trends in North America which negatively affect the religious faith and practice among Roman Catholics. It seeks to show how these trends have adversely impacted the
understandings of faith, community, academic excellence, and service—the constituent ingredients of identity in Catholic schools—by distorting, minimizing, or domesticating them. Indeed, these trends are often unreflectively embedded in the attitudes of the presumed stakeholders in and advocates for Catholic primary and secondary schooling. By noting these hindrances, the chapter also begins to point toward a renewed future for Catholic schooling in America.

**Interior Changes Within the Catholic Church**

It is noticeable to most people, especially in the United States, that Catholic education has changed significantly over the past 60 years. This is especially true of the northeastern United States where Catholic education began and grew to become the standard of educational excellence. During the first half of the twentieth century, the major urban centers of the East were home to large archdioceses with vast systems of parish elementary schools and diocesan-sponsored secondary schools. Enrollment in many of these institutions reached the thousands; and they thrived because of the total, unquestioning support of the parents, parishioners, faculties and local communities. It was time when the Catholic faithful held the clergy and religious sisters in the highest esteem, and the local parish church and its accompanying school were the hub of everyday Catholic life. In the era of the 1960’s, 5.2 million students were being educated in Catholic schools across the nation. By the 1990’s, however, that number was
approximately 2.5 million.¹ This dramatic decline can be traced back to a combination of social and cultural trends which were occurring in our nation during these decades as well as to the myriad of internal shifts within the Catholic Church itself which changed the very way in which the Church was conformed to and perceived.

As we have previously discussed, the eventual decline in the Catholic school system was the result of a variety of both internal and external factors. Significant among them, however, was the dramatic decrease in religious sisters to staff the schools, especially in the years following the Second Vatican Council, which came to a close in 1965. Through the Council’s document *The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, (Perfectae Caritatis)*, the Church hierarchy commissioned orders of women religious to become a more contemporary presence in the world by modifying their religious habits/garb and taking a more visible and modern role in society. Sisters were strongly encouraged to pursue careers other than teaching, such as social work, medical professions and law. What followed over the next decade was an upheaval in many religious congregations that precipitated a mass exodus of women from their respective orders and altered the way in which religious sisters were perceived by the public and, particularly, by the Catholic faithful. The awe and high regard for religious sisters diminished as they were no longer viewed as saintly and austere. Many sisters

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who remained in their congregations after the initial wave of exclaustrations, and who had become teachers under the vow of obedience and not by choice, left the classroom seeking other career opportunities. Between 1965 and 1980, the number of religious teachers declined by almost 40,000 for Catholic elementary schools and by over 33,000 for Catholic secondary schools. Since school enrollments remained consistently strong during this time, lay women and men were hired to assume the majority of newly vacated teaching positions on both the elementary and secondary levels. More than 42,000 lay teachers were added during this 15-year period, with the result that the number of laity more than doubled between 1965 and 1980 for both Catholic elementary and secondary schools. By 1980, lay teachers comprised nearly 75 percent of Catholic school faculties; and, by 1990, the number had risen to 85 percent. Today, the figure stands at 98 percent. Although lay teachers in Catholic schools receive a small fraction of the salaries and benefits of their public-school counterparts, the dramatic increase in the number of lay teachers caused a corresponding rise in expenditures which the schools were unprepared to assume. The result was the levying of tuition on already-strapped Middle-American families. In many Catholic families, the cost was a burden too difficult

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2 Exclaustration: Permission that is granted by a bishop for diocesan communities and by the Holy See for institutes of pontifical right, and that permits religious to live outside the community for a specified time. The religious remain bound by their vows and by the obligations of their profession so far as they are compatible with their status.

3 Convey, 113.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

to bear; and parents were forced to withdraw their children from Catholic schools. Student enrollment began to decline sharply nationwide. The combination of rising operational costs and the steep drop in enrollment resulted in spiraling tuition costs. In 1970, almost 75 percent of Catholic elementary schools charged an annual tuition of $100. By 1989, the amount had risen to nearly $1000 per child. The median tuition rate for Catholic secondary schools during that some period was $2300.7 Today, the average cost of enrolling a child in a Catholic elementary or secondary school is $4,800 and $11,240 respectively.8

Financial considerations were only one factor which precipitated the steep decline in Catholic school enrollments, but it was a leading cause. In 1960, Catholic schools educated 12.5 percent of students nationwide; by 1988, it was less than 6 percent.

While enrollment has declined in all sections of the country, it seems that the region with which I am most familiar (Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and neighboring states such as New York, Maryland and the District of Columbia) has seen the greatest decline in student population. Between the years 2007 and 2018, student enrollment in Catholic schools in the Mid-Atlantic region alone declined by nearly 200,000 students, a number greater than any other section of the country.9 This is due to the fact that these states were once populated by the highest concentrations of Catholic

7 Convey, 46.
9 Ibid, 13
immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These areas contained the largest numbers of Catholic educational institutions; and, so, it stands to reason that they would likewise experience the greatest decrease in enrollment figures and the highest number of school closures.

Each year the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) publishes a statistical report on Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States. This annual report is designed to provide an understanding of Catholic education, to inform the public discussion of educational policy issues and to encourage and improve practice at the school level. In its report for the current 2017-2018 school year, the NCEA states that:

In the United States during the 2017-2018 academic year, 1,835,376 students were educated in 6,352 Catholic schools. This includes 561,214 students enrolled in 1,194 secondary schools and 1,274,162 students enrolled in 5,158 elementary schools. 16 new schools have opened, while 110 have consolidated or closed10

Another factor which had a negative impact on the Catholic school system in America was the scandal involving the abuse of children by members of the Catholic clergy. While the abuse occurred over decades, the story only reached the public’s awareness in 2001. It was an atrocity which shook the Catholic Church to its core and had massive repercussions for individuals, parishes, dioceses and schools. Amidst the public outrage, members of the clergy who perpetrated the abuse and the subsequent

10 Ibid.
cover-up plunged the Church into a crisis from which it has yet to fully recover. Sadly, many individuals and families associated the clergy with the Church at large and relinquished their faith altogether. Dioceses assumed tremendous amounts of financial debt in order to absorb legal fees and pay settlements to the victims of the abuse. In turn, parishes and schools were forced to close for lack of funding; teacher salaries, benefits and pensions were frozen or terminated; and many social assistance programs were discontinued. Because of this crisis, the Catholic Church lost the trust of its faithful and the long-term effects have been far reaching. This firestorm of events has indeed contributed to the Catholic school system experiencing a steep decline in enrollment since the turn of the twenty-first century.

We have discussed at length two key factors within the Catholic Church which have had a dramatic negative effect on Catholic schools over the past 60 years. It is essential to remember, however, that the Church is not an isolated entity. All religions and religious institutions function within, and are part of, a social and cultural structure. Let us now explore the external forces which were at work during these same years which have also had an impact on Catholic education in America and the way in which Catholic schools are perceived.

Social and Cultural Influences

The decade of the 1960’s was a tumultuous time in the United States. It was the beginning of a period marked by the questioning of authority, protesting the government establishment, exercising free will, abandoning the status quo and breaking with
traditions. While the parents and grandparents of school-aged children remained faithful to their Catholic faith and practices and Catholic schools flourished, the new generation that would soon be parents themselves would carry a new sense of independence and self-determination into their adulthood. They would no longer simply obey and quietly follow the mandates of the Church or its male-dominated hierarchy and clergy. They were a generation that was more headstrong, more educated, and had more financial resources available to them than previous generations – and they were more outspoken and ambitious. By the 1980’s, American life had changed dramatically. The tumult of the Vietnam War years was over, the unrest of the civil rights and women’s movements had subsided, and the economic recession of the 1970’s had ended. Americans became ever more focused on personal goals and the pursuit of pleasures. The era of mass consumerism had dawned, and Catholics were not immune to its attraction. A byproduct of these trends was the secularization of American culture. Religion became less important than the attainment of individual ambitions and desires. This secularization likewise eroded the belief that religious education was a priority. As Americans grew more affluent, the desire for wealth and material possessions took precedence over more religious ideals. Instead of spending hard-earned money on Catholic school tuition, for example, parents made the choice for public education, thereby freeing finances to be spent on more pleasurable items. Over the years, this lifestyle has created an ever-growing number of individuals who have become collectively known as “nones.” This is a phenomenon in which people believe that religion is not necessary in order to be a good
or moral person. In a two-part survey entitled, *The Religious Landscape Study*, the Pew Foundation found that

The percentage of adults who say that they believe in God, pray daily, and regularly go to Church or other religious services all have declined in recent years. The recent decrease in religious beliefs and behaviors is largely attributed to the “nones” – the growing minority of Americans…who say they do not belong to any organized faith.11

While many Catholic school parents may claim affiliation to the Catholic Church, practice of the faith at home many times is not present. This places an increased responsibility on Catholic schools to educate and catechize students who may have been baptized at birth but who have no religious support at home. It creates a dichotomy for children and teens who learn one standard of life in school but live the reality of conflicting ideals at home. It becomes even more crucial, then, for schools to be strongholds of Catholic teaching and communities of faith on which students can rely for consistency and stability.

The issues of enrollment, funding, staffing and remaining a viable choice of educational options for families today continue to be challenges for Catholic schools, who face them with resolve and a serious commitment to educating young people to be faith-filled, moral and intelligent contributors to the Church and to society. Faculties who staff our schools must be aware of the responsibilities placed on them and must be uncompromising in their obligation to be champions of the faith as well as academic

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instructors. The world and the Church have changed dramatically in post modernity and people’s priorities have become more materialistic than spiritual. As a result, our very Gospel values must now be transmitted in new and more relevant ways to students who might not have a connection to a religious tradition or, specifically, to the Catholic faith. We have a tremendous opportunity and duty in Catholic schools to educate young people who hold a true apostolic commitment, who will defend and work for what they believe and who strive to promote the common good. In order to do that, our faith must be an important aspect of who we are and what we communicate to our students. We must embody an identity and charism that makes a unique and meaningful contribution not only to the Church but also to society. Ideally each of us involved in Catholic education wants our schools to be effective centers of Christian learning. We want to know that, when our students leave our community of faith, we have provided them with a solid foundation in both spirituality and academics. As basic as this goal seems, sadly, it is not always the reality of what occurs within our schools. During a student’s four years in a Catholic secondary school, situations may occur which create confusion or disillusionment regarding his or her faith and create a dichotomy between faith and lived experience. There are several possible causes for this, and these will form the body of this chapter as we explore some of the scenarios which could hinder the Catholic identity of a school.

Unfortunately, there are many ways in which this distinct identity can be repressed or undermined. The idea that those who serve in significant capacities such as
administrators, teachers, parents and students, could be impeding the very character and mission of the school is tragic. Each of the stakeholders within a Catholic secondary school plays a significant and crucial role in the spiritual lives and faith development of the students who are entrusted to us. This responsibility is often relegated to a minor role or disregarded completely by those who, for one reason or another, do not value its importance. At times, administrators and teachers fall prey to the same social and cultural attractions which the students and their parents experience. Individualism, relativism and consumerism are strong adversaries to the challenge of Christianity and Gospel values. We will now consider each of the major contributors to the life of the school and explore the possible ways in which their actions may hinder the Catholic identity of the school in which they minister.

In the previous chapter, I wrote about the roles of specific groups who play a significant function in the life and faith of the school community. From the administration to the alumni, each of these groups view and witness to Catholic identity in different ways; and each of them also promotes or hinders that Catholic identity in different ways. In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at the roles of the administrators, faculty, parents and students and explore the ways in which these groups can hamper Catholic identity within our secondary schools. While alumni are an important aspect of the life of the school, most often that is evidenced through their financial contributions. For this chapter, and because they do not hold a daily
responsibility in the life of the school and faith community, alumni will not be included in our current discussion.

**Administrators**

Anyone who has spent time in a school setting understands and appreciates how crucial the administration is to the life of a school. When there is strong leadership, the entire community benefits and flourishes. When the administration struggles, however, every aspect of school life is affected and, to varying degrees, suffers from the ineffectiveness of an inept leader. The proficiency and competence of the principal or head of school is paramount to the institution’s vitality and its ability to fulfill its goals and mission. A mission-driven administrator keeps everyone in the school community on course. His or her vision for the future of the school plays a critical role in its ongoing success and credibility as an academic institution of excellence that is unique in character. In Catholic institutions of learning, the responsibility of the administration assumes an even deeper burden of accountability than his or her public-school counterparts, since the school’s very existence is grounded in faith and Gospel values. Not only must academic standards be maintained, but the spiritual life of the faculty and students also comes within the purview of the administration. In this way, the principal of a Catholic school is, simultaneously, the academic and spiritual leader who sets the tone and establishes the spiritual tenor of the entire school. For these reasons, it is essential that the principal or head of school be fully committed to maintaining the Catholic identity and the religious aspects of the school’s mission before all else.
Each Catholic school’s identity and uniquely competitive advantage begins with its mission statement. This statement is the public articulation of the heart of the school – the very reason for its existence. Sr. Jerilyn Einstein, FMIJ, principal of Guardian Angels Regional School in New Jersey, highlights the importance of a school’s mission statement:

Always return to the school’s mission…When parents call, when they and their children walk in the door, they can hear, see, and experience that. We attempt to live those values consistently through a family atmosphere and respectful dialogue.¹²

Ideally, the school’s mission and Catholic identity are lived out and preserved by the members of the school community who demonstrate each day who they are, what they do, who they aspire to be and what, in fact, makes the community unique and different from other schools in their surrounding areas. Sadly, however, many schools have recently introduced new, less theological mission statements that appeal to a more secular pool of perspective students. For example, statements that emphasize a more wholistic approach to the development of the students (i.e. moral, intellectual, social, emotional and physical) rather than focusing on Christ-centered values do not fulfill the true meaning of Catholic identity.

This seemingly simple alteration can effectively change the entire dynamic of the school community and the values it promotes. As the primary figure of authority, the

principal or head of school must always be aware that the mission statement plays a key role in the school’s character and must insure that it always retains its specifically Catholic nature. Regrettably, outside influences such as financial stability; competition from non-public, private schools and charter schools; an increase in non-Catholic families and students; and the necessity of complying with state educational mandates have caused some administrators to shift their focus away from highlighting the religious nature of the school to promoting such areas as academics, athletic programs and other popular extra-curricular activities. This has led Pennsylvania State education sociologist David Baker to observe that “fewer than half of Catholic high school principals today identify ‘religious development of the student’ as their school’s primary mission [and, instead,] identify ‘academic excellence’ as their school’s chief objective.”

Principals sometimes view themselves as CEO’s of a corporation whose primary goal has become the satisfaction of their customers and not the fulfillment of the school’s faith-based mission. Arbuckle contends that “a fundamental tension exists today between the mission of a Catholic institution and what can be termed ‘the business.’” He elaborates:

In Catholic institutions, ‘the world’ or ‘the business’ consists of such realities as: people’s needs, their cultures, institutional realities such as employer-employee relations, government standards, and funding requirements… All decisions should be made in light of the mission. However, there is a constant danger that administrators will concentrate on

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meeting the challenges of ‘the business’ side and be less concerned with the demands of ‘the mission,’ which are seen to be unimportant, ‘soft,’ unrealistic or unworldly. Compared with the world of financial panning or the meeting of professional standards, the issues relating to ‘the mission’ are viewed as rather quaint and irrelevant.\textsuperscript{15}

This, then, can easily result in the creation of an environment in which the practice of the faith and the integration of Gospel values becomes less important to the staff and increasingly less noticeable in the day-to-day instruction and interaction of the faculty and students. For this reason, it is vital that a principal or head of school select teachers who are dedicated to the Catholicity of the school’s mission and identity and that he or she closely monitor the faculty’s attitudes toward, and participation in, all faith-based endeavors. This creates, in a sense, a system of checks and balances whereby the administration and the faculty can support one another’s efforts in maintaining a strong and visible Catholic identity lived through a vibrant mission that is faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

As we continue to investigate the expansive role of the administration as it particularly relates to Catholic schools, we will now explore three specific ways by which a principal can make the school a more effective religious environment or not, depending on his or her ability to give personal witness to the faith, to hire and supervise staff, and to be a good steward of available resources. An administrator who fails to adequately

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., Loc. 1714.
fulfill these primary roles will be seriously detrimental to the Catholic identity of the school as well as its ability to function successfully and carry out its mission.

Personal Witness to the Faith

As necessary as it is for teachers to support and uphold the Catholic identity and Gospel values of the school both professionally and personally, it is even more vital for an administrator to do so. Because the principal is the spiritual leader of the school, there can be no question concerning his or her commitment to the faith, support of the doctrines of the Church or faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus Christ. In word and deed, administrators must exude the spiritual values on which the Church and our schools are founded. Professor Christopher Beeley tells us that,

What ultimately moves people into a deeper life in Christ is not personal charm, social connections, or managerial expertise, no matter how useful they may seem in the short term. Instead, it is the real and palpable holiness of a leader steeped in the grace of Christ.\(^\text{16}\)

The ultimate goal of every administrator should be to transform each school from an ordinary educational site into an effective faith community and center of Christian culture. This requires an unwavering commitment, untiring involvement, and steadfast dedication to the school and all it stands for. In times of conflict, personal opinion and prejudices must be set aside in the interest of maintaining a spirit of peace and solidarity. An environment in which Christian ideals, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness and the

common good must be sustained at all costs, for these are the essence of a school’s Catholic identity. A principal or head of school who cannot distinguish between personal preferences and what best serves the identity of the school as a specifically Catholic institution is no longer qualified to lead that community. Because of his or her unique position of leadership, an administrator has the ability to draw others’ support and, in doing so, cause an irreparable rift among the faculty, students and parents. Such a situation could ultimately deliver a fatal blow to the outwardly Catholic character of the school. Even those outside of the immediate school community could conceivably become involved, thereby exacerbating the divisiveness and toxic environment precipitated by the actions of a person in a leadership role. There must be, therefore, a system of accountability in place whereby an administrator is held responsible for his or her actions while holding such an esteemed and influential position.

The influence which the chief administrator in a school has can never be underestimated. In both tangible and subtle ways, the principal or head of school holds the attention of teachers, students and parents at all times. For this reason, administrators in Catholic schools must be continuously aware that their attitude toward such practices as prayer, religious events and celebrations, liturgies and retreats is contagious. Their disposition toward, and participation in, such events has the power to sway others either for or against such outward displays of faith. For example, the participation of my school’s students in local Diocesan events such as the Holy Week Pilgrimage, Marian celebrations in honor of Mary or the National March for Life in Washington, DC, could
have been better encouraged and promoted by the administration in order to increase the students’ interest and attendance. Even on a local level, daily prayer, school Masses, Catholic Schools’ Week celebrations, class retreats and service projects could elicit more positive results if greater attention was offered by the administration. The religion department encourages such events; but other faculty members and, especially the administration, do not offer much encouragement to the students to partake in these opportunities for religious expression.

In short, the impact of an administrator’s lived witness of Christian values and Catholic doctrine cannot be minimized. It has a profound influence on every aspect of school life and must remain the constant priority of a good principal or head of school. He or she must realize the power of words and actions to strengthen or to undermine the Catholic identity of the entire school.

**Hiring of Personnel**

Although the principal or head of school bears the onus of insuring the vitality of the Catholic identity within the institution, he or she must be supported in that mission by a staff of dedicated teachers and support personnel. In order to insure a high level of corroborations, the administrator must seek candidates for employment who fully understand, accept and agree to inculcate the Gospel values on which the school is based. The work of enhancing the school culture, its Catholic identity and its mission begins with the hiring process. The task of hiring the best person for a vacant position is exacerbated by the requirement that teachers in secondary schools have degrees in the
academic fields they will be teaching. Often, applicants for teaching positions in areas other than religion do not even take religiosity into consideration, leaving principals with the decision of hiring a candidate who is most qualified in his or her curriculum area or one who will support the Catholic identity of the school. Ideally, the perfect candidate is one who can willingly fulfill both expectations, but that is not always the reality when teachers are hired. An administrator who prioritizes the faith-based mission of the school will hire a teacher who is strong in both curriculum and the Catholic faith. An administrator’s preference for hiring alumni is not always a practice that insures compliance with the school’s mission or identity either. Typically, four years have passed since an alum has left the school; and many factors may have influenced a change in his or her faith life since graduation. What may have been a priority when he or she was a student in the school may no longer bear the same level of importance or conviction as a member of the faculty. A good administrator knows that a single anti-religious or even religiously indifferent teacher can damage the educational and spiritual ethos of the school and can make it more difficult for others to maintain the Catholic identity in light of their resistance. “If hiring practices are not addressed in the Catholic school community, some of the schools will continue to call themselves Catholic but will have lost their real identity; they will have lost their souls.”17 By soul, I mean the center of a person’s life – his or her values, commitments, choices, thoughts, feelings, memories

and hopes for the future. Administration will have precipitated this if their hiring practices fail to support and sustain the mission, philosophy and Catholic identity of the school. For example, although it may be the case that a candidate has an extraordinary résumé, his or her beliefs and behaviors may not be compatible with the mission and philosophy of the Catholic school. Principals must choose carefully, then, and question potential candidates not only about their academic prowess and experience but primarily about their faith life and how Christian moral values are integrated into their daily lives. 

Catholic school administrators and faculty are expected to be persons of integrity who conduct themselves in a manner that is open and honest. This requires that they be conscientious in their ministry and morally upright in their personal lives. A good administrator can glean a great deal of information from a candidate in the interview process and should be able to judge the sincerity of the applicant’s responses. Although it is not a requirement that teachers in Catholic schools be practicing Catholics, unless they teach religion, their personal and professional lives must be beyond reproach; and they must agree to uphold the doctrines and teachings of the Church. They may not, at any time in their dealings with students, disparage the Church, contradict its teachings or advocate for positions contrary to Catholic beliefs. Doing so would indicate a breach of contract and would be grounds for dismissal should the administration choose to do so.

This, however, is where the problem lies because, most often, this does not occur. It has been my experience that faculty members do openly criticize the Church, the clergy, or the Catholic teaching on moral issues in front of the students without repercussion,
creating doubt and confusion among them. The informed educator will be able to distinguish between criticizing Church doctrine and the actions of the clergy who represent the Church. This will enable them to cultivate a classroom in which students can think critically as a dimension of their faithfulness. At times, students will bring their concerns about teachers’ comments to religion class for clarification; but it is evident that the seeds of confusion have already been sown. With no follow-up after a teacher is hired, with no consequences for blatantly opposing the Church, and with no monitoring of a faculty member’s outspokenness or resistance to religious events in the school, the door is left wide open for the secularization of our culture to overtake the Catholic identity of the institution.

Although a good administrator is the first line of defense against hiring teachers for whom Catholic identity is not a priority, a system of mentoring would be of great assistance in insuring that all new teachers fully understand their role in maintaining the spiritual character of the school. Administration, faculty and staff already employed must actively teach the mission, Catholic identity and particular charism of the school to all those new to the community and accentuate the commitment of teachers by emphasizing and discussing the school’s purpose and goals at faculty meetings, conferences, and in public announcements. In order to illuminate or educate those who are hired to teach in a Catholic school, we must focus on forming educators to lead Christ-centered lives and helping them to understand that are all called to serve as followers of Christ. What we do each day is not simply a job, it is a vocation – a vital ministry of service within the
Church. If we do not mentor or continuously form those whom we hire, we are saying that the mission and Catholic identity of our institutions and the faith formation of our students is not important. The Catholic identity and culture of the school can be considerably strengthened if the administration conveys the message to faculty and students that high standards have been set and are expected of them as both teachers and students in a Catholic educational institution. There must be consistency with the promotion of the Catholic identity. All employees and, specifically administrators, must be committed to maintaining the school’s distinctiveness, its religiosity and its academic culture at any cost. This begins by hiring good, moral and faith-filled candidates and continues by a consistent reinforcement of expectations over the course of their employment.

**Stewardship**

Now more than ever, Catholic schools nationwide face overwhelming financial hardships. The extensive departure in the 1970’s and ‘80’s of religious orders from their teaching ministries required the hiring of lay teachers to staff our still burgeoning educational institutions. Their salaries, while far below those of their public-school counterparts, still placed a previously unknown burden on the schools’ financial resources. This increase in expenditures was then passed on to the parents in the form of tuition, which has risen exponentially over the decades as the cost of maintenance, utilities, technology and instructional materials has also risen. For the 2017-2018 school term, the average freshmen tuition in a Catholic secondary school was $11,239 which
covers approximately 74% of the cost to educate each pupil. Receiving no financial assistance from state or local agencies, and the refusal of the government to enact a tuition voucher system, have left the Catholic school system with limited options for income. Parents continue to bear the brunt of the expenses through ever-increasing tuition, which has subsequently caused some families to remove their children from Catholic schools because of their inability to pay. Grants, endowments, donations and fundraising assist some schools in their search for economic stability; but, in some areas, the struggle remains an ever-present reality or the cause of a school’s closure. For this reason, Catholic school administrators must be vigilant and fiscally savvy stewards of the resources afforded to them. They realize that everything that has been given to them and to the school is gift. Bishop Carl A. Kemme, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita, Kansas, states:

There is nothing we have; nothing; that is not a gift. Everything we are and everything we have is founded in the loving generosity of the Creator. When we know this, not just in our minds but in the depths of our hearts, then life takes on a whole new meaning. Then we have a whole different perspective about our time or our talents or our treasure, our bodies, our minds, hearts – everything that we are and everything that we have – takes on a completely different perspective.

Good stewardship, then, is a choice to help each of us become disciples of Jesus Christ by recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God and accepting the

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obligation to give back to God by offering our time, talents, and treasures to those in the faith community.

Administrators, therefore, have a moral obligation to use the financial resources available to them to best meet the needs of the entire school community. Unfortunately, determining what is “best” and “needed” often becomes a subjective decision made by the principal or head of school alone. Administrators who allow those decisions to be skewed by personal preferences, by the whims of contemporary culture or by outside influences run the serious risk of misusing funds and crippling the school’s ability to fulfill its mission. Finances impact the Catholic identity of the school by enabling it to fulfill its mission to provide a faith-based program of excellence which prepares its students to be models of integrity, morality, conscience and service both now and in the future. Providing the students with the materials they need to reach their fullest potential requires the wisdom and good stewardship of an experienced administrator. In some secondary schools, this role is shared with a financial officer; but the ultimate responsibility for spending remains with the principal or head of school.

The administration of any Catholic institution must understand that a commitment to be good stewards of the resources that the community has to offer is a tremendous responsibility.

In the current environment, in which needs are many and resources are few, the administration of a Catholic school plays a crucial role in affirming and advancing the Catholic identity and mission, providing leadership, and offering new perspectives and
insights. On the path to sustainability, the administration’s efforts may be required to take
many new forms: increased levels of public engagement with potential donors, seeking
broader bases of support, utilizing sound business practices, insuring transparency, and
accountability with regard to expenditures. Administrators who fail to willingly accept
and fulfill these responsibilities can seriously damage the school’s financial stability and
undermine it successful operation.

The question of dynamic stewardship is not just a matter of money, but of an
active practice of the faith. Catholic schools are not primarily academic institutions; they
are first and foremost schools of formation in faith and of evangelization, moral values,
service, and spirituality. This realization must drive the administrator’s work to promote
the school as a unique and valuable return on one’s investment from the perspective of
parents, donors or other stakeholders of the institution. An article in America Magazine
titled The Catholic Schools We Need, the Most Rev. Roger J. Foys, Bishop of Covington, Kentucky, states, “While there may be alternatives to Catholic education,
there are no substitutes.”¹⁹ This type of forward thinking is needed by today’s
administrators to encourage the willingness of perspective parents and others, perhaps
outside of the school community, to financially support the ministry of Catholic
education and secure its future for generations to come.

¹⁹ Most Rev. Roger J. Foys, “The Catholic Schools We Need,” America Magazine, (September 13, 2010).
On the contrary, administrators who haphazardly spend the school’s limited finances on frivolous or extravagant items (i.e. new furniture, constant need for state-of-the-art technology) or who hire unnecessary personnel can intensify the school’s hardship and draw resources away from more vital materials or services. Although what they have done may not be illegal, it is an ethical breach of their responsibilities and the trust that has been placed in them. Administrators must realize the magnitude and scope of impact that their financial decisions bring to bear not just on the daily operations of the school but on its long-term future as well. Lack of financial resources is the primary reason for the closure of Catholic schools, and administrators who ignore their role in that scenario only hasten the school’s demise.

Although the administration is responsible for providing leadership and guidance to the entire school community, it is the faculty who interact closely with the students on a daily basis and have the greatest influence on incorporating the Catholic identity throughout the school. This next section of the chapter will explore ways in which teachers can negatively influence the school’s identity and mission.

**Faculty and Staff**

Every teacher holds one of the most important occupations in life and exerts a tremendous amount of influence on the students entrusted to his or her care. Teachers interact with their students throughout the day; and, very often, the teacher becomes someone that the students see more than their parents. Not only does a good teacher provide excellent instruction in the classroom, but a teacher in a Catholic school is
someone who can and should be an influential promoter of, and witness to, the Catholic faith. To be called to be a teacher in a Catholic school is a vocation – not simply an occupation – and teachers who do not see it as such, quite honestly, should not be employed in that role. A major problem in Catholic schools today, however, is that teachers do not understand the meaning of “vocation” and how they can best fulfill that call in their daily lives. Thomas Groome offers a wonderful analysis of the situation when he writes:

There was a time when the nature of our role…seemed obvious and was taken for granted: we were to teach children their catechism questions or their Bible stories…depending on our denomination. For pedagogical, theological and social reasons, that self-image is no longer adequate for us, if it ever was. Yet, relinquishing that self-image has left us with nothing as clear-cut in its place. We have had our own identity crisis about who we are and what it is we are expected to be about. Forging an alternative image for ourselves as educators should involve the reclaiming of a tradition that has been largely lost: namely, that what we do is a bona-fide Christian ministry.²⁰

When an educator does not fully understand what it means to be a role model for students and give testimony by his or her life to the mission of the Church and Catholic education, it becomes problematic for the school striving to fulfill its desired mission. The Catholic teacher has a great responsibility to be a moral example to his or her students and should remain devoted to leading students to Christ and the Church. Today, the concept of a teacher as witness has been lost to history and set aside in favor of

professional qualifications. More and more teachers are being hired who are not Catholic or who may be a non-practicing Catholic, long removed from an understanding of, or commitment to, their faith. There are currently very few educators within Catholic secondary schools, besides those in the religion department, who are able to clearly identify and articulate the essential characteristics of Catholic education and Church doctrine. The Catholic theological knowledge and commitment of 95 percent of today’s lay Catholic school teachers is sometimes quite thin, however solid are their mainstream academic credentials and aptitudes. This presents overwhelming challenges for schools’ efforts to maintain a strong Catholic identity and instill that character in their students. In this section, we will look at ways in which these challenges come to the forefront and may present obstacles that impair a school’s ability to fulfill its mission in both the immediate and long-term timeframes.

We have already discussed the dramatic shift in Catholic school staffing that occurred in the middle and second half of the twentieth century. During the decade of the 1950’s, more than 90% of Catholic school teachers were men or women who were members of religious congregations. That figure dropped to half that amount just 20 years later; and, during the 2017-2018 academic year, more than 97% of faculties were comprised of lay staff. The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) states that “97.4% of all full-time professional staff in Catholic schools across the United States

are laity, the majority of them being women.”

Only a minimal percentage (2.6%) are now religious sisters, brothers or priests.\footnote{NCEA reports that 74.8% are women as compared to 22.6% men.}

The exodus of teaching sisters, brothers and priests from Catholic school classrooms affected the schools in unprecedented ways and changed the dynamics within those school as well. In the beginning of this evolution, the primary qualification for lay teachers was that they be practicing Catholics. Academic certification and expertise in assigned curriculum areas were not mandated. The goal for many Catholic schools at the time was to hire teachers who required the lowest possible salary and who would waive the need for health benefits, thereby lowering the amount of money that the schools would have to expend on personnel. This pattern of employment served to greatly reduce the public’s trust in the professionalism and ability of Catholic school teachers. Even though lay teachers were practicing Catholics, parents did not view them to be adequate models of the faith for their children in comparison to the religious sisters, brothers and priests. This attitude, coupled with the imposition of tuition, resulted in families withdrawing their children from Catholic schools in large numbers. Today, that decline in enrollment sadly continues; and it places a heavier burden on teachers to make the schools places that attract students and are able to retain them for the entire four years of their secondary education.

\footnote{NCEA, Ibid.}
Although enrollment figures show a 1.2% decrease from the 2016-2017 academic year; at the same time, a strong demand and enthusiasm for Catholic schools and the education and culture that they provide remains. Many Catholic schools have waiting lists; and several new schools continue to open each year across the country, particularly in the South where the number of Catholic families is on the rise. This upswing in interest in Catholic education is due in large part because Catholic schools offer an environment that emphasizes the importance of academic excellence. National test scores, high graduation rates and college attendance show that Catholic school students frequently outperform their public counterparts as well as those in some private institutions. Statistics such as these are restoring the public’s confidence in the ability of Catholic schools to provide an outstanding academic course of study and prepare their students to meet the challenges of today as well as of the future. Teachers are now required to be certified in their field of study, and many teachers are pursuing degrees beyond the basic bachelor’s degree needed for hiring. While this picture may be hopeful in many respects, what has gone by the wayside is the requirement that teachers be practicing Catholics or even members of another Christian faith tradition. On one hand, the academic proficiency of the faculty has greatly enhanced the educational aspect of the schools; but, on the other, the Catholic identity has suffered because of this practice.

24 Catholic Bishops in the South indicate that this trend is due to the number of Catholics from the North moving South and also to the number of Latin American immigrants who are primarily Catholic by religion. “In the US South, the Church is in growth mode,” The Catholic World Report. July 6, 2017, https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/07/06/in-the-us-south-the-church-is-in-growth-mode/. (accessed June 12, 2018).
Teachers hired merely on the basis of their academic expertise, while not considering their willingness to support the Catholic identity, often result in undermining that identity and the very mission of the school itself. A one-sided picture of success is currently being publicized and offered to families seeking the best possible educational opportunity for their children. Parents often assume that, because the school bears the title of “Catholic,” values are taught, and the entire faculty support the school’s faith-based mission statement. Unfortunately, our secular culture has also persuaded many families to place less importance on Catholic identity in lieu of graduation rates and college entrance statistics. Regrettably, the faculty and staff often play a prominent role in establishing and promoting such a skewed perspective.

In this same light, guidance counselors also bear a measure of responsibility in minimizing the role of religion in the students’ educational careers. Often, they push students to take extra science or mathematics courses in lieu of theology. In the students’ choice of classes or electives, they are often told that religion is not important or that it will not affect their acceptance to college, giving the impression that religion classes are a waste of the students’ time and effort. Frequently, students are taken from religion classes for guidance appointments; or counselors intentionally do not promote Catholic colleges as viable choices for furthering the students’ education. All of these practices imply to students that religion is the least important of all curriculum areas and that it bears little relevance to their lives or their futures.
In large part, the problem of faculty negativity regarding religion begins with the hiring process, as we have already discussed. If perspective teachers are not asked about their personal faith lives, their beliefs on moral issues and their willingness to integrate the Catholic identity of the school into their classrooms and interactions with others, the platform for failure is already established. It is imperative that teachers understand the correlation between the religious nature of the school and all other areas of the curriculum as well as the daily school life. Even though teachers are no longer required to be practicing Catholics in order to secure a position in one of our schools, there must be a commitment to supporting and promoting the faith and the values to which Catholics ascribe. Likewise, there may not be, at any time, a contradiction of Catholic teachings, a resistance to participation in religious events, or an aversion to incorporating spirituality across the curriculum. Yet, these things do exist and, regrettably, they exist with considerable frequency among the faculties of Catholic schools. In faculty rooms, in classrooms and in hallway conversations, teachers often question and complain about the need for prayer, the “interruption” in schedules caused by school Masses, the need to follow moral teachings outside of the school environment and the “interference” of the Church in areas of science and the personal choices of individuals. Teachers who are not Catholic or who are non-practicing Catholics struggle or refuse to make religion a part of their ministry as an educator in a Catholic institution and wrestle with understanding how their call to witness in their personal lives connects to the dynamic of their vocation as a teacher and their ability to encourage that same witness among their students. At times,
these teachers rely on the excuse that they are not Catholic as a way to avoid participating in religious activities or services rather than engaging with the students during them. Such evasion tells the students that participation is not important and leads to the students’ own lack of interest. In my own experience, a teacher recently refused to extend a sign of peace to a student during Mass because the teacher was not Catholic and felt that it was unnecessary to take part. The student was offended and confused, since the simple gesture was merely one of peace and not anything outwardly “religious.”

At times, these teachers openly criticize those for whom the Catholic faith is important and who follow the Church’s teachings both professionally and personally. My position as a religion teacher in a Catholic secondary school necessitates my faithfulness to Catholicism and the teachings of the Church; but, as previously discussed, my faith would be an essential part of who I am regardless of my occupation. As I have stated before, being Catholic is an integral part of my character. It is not something that I have learned but, more, it is something that was instilled in me by the grace of God and something which I have lived my entire life. My faith is not perfect and, certainly, my expression of it has changed over the years; but it still remains the biggest part of who I am and whom I believe God calls me to be each day. Because of this, it is sometimes easier for me to identify the often-blatant clash of values with which we are faced in today’s secular culture.

Many times, when I mention the Catholic Church’s beliefs in gatherings of my fellow teachers, people make some sort of negative comment. In the face of such
criticism, I have no qualms about defending my faith which, on some occasions, results in disagreements with my colleagues. Any comments that have been made did not stop me from believing in my faith, however, nor did they make me question what I believe; in fact, they increase my resolve to promote the faith even more. Often times, we are placed in positions such as these that are uncomfortable, but so was Jesus; and, so, he becomes a role model for us in the defense of what we hold as true. When it becomes necessary to constantly defend the faith and the positions of the Church on certain topics among my colleagues, however, I get frustrated with what is happening within our schools. It becomes clear to me that the secularization of our society has laid claim to many of the ideals and practices that had once been unshakable standards in Catholic education. As educators, one of our main duties, then, is to teach our students to recognize the differences between our religious values and those popularized in the world today. This becomes more difficult, however, when they receive mixed messages from the teachers with whom they interact each day. For teenagers, whose main concern is to be accepted and popular, it is much more challenging to be able to distinguish between what is important for their own spiritual well-being and the opinions and perspectives of others. It is critical then for teachers to be able to guide their students in the challenges of thinking critically when it comes to matters of Church teachings and decision-making. A faith-based education is such a valuable asset in helping our young people to make those distinctions and to choose the best decisions and paths for their lives – but only if the messages they receive from trusted adults are consistent and based on a solid foundation.
of faith and reason. That is why a well-established Catholic identity within the school is so critical and why all faculty members must reinforce these values in every aspect of school life. In *The Religious Dimensions of Education in a Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education clearly states that

> The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, but if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved…’ The distinctive Catholic identity and mission of the Catholic school also depend on the efforts and examples of the whole faculty… All teachers in Catholic schools share in the catechetical ministry. ‘All members of the faculty, at least by their example, are an integral part of the process of religious education… Teachers’ life style and character are as important as their professional credentials.’ Their daily witness to the meaning of mature faith and Christian living has a profound effect on the education and formation of their students.²⁵

Considering the significance of the role of teachers and staff in maintaining the Catholic identity, it is paramount that Catholic school leadership, at both the diocesan and local school levels, initiate an inclusive formational program for all Catholic school employees in order to integrate the Catholic identity and unique mission at each level of service within every school. Those who are practicing Catholics should be called upon to be leaders and help in the formation and mentoring of those who are unfamiliar with Catholic doctrines and practices or who do not understand the Church’s teaching on various contemporary issues. Guidance should also be offered to administrators regarding the best practices to be followed when interviewing and hiring new employees.

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In so doing, the hiring process for Catholic school faculty and staff will then be one of proactive involvement in examining and reclaiming the components of their school’s Catholic identity and unique heritage. Administrators should also be made aware of the importance of monitoring teachers with regard to their attitudes toward religion and the religious character of the school. Each school and each diocese/archdiocese have a responsibility and duty not only to its administrators but also to all faculty and staff to help in the faith formation of each individual so as to strengthen the integration of the Catholic identity throughout every school.

Everything in a Catholic school must transmit the faith and Catholic identity, from the way we answer school phones to the rehearsal schedule of the school play to the attitudes of coaches on the athletic fields - from how we share meals in the cafeteria to how students are greeted at the school door or helped in times of crisis. Everything we do teaches Catholic identity because how we conduct ourselves and the daily operations of the school demonstrates what and whom we value. Groome tells us that

The Christian educator is to represent Jesus Christ in service to the community by an “incarnational” ministry of the Word… We must remember that if we are to fulfill this incarnating dimension of our ministry, we must apply it first to ourselves…If we are to teach the Word as effective models for the formation of others in living it, then we ourselves are to embody the Word in our way of being with people.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26} Groome, 267.
This can be a difficult lesson for people to learn and to apply, particularly in schools with a large number of faculty and staff – and an equally large number of differing personalities and ideas regarding what is important and how things are to be done. However, seeing ourselves not only as teachers but, specifically, as Catholic-school teachers, enables the Catholic identity of the school to thrive. It has been my experience that a school’s Catholic identity flourishes best when teachers model faith in God regardless of the subjects they teach. Designating faith formation to one person or group, usually to the religious studies/religion department in the school, limits Catholicism, treating it as a body of knowledge to be studied and narrowing it into historical moments, teachings, and figures. It is not just the primary role of the religion teachers but of each of the adults in the building to encourage and lead the students to follow not only the Gospel teachings but also to lead lives that are centered on Christ, the Church and its people. Being Catholic is far too dynamic to be revealed or understood in a single course. It is about living, stumbling, loving, and renewing. We are called not just to teach the students but also to embrace them where they are on their journey with Christ and encourage them to be witnesses to their faith in their daily lives, understanding that their actions will always speak louder than their words.

Thus far, we have examined how administrators and faculty members may exert a negative influence on the Catholic identity of an individual school or on the general perception of Catholic education overall. Schools only exist, however, to serve the
students entrusted to them; so we will continue our discussion now by investigating the role of students in this matter of how the Catholic identity may be hindered.

**Students**

The vast majority of Catholic high schools in the United States emphasize an academic or college-preparatory curriculum for their students. Catholic high schools have a strong commitment to a core academic program for all students regardless of their educational background, levels of ability or future educational aspirations; so it is not surprising that, in most studies on school effectiveness, researchers concentrate on outcomes of an academic nature when examining the effects of schools on students. Most often, we see statistics involving the students’ academic success through their performance on standardized tests,\(^{27}\) perseverance in school\(^{28}\) and their achievements in postsecondary endeavors.

Catholic schools are academic institutions; and, so, these outcomes are important to consider when examining the effectiveness of Catholic schools, but they should not be the only factors to consider. Catholic schools do much more than teach academic subjects, they are faith communities that strive to develop in their students an understanding of the Catholic faith, a commitment to be active participants in their religion, an acceptance of their responsibility to serve those in need and to instill values

\(^{27}\) On the 2016 SAT’s, religiously affiliated students had a mean score of 532 in math, 537 in reading and 525 in writing compared to the public school mean score of 487 in math, 494 in reading and 472 in writing. The national mean score is 494 for math, 508 for reading and 482 for writing. www.NCEA.org.

\(^{28}\) 99% of students who attend Catholic high school graduate and attend college. Of those, 86% attend 4-year colleges. www.NCEA.org
that will influence the students’ present and future lives. Thus, judging the effectiveness of a Catholic school must go beyond the traditional academic outcomes and include the effects of its Catholic identity and the value development of its students. This becomes an even greater challenge in an era when nearly 350,000 students, or 19% of the current enrollment, are not Catholic and an undetermined number identify as Catholic but do not practice their religion. Peer influences, a highly secularized society, a culture that promotes popularity versus virtuousness, the negative persuasion of social media and, in many cases, the lack of parental monitoring make the mission of Catholic schools even more difficult to fulfill in our postmodern world – and all the more vital.

If the primary focus of Catholic education is the promulgation of the faith, statistics suggest that many students entering into Catholic secondary schools lack even a basic understanding of or commitment to the Church and its teachings. According to the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR), a study conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, with 3,000 U.S. youth between the ages of 13 and 17, indicates that Roman Catholic teenagers in the United States demonstrated a consistently weak understanding of basic Church teachings and, in comparison with their non-Catholic Christian peers, reported little to no practical application of the faith in their daily lives. Sociologist Christian Smith, whose research focuses primarily on religion

29 NCEA, Ibid.
30 According to the aforementioned survey, Catholic teens scored between 5 and 25 points lower that their conservative, mainline and black Protestant peers on a variety of religious beliefs, practices, experiences, commitments and evaluations.
in modernity and who participated in the NSYR survey, writes, “Our findings regarding Catholic teenagers show many of them to be living far outside of official Church norms defining true Catholic faithfulness.” There are many factors to blame in this situation which are unrelated to our study here, but one that is pertinent is the fact that the Catholic Church places very little emphasis on parish groups specifically designed to develop a strong faith base in its young people. Smith states that the “U.S. Catholic Church appears in its institutional infrastructure to invest fewer resources into youth ministry and education than do many other Christian traditions and denominations in the United States.” This translates into a serious deficit of knowledge, understanding and practical integration of Catholic faith and morals among today’s American teens and places an even heavier burden on Catholic school faculties not only to teach the faith but also to demonstrate firsthand what these values look like when lived.

Christian Smith and other sociologists also attribute the disconnect between today’s Catholic teens and religion to their more affluent socio-economic status that infiltrates their lives with more possessions, social involvements, peer pressures, and academic demands than any previous generation. In his work with American Catholic teens, Smith correctly observes that:

As a whole, today’s Catholic teens come from relatively prosperous families and enjoy great chances for success in mainstream society. There is little about their religious identity that, in their cultural context, automatically reminds them of their distinctiveness or tension with

31 Smith, 194.
32 Ibid., 210.
the larger culture. Thus, the Catholicness in their larger personal identities and lives is increasingly able to slip into the background of their overall concerns, activities, practices and commitments. Whether contemporary U.S. Catholic teenagers attend Mass regularly, understand what Catholics believe, and live up to Catholic morality is simply not a pressing issue for many of them.\textsuperscript{33}

What impact, then, do these students in Catholic secondary schools have on maintaining and promoting the Catholic identity of the school in which they spend four very significant years of their young lives? If their primary focus lies in excelling in sports, in academics, and in the opinions of their friends, what chance does Catholicism stand in competing with these many outside influences?

One scenario with which I am personally involved exists in the all-girls’ Catholic academy where I currently teach. In our school, a great deal of emphasis is placed on “Sisterhood” – the community of solidarity and support that is formed among the student body regardless of class. It reminds one of the sorority bonds formed by young women on college campuses – “We are Sisters”! Sisterhood forms one of the main pillars of our school, and many students view as the \textit{single} most important aspect of their educational experience. Sisterhood has a long and well-established legacy in the Catholic Christian tradition. From the time of the Desert Mothers and the earliest cloistered communities of religious women, the term “sister” has held a revered place in the spiritual life. Often times, this was met with challenge and disparagement by the male-dominated hierarchy of the Catholic Church, but resilient women of faith have always persevered. It is this

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 215.
enduring heritage, founded on a love of God and service to one another, that we wish to instill in our students. However, the spirituality of sisterhood as it is practiced in our school does not adequately reflect the deep roots of our Catholic tradition. So much emphasis is placed on the externals of sisterhood that it has virtually replaced all other qualities of the school in the minds of the students. While community is certainly key to the identity of any Catholic school, it must also be situated within the overall context of the school’s mission. My contention is that sisterhood is not equivalent to spirituality, and I fear that, in our school, we have replaced the essential religious foundation of what sisterhood really means. It serves as one example of how religious ideals can become domesticated and given equal value with contemporary trends such as feminism and the power of women in the world today, and it presents a challenge for the adults in our school to maintain a sense of the sacred in the midst of the bonds of sisterhood.

Finally, the lack of student support for the Catholic identity of the school stems from a lack of perceived relevance to their everyday lives. Teenagers are most impressed by ideas or situations that relate to them directly and in which they see themselves intimately invested. School shootings, teen suicides, drugs, teen sex, social media, are all examples of issues which today’s teenagers face and which cause them concern. They do not see religion related in any way to these topics and, therefore, see Catholicism as an entity outside of their realm of reality. Catholic teaching and moral values are viewed as a set of rules to be followed blindly without the benefit of negotiation instead of guides for living a full and faith-filled life. Teens are notorious for resenting the imposition of
restrictive regulations in which they have no input, and it becomes easy to dismiss the Church as being outdated and out of touch with contemporary society. Smith contends that American teenagers are plunged into a “cultural ocean” which “saturates them in an ethos of therapeutic individualism.”

He notes that:

Therapeutic individualism defines the individual self as the source and standard of authentic moral knowledge and authority, and individual self-fulfillment as the preoccupying purpose of life. Subjective, personal experience is the touchstone of all that is authentic, right and true. By contrast, this ethos views the ‘external’ traditions, obligations, and institutions of society as inauthentic and often illegitimate constraints on morality and behavior from which individuals must be emancipated.

In the eyes of high school students, what is “right” and “just” and “fair” equates to what they believe those things to be, so the Church’s teachings on contemporary issues are often difficult to instill in the students. Yielding to peer pressure, they readily join causes or act in ways that are popular and prevalent among their classmates and friends. For many, relating these behaviors to the teachings of the Church is their last thought – if it is a consideration at all. This is not to say that teens – even teens in Catholic high schools – do not have a right to form their own opinions or speak their own truths, but it is the responsibility of teachers in these schools to insure that their students act from consciences formed in the faith and in light of the teachings of the Church.

Sharing closely with teachers in this responsibility are the parents of the students entrusted to our care in Catholic schools. While the teen years are often marked by

34 Ibid., 173.
35 Ibid.
blatant or subtle rebellion against authority, most students do look to their parents for guidance and stability; parents bear a huge burden of accountability when it comes to the moral and spiritual formation of their children. We will look now at how this dynamic can undermine the Catholic identity of the school which their child attends.

**Parents**

It is more than a cliché to say that parents are the first teachers of their children. From the moment of birth, parents create an environment in which children learn, and this influence is paramount in forming good, moral, faith-filled adults of the future. Throughout the history of Catholic education, the Catholic Church has emphasized and extolled the primacy of parents in the education of their children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.”

At the same time, the unique and primary role of the parent-educator is not solitary. The pastors, principals, and teachers who educate and care for Catholic children in the parish and school are collaborators with parents in the spiritual and intellectual formation of their children. The Catholic parish and school become a second home of sorts where the faith and values first modeled by the parents are reinforced through religious education and catechesis. The Congregation for Catholic Education, the Vatican office charged with international oversight for all Catholic educational matters worldwide, remarked that “[m]any of the students will attend a Catholic school—often

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the same school—from the time they are very young children until they are nearly adults. Because of this, “it is only natural that they should come to think of the school as an extension of their own homes.” As such, the relationship between parents and school, between the child’s primary educator and the institution charged with deepening the spiritual and intellectual formation begun in the home, is critical. Parental love and care for children serve as the foundational basis for healthy child development and thereby contribute to education in its earliest and most basic form. Parents are also charged with the faith development of their children, a responsibility solemnly conferred through baptism, the foundation upon which a Christian life of faith is built and nurtured. In On Catechesis in Our Time, Pope John Paul II (1979) emphasized that education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children’s tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. Given that children learn their earliest lessons in the context of family life, parents should bear in mind the power of their example and regularly ask themselves if their day-to-day actions reflect a Christian lifestyle.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stated, “an adult community whose faith is well-formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on

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39 Before 2001, the bishops of the U.S. acting jointly were known as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and their documents were published by the United States Catholic Conference. Thus these titles should be respectively for author and publisher for the bishops’ documents before 2001, as the documents themselves should make clear. In 2001 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and United States Catholic Conference became the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
to the next generation.”

The call for ongoing parental catechesis through the schools and local parishes is therefore a logical consequence of and complement to the primacy of parental role in education and parents as witnesses in the world. Since parents are indeed the “first heralds” of the faith (CCC, 2225), every effort must be made to provide them with opportunities for continual spiritual growth and conversion—for catechesis—so that they may subsequently effectively model the faith for their children. Parents who actively seek opportunities to grow in their own faith embody for their children a spiritual thirst that is “lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood.”

Active parent participation in school functions, increased dialogue between parents and teachers, and the establishment of parent organizations unite parents with the mission of Catholic schools. The Code of Canon Law makes clear that this cooperation and collaboration are more than just highly desirable. They are canonical requirements. Canon 796 states that “it is incumbent upon parents to cooperate closely with the school teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated.” Moreover, “teachers are to collaborate closely with parents who are to be willingly heard.” Thus, teachers and administrators should work in unison with parents in collaborative decision-making processes in order to strengthen Catholic education. Sadly, this is often not the case.

41 USCCB (1999) §40
One problem or hindrance appears to be that many parents focus too closely on their own children and not enough on the common good or the whole community. The problem of parents having a “narrow focus” or not seeing the “larger picture” has played a role in how each of the constituents in the academic community communicate to each other. Another hindrance to Catholic identity is that, since parents are the ones who pay the tuition, they often believe that they can also determine school policies and personnel decisions as well as what happens in the school on a daily basis. Frequently, parents come with a certain agenda which may conflict with the objectives of pastors, administrators and teachers. At times, they contend that they know what the “best practices” are in the classroom, although very few parents are also trained educators. For these reasons, many schools are reluctant to give parents substantive participation in school governance, as they are often not looking at the benefits of the entire school but, rather, on the promotion of their own ideas and opinions. Closing the door to this type of mutual collaboration is, in itself, undermining the Catholic identity of being a faith community; however, it has been my experience that extreme interference by parents in the governance of a school can, in fact, harm the school and its Catholic identity and mission by creating a dynamic of tension and resistance. Providing parents with a forum in which to air concerns can be a valuable asset to school growth, but allowing them to intimidate or threaten administrators or teachers creates a harmful relationship and is severely detrimental to the school’s Catholic identity. Administrators or teachers who simply give in to parents’ demands in order to “keep the peace” are, in fact, doing quite
the opposite, as this has the potential to give the impression of weakness on the part of
the school’s leadership and cause chaos among the school community. Parent input must
be a priority among administrators and teachers but, at the same time, parents must trust
the educational expertise of those to whom they entrust their children and know when and
how to express appropriate concerns.

Surprisingly, one of the main areas of disparity between the parents and the
school is regarding the very Catholic nature of the school. One would think that parents
who choose a Catholic education for their children do so for the very faith-based
education they provide. Often, however, that is not the case. This seems to stem from
differences in values and priorities between parents and Catholic schools. Some parents
no longer see the importance of a Catholic education, choosing instead to emphasize high
academic achievement, athletic programs in hopes of scholarships to universities, or
performing arts improvements. Personally, that has been evident in a very simple way in
my twelve years of teaching but, especially, in my time as a religious studies teacher.
Each year, we hold two days of conferences, a time for teachers and parents to talk about
the progress of their students; and, for the past two years, I have had no conferences at all
while the teachers in the math and science departments could have 5 – 6 an hour. There
is a general lack of concern among parents for the curriculum covered or the level of
progress in religion classes. They fail to see the relevance that these courses have on
their child’s life or their future academic success. It is very discouraging to me both as a
religion teacher and as a woman of faith.
Many parents have lost sight of the importance of Catholic identity, which should take precedence above all else. They often do not come with the same vision of Catholic identity and ministry that an administrator or teacher might have for the school. Parents who do not have a strong faith life themselves will not instill a strong affiliation with the Church in their children and will not strongly support the spiritual dimension of the school overall. One would naturally ask, then, why those parents would enroll their children in a Catholic school at all. Because of established codes of conduct, Catholic schools tend to be safe havens in sometimes unsafe areas; and, as we have previously mentioned, a rigorous academic program is traditionally offered. In our postmodern, secular society, many parents have fallen victim to a misplaced sense of valuing the things that do not matter as much as their own or their child’s spiritual lives. It is a treacherous path to allow material concerns to outweigh the importance of faith in one’s life. For parents, it is even more dangerous, as they set the example, for better or for worse, for their children’s futures as well. In accentuating academics, athletics and college acceptances over attendance at Mass, prayer, and Church teaching, parents not only set a poor precedent for their children but also serve to undermine the very Catholic identity of their school.

Still, as Catholic educators, we know that a Catholic school and its identity can only succeed if administrators and faculty work hand-in-hand with each other and with the parents. In closing this section, I find the following words of Pope Francis to be particularly poignant:
And here we come to the second point, that is, to the educational alliance between the school and the family. We all know that this alliance has long been in crisis, and in some cases completely broken. Once upon a time there was significant mutual reinforcement between the stimuli given by teachers and those given by parents. Today the situation has changed, but we cannot be nostalgic for the past. We must take note of the changes that have affected both the family and the school and renew the commitment to constructive collaboration – or rather, rebuild the alliance and the educational pact – for the benefit of children and young people. And since this synergy no longer occurs in a “natural” way, it must be promoted in terms of planning, also with the contribution of experts in the pedagogical field. But first we must encourage a new “complicity” – I am conscious in my use of this word, a new complicity – between teachers and parents. First of all, by avoiding thinking of each other as opposing fronts, blaming each other, but on the contrary putting ourselves in the shoes of each other, understanding the objective difficulties that each encounter in education today, and thus creating greater solidarity: complicity in solidarity.  

**Conclusion**

As a Catholic educator who is dedicated to preserving the unique and inestimable identity and long heritage of Catholic education in America, it saddens me to write a chapter of this work on situations and people who can hinder and undermine the very mission of our schools. Yet, it is necessary; and my lived experiences make some of these scenarios all too real because I know that they exist not just in my school but in many others in our nation. The bishops, diocesan superintendents, pastors, principals, teachers, parents, students, alumni and benefactors who have built and supported Catholic education over nearly three hundred years were not perfect, and the system that exists

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Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers’ Association, Rome, Jan. 5, 2018.  
today is not either – and yet it continues, in spite of our detractors and those who would have us shut our doors forever. Catholic schools endure because our mission is to lead others to Christ. Groome reminds us that:

It is clear from the early Church that the ministry of the teacher was to be a ministry of the Word...The ministry of the teacher was to attend deliberately to the process by which people came to incarnate the Word in their everyday existence. Theirs was the task of formation, of [helping] people to embody the Word in their everyday lives. The task of the evangelist was more of ‘announcing’ the basic message, the kerygma...Having announced it, the evangelists could move on...but the teachers were the ones who settled down to impart the didache (the teaching), who stayed on to promote the slow process of human growth, understanding and formation necessary for embodying the Word in lifestyle and celebrating it in a Christian community.44

Sometimes, it is a slow process, indeed, and obstacles or difficult situations may deter our forward progress and the visibility of our Catholic identity; but we must persevere in faith and hope. We must acknowledge that life is vastly different than it was when Catholic education took a firm hold in America, and the way in which we promote and maintain a strong Catholic image must likewise change to meet contemporary needs and expectations without compromising our God-given mission. Today, many theologians and sociologists believe that we have entered an era which they term “post-Christendom.”45 The previously mentioned Pew research study affirms that the number of people who are unaffiliated with any religious denomination is increasing rapidly. The percentage of Americans who now identify as atheists or agnostics has risen from 4 to 7

44 Groome, 266-267.
percent in the past several years. At the same time, the portion of Americans who describe themselves as Christian has declined from 78.4 percent in 2007 to 70.6 percent in 2014. In his book, *The Resurgent Church: 7 Critical Ways to Thrive in the New Post-Christendom World*, Pastor Mike McDaniel acknowledges,

> Gone are the days when a church could swing open its doors and people would come. Today, churches open their doors and people not only won’t come, they often laugh or simply ignore the church completely. The faith described in Scripture no longer dictates the cultural or political directions in our nation. The church has in essence been shoved out of the public square. Seismic shifts have moved the church from the center to the fringes, and we’re now on the outside of culture looking in.

Dr. McDaniel recognizes that many voices today are competing for our attention and our allegiance. Among them are *individualism and relativism*, which establish the personal interests and values of individuals as the epitome of standards of moral behavior; *consumerism*, which seduces individuals and societies into the belief that having more of everything will bring happiness and fulfillment; and *secularism*, which lures people away from the one, true God and into the trap of creating gods out of worldly pleasures and pursuits. These tendencies have now assumed a prominent role in the lives of young and old and have replaced the traditional beliefs of our predecessors. McDaniel contends that Christianity can no longer claim any dominance within the population. We live in a time of religious plurality and competing worldviews. People no

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47 McDaniel, 10.
longer find religion to be a necessary tool for them in reaching their goals. “Suddenly, [Christians] are the ones being marginalized, and it’s not a comfortable feeling,” McDaniel asserts.

Because neither the Catholic Church nor Catholic schools operate in a vacuum, the social and growing cultural rifts have had a negative influence on both the Church and the schools which they sponsor. Attendance at Masses and other liturgical events has dropped considerably, as have financial contributions on which parishes and dioceses depend. Enrollment in school has also declined, as we have previously noted. All of these challenges place a heavy burden of accountability on the clergy and laity alike to defend and promote the Catholic faith in word and practice. For our discussion here, the responsibility for educators in Catholic schools seems paramount. The establishing and maintaining of a school’s particular Catholic identity is essential for the school to fulfill its mission to teach the faith and instill Catholic moral values in its students, preparing them to contribute their time, treasure and talent to the world and the Church both now and as adults. In order to accomplish this in a world of competing attractions and temptations, a school must have a strong, mission-focused faculty who love and live the Catholic faith with zeal and a desire to disseminate Gospel values throughout the community in which they serve. This begins with an administrator who understands and willingly fulfills his or her role as the spiritual and educational leader of the school and

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94 Ibid., 8
who hires highly qualified teachers who are committed to living the Catholic identity in word and deed. Although the students and parents are the ones being served in a Catholic school setting, they are vital components of the faith community and play an integral part in the overall success of the institution. No school can be the vibrant educational and spiritual community that it is called to be unless all those who participate in its operation take their responsibility seriously to bear witness to the Catholic identity every day. It must be a conscious choice to teach Christ, to mirror Christ and to bring Christ to each person we encounter and in every situation of our day. McDaniel affirms this objective when he says, “The goal is to be the expression of Jesus in your context.”\(^{48}\)

Gerald Arbuckle tells us that all “Catholic institutions have one thing in common: their effectiveness depends chiefly on staff members’ personal knowledge of and commitment to the mission… otherwise these institutions will be Catholic in name only.”\(^{49}\) It is the moral obligation of every person charged with forming the students entrusted to them not to let that happen. The future of Catholic education as we know it rests squarely on the shoulders of all those to whom this noble mission has been entrusted. In the next chapter, we will explore more deeply the methods which the constituents of a Catholic school can, both individually and collectively, faithfully fulfill their respective vocations in support of the school’s distinct identity.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 23
\(^{49}\) Arbuckle, Loc. 1016.
Chapter Three

Factors Which Promote and Strengthen Catholic Identity in Secondary Schools

“The mission of the Catholic school is the integral formation of students, so that they may be true to their condition as Christ’s disciples and, as such, work effectively for the evangelization of culture and for the common good of society.” - St. John Paul II

Introduction

Chapter One of this work established a foundation of understanding regarding Catholic Identity in Catholic schools and its preeminent importance in the life of every educational institution which the Church sponsors. We identified four primary pillars or characteristics which serve as hallmarks of Catholic education in general and which should be visible and active in every school: faith, community, academic excellence and service. I contend, then, that, as a school works to strengthen these four attributes in its daily life, it will simultaneously reinforce its Catholic Identity and its mission, which the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) reminds us is to support the Church’s vocation of evangelization and catechesis. The NDC states: “Whether Catholic schools are part of a parish structure or are regional, diocesan, or private, growth in the Catholic faith for the children and young people who attend them is essential to their identity and purpose.”

This chapter, then, will delineate ways in which each of the constituents of the school community contributes in a significant way to the specific goal of strengthening the

Catholic identity and making it palpable in the context of school life. In some ways, we will reiterate assertions made in previous chapters, which is both a necessary and acceptable strategy for our argument that the contributions of all members of the school community are essential. It is my intent, at the same time, to introduce fresh views on the roles of administrators, teachers, students and parents in building a school culture that is worthy of bearing the name Catholic.

We have previously established that Catholic schools provide a sacred space for each student to learn how to view his or her world with the eyes of faith. Every subject area must be imbued with the central message of the Gospel, giving the students hope and purpose in life. In the halls and classrooms, the gym and cafeteria, the chapel and office – we must create an environment dedicated to making our schools not just educational institutions, but an experience in Christian living - a truly sacred space. As a Christian community, the administrators, faculty and staff must be focused on making the school environment a place where the students can feel at home in the household of faith. This is particularly critical today where the “breakdown of the family, along with the deterioration of community identity in contemporary American society, demands that educators ‘no longer take for granted a sense of community…but instead work to develop and sustain it.”\footnote{National Conference of Catholic Bishops, \textit{Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory of Catholics in the United States}, (Washington, DC, 1979), §21.} This sense of community is central to the fundamental essence of Catholic identity and lies at the very heart of what it means to be a Catholic school.
The Congregation for Catholic Education tells us that “From the very moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illuminated in the light of faith and having its own unique characteristics.” This environment, this community of faith that welcomes and nurtures, that educates and forms, is one of the main identifying characteristics of a Catholic school; and, within this sacred space, its Catholic identity is born and matures.

In the marketing world, we understand that organizations must promote a distinctive trademark that provides the right attraction for the shopper. There must be a specific image or feature that distinguishes it from all other products of its kind and draws consumers to choose that one over another. Schools today are likewise challenged to provide the best overall educational programs in order to appeal to their target audiences. Regardless of the type of school or its affiliation, principals and school boards know that they need effective marketing techniques to appeal to a consumer’s dollar that is already stretched to make ends meet. Cook points out that Catholic schools navigate in a sea of educational choice. Families have more schooling choices than ever before that include open enrollment public schools, charter schools, nonsectarian private schools, faith schools, home schooling, and virtual schools. Today’s consumers are choosy and demanding. Catholic schools face the challenge of developing and promoting an exciting vision and distinctive identity that is recognizable and appealing brand.\footnote{Congregation for Catholic Education, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, (Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988), §24.} \footnote{Cook, Intro.}
The particular mission of the Catholic school is the distinct image we must promote in order to demonstrate to parents that this school proudly showcases its Catholic identity as a hallmark of its excellence. However, just because our schools have mission statements – and they must – it does not mean that a school is automatically “Catholic” in nature. Years ago, we could count on religious men and women to be the vanguards of Catholic identity for our schools. The very presence of sisters helped students to absorb, almost through osmosis, what it meant to be Catholic or even to be holy. We learned through their witness what it meant to embrace the unique spiritualities of our school’s patron saints - such as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales for the school in which I now minister. I remember clearly each of the religious communities that I encountered throughout my childhood - those who were directly related to me and those who educated me in both elementary school and in college. Unfortunately for most Catholic schools today, these guiding lights are no longer part of the image we took for granted in our schools. We have now shifted to a time when schools are primarily staffed by lay people, who do not always elicit the same trust from parents that they will be strong role models of faith. Without the obvious and visible presence of women religious, we must find other ways in which to clearly define and demonstrate our Catholicity so as to better attract families and students seeking a strong faith-based educational environment that encourages personal growth.

Promoting Catholic identity in every elementary and secondary Catholic school across our nation is vital for the survival of each of these institutions individually and of
the system as a whole. Catholic schools have something unique to offer their students that extends far beyond a quality education in the classroom or even a faith-based education through religious instruction. We know that the mission of every Catholic school is to proclaim the Good News and provide a place for each of their students to encounter God and lead a life focused on the example of Jesus Christ. In order to do this, the Catholic identity must be the prime focus of every person who ministers in that school and must be consistently integrated throughout everything that happens in the institution. Catholic identity is fundamental to the very existence of Catholic education and helps to set those schools apart from their public counterparts. If Catholic schools are not inspiring their youth, engaging everyone in the faith, and changing the lives of everyone they are called to serve, then they are simply nondescript schools that provide a venue for academic learning. Catholic schools must be willing to educate their students and transmit the faith to them in ways that are unmistakable with particular emphasis on moral conduct, women’s rights, peace, justice, equality, and social accountability. As a graduate of a public high school and someone whose faith was formed in them at a young age, it is clear to me that Catholic schools are different and provide a very positive alternative to public education today.

Fostering a uniquely Catholic culture in our schools is both a necessary task and a challenging one. It can become an even more complex endeavor when those responsible for building this Catholic persona do not fully understand its meaning and application or choose to ignore their responsibility to do so. This was brought out in Chapter Two in
our discussion of ways in which a school’s identity may be compromised. Here, however, I propose two possible aids in alleviating misunderstandings and helping to create a cohesive articulation of doctrine and practice. These two approaches consist of establishing a common language and the integration of shared rituals and symbols.

A common language helps all those who are engaged in the school’s mission to understand and talk about what it means to be Catholic, how to express our Catholicity in word and deed in an educational setting and how to give witness to being Catholic in the particular school in which we serve, since each school is a distinct entity and lives its identity in a unique way. Being able to understand and interpret the same language when we talk about our faith and how that faith is to be lived out is essential for consistency and collaboration. Terms like Catholic identity, community, mission, vision, values, sisterhood and culture, as well as more specific terminology such as sacrament, liturgy, servanthood and vocation are used regularly in our schools but are often misunderstood by the faculty, students and parents, which causes them to be minimized or overlooked. Likewise, using such terminology interchangeably (i.e. Mass, Liturgy, Service, Sacrament) can cause confusion among non-Catholic students and faculty and, at times, give rise to an unwillingness to understand the distinctions. Taking the time to explain such things as particular terms, the reasons behind various celebrations, the significance

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54 For the benefit of clarification, Catholic identity is who we are, mission is what we do and who we serve, Values are our fundamental beliefs, and culture is our way of life. From Timothy Cook, Charism and Culture, loc. 187.
of the saints and the Blessed Mother, or the very hierarchical structure of the Church itself and by providing staff development on what it really means to be Catholic can go a long way in easing the tensions and uncertainties that may arise throughout the year. When people have a better understanding of the culture in which they work and the rationale for being asked to participate in it, they are more likely to contribute to the school’s Catholic identity in a positive way. Sharing a common language will also result in a well-articulated mission, one that is communicated effectively to parents and which attracts families to our schools.

A second strategy which will assist in creating a mutual understanding of Catholic identity is the consistent use of symbols and rituals which are richly tied to the traditions of the Church. With an increasing number of non-Catholic students, or children of non-practicing Catholic families in our schools, it is essential that the presence of particularly Catholic symbols and the incorporation of Catholic rituals into the school day be fully understood and appreciated. Symbols of our faith are found throughout every Catholic school: bibles, crucifixes, icons, statues, posters of faith in action, pictures of the saints or other figures important in Catholicism. These are much more than mere decorations, they are sacramental symbols that should bring to mind and make visible the very tenets of our faith and the reason for our existence. For students or teachers who are not Catholic, these symbols could possibly be ignored and their importance misunderstood unless their deeper meanings are explained and reiterated frequently. For those in tune with their faith, however, they serve as ever-present reminders that God is with us
throughout the joys and challenges of our day and that we walk our life’s journey in God’s loving care and supported by our faith community. These symbols can also offer valuable learning tools outside of the classroom for the instruction of lessons about important aspects of our faith and should always be recognized for their contribution to a school’s Catholic identity.

The same is true for the particularly Catholic practices and observances which occur in our schools. Masses and other liturgical celebrations can seem confusing and uninteresting to students for whom the faith is not a priority in their lives. In these cases, however, it is the responsibility of the faculty to guide them to an understanding of, and appreciation for, the beauty and richness of tradition found in these rites. At the very least, students should be encouraged to listen attentively, participate as fully as they can, and be respectful of what is taking place. Sadly, teachers do not always offer such guidance and often do not participate themselves, which sends mixed messages to the students, who may already be difficult to affect through religious activities. It is vital that the entire school community share wholeheartedly in these sacred rituals which form the core of our faith and our identity as Catholic institutions and which give public witness to the same.

Both a common language and the sharing of symbols and rituals contribute greatly to the image that Catholic schools portray to their clientele and to the world outside of the school. The school, its staff and its students are visible reflections of Catholicism in our very secular, postmodern world; and their individual and collective
integrity should be flawless. In the next section of this chapter, we will examine more closely how each of the prominent groups within the school contributes in significant and concrete ways to the portrayal of the institution’s identity.

**Administrators**

In all institutions, the chief administrator bears the responsibility of setting the tone for the entire organization and is the role model for all those who follow his or her leadership. In Catholic educational institutions, this administrator must reflect in a very tangible way the image of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ. Regardless of age or gender, the principal or head of school must be the one who inspires others to fulfill their respective vocations in clear and uncompromising ways and empowers them to reflect Christ through their instruction and in their interactions with others. It is through the example of the chief administrator that a community of faith is created and sustained.

This strong sense of fellowship manifests itself in a palpable way that is immediately noticeable to all those who enter the building. Such a bond of community reflects the relationship to which we are all called by our loving creator God and is central to the Catholic identity of the school. M. Scott Peck, in his book *The Different Drum* states that “Community is integrative. It includes people of different ages, religions, cultures, viewpoints, lifestyles and stages of development by integrating them into a whole that is greater – better – than the sum of its parts.”55 As the spiritual leader

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of the school, the principal or administrator must embrace the responsibility of unifying the many personalities, abilities, interests and strengths of the staff and student body into one cohesive whole brought together in the Body of Christ. The administration must regard the building of such a community within their institution as one of the most important functions they serve. The National Catholic Education Association believes that,

The principal, more than any other individual, shapes both the academic and social environment of a school and thus plays a major role in the development and maintenance of the school community…The leadership of the principal is essential to the development of the faith community in a Catholic school…[and this] faith leadership is the most important leadership quality of the principal, more than symbolic, educational and administrative leadership.56

Needless to say, it is not an easy task to create unity out of such diversity. Individuals are often resistant to what they consider the giving up of their personal beliefs or points of view to conform with the institutional perspective. A good leader, however, understands that community does not require its members to sacrifice individuality for harmony. This is especially true in a faith community such as that found in Catholic schools. Peck utilizes an excellent metaphor for community:

[Community] has been compared to the creation of a salad in which the identity of the individual ingredients is preserved yet simultaneously transcended. Community does not solve the problem of pluralism by obliterating diversity. Instead, it seeks out diversity, welcomes other points of view, embraces opposites, desires to see the other side of every issue. It is ‘wholistic.’ It integrates us human beings into a functioning

56 Convey, 107.
mystical body.\textsuperscript{57}

A good administrator is able to create such a community within his or her school by emulating the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, in the vocation of servant-leader.

The image of servant-leader is both noble and humbling, and it lies at the foundation of how an administrator enriches the Catholic identity of the school. Servant leadership is never about power or authority, structure or rigidity. Robert K. Greenleaf, founder of the Servant-Leadership Movement, warns that it is not enough to want to be a servant-leader, however. He explains:

If our commitment is not rooted in knowledge about what it means to be a servant leader and exactly how we can accomplish this goal, our commitment will soon wane and die…We have to learn what it means to be a servant leaders and how we can practice servant leadership on a day-to-day, relationship-to-relationship basis. Finally, we have to learn how to sink the roots of servanthood deep into the soil of our character so that our commitment holds up in the face of life’s inevitable challenges.\textsuperscript{58}

Essential to this type of leadership is the desire to use the position of administrator as a means of serving others by demonstrating a deep sense of caring for them both personally and professionally. Caring is intrinsic to servant-leadership because the act of caring can transform an institution and the people in it. Caring deeply about others implies a personal dedication to helping them develop into the best persons they can be – both individually and collectively. Greenleaf believed that “caring is the rock on which a

\textsuperscript{57} Peck, 234.
\textsuperscript{58} Owen Phelps, The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus: Introducing S\textsuperscript{3} Leadership – Servant, Steward, Shepherd, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2009), 71.
good society is built. The same may well be said for a good school and, particularly, for a good Catholic school. This caring must be sincere and heartfelt and must stem from a desire to share the compassion of Christ with others. Owen Phelps explains that,

The effective leader recognizes that each person is unique. If we want to contribute to every person’s development, we have to understand as intimately as possible where they are on the developmental continuum and how we can best help them continue to grow…No two of us have quite the same mix of gifts or develop exactly along the same lines. Servant leaders recognize the individual, God-given dignity of each person and seek to optimize the development of each person individually. To do that, servant leaders must exercise humility by continually observing and listening rather than assuming that they know everything that needs to be known to assist that person’s development. If we want to be effective leaders, we have to recognize the uniqueness of every person we encounter.

This type of leadership demonstrates an attitude of selflessness in which others’ needs are met, others’ opinions are honored, and others’ potential is encouraged. Servant-leaders look for ways to help others achieve success and for the greater good to become the common goal of all. Catholic school administrators who see themselves as servant-leaders treat teachers and staff, students and parents with respect at all times, empowering them with support and encouragement. They ensure that their dealings with others are always fair, ethical and honest and that they listen with an open and receptive mind and heart. Treating others in this way lets them know that they are appreciated and that their concerns, ideas or opinions are valued.

60 Phelps, 81-82.
Servant-leadership does not, however, imply that the administrator allows others to run the school or to feel as though their every desire or whim will be met. Principals must still make difficult decisions at times, must still be accountable for resources, must still discipline when necessary, and must still stand firm when they believe it is best for the school. They must be committed, however, to making certain that love and respect always form the basis of their decisions and actions. Nsiah explains that,

Servant-leadership in the school context is not a *laissez-faire* leadership style that seeks to please everybody, but rather that the impulse of compassion made the servant-leader seek to understand situations before acting so as to see how he/she can best help the students, teachers and parents.\(^6\)

In addition to caring deeply about each person within the school community, Catholic school administrators must demonstrate that same care with regard to the institution itself. Administrators must become personally committed to transforming their schools into communities of both faith and learning through good stewardship of the human and material resources entrusted to their care. In the broad sense, a steward is someone who assumes responsibility for things that do not belong to him or her. Stewardship forms part of mutual support, and it demands interacting with people, and leaving them better than they were.\(^6\) A Catholic school administrator understands that his or her accountability goes far beyond the oversight of the pastor, superintendent or

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\(^6\) Nsiah, 70.
Diocesan office – since all good gifts come to us from God, to whom we are ultimately answerable. Making the best use of the personal and institutional gifts they have been given allows Catholic school principals to more deeply fulfill their vocation as servant-leader and, in this way, give lived witness to the true Catholic identity of the school in which they minister.

In this section, we have identified ways in which the principal or other administrator builds and maintains the Catholic identity of the school by approaching his or her leadership role in light of the example of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ. Imitating Christ’s compassion, empathy, patience, openness and respect toward others serves to establish an environment in which students, teachers and parents feel valued. This feeling of worth and appreciation creates a strong community in which “followers” are empowered to reach their full potential and to lead others in the same way to achieve a shared vision for the institution. This shared vision, we are told, “Is not an idea…it is rather a force in people’s hearts, a force of impressive power… It is palpable. People begin to see it as it exists. Few, if any, forces are as powerful as a shared vision.”

Nsiah also tells us that, “In short, a shared vision propels people into action because they can feel and understand it as relevant to their aspirations.” It is this shared vision of Catholic identity, of the school as all that it can be, that will, in fact, motivate

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64 Nsiah, 72.
administrators, teachers, students and parents to work together to transform an educational institution into a true community of faith.

**Teachers**

Although the administrator or principal of the school is identified as the academic and spiritual leader, teachers are no less responsible for establishing a Catholic culture within the school and maintaining its unique identity. Truthfully, teachers bear an added responsibility, as they often interact with the students, parents and other staff members more than administrators, who are frequently office bound. The National Catholic Education Association states that teachers’ “efforts are indispensable to the school’s ability to develop effectively a vital faith community.” In the previous section of this chapter, we have already established the correlation between a community of faith and the school’s Catholic identity. Teachers, then, are critical components of the formation of that identity and its stability over time.

It is still essential that, when hired, teachers fully understand what being a member of the faculty in a Catholic school entails and that ongoing staff development reinforce those responsibilities throughout the year. Meeting state academic requirements for teachers is generally not a concern in Catholic schools, as nearly every faculty member is appropriately degreed and certified. On the other hand, it is essential that all teachers must see their roles, first and foremost, as an extension of the teaching ministry of Christ himself and of the Church. This is often where faculties fall short. During his 1987 visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II addressed Catholic
educators and emphasized the need for every teacher to be faithful to the heart of their ministry. He said,

Jesus shared with you his teaching ministry. Only in close communion with Him can you respond adequately. This is my hope; this is my prayer: that you will be totally open to Christ. That he will give you an ever greater love for your students and an ever stronger commitment to your vocation as Catholic educators. If you continue to be faithful to this ministry…you will be doing much in shaping a peaceful, just and hope-filled world for the future. Yours is a great gift to the Church, a great gift to your nation.\(^{65}\)

Regrettably, however, a disconnect occurs when a teacher is not a person of faith or does not envision his or her occupation as a vocation with a sacred purpose. Teachers of non-religious curriculum areas, teachers who are not Catholic, or non-teaching staff such as coaches, guidance counselors, nurses, etc. often do not see any connection at all between what they do each day and the Catholic identity or mission of the school. This attitude wrecks tremendous harm on the school by undermining the very essence of what the school is or what it is meant to achieve. We discussed these repercussions at length in the previous chapter of this work and will now emphasize the significant ways in which teachers who are aware of, and cooperative with, their role can enhance and support the Catholic identity of the school in which they serve.

There is no doubt that the role of the teacher in a Catholic school is extensive and multi-faceted. The Congregation for Catholic Education explains that “‘School’ is often

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identified with ‘teaching’; but, actually, classes and lessons are only a small part of school life”\(^66\) and teachers are involved in nearly every aspect of it. Throughout the Church documents which have been issued on education over the decades, teachers have been encouraged to:

- participate in the shared vision and the written philosophy of the school,
- affirm the dignity of each student,
- appreciate student diversity,
- teach to issues of peace and justice,
- develop caring relationships with the students,
- collaborate with colleagues and parents,
- and integrate service into the curriculum.\(^67\)

These should not be seen as isolated duties but, rather, as a concerted way in which teachers embody the school’s identity and mission. Upon accepting a position in a Catholic school, each teacher also accepts the summons to adhere to and support the school’s mission and distinct identity. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education declares that

> If all who are responsible for the Catholic school would never lose sight of their mission and the apostolic value of their teaching, the school would enjoy better conditions in which to function in the present and would faithfully hand on its mission to future generations.\(^68\)

Every teacher, then, is intimately invested not only in the present success of the school but also in its future viability. Nether is possible without a strong, well defined and visible Catholic identity.

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\(^66\) The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, #47.
\(^67\) Shimabukuro, 13.
Fundamental to establishing a school as a distinctly Catholic institution is the realization of the unique and intrinsic value of every student, colleague and parent who comprise the community of faith. Central to every aspect of the Church’s teaching is the belief in the life and dignity of each person regardless of age, sex, race, religion, economic status, or physical or mental state. When we look at another person, we see the face of Christ and, as such, are called to treat that person with respect and compassion. In the same way, we bring the person of Jesus Christ to all those whom we encounter regardless of the situation in which that encounter occurs. In the image of the Trinity, we are called to build relationships based on faith and our shared sense of community. Schools become quasi-families in which relationships develop and are nurtured over time through trust. According to Peck, such a community becomes

a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to ‘rejoice together, mourn together’ and to ‘delight in each other, mak[ing] others’ conditions their own.’ 69

No personal loss or sadness should go unnoticed, and every individual success or joy should be shared. This, in turn, causes a further deepening of community and also instills a desire to seek the common good and to love one another. It becomes a powerful force for working towards and realizing a common vision and communal goals and fortifies the very identity of the school as Catholic. Teachers are instrumental in creating

69 Peck, 59.
such a community of caring within the school by encouraging and supporting students, by collaborating with colleagues, by fulfilling the expectations of administrators and by treating one another with respect.

This may be a difficult ask when students are resistant or rebellious, when colleagues do not act as we believe they should, when administrators add tasks to already busy schedules, or when parents question decisions regarding their children. Teachers may be faced each day with circumstances which try their patience, or which have the potential to become volatile; but it is in these situations especially when they must return to the very reason why they have chosen to teach in a Catholic school: not just to teach academic content but to be models of faith and Gospel values and to help their students navigate the myriad of social realities with which they cope on a daily basis. If teachers can

instill in students the vital life dimensions of Christian faith and hope within a society marked by rising depression and suicide among its young, and concern for others in a society that cultivates narcissism through the media…[and] assist students to develop coping skills based upon a solid foundation of moral decision making…

they will have fulfilled their call to Teach as Jesus did and will successfully promote and support the Catholic identity of the school in which they minister.

We have already seen how administrators and teachers strengthen a school’s Catholic identity by building community, interacting with others in respect and compassion, and by guiding students to be faith-filled and moral individuals. We
understand, however, that schools only exist for and with the students entrusted to their care; so it is fitting that we turn our discussion now to the ways in which those students are integral to the image and identity of an authentically Catholic institution of learning.

*Students*

The focal point of Catholic education is that completely unique, individual person who is made in the image and likeness of God, having a distinct personality and remarkable potential – the student. While this description applies to every human being, the students are the reason why Catholic schools exist and the ones on whom the efforts of the entire faculty focus. Without the students, there would be no need for the schools at all. Although the students are the recipients of the school’s good work, they likewise contribute in distinct and substantial ways to the Catholic identity and culture of the school they attend and are representatives of Catholic education in general.

Research reveals that there has been a resurgence of interest among young Catholics in the symbols and rituals of the Catholic faith. If Catholic schools want to engage students in the Catholic way of life and the specific charism of the school, they have an awesome opportunity to do so through the rich cosmology of school symbols and traditions.⁷⁰

As we have already discussed in this chapter, establishing a common language and engaging students in understanding symbols and rituals offers a valuable learning experience which teachers should incorporate through the daily activities of the classroom.

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We have already discussed how the foundation of the Catholic school is community. Since the school mirrors a home environment in many ways, it is paramount that genuine, trusting and supportive relationships be established between the faculty and the students and among the students themselves. Teachers who truly care about the students as persons, who allow them to talk freely about their concerns, who offer direction based on Gospel values and who are role models of faith and compassion are critical to the identity and mission of the school as a faith community. Pride and a strict sense of power on the part of the teacher have no place in the rapport that should be established with the students. Although disciplinary standards need to be instituted and enforced in a school setting, the tone and manner in which that is done should reflect to the students that teachers respect them and understand extenuating circumstances which may impede their progress from time to time. Students must, at the same time, accept responsibility for their conduct and for consistently meeting the required academic expectations. This environment of openness, understanding, concern and mutual respect reflects the love and life-giving dynamic of the Trinity, personifies the call of Jesus Christ to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13: 34) and makes tangible the Catholic identity of the school.

Through the loving and supportive relationships, they develop with their teachers and peers, students in Catholic schools learn to experience God’s grace and presence in their lives. As a faith community, the school celebrates each other’s successes and achievements. They share in each other’s grief and disappointments. They unite together
in solidarity and challenge each other to become better witnesses of the divine. We are all created to share in community, but when Catholic school administrators, teachers, parents and students focus on and make the Catholic identity and mission of the school their priority, they can join in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in a special way and participate in building the kingdom of God on earth.

Since the main objective of the Catholic school is the passing on of the faith to a new generation, students join in this mission by receiving the teachings of Christ through the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Catholic Church and by learning to integrate them into their daily lives. In a society that challenges them at every turn to yield to materialism, egotism, relativism, social media, and peer pressure, staying true to the religious values learned in school is a daunting task for today’s young people. Christian Smith reminds us that,

American youth live between five and 20 years in a kind of socially constructed developmental limbo, ever waiting, delaying, anticipating, preparing for the day when they will take on and enjoy the freedoms and responsibilities of being real grown-ups. The cultural message to youth is that they are not mature or prepared enough to enter the adult world and so must continue for years to wait, even as other powerful, contradictory messages implore them to act fully responsible, be self-directed, and make very good choices as independent decision makers...The wait is therefore not only incredibly long but often very confusing.71

It is a very difficult and tedious place in which to be, and I am aware every day of the stress which this position places on teenagers today. Unless the students are able to

71 Smith, loc. 3999.
assimilate the relevance of the religious and value-driven lessons they learn in school, the likelihood of their integration into behaviors and decisions outside of school is minimal. Catholic schools promote self-discipline through a clear moral vision that is based on the Gospel. Students are challenged to be Christ-like in both word and action, and they are asked to examine their choices and actions in light of the Ten Commandments and the Gospel law of love. They are given a strong theological foundation for ethical behavior, and it is hoped that those roots will support wise choices and decisions even outside of school where the challenges are the greatest. In being true to what they have learned and witnessed during their education, students support the true Catholic identity and mission of their school both now and throughout their lives.

An integral part of the Catholic educational community are the parents of the students enrolled in the school. As the final piece of our discussion on what supports and promotes the Catholic identity of the school, we will now focus on the role of these key figures who impact the school’s mission in countless ways.

**Parents**

Parents have long been considered the first and foremost educators of their children. Under their protection and through their care and guidance, children grow to become mature and responsible adults, able to have a positive impact on the world in which they live. Pope John Paul II summarized the parents’ responsibilities when he said:

Not only are the attitudes of teachers crucial for the success of
Catholic education but also the attitudes of Catholic parents. Parents must set themselves very definite priorities, such as the determination to have schools in which their children’s faith will be respected, fostered and enriched; schools in which their children learn the value and beauty of the Church’s teaching. They must also see to it that their own homes are places in which these values are first fostered and lived. Parents’ own practice of the faith, their own love for Christ, is of course fundamental.72

One of the primary duties of every parent, then, is to ensure that his or her child receives the best education available in their particular circumstances. For some, a Catholic school education is not an option because of distance, enrollment caps, or the inability to afford tuition. In this latter case, however, schools try their best to offer scholarships and financial aid to those with limited monetary resources, understanding that Catholic schools offer a stable and caring environment as well as a premier academic program. At times, parents must lay aside their pride and accept the assistance that is made available in order to provide an optimal educational and spiritual experience for their child. By taking full advantage of the opportunities at their disposal, parents allow the school to fulfill its dual mission of education and evangelization.

Parents are also instrumental in supporting the school’s distinctly Catholic identity by reinforcing at home the religious values and teachings that their children learn in school. This means taking their children to Mass if they are Catholic, following the

Church’s teachings on important moral issues, not openly degrading the Church or its clergy, and being supportive of their children’s faith-based decisions. Unfortunately, parents do not always fulfill these obligations, causing confusion and frustration in their children. If students look to their teachers as models of truth, trustworthiness and morality, they look to their parents even more so. Children whose home and school lives are based on the same set of ideals, moral values and ethical behaviors fare much better than those for whom there are contradictions. Teachers must also be aware, however, that, sometimes, the parents are ill equipped or not educated with regard to various Church doctrines or teachings. Many parents identify generically as Christian or Catholic through Baptism but lack a deeper understanding of Scriptures, the sacraments, prayer, sin, or the Church’s stand on contemporary moral issues. Most Catholic adults have not actually read the Bible or tried to interpret the meaning of specific passages or relate them to their lives, as Catholics were not traditionally taught to do so. Frequently, parents hesitate to speak with their children about spiritual topics because they feel inadequate or because of their own lack of interest. At times like these, it is important that teachers must not be critical but must offer information or clarification for both the students and the parents in a way that may open the door for evangelization in a broader context.

In a practical way, parents are also instrumental in promoting the school’s image and objective by helping to create a partnership between the student’s home and school.
The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education encourages close contacts between the parents and the school, stating that

These contacts are very necessary because the educational task of the family and that of the school complement one another in many concrete areas; and they will facilitate the ‘serious duty’ that parents have to ‘commit themselves totally to a cordial and active relationship with the teachers and the school authorities.’ Finally, such contacts will offer to many families the assistance they need in order to educate their own children properly and this fulfill the ‘irreplaceable and inalienable’ function that is theirs.\(^73\)

By being active participants in school events, by volunteering in school activities, by accepting the invitation to serve on committees and boards, and by collaborating with the administration and faculty, parents help to develop a close and cooperative relationship with the school from which all parties can benefit. It is the duty of parents to remain aware of what their children are learning in school and, if a question or concern arises, it should be addressed promptly in a professional and non-judgmental way. In dealing with their children’s teachers, parents should always be respectful and non-argumentative, recognizing that their children may, in fact, be in the wrong. In this way, parents demonstrate to their children that they care deeply about their education and, at the same time, support the school’s efforts to provide the best education possible and fulfill its mission as a uniquely Catholic institution. The bonds created by the collaboration of parents, teachers, administrators and students are among the strongest

and most beneficial that can be experienced. Such relationships result in stronger homes and schools and students who will, one day, continue the tradition of helping to promote Catholic education for their own children.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have attempted to delineate the most significant factors that promote and strengthen a Catholic school’s unique identity and mission. As in previous chapters, we have separated out the specific duties of administrators, teachers, students and parents as they relate to the overall concept of support; but, here, we have given particular emphasis to the role of the principal as leader and model of Catholic identity. As indicated in the previous chapter, the decision was made not to include alumni when discussing how Catholic identity is promoted. In both instances, this was done not to minimize the importance of alumni but simply to distinguish them from members of the school community who interact on a daily basis. Through the discussion in this chapter, I have reiterated certain overarching characteristics that distinguish a school as Catholic, with particular emphasis on faith and community. Additionally, I have chosen to accent the role of the administrator as servant-leader. Each in their own way, all members of the school community add a particular perspective and contribute in distinct ways to the school’s identity while simultaneously working together toward the same goal: the school’s success and a clear expression of its Catholicity.

While an administrator serves as the school’s primary academic and spiritual leader, teachers and parents also have distinct leadership roles when it comes to
supporting the Catholic identity. Children and young adults will imitate the adults around them without even realizing it. Often, the opinions and judgments of parents are heard loudly and clearly in the words that their children speak in school. Most times, we do not choose when or when not to be a leader. By virtue of our vocations as educators or parents, we become the adults who have the greatest influence on the children in our care as well as on their environment. Both teachers and parents must create caring, nurturing and stable settings in which young people can grow and discover the persons whom God has called them to be. This requires setting standards and reasonable expectations and requiring that children accept responsibility for their actions and choices. At home and in school, Jesus Christ should be the ultimate model and guide for our interactions with others, our approach to discipline, our understanding in difficult times, and our desire to fulfill our respective roles to the best of our abilities. This is what God asks of each of us, and this is what the identity and mission of every Catholic school has as its foundation and heart. When we fall short, as humans do, it is important to begin again with a renewed commitment to God, to our children and students, and to the particular vocation which we have willingly accepted. Administrators, teachers and parents share a mutual responsibility not just to provide the best academic program for the students but to be examples of Christian living and Catholic teaching that young people will emulate. In this way, we create a true community of faith and build a school’s Catholic identity that will thrive for years to come.
We have seen that, at times, teachers require some assistance in learning the particulars of what it means to teach in a Catholic school, the basics of Catholic doctrine and the best practices for integrating Catholic Identity into instruction and relationships. For this reason, I propose a program of staff development sessions meant to introduce new teachers to the fundamentals needed to fully understand and implement the essentials of Catholic Identity. These sessions are meant to be both informative and informal conversations which would consist of a presentation of information, followed by ample time for questions, dialogue and the sharing of ideas for the practical application of material. In the final chapter of this work, I offer a proposed plan for such a program which may be used by individual schools or by diocesan offices of education. The outline is based on the needs of the school in which I currently teach but may be adapted to best serve the school and the faculty who choose to implement it. It is my hope that these suggestions may inspire more schools to consider carefully the meaning of Catholic Identity within their own institutions and to dedicate themselves to fulfilling their call as Catholic schools for the twenty-first century.
Chapter Four

Integrating the Paradigm of Catholic Identity

New Teacher “Conversations”

“Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It assumes that there is room in the heart for the person’s point of view, opinion, and proposal. To dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. In order to dialogue, it is necessary to know how to lower the defenses, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.”

Pope Francis

Introduction

It is a sad fact that while most of us spend a sizeable part of our lives communicating with others – over the phone, in committee meetings, via email and through social media – we seem to have lost the ability or the willingness to have face-to-face conversations with those with whom we have daily contact or with whom we work. Much of the time, we are not listening to each other at all. We speak at each other or over each other just trying to get our own point across, our own values, or our ways of viewing a situation. It seems that, many times, we don’t know how to engage each other in meaningful exchanges.

Through my research and experience as a Catholic educator, I have come to know that we, too, don’t always listen. We hear questions in the classroom, most of which we

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can answer; but, when we are having conversations with each other, we often look past what is being said and judge the words and actions of others rather than trying to understand them. Encouraging and promoting dialogue with one another is critically important, especially in the education field. It is a profound way to foster mutual insight and common purpose. The process should involve listening with empathy, searching for common ground, exploring and being open to new ideas and perspectives and bringing unexamined assumptions into the open.

With the concept of dialogue and communication in mind and through all of my research and experience, I have come to know that understanding Catholic identity is not about whether you pray, go to Mass or have a crucifix in your home; but it is about living the call of Christ in your everyday life according to the Gospel message. Regrettably, however, many teachers in Catholic schools do not fully comprehend what that means or how to live in that way or find faithfulness to that commitment too difficult. With this in mind, there must be some type of formation for those who might not understand the teachings of the Catholic Church, the dynamics of the Diocese in which they work or the charisms and traditions of their specific faith community.

As a teacher in a Catholic school who takes her ministry very seriously, and as a way to incorporate all that I have learned through the process of writing this doctoral thesis, I have concluded that it would be important to examine how we communicate the history and dynamics of the Catholic Church and importance of being a Catholic educator to new teachers through a series of open conversations and learning experiences. These
conversations would offer those who are new to the school community a venue in which to ask questions and learn more about the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware, and our school, Padua Academy. This series of discussions is designed for new full-time faculty members who have been hired to Padua Academy within the past five years. Over the course of six months, new faculty (those under five years of service at Padua Academy) would be invited to join in conversations to explore issues related to Padua Academy’s mission and Catholic identity, especially as they relate to their unique vocation of teacher, and to their experiences as new members of our faculty. These open conversations are intended to provide foundational information and also to allow teachers to ask questions, seek clarification, internalize the deeper meanings behind Church teachings and to be able to integrate the theory with their pedagogical practice.

This series of informal conversations would help the newer faculty in the building and our faith community to understand the history of both the institution as well as the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Wilmington. Certain members of the faith community will be called upon as speakers or contributors to encourage and promote the mission and Catholic identity of the school and offer valuable personal experiences which would give specific examples of living the Gospel message within the high school setting.

The sessions will be completed throughout the year (once of month) on an agreed-upon time with the administration of the school. Current faculty and staff who have been in the school longer than five years are encouraged to actively participate in these
discussions but would not be required to attend. All members of the current faculty, staff and administration of Padua Academy will be welcomed on the final date of the “conversations” in April where we will “break bread” and remember and embrace why we are a faith community. More details will be given for that specific part of the “conversations” at a later date after being discussed with the administration. This project can be adapted for each school in the Diocese, according to their own school’s history, patron saints and charisms. What follows, then is a brief synopsis of the points to be covered each month. Each is not meant to be a complete lesson, which the presenter would be responsible for providing, but a skeleton on which much flesh would be added in preparation for each “conversation.”

**Sample Agenda for Monthly Conversations**

- Opening Prayer
- Overview of Topic to be discussed
- Presentation of Material
  - Power Point by presenter or guest speaker
- Questions and Answers
- Open Discussion of Topic
  - How do I relate it to my particular curriculum area?
  - A word about next month’s topic
Schedule of Monthly New Faculty Conversations

- **August** – The history and cornerstones of the Catholic Church
- **September** – The history of the Diocese of Wilmington and Padua Academy.
- **October** – Charisms of our patron saints: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales
- **November** – The vocation of a teacher
- **January** – Academic excellence and the call to a holistic education of our students
- **February** – The legacy and concepts of Catholic Social Teaching
- **March** – The call to community and good relationships.
- **April** – Dinner with entire faith community

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**August – History and Cornerstones of the Catholic Church**

**Rationale** - We have the responsibility to not only ourselves as educators but also to our students to know some of the history of the Catholic Church. While there is significant and profound information with regard to the history of the Catholic church, for this project, I will talk about the foundational and fundamental aspects of what it means to be Catholic. It is important for all those in Catholic education, whether Catholic or not, to understand a basic foundation of the Catholic church in order to begin to grasp the dynamics of Catholic education and how their roles as teacher’s impact on the lives of their students.

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” – Matthew 7:12

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History and Cornerstones of the Catholic Church

According to Catholic teaching, the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ. The New Testament records the activities of Jesus, his teachings, his appointment of the twelve Apostles, and his instructions for them to continue his work. The Catholic Church teaches that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, in the event known as Pentecost, signaled the beginning of the public ministry of the Church. Catholics hold that Saint Peter was Rome’s first bishop, even though his following of Christ was rocky at times. It pledges that we all have faults and we all make mistakes but we are called to follow Christ and the Church. St. Peter starts the unbroken line from Christ, which includes the current Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. This means that the Catholic Church maintains the apostolic succession of the Bishop of Rome all the way back to St. Peter.

The ministry of Jesus begins with his baptism in the Jordan River and ends in the city of Jerusalem following the Last Supper with his disciples. Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus lived in relative obscurity with his family in Nazareth. After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus began three years of public teaching and ministry. In the early time of his ministry, Jesus began his preaching along with his earliest followers, the first disciples who ultimately travelled with him and eventually formed the early Church. As Jesus and His disciples journeyed through the land, people gathered around Him because he was a master communicator and teacher. Through stories called parables, Jesus taught people the ways of God and called them to live according to those ways. He always had compassion for the outcast and the brokenhearted and expressed
His compassion and love through miracles and healings. He spoke with authority, and he was a man of actions, not just words. Throughout his ministry, He demonstrated His power over the physical and spiritual world, over life and death.

A Catholic school teacher is one who models the life of Christ and the Christian faith to the best of his or her ability because the students learn by observing others’ actions and words. What we do can often become more valuable than what we say. Our students will watch their teachers and learn from us. It is vital, then, that we model the great Teacher, Christ. The most powerful teacher is one who not only recites, “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you” (Luke 6:31), but also actually practices it. Regardless of religious background, your faith must be evident, must be truly witnessed through your own actions in the face of your community, both in and out of the classroom.

Like Christ, we teach and lead because God has called us to do so. As Catholics, we understand that God has asked his disciples to participate in the work of helping others to come to know him and lead as people of faith. As Catholic school educators, we are called to do the same in helping our students to know and love God in their own lives. We have heard the call of God in scripture to teach, and we must respond.

**Scripture**

Christianity regards the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament as authoritative. It is believed that it was written by human authors who were inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. For Roman Catholics, theology distinguishes between the
literal and the spiritual senses of scripture. The literal sense of understanding scripture is through the meanings of the words of scripture while the spiritual sense is based on signs, ethical teaching and eternity.

**Sacraments**

There are seven sacraments of the Church, the most important of which is the Eucharist. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, these sacraments were instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. These are ways in which God’s grace is given to the person who receives them. Participation in the sacraments, offered to individuals through their parishes, is a way for Catholics to obtain grace, forgiveness of sins, and formally ask for the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

**Liturgy**

The word Liturgy means the public worship of the church. For Catholics, that worship takes the form of the Mass, which we are required to attend each week. Sunday is a holy day of obligation for Catholics, but we may also attend Mass on Saturday evenings. At Mass, Catholics believe that they respond to Jesus’ command at the Last Supper to “do this in remembrance of me.”

The Catholic mass is separated into two parts. The first part is called the Liturgy of the Word; readings from the Old and New

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Testaments are read prior to the Gospel reading and the homily. The second part is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in which the actual sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated. Catholics regard the Eucharist as “the source and summit of Christian life”\textsuperscript{76} and believe that the bread and wine brought to the altar are changed through the power of the Holy Spirit into the true Body and Blood of Christ. This doctrine is known as \textit{transubstantiation}.

\textbf{Liturgical Calendar}

In the Latin Church, the annual calendar begins with the season of Advent, a time of hope and preparation for the celebration of Jesus’ birth and his Second Coming at the end of time. Readings for Ordinary time follow the Christmas season but are interrupted by 40 days of Lenten preparations and 50 days of Easter celebration. The Easter Triduum consists of the Lord’s Supper, Good Friday (Jesus Passion and Death on the cross), and the Resurrection of Jesus. The Easter season follows the Triduum and climaxes at Pentecost (50 days after Easter). Ordinary Time then continues until the season of Advent.

\textbf{Trinity}

The Trinity refers to the belief in one God, in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three are equal in their divinity, yet separate in nature. While we are all given a singular nature with a personal relationship with God, we also have a

communal relationship as the Body of Christ. We recognize the Father as the creator and source of all life and view Him as a loving and caring God who is active in the lives of His people and desires us all to love one another. The Son is the word or expression of the Father through his baptism, healings, teachings and ministry; and the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son which is received through the sacrament of Confirmation (usually in the 8th grade in the Diocese of Wilmington).

**Catholic Social Teaching**

Catholic social teaching is based on the teachings of Jesus and commits Catholics to recognize the importance of others. Although the Catholic Church operates and supports many social ministries throughout the world, individual Catholics are also required to practice both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy include feeding the hungry, welcoming the strangers, immigrants or refugees, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick and visiting those in prison. The spiritual works of mercy require Catholics to share their knowledge with others, to comfort those who suffer, have patience, forgive, pray for the living and the dead and give to those who need it. Catholic social teaching is central to our faith and requires a commitment from us all. Because this topic is so important and has much on which to elaborate, a conversation will be conducted in a future month of this project.

**Mary and the Saints**

Catholics hold that the church exists both on earth and in heaven simultaneously, and thus the Virgin Mary and the saints are alive and part of the living Church. Prayers
and devotions to Mary and the saints are common practices in the Catholic Church. This year, the diocesan theme for the academic year was “To Jesus Through Mary” which recognizes the importance of Mary and the saints as intercessors on our behalf. Mary is given special honor and devotion above all of the saints. Catholics do not worship Mary, as many think, but rather honor her as the Mother of Christ, the Church and of all those who believe in Christ. We are encouraged to follow her example of holiness and her devotion to her Son, Jesus Christ. The church devotes several liturgical feasts to Mary: The Immaculate Conception, which is the Blessed Mother being free from original sin; the Visitation of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist; and the Assumption, in which Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven, are among the most significant of these feasts.

**Ordained Ministry - Sacrament of Holy Orders**

Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, a baptized man is given the grace to serve the Church as a deacon, priest, or bishop. Candidates to the priesthood must have a college degree in addition to another four years of theological training. The Catholic Church, following Apostolic tradition, ordains only males but encourages women to participate in all aspects of Church life through leadership and service in the parish community. *Apostolic succession* is the belief that the pope and Catholic bishops are the spiritual successors of the original twelve apostles through the historically unbroken chain of consecration.
Bishops are believed to possess the fullness of the Christian priesthood and are considered to be the successors of the Apostles. They are members of the College of Bishops and are the only ones allowed to perform the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Many bishops have responsibilities of leading a diocese, which is divided into parishes and other Catholic institutions.

The parishes are usually staffed by a priest who might perform tasks such as research, teaching or office work. Priests are called to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments to the faithful. They are ordained to be coworkers of the bishop and assist him in the fulfillment of the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to the Apostles.

For men who are called to the priesthood, there are two distinct paths to follow: the diocesan priesthood or the priesthood as part of a religious community. The two paths share common characteristics, but there are also important differences. A diocesan priest is part of a particular Church, or diocese. His ministry is under the direction of his diocesan bishop and is usually spent in the service of the faithful within the diocese. They make promises to obey their bishop, to pray, and to remain celibate. Many diocesan priests live a simple lifestyle but do not take vows of poverty, so they are allowed to earn money for themselves and to own personal property.

A religious order priest belongs to a particular religious order, such as the Franciscans, Oblates of St. Francis de Sales or the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). They are ordained only after they have made their final commitment to their religious community.
A man is ordained a religious priest by a bishop at the request and with permission from the religious superior, the leader of his religious community. The priest must respect the bishop but must be obedient to his religious superior. Because a religious order priest takes a vow of poverty, any money or property he might receive belongs not to him but to his community. Most religious order priests live out their priesthood while engaging in a particular mission for which their order was founded. For example, many Jesuit priests teach in high schools and colleges because their order, the Jesuits, was founded in part for the sake of evangelizing through education. Franciscan priests, however, often work directly with those who are poor, as this was part of the focus of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi.

Permanent deacons, those who do not seek priestly ordination, often preach to the community and educate the faithful on scripture and the sacraments. They may baptize, lead the faithful in prayer, witness marriages and conduct funeral services. There is a formation program for men wanting to become deacons in their diocese or archdiocese. In August of 2016, Pope Francis established the Study Commission on the Women’s Diaconate, to determine whether ordaining women as deacons should be revived. This would include the deacon’s role of preaching at the Eucharist. While deacons can be married, only celibate men are ordained as priests in the Catholic Church.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church usually refers to the bishops within the Church. Below, the picture gives you a very simple understanding of those who exercise the authority within the Church.
Apostles’ Creed/Nicene Creed

When attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, the congregation joins together in reciting a Profession of Faith after the homily. This is also known as the Creed, from the Latin word *credo*, meaning “I believe.” The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explains the purpose of the Creed embedded in the Mass.

The purpose of the Creed or Profession of Faith is that the whole gathered people may respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also honor and confess the great mysteries of the faith by pronouncing the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use and before the celebration of these mysteries in the Eucharist begins.

In other words, the Creed is a much longer “Amen” to everything that was said in the Liturgy of the Word and an affirmation of what is about to unfold in the Liturgy of
the Eucharist. It is a personal and collective assent, proclaiming to all present that you believe in the foundational beliefs of the Catholic faith. Both Creeds essentially say the same thing, with one being more precise (Nicene) and the other summarizing the faith in fewer words (Apostles’). The purpose of each one is the same, affirming the faith and proclaiming before all what we believe.

First and Second Vatican Councils

An ecumenical council is a conference of ecclesiastical dignitaries and theological experts who convene, usually in Rome, to discuss and settle matters of the Church doctrine and practice. Both of the Vatican councils were important to the life and faithful
of the Church and represent a significant change that continues to play a role in the daily life of the Church.

- **First Vatican Council** – The council was summoned by Pope Pius IX in 1868. The first session was held in December of 1869 in Rome. The purpose of the council was to define the Catholic doctrine which lead to approval of two documents: Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith and First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ. The council was never closed due to the Piedmontese troops occupying Rome. In October of 1870, Pope Pius IX suspended the council indefinitely, after only completing a small fraction of the work that was planned for the Council.

  - **Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Faith (Dei Filius)** – shorter version of the outline of the Catholic faith which deals with faith, reason, and their interrelations.

  - **First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ** – dealt with the authority of the Pope

    - **Papal infallibility** – the understanding that the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error “when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church. The infallibility teachings of the Pope
must be based on, or at least not contradict, Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.”

- **Second Vatican Council** – The council was announced by St. John XXIII in 1959 as a means of spiritual renewal for the Catholic Church. There were several documents that came from the calling of the Second Vatican Council, each of them serving a different purpose to encourage the faithful in the Church and those who have fallen away from the Church to be reunited and become full participants in the life of the Church.

  o **Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)** - magnified the authority, identity and the mission of the Church, as well as the call of lay people to holiness and to share in the missionary vocation of the Church.

  o **Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)** - attempts to relate the role of Scripture and tradition to their common origin in the Word of God that has been committed to the church. The document affirms the value of Scripture for the salvation of men and women while maintaining an open attitude toward the scholarly study of the Bible.

  o **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrodanctum Concilium)** – establishes a principle for greater participation by the laity in the celebration of mass and authorizes significant changes in the texts,
forms, and languages used in the celebration of mass and the administration of the sacraments. What was primarily in Latin, changed to the vernacular, or the language of the people.

- **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today**

  *Gaudium et spes* - acknowledges the profound changes humanity is experiencing and attempts to relate the church’s concept of itself and of revelation to the needs and values of contemporary culture.

The council also promulgated documents on the pastoral duties of bishops, ecumenism, the Eastern-rite churches, the ministry and life of priests, the education for the priesthood, the religious life, the missionary activity of the church, the apostolate of the laity, and the media of social communication. Furthermore, documents on religious freedom, the church’s attitude toward non-Christian religions, and on Christian education were produced.

Many of its promulgations are still in the process of being realized in parishes and diocese around the world. However, the Second Vatican Council stands as the largest, and perhaps most surprising, ecumenical councils convened in the Church’s history.

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**September – The history of the Diocese of Wilmington and Padua Academy.**

**Rationale** – It is important to know the history of the diocese and your school in order to better understand the role of Catholic identity in your teaching. When you are able to understand the traditions and those who have come before you in
your ministry, you are able to better help the students appreciate and integrate the spirituality of all that we do and the values we instill in them as a faith community.

“Be who you are and be that perfectly well” – St. Francis de Sales

**History of the Diocese of Wilmington**

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Wilmington encompasses not only the state of Delaware but also several counties on the Eastern shore of Maryland. The Diocese strives to encourage all of their faithful to join, with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, each other in living a faith filled life through community. Members of the diocese, and Catholics throughout the world, are called to celebrate Christ in the celebration of the liturgy and through our willingness to deepen our understanding of the Gospel message. We are all called to serve one another in the hope that, as we are united in faith, prayer and service, we may use the many gifts and talents that Christ has bestowed on us to further the mission and promote the presence of God’s Kingdom in all the work that we do now and in the future.

The Diocese of Wilmington was established in 1868 by Pope Pius IX under the leadership of its first Bishop, the Reverend Thomas Andrew Becker, D.D. During his long tenure, he witnessed an increase in the number of priests who served in the diocese and its churches. Through his work in the diocese, he was able to establish an orphanage, and several schools. After he was transferred to a diocese in the southern United States, his successor, Bishop Alfred Allen Curtis, worked closely with others to minister to the
African American population in the area. He also worked with St. Katherine Drexel, the second canonized saint to be born in America, to establish a school in Delaware.

In 1897, a new bishop was appointed to the Diocese of Wilmington, Bishop John J. Monaghan who helped to establish several new parishes and missions as well as several new schools, including our brother school, the Salesianum School. He worked with the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia to establish St. Francis Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware. The Sisters used to minister at Padua Academy and currently minister at St. Francis Hospital as well as other area schools including their sponsored ministry of Neumann University in Aston, Pennsylvania.

Between 1925 and 1960, the Catholic population of the diocese doubled in size under the direction of a new bishop, Bishop John Fitzmaurice. He founded many new parishes and schools outside of the city of Wilmington and worked hard to establish several different initiatives in the Diocese including but not limited to Catholic Charities, Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and the Knights of Columbus. Upon his retirement, his successor, Bishop Michael William Hyle, came to the Diocese of Wilmington under his role at the Second Vatican Council. He was able to attend each of the sessions at the Second Vatican Council and helped to implement the Council’s early reforms. Under his leadership, money was raised to create the diocesan high school, St. Mark’s and a Newman Center at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. The Newman Center, now known as the St. Thomas More Oratory, continues to serve the University of
Delaware community through mass, dinners, service and prayer opportunities for the students, faculty, staff and family members of the University of Delaware community.

Due to the death of Bishop Hyle in December of 1967, a new bishop was appointed in 1968, Bishop Thomas Joseph Mardaga. Bishop Mardaga continued with the implementation of the reforms that came from the Second Vatican Council while also focusing efforts to enhance both public relations and media efforts in the Diocese of Wilmington.

When Bishop Mardaga passed away in 1984, Bishop Robert E. Mulvee, an auxiliary bishop from New Hampshire was selected as Wilmington’s seventh bishop and began his administration emphasizing collegiality. The diocese continued to grow and remained focused on establishing new parishes throughout the diocese.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Catholic population was concentrated in the Wilmington area due to successive waves of immigration – Irish, French, German, Polish, Italian, and more recently Latin American, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese. With populations continually growing outside the city of Wilmington, the diocese understood the need for an expansion of services to areas south and into the beach towns of Delaware and Maryland.

Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli eventually became the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington and directed an era of expansion and growth throughout the Diocese. Through his implementation of a three-year capital campaign, *Bringing the Vision to Life*, he addressed the needs of a growing diocesan family to build, renovate and expand
churches, schools and other facilities throughout the diocese. With Bishop Saltarelli’s leadership, new schools and parishes were being established, existing schools were being expanded, and numerous capital projects were completed in parishes throughout the diocese.

In the wake of the clergy scandals that were brought to light in the last few years, the bishops of the United States examined all of their policies and procedures relating to the protection of children and youth particularly with regard to sexual abuse. They determined that these new times demanded a much stronger and more comprehensive approach throughout the Church to ensure the protection of children and youth. Under Bishop Saltarelli’s leadership, a comprehensive program called, *For the Sake of God’s Children, was created in the Diocese of Wilmington to focus on the continuous development of a safe environment in each of our communities. The program includes conducting background checks for all Church personnel, delivering ethical and behavioral standards and maintaining safe environments for all of our children. By our baptism, we are all called into ministry to, with and for one another. Creating a safe environment is paramount to our ministry.

On July 7, 2008, the pope appointed Bishop W. Francis Malooly as the ninth and current bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington. Bishop Malooly has lead the diocese for almost 10 years. He has worked on developing ways to integrate the gifts of both the laity and the clergy in the diocese, renewing and revitalizing the call to holiness and the formation of adults and youth in the diocese and promotion of vocations to both religious
life and the priesthood. Bishop Malooly continues to lead the Diocese of Wilmington into the future.

**History of Padua Academy**

*Mission Statement:* Padua Academy, rooted in the Catholic faith, offers young women a transformational college preparatory education, challenging them to live Christ-centered lives of leadership and service.

The mission of Padua Academy has always been to prepare our young women for a life of faith and excellence. As educators, we have a responsibility to broaden the intellectual horizons of our students while also deepening their faith so that they can lead lives that emulate the love and service of Christ. All that Padua Academy and its graduates have accomplished can be traced back to the prayers, wisdom and tenacity of one man – Father Roberto Balducelli, OSFS (Oblate of St. Francis de Sales). Fr. Roberto was born in a small village in central Italy called Castulluccio, in 1913 and came to St. Anthony of Padua parish in 1954.

In 1954, the eighth-grade grade class at St. Anthony’s parish school was nearing graduation and had very few options for continuing their Catholic education at the high school level. Believing that every child should be afforded an opportunity for a Catholic education, Father Roberto shared his vision with the pastor, who agreed to open a high school for girls. Fr. McCoy, the pastor of St. Anthony of Padua at the time, appointed the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia as initial administrators of the new school. In the fall of 1954, Padua Academy opened in the upper level of the current grade school...
building, occupying just two classrooms, two blocks away from the current location of Padua Academy.

In three short years, the grade school could no longer accommodate the growing enrollment of Padua Academy; so it was moved to an old abandoned public school across the street in the city of Wilmington. Fifty-seven girls became Padua’s first graduating class in 1958. That same year, Fr. Roberto Balducelli was appointed pastor of St. Anthony of Padua parish.

Many people who talk about Fr. Roberto, state that he always managed to accomplish what he set his mind to. Fr. Roberto had a dream to construct a new building for Padua Academy and in 1966, the bishop, Bishop Michael W. Hyle broke ground for the new building, bringing the once impossible dream of Fr. Roberto into reality. It took nearly 6 years for the building to be built but it was dedicated on November 24, 1974.

Father Roberto’s passion for education is what drove his desire to build Padua Academy. He knew that tremendous influence that women had on the lives of children and that “educating a woman meant educating a community.” Father Roberto knew that the family was the moral center of civilized society and for this reason he created and nourished the family of Padua Academy. The growth and demand to have a school for young women that is steeped in faith, where they are challenged by their teachers and are offered a rigorous education is exactly what Father Roberto had envisioned.

His vision was bold and progressive and was always rooted in an unwavering faith in Christ and others. The legacy of Fr. Roberto is felt in the lives and achievements
of every student at Padua Academy. We believe that his legacy has shaped our students to become engaged in global citizenship and tremendous leaders in whatever ministry they are called to through Christ.

Father Roberto was a spiritual leader and a father figure for generations of those who grew up in the city of Wilmington. He was an essential part of the community for decades and was responsible for several Catholic institutions in the area. He was known as a humble man, yet was forceful when it came to his faith, his church and his community. Father Roberto Balducelli passed away in 2013 just hours before his 100th birthday, although it was already his birthday in Italy. I was blessed to have met Father Roberto in my initial year at Padua Academy. The girls loved when he would say prayer for the school on the Padua Academy television station (PATV). He certainly represented our motto of *softly but strongly.*

Padua Academy’s motto *Suaviter sed Fortiter,* softly but strongly, represents a way in which the students, and later graduates, conduct themselves in how they live and love. The motto reminds each of the young ladies at Padua Academy to exemplify in their lives the traits of gentleness, while also remaining firm in upholding womanly virtues. We as educators must model this in the classrooms and in our interactions with others.

Padua Academy is an all-girls Catholic high school in Wilmington, DE. While Padua Academy is a parish school belonging to St. Anthony’s Catholic Church within the Diocese of Wilmington, the school maintains a strong affiliation with the Oblates of St.
Francis de Sales, the founders of Padua Academy. These two connections make Padua unique among the many and different Catholic and independent schools in the state of Delaware. From 64 students its opening day, the enrollment has grown to 661, and the program of instruction has expanded greatly to meet the diverse needs of the students. Padua Academy was truly conceived by the faith and hope of Fr. Roberto and dedicated to all that help to construct the school.

Statements of belief serve as a foundation for a school’s fundamental values as well as an ethical code. Padua Academy holds that the 4 S’s of spirituality, scholarship, sisterhood and service, are present to all who enter the faith community. We as Catholics demonstrate our faith in our daily lives and in the life of the school. We encourage our students to pursue a life with Christ focusing on that growth throughout their high school education. We strive, in the words of St. Francis de Sales to “be who we are and be that well.” While spirituality is at the very core of who we are as a Catholic school, we are committed to academic excellence in order to help our students build a solid foundation that can sustain them for a life-long love of learning. Our academic program is rigorous; but it encourages the development of the whole person. We recognize the differences of our students, we encourage diversity; and, through global education, we understand that not all of what we learn is in the physical classroom. The faculty and administrators of Padua are dedicated to the education of young women and support each one in becoming the person God created her to be. By learning to work collaboratively through mutual encouragement and love, our students acquire a gentle strength that transforms them into
leaders and those who serve. Finally, we foster a dedication to love, serve and care for others in our communities, both locally and globally. We encourage our students to see the good in all of creation and to value every person and a gift from the Creator. Our current Head of School, Mrs. Cindy Hayes Mann states:

As a college preparatory school, we seek to inspire and empower young women for success. By helping them to identify their talents and interests, we prepare our students for their future academic and professional pursuits. Educated and nurtured on all levels – spiritual, academic, social, and physical – our students thrive under the guidance of our experienced and knowledgeable faculty and administration. A Padua education is truly transformational. We help our students to build bright futures while making lasting memories.77

October – Charisms of our patron saints: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales

Rationale – It is important in each of our schools to name those with whom we can follow and who can lead us to a life of Christ. At Padua Academy, the lives and spiritualities of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales have encouraged us in many ways, both in living a simple life and in the value of education, to have Christ in our lives and to encourage others to do the same. We also are fortunate to hold St. Anthony of Padua as our patron saint. We do include the lives of St. Clare of Assisi and St. Jane de Chantal as models of women of faith, since Padua Academy is an all-girls’ Catholic high school.

“Preach the Gospel, if necessary use words” – St. Francis of Assisi

Religious order schools and networks often draw on the charisms of their founding religious congregations to sharpen their focus and clarify their distinctive

educational vision and qualities. A charism is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to a person or group for a particular work in the world. Catholic schools sponsored by the Franciscans distinguish themselves by living out the charisms of Saint Francis of Assisi. According to M.E. Govert, “the Franciscan charism includes the following dimensions: recognition of the primacy of Christ, reverence for all creation, respect for the dignity of the human person, community, peace-making, service, compassion, poverty, and simplicity.” Although there are great similarities between the charisms of many religious orders like the Franciscan, Ursuline and Salesian Catholic schools, each type of school has its own unique charism that results in an enhanced Catholic education in their approach and what they emphasize in their school community.

As was stated in the history of Padua Academy section of this project, Padua Academy was founded in 1954 by the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and by members of the St. Anthony of Padua parish. In the early history of Padua, members of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia staffed the school. To ensure a continuing tradition in the founding spirit, St. Francis de Sales and St. Francis of Assisi were chosen as the patron saints of the school.

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Before he was a saint, St. Francis of Assisi was simply known as Francis Bernardone. Francis Bernardone was born in 1181/1182, one of several children of Pietro and Pica Bernardone. He was a young man who was caught up in the spirit of his age and not very concerned with living a life for God. Being the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, Francis did not want for anything. He often indulged in pleasures while donning fancy clothing. His earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, writes in his *First Life* that, “until the twenty-fifth year of his age he miserably squandered and wasted his time.”

Celano states that Francis surpassed all of his peers as an instigator of evil deeds and was a proud young man, given to vanity. Francis would later write of himself simply, “I lived in sin.” We all have a past – saints included – and very often we are not proud of every aspect of our past. Certainly Francis of Assisi would later weep for his unfaithfulness to God, but he did not remain paralyzed by his guilt. He moved forward and worked hard to lead a life centered on Christ despite his sinful path. Each of us must learn to do the same in order to enter a life focused on Christ and not on our past.

When we think of St. Francis of Assisi, we often imagine statues found in gardens where we can understand his fondness for nature and the beauty of creation but Francis’ love of creation must not overshadow the love he had for Christ. Francis of Assisi was a man who endured great suffering and hardship. He spent a year in a dark, dank cell in

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Perugia after being captured in a military expedition against Perugia. During this time, he became very ill and was not released until his father paid a ransom. Francis would suffer from not only abandonment from his earthly father but also physical conditions that worsened in a time where medical treatment was not ideal. This illness and abandonment would lead Francis to a spiritual conversion which helped him to begin to re-evaluate his life. During this time, he was said to have had a mystical vision of Jesus Christ in a small chapel of San Damiano, just outside the town of Assisi, in which the icon of Christ crucified said to him, “Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, if falling into ruins.” While Francis took this to mean the physical church in which he was standing, God had a different idea. God wanted Francis to help bring His people home to him and led Francis to nurturing the lepers and the outcast, preaching to all who would listen while maintaining a deep sense of prayer.

Later in life, he would bear the stigmata, the nail marks of the crucifixion of Christ, in his hands and feet at La Verna, a hillside retreat where he often visited for solitude and prayer. Like Francis, we all encounter suffering in our walk with Christ. We must never see suffering as a proof of God’s absence. Rather, we must see like St. Francis of Assisi did that God works through our suffering: teaching us to love, to trust, and to bear our burdens with humility and patience, as hard as that may be. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2725), states that “the spiritual battle of the

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Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer. Francis had discovered a God who loved him, despite his former way of life. Now, Francis wanted to respond to that love and be close to God. The only way this could happen, Francis knew, was through prayer. Francis learned to pray through praying. As a young man, he had a very active social life and learned the family trade, but Francis had little time or inclination for silence and interior recollection. There were skills that Francis had to learn through tenacious perseverance. Upon this conversion from his former way of life, Francis began to spend long periods in solitude in the fields of Assisi. He often withdrew from the world to isolated caves to be alone with God.

Francis was also inspired to devote himself to a life of poverty. Having obtained a woolen tunic, the dress worn by the poorest peasants of the time, he tied it around him with a knotted rope and went forth preaching to the people about penance, loving of one another, and peace. Francis’ preaching to ordinary people was unusual since he had no license to do so, but his actions drew others to him. Within a year, Francis had several followers. They lived a simple life in a deserted house near Assisi and spent much of their time wandering through the mountainous areas of Umbria, a region in central Italy. Under the direction and approval of the Pope at the time, Pope Innocent III, Francis and his brothers became known as the Franciscan Order. The group was centered in Assisi before expanding throughout Italy. Francis chose to never be ordained a priest; but, later,

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he was ordained a deacon. From then on, the Franciscan Order grew quickly with new vocations.

Hearing Francis preaching in the church of San Rufino, Clare of Assisi was touched by his message and began to realize her calling, her vocation. Clare, born of nobility left her family home to join Francis and establish an Order for women called the Order of Poor Ladies. This became known as the Second Franciscan Order and later changed their name to the Poor Clares.

Like St. Francis, God is calling each one of us to a deep and personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. This relationship is realized, strengthened and finds its nourishment in prayer. In a world of instant downloads and ever-present technology, silence can seem scary; yet, it is through persevering in silence that we will discover the love of God.

**Patron Saint – St. Francis de Sales**

Like Francis of Assisi, our second patron saint, St. Francis de Sales, was devoted to his faith and recognized the great divisions during his time, certainly many of these stemming from the Protestant Reformation.

St. Francis de Sales was born in 1567 to a noble family in France. He was baptized Francis Bonaventura, after two great Franciscan saints and was privileged to have the best of educations. Francis attended school in Paris where he studied rhetoric and humanities. As a nobleman, he was very aware of that which pleased his father and often revolved his lessons around that which his father would like him to do.
In 1584, Francis de Sales attended a theological discussion about predestination,\(^84\) convincing himself that he was going to hell.\(^85\) A personal crisis, or conversion, just like St. Francis of Assisi, led him to consecrate himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary; and he decided to dedicate himself to God through a vow of chastity.\(^86\) For the next several years, Francis focused on the role that God played in his life and how he was being called to serve. In 1588, St. Francis de Sales continued his education but, this time, at the University of Padua in Italy, where he studied both law and theology. This is where Francis decided that he was being called to the priesthood. After receiving his doctorate in law and theology, Francis headed back to France where his father was sure he would become a lawyer or embark on a prominent political career. His father had also arranged for him to marry a wealthy noble heiress; but Francis was committed to a life focused on God and His role in his life and was ordained to the priesthood in 1593.

At 35, Francis de Sales became bishop of Geneva. While administering his diocese, he continued to preach, hear confessions, and catechize the children. His gentle character was a great asset in winning souls. He practiced his own axiom, “A spoonful of honey attracts more flies than a barrelful of vinegar.”\(^87\)

\(^84\) Predestination – is a doctrine in Christian theology which states that the divine predetermined all that will happen, especially with regard to the salvation of some and not others. It has been particularly associated with the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo and of John Calvin.


\(^86\) Chastity – the state or practice of refraining from extramarital, or especially from all, sexual intercourse.

The Diocese of Geneva became famous throughout Europe for its efficient organization, zealous clergy and well-instructed laity which were monumental achievements in those days. Francis worked closely with a male religious order who were active in preaching the Catholic faith in the diocese. It is said that, on Lake Geneva, St. Francis of Assisi appeared to him and said: “You desire martyrdom, just as I once longed for it. But, like me, you will not obtain it. You will have to become an instrument of your own martyrdom.”88 During his time as bishop, Francis was known as someone who preached through love. Many viewed him as good, patient and mild man and someone who embodied the love of Christ.

Besides his two well-known books, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *A Treatise on the Love of God*, he wrote many pamphlets and carried on a vast correspondence. For his writings, he has been named patron of the Catholic Press. His writings, filled with his characteristic gentle spirit, are addressed to lay people. He wanted to make them understand that they, too, are called to be saints. As he wrote in *The Introduction to the Devout Life*: “It is an error, or rather a heresy, to say devotion is incompatible with the life of a soldier, a tradesman, a prince, or a married woman…. It has happened that many have lost perfection in the desert who had preserved it in the world.”89

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89 De Sales, St. Francis. *Introduction the the Devout Life*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1891.
In spite of his busy and comparatively short life, he had time to collaborate with another future saint, Jane Frances de Chantal, in the work of establishing the Sisters of the Visitation. These women were to practice the virtues exemplified in Mary’s visit to Elizabeth: humility, piety, and mutual charity. At first, they engaged, to a limited degree, in works of mercy for the poor and the sick. Today, while some communities of these sisters conduct schools, others live a strictly contemplative life.

St. Francis de Sales was a model of patience and gentleness and focused much of his time on his relationship with God and writing. As educators in a Catholic institution, we must focus not on the person but how they lead a life centered on Christ and prayer. When we see the differences between St. Francis de Sales and St. Francis of Assisi, we begin to understand that their call was the same as ours in the fact that they wanted a life focused on Christ, but their method of delivery was different. Francis of Assisi maintained a life of prayer and solitude while Francis de Sales understood the value of writing and a good education. Both were saints that we can emulate in our daily lives, and we are encouraged to follow the model of our patron saints to encourage our students to focus on their relationship with Christ and how they can be in full communion with that relationship.

*Two Men Named Francis*

In recent years, I created a class called *Two Men Named Francis* in the hope that the course could engage our students in understanding and learning more about our two patron saints, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales. Thankfully, the
administration saw the valuable potential of such a course, and it has become a popular elective at Padua Academy. The course incorporates the lives and spiritualities of our patron saints and their female equivalents, St. Clare of Assisi and St. Jane de Chantal as well as the current Pope, Pope Francis. The final “project” for the course is a 10-day trip to Europe, to the places where these saints thrived and walked, where they prayed and preached and where they grew in their relationship with Christ. The trip includes Annecy, France as well as Turin, Padua, Assisi and Rome in Italy. The course is a wonderful and effective way for our students to understand the saints’ lives and spiritualities through lived experience.

*See attached lesson plan for October - The Lives and Spiritualities of our Patron Saints: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales (Appendix A)

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**November – The Vocation of a Teacher**

**Rationale** – Each of us is called to something greater in life, something that leads us to follow Christ and to lead a life of holiness. When we think of vocations, we often think about whether one should become a priest or religious sister; but a vocation is more than an ordinary call. A vocation is a call from God, and anyone who has felt God's call knows that the process of discerning and fulfilling one’s vocation is anything but simple. While most people think of a vocation as what they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God is a call to holiness.

“For many are called, but few are chosen” – Matthew 22:14

Everyone can agree on the importance of education. Teachers impact many lives during their careers and have the great ability to influence children who will make a
difference in society. When Christ came among us to share our lives as human beings, he could have chosen for himself any position, any title, any job but he chose to be a teacher. Though sometimes shown in fanciful illustrations making fine pieces of furniture, Christ, as well as St. Joseph are, in fact, more properly called “construction workers.” Yet, this is not the title we see used most often for Christ in the Gospels. He is surrounded by disciples, a term which literally means students. Catholic education and the vocation of the teacher go all the way back, then, to the One who is the Beginning and whom we know as the Greatest Teacher. As stated in the Gospel of John (13:13), Christ states, “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.”

In our own time, teaching tends to be thought of as a job, a career path, a refreshing alternative to the business world; however, the idea of teaching as a vocation, as an identity beyond a job, a way of life that pervades a teacher’s whole day, whole year and whole mentality, a response to an invitation from God and a path toward deeper intimacy with him, is often forgotten. The Catholic school system, the individual Catholic school, and the individual Catholic school teacher have, to a far greater degree than others, kept alive the realization that teachers are called (“vocare” in Latin) by the One who is the heart of what they teach. He provides the source of their inspiration and the goal toward which they are moving. As has been said by many teachers, “We don’t teach the kids because they are Catholic, we teach them because we are Catholic.”

In practical terms, this is why Catholic schools are built around the idea of the “cura personalis,” the care of the (whole) person. The Catholic educator does not simply
recite disembodied information to a room full of anonymous customers. The calling of Catholic teachers is to understand the strengths and weaknesses, the possibilities and needs of their students—as a group and as unique individuals. Teachers use that understanding to challenge their students’ abilities, enhance their strengths, bolster their weaknesses and help each student discover and explore her or his possibilities. This is why the Catholic school is built to support Catholic school teachers as they convey to students the love Christ has for them. Teachers do so through their own commitment and even self-sacrificial dedication to their students, as well as the teachers’ own love and delight in their subjects or educational disciplines. The English teacher conveys a love of literature or the chemistry teacher, a love of science, because they care enough for their students to impart this love to them. They care for their students because they feel a calling to awaken in them the realization of Christ’s love for them and the demand of the Gospel that they use their own talents to express their own love for others.

Ultimately, the Catholic teacher’s vocation, as is true with all vocations, is born from Christ’s command, “that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Whether a teacher teaches Spanish or math, history or computer science, the reason for teaching at all, that call, that vocation, is to bring students to an awareness of the first part of that command, that they are loved. This inspires in them a commitment to the second, that they are called themselves to live for others and to love others.
Christ could have chosen any title for himself, any way of life, but from all the world’s possibilities he chose to be called, “Teacher,” and continues his work by calling teachers to do his work today.

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**January – Academic excellence and the call to a holistic education of our students**

**Rationale** - A Catholic education anticipates that each of the students pursues higher education. The students maintain a rigorous curriculum throughout their high school years. They are expected to accept responsibility for their actions, respect others and to make good decisions in the context of their faith experiences. One of the many goals of a Catholic school is to help the students mature into Christ-like people who recognize the presence of Christ in themselves and in others. While the religious formation of a student begins at home, a Catholic school offers the opportunity for a holistic view of their education and as a means to incorporate their faith into all they do both in and out of the classroom.

“I never teach my pupils; I only provide the conditions in which they can learn” - Albert Einstein

Anyone who has ever strolled through the halls or perused the website of a Catholic elementary or high school has likely encountered slogans about “educating the whole person” or “educating the mind, body, and soul.” Such slogans testify to the Catholic belief that initiating others into the faith entails, in the words of the *General Directory for Catechesis*, a “transformation of life [that] manifests itself at all levels of
the Christian’s existence.”  

After all, Jesus promised his disciples not just knowledge or technical skills but life in all its fullness (Jn 10:10).

A school has a duty to help children learn how to make moral decisions, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, and to prepare students for college and the workplace. Those who exalt traditional teaching methods like repetition learning or memorization are displaying a gross misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of education. Children are not empty shells waiting for a teacher to pour knowledge into them, or just a person to be prepared for the world of work, but are human beings deserving of a holistic education that meets all of their needs. To focus merely on academics and preparedness for adulthood is to undermine the dignity of a complex human person. After all, “the aim of Catholic education is not merely the attainment of knowledge but the acquisition of values and the discovery of truth.”

Moreover, a school should be a melting pot of children with different gifts and talents and from different backgrounds that promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding and respect. In order to meet these greater goals, it is imperative that a school becomes an institution whose work and progress is shared between families, teachers, and administrators in order to foster cultural, civic and religious life, as well as by civil society and the entire community. “The task of a Catholic School is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is

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reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian.\(^9^2\)

In addition to the traditional academic components, Catholic schools must actively cultivate the development of the whole student: her emotions, her social skills, her spiritual beliefs, her participation in the community, and her role in the greater world. One of the many goals at Padua Academy is to help each of our students find identity, meaning and purpose in life through her connections in the community, in the world and in the Church. We want our students to understand and embrace an intrinsic reverence for life and a passion for learning. As a Catholic school, we have focused much time and resources in developing in our students habits of discipline, attention, and respect for others, especially teachers and administrators. We recognize the great diversity and human dignity of each of our students. Padua Academy offers great opportunities that place emphasis on relationships, social development, and empathy. We want our students to develop critical thinking skills that can strengthen them in a society that is constantly telling them or “guiding” them in directions that are not always in line with the Church and its teachings.

In order to promote the holistic view of our students, we must place a great emphasis on how we are teaching. We must continue to deploy a range of pedagogical

styles that engage each of our students and best develop their intellectual qualities. As educators, we must continue to work on ways that we can grow and develop in our understanding of our students through professional development that takes us out of the box of our comfort zone. It is quite clear that we, Padua Academy, have a strong and academically rigorous program that challenges each of our students to achieve to her full potential. We promote cross-curricular integration as well as extra-curricular activities which help to build a well-rounded and faith-filled individual. An authentic curriculum must be broad in scope and reinforce the mission of the school while also promoting value-based concepts such as respect, social justice, peace and forgiveness.

We must continue to meet students where they are on both their faith journey and their academic development. This requires that we develop a structure that supports all students but especially those with needs beyond the classroom. As educators, we must foster a sense of morality and focus on the development of the whole child: socially, morally, physically and spiritually. This will certainly prepare them for a life beyond the walls of Padua Academy.

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**February – The legacy and concepts of Catholic Social Teaching**

**Rationale** – Catholic social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges and struggles of modern society. The depth and richness of these teachings can be understood best through the direct reading of the Church’s documents on social concerns. In the brief reflections that I have given, I highlight the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition and will discuss what each means for us as Catholic educators.
“Love one another, contribute to the needs of others, live peaceably with all.”
Romans 12: 9-18

Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith. Its roots stem from the Hebrew prophets who announced God’s special love for the poor and called God’s people to a covenant of love, service and justice. Catholic social teaching is a teaching founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came to “bring glad tiding to the poor...liberty to captives... recovery of sight to the blind (Lk 4: 18-19), and who identified himself with the “least of these,” the hungry and the stranger (Mt 25:45).

Catholic social teaching is built on the notion that we must all commit our time and talents, our love and service to the poor. This commitment comes from our experiences of Christ in the Eucharist where, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, we “receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ in the poorest, his brethren.”

Catholic social teaching is based on the belief that God is communal and social. He is relational, therefore, we who are made in God’s image and likeness must share in this communal and social aspect. The body of social teaching has as its foundation the belief that every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to live a life consistent with that dignity. Human dignity comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment. Our commitment as Catholics, as Christians, as human beings must be rooted in and strengthened by our personal spiritual lives. In our

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own relationship with God, we experience the conversion of heart that is necessary to truly love one another as God has loved us.

• **Life and Dignity of the Human Person** - All people are created in the image of God and thus, all human life, from conception to natural death, is sacred. The basic dignity that each person possesses comes from God; therefore, all forms of discrimination are always wrong. All people are meant to serve and care for one another. Scripture tells us repeatedly of God’s love for us. We are called to see every person, regardless of their state or condition in life, through the eyes of God and to love them because God loved them (and us) first.

• **Call to Family, Community and Participation** - Our faith is rooted in the mystery of the Trinity: the divine relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As stated, God’s own essence is centered upon community. We, too, are called to live a life centered on community, a community where the dignity of every person is realized and accepted. Through this community, we are called to love and serve the world and actively participate in making the world a better place.

• **Rights and Responsibilities** - Every person has the right to life and to those things which preserve their dignity or quality of life: food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful employment. Because we are created in the image of the Triune God, we must accept the responsibility of respecting the rights of others and caring for others according to God’s commandments and His example.
• **Option for and with the Poor** - The morality of society is judged by how well our most vulnerable members are treated. As Christians, we are called to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Those with the greatest need require the greatest response. In a society marked by the deepening divide between rich and poor, the gospel calls us to love and to meet the needs of the poor and the vulnerable with special diligence.

• **Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** - Work is about more than making a living; it is also a way to participate in the work of God. People have a right to decent, meaningful work and fair wages. In addition, work should always serve to promote the dignity of the worker. Our faith calls us to demand justice for all workers and a just economy that serves the life and dignity of all.

• **Solidarity** - We are one human family, whatever our racial, ethnic, economic and religious differences. As Christians, we are, as St. Paul reminds us, one body. Love of neighbor has global dimensions in our rapidly shrinking world. At the core of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace, for the love of our neighbor has global dimensions. The gospel calls us to be peacemakers: that we live in right relationship with others, ourselves, and God. Pope Paul VI taught, “If you want peace, work for justice.”

  Our love for our entire human family demands that we work for justice and for peace, that we promote God’s peace in our world.

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• **Care for God’s Creation** – To care for God’s creation is a commandment for humanity and a fundamental requirement of our faith. Creation witnesses to God’s existence. God reveals himself in creation, and we see in nature the fingerprints of God. We are called to honor and protect our planet and its people—to live in relationship with all of God’s creation. God commanded us not only to be fruitful and multiply, but also to use creation for his good. With St. Francis of Assisi, our school’s patron and patron of the environment, we recognize the sacredness of all creation and promote initiatives which protect the Earth, our common home, and all of her inhabitants.

Scholars have also attempted to capture the essence of Catholic education with regard to the Church’s social teaching. In *Educating for Life*, Groome proposes eight characteristics of Catholic Christianity that he believes informs the educational philosophy and spiritual vision of Catholic education. It is clear that each of these can be linked to Catholic social teaching. For Groome, these faith-based characteristics are: “a positive view of humanity, the belief that everywhere is God and everything is sacred (“sacramental consciousness”), an emphasis on relationship and community, a commitment to history and tradition, an appreciation for reason and a desire for truth, the belief that humans are spiritual beings, a conviction for justice, and a dedication to inclusive hospitality and global solidarity.”

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As teachers of the faith, we must join in facing the urgent challenge of communicating Catholic social teaching more fully to our students and to our colleagues. As educators, administrators and staff, we must carry out the work of God through the education of others in order to understand and to act true to our faith. We must be committed and creative in our endeavors to serve the least among us, those who hunger and thirst for justice and those who work for peace. The sharing and living of a social tradition is a defining measure of Catholic education as well as being followers of Christ.

March – The Call to Community and Good Relationships.

Rationale – Humans seem “hard-wired” with a desire and need to connect with others. We are social beings who thrive on positive and strong relationships and, often times, the importance of positive relationships is over overlooked within our schools. For all students who are trying to understand who they are and for those who are trying to gain independence, relationships with their peers, teachers and administration are crucial to their success.

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”
Matthew 18:20

Human beings are naturally social creatures – we crave friendship and positive interactions, just as we do food and water; so it makes sense that the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive we and the community are going to be. Good collegial relationships can lead to a work environment that is more enjoyable, where we are more likely to embrace changes and which encourages us to be both innovative and creative. We can focus on opportunities that will benefit our faith
communities rather than focus our time on problems associated with negative relationships. Good relationships are also necessary if we hope to advance in our careers. If there are feelings of mistrust or conflict, it is unlikely that we will be considered when new positions become available. Overall, as human beings, we want to work with people whom we can trust, with whom we can collaborate and to whom we do not feel inferior. When we create an environment of mutual trust and respect, we form a powerful bond that aids open communication and strengthens the institution as a whole. The same principles of openness, mutual respect and honest communication should likewise help to create a good rapport with our students in the classroom.

If we are honest with ourselves as educators, we must admit that accepting our students for who they are is likely one of the toughest challenges we face. Young adolescents are trying to sort out who they are and how to "show up" in life; sagging pants, piercings, selfies, don't tell the whole story. As educators, particularly in a Catholic school, we can give them a gift by embracing them for their individuality and uniqueness rather than giving into stereotypes and judgments. Taking an interest in their lives, their quirks, and their desire to dance to the beat of their own drum is often the most powerful strategy we can use to open a door and reach a child.

Young people usually have no idea about what it is like to be an adult and, therefore, cannot empathize with the stresses, strains, pressures and problems of modern day teaching. They have no clue and neither do they care about long hours, long commutes, endless emails, aggressive parents, ever-changing curricula, and the goals that
are constantly in flux. Many, if not all, of these challenges occur every day in school and, without doubt, have an impact on how we react in the classroom and behave towards each other in the school community. More importantly, these stressors can seriously affect the way in which we relate to the students. The ways in which students are treated by staff is the single biggest factor that contributes to the culture of the school. We must recognize the importance of the student-teacher relationship and embrace all that it can do to help in the education and personal development of a child.

I believe that improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both the students' academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers will not produce gains in achievement. However, those students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in those relationships. Students will naturally want to work harder and participate more in a class where they are appreciated and respected by the teacher in order to impress him or her and to show all that they can accomplish.

Consider a student who feels a strong personal connection to her teacher, who feels comfortable talking with her teacher frequently and receives more constructive guidance and praise rather than just criticism from her teacher. That student is likely to trust her teacher more, show more engagement in learning, behave better in class and achieve at higher levels academically. Positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn.
Through my education at the Duke Divinity School, I continue to learn and engage in relationships that challenge me to become a better version of myself and a better woman of faith. It is my goal as a Catholic educator to pass this along to my students and my colleagues. During one of my classes, we read an article from Faith & Leadership. In that article, Duke Divinity School’s Greg Jones describes “holy friends” as those who “challenge the sins we have come to love, affirm the gifts we are afraid to claim and help us dream dreams we otherwise would not dream.” Each time we engage in dialogue, share in a meal or speak of the call to serve others, we were creating these “holy friendships.” I can not help to think that, each time we serve others, each time we recognize the gifts of others and not just those who agree with us, we create these “holy friendships” that help us build up the Kingdom of God.

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**April – Dinner with entire Faith Community**

**Rationale** - There is something very biblical about sharing a meal together. Scripture is full of the hospitality and fellowship of sharing food together with friends, community, and even strangers. The sharing of a meal, at least metaphorically, is alluded to in Revelation 3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Suffice it to say that there is a profound opportunity at school lunches to share our hearts with one another.

“Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread” - 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

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Teachers in Catholic schools are in a privileged position and have the opportunity to model the faith, and guide both students and parents, instilling in them a sense of the Gospel challenge to acknowledge God’s central place in their lives. With their enthusiastic devotion to the mission of the Catholic school, teachers do whatever is necessary to help children grow and develop their gifts, and to form disciples — students who know, love and serve Christ in this world and the next. The continuing success of the ministry of Catholic schools depends upon the commitment and support of teachers, parents and the whole Catholic community.

As a way to thank all the faculty, staff and administration, it seems important to welcome the new teachers as well as all those who make an impact in the lives of our students to a gathering, a “breaking of bread,” at the end of the academic year to engage and promote the very faith community that we strive to create throughout the year. The dinner will help to encourage conversation among those who might not have the opportunity throughout the year because of schedules, especially in the secondary school setting.

**Conclusion**

Although this program of professional development is primarily geared toward providing new teachers with a better understanding of, and appreciation for, the basic religious concepts involved in being a teacher in a Catholic school, it is hoped that it will extend out to the veteran teachers of the school as well. Including them in the dialog,
drawing on their years of experience and their expertise in various areas, and refreshing in them a sense of the spirituality of their own vocations will, it is hoped, help to build a stronger faith community and culture of solidarity within the school. A faculty that is divided and which operates in an environment of distrust and tension cannot support or maintain the Catholic identity of a school and undermines its entire mission. On the other hand, a faculty that is open and honest in their relationships with one another and who recognizes the sacredness of what they do each day will be better able to bring Christ to their interactions with both their colleagues and students. Creating that community of faith in which each person can grow and be encouraged in his or her God-given individuality is, after all, the meaning and the identity of every Catholic school.
Conclusion

For more than four centuries, Catholic schools have played a prominent role in the education of America’s children and have helped to fulfill in a very special way the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church. From the founding of the first Catholic school in 1606 until the present day, these faith-based centers of learning have struggled against discrimination, hostility, misunderstanding, and financial deficits to fulfill the command of Jesus Christ to “Go, therefore, and teach all nations…Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. (Matt 28:19-20). In spite of obstacles, the schools have succeeded precisely because they do the work of Christ in the world in every age. Those of us to whom this call to teach has been extended in a distinct way, bear the Gospel message through our words and deeds both to our students and all those we encounter on a daily basis. It is a tremendous responsibility and one that must be taken seriously by all who accept the challenge to minister in a Catholic school. Being able to meet the challenge begins with understanding. As far back as 1977, the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for Education in The Catholic School voiced its concerns that, “Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realization of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness.” From my own personal experiences as a teacher on both the elementary and secondary levels, I can attest that their concern is still a valid one today.
Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to emphasize the importance of identity and mission in the daily life of a Catholic school and highlight the significant impact that the various groups involved with the school have on that identity. Using prominent research, a significant number of Church documents on Catholic education and my own firsthand knowledge, I first endeavored to establish a framework of characteristics that define and identify a school as being distinctly Catholic. Prominent among these is to truly be a faith community. If dissected and lived out each day, these two words summarize the very essence of a Catholic school.

The first word, faith, identifies that Jesus Christ is the core – the heart – of the identity and mission of the school. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education states, “Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school.” \(^97\) In all aspects, the school must focus on the teaching ministry of Christ, his Gospel message of love and service, and his life of prayer and reliance on his heavenly Father. Prayer, love and service are values commonly shared by all Catholic schools and often form the basis of their formal mission statements. As mentioned frequently in this work, Christ must, indeed, be the very reason for our schools’ existence. For this reason, Liturgies, common prayers, retreats, and service opportunities must all be regular components of the students’ school experience in addition to formal religion classes. Participation in these activities should not be optional for faculty members or students, as

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\(^97\) Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, #34.
everyone in the school should willingly accept the responsibility of witnessing to Christ through his or her particular vocation. Likewise, adults within the school should be models of the faith for the students entrusted to them; and their witness should inspire students to establish a personal relationship with Christ that can guide their choices and their actions both now and in the future.

*Faith* also refers to the school’s affiliation with the larger Roman Catholic Church and, specifically, with its mission of evangelization. In our instruction, regardless of the curriculum area being presented, the doctrines of the Church must be upheld. Teachers in Catholic schools may not, in any way, oppose the specific teachings of the Church or live personal lives which contradict those teachings. For example, science teachers may not openly support or promote scientific advances such as contraception, en vitro fertilization or cloning, as the Church does not approve of such measures. At times when such topics might be discussed in the classroom, the Church’s stance must always be made clear to the students, and teachers should help guide the students in understanding the rationale behind the Church’s stance. Whether teachers personally agree with the Church’s doctrines or not, they are mandated to uphold those teachings both inside and outside of the classroom. For non-Catholic or non-practicing Catholics, this is sometimes an extremely sensitive condition of employment; but it is one which they must accept along with their teaching position. It then becomes the responsibility of the principal or head of school to monitor the faculty’s compliance with this requirement. Failing to do so results
in conflicting messages being given to students by dissenting teachers, which undermines the very nature of the school’s identity and mission.

The second word of the defining pair, *community*, likewise bears preeminent status in understanding the identity and mission of the Catholic school. In the image of the Trinity, we are created for relationship; and, for Christians, this relationship is lived out in community. The Catholic school is a unique and Christ-centered community in which care, compassion and concern bind all members together. The genuine care extended to teachers, students and their families by the administrator sets the example for the thoughtfulness which is then shared among the faculty for each other and for their students. This mutual concern creates an atmosphere in which individuals are respected and supported and in which they are comfortable in being themselves and expressing their God-given uniqueness. In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, The Congregation for Catholic Education clearly stated that the, “Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers.”

In a culture in which young people frequently face a multitude of conflicting messages, unstable family life and the pressures of shifting peer relationships, the caring environment of a Catholic school can often be the only stable guidance that students receive. We have a moral responsibility to provide such an environment for our students.

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This thesis, then, has attempted to define the intangible yet very palpable meaning of Catholic identity and demonstrate the magnitude of its role in the daily life of the Catholic school. Its significance cannot be overestimated or over expressed. Every adult and every student who is involved with the school in any way bears a moral obligation to understand and to contribute in a positive way to the particular identity of the school in which they serve. When necessary, professional development should be provided to all employees so that everyone shares in the same goal of creating an environment in which the Catholic identity is known and lived with joy and dedication. In this way, each school can fulfill its true and God-given call as an institution of academic excellence and a community of faith, preparing future generations to be leaders in the Church and in society.
Appendix A

Rationale

Every Catholic educational community is a vibrant faith community of learning, dedicated to academic excellence, fostering quality interpersonal relationships, and a strong sense of belonging. Catholic education contributes to the church’s educational mission, promoting a view of the individual and community centered on the human person and the Gospel vision of Jesus Christ. Following St. Ignatius of Loyola’s model of reflection through communal conversation, this lesson proposes an open conversation with the new faculty members at Padua Academy on the lives and spiritualities of our Patron Saints: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales. The conversations will help to advance the teachers’ understanding of the patron saints and ways in which they can incorporate their lives, essential principles and spiritualities into their classroom. One of the many goals of this lesson, as well as the other monthly conversations, is to provide the teachers with an open space to ask questions, free of judgment. After recognizing the importance of knowing and understanding the church and the school in which they teach, teachers are then called to be agents of faith in their own classrooms through their actions by engaging their students in prayer, reflections, dialogue and listening.

A goal remains in providing a welcoming space for shared theological language and methodology about Catholic identity and to engage each other in promoting a new dialogical paradigm for the faith community. The conversations are a way to engender confidence in the faculty about the rich diversity of Catholicism in the school community.
The monthly conversations create an interconnected and integrated approach to the religious life of the school which can lead to a more profound approach to the development and formation of our students. It gives the school community the ability to establish a common language and shared understanding of the Catholic Church, its teachings, the history of the school and diocese, and the life and spiritualities of our patron saints.

When we offer the tools for formation to teachers to grow in their faith and in their ability to communicate that faith to others, we demonstrate the willingness to empower each other in our vocations as educators in the gospel values.

The Lives and Spiritualities of our Patron Saints: 
St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales

Teacher: MaryAnn Wallen
Month: October 2018

Overview: It is important in each of our schools to name those saints and holy people whose lives we can emulate and who can lead us to a life in Christ. At Padua Academy, the lives and spiritualities of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales have encouraged us in many ways, both in living a simple life and in the value of education, to keep Christ as the center of our lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Identify the patron saints of Padua Academy and recognize why they are important to the life of the school community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Recognize the essential principles of each saint in order to use them as examples of ways to live our own lives focused on Christ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Implement the principles and spiritualities of these saints into each classroom and curricula area.</td>
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<td>Summary of Tasks/actions (60 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Open the monthly conversation with the “Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi” - connect this to the prayer in the main lobby of the school building.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Initiate a brief open discussion on what the new faculty know about the patron saints, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis de Sales</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Distribute a short biography on St. Francis of Assisi. (This can be sent electronically).</td>
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<td>➢ Summarize the essential principles of St. Francis of Assisi through a power point presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ How can one live the principles of St. Francis of Assisi in their own lives today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Distribute a short biography of St. Francis de Sales. (This can be sent electronically)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Summarize the essential principles of St. Francis de Sales through a power point presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ How can one live the principles of St. Francis de Sales in their own lives today?</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Conduct an open conversation on the similarities and differences of the Saints.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Identify ways we can incorporate the lives and spiritualities of our patron saints into our classrooms.</td>
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<td>• (Ex. When conflict arise, using Francis as a model of peacemaking, using the example of Francis de Sales to encourage students to be the best version of themselves.</td>
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<th>Materials/Equipment</th>
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<td>➢ Prayer of St. Francis</td>
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<td>➢ Biography of St. Francis de Sales</td>
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<td>➢ Power point presentation on essential principles</td>
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<td>➢ Overhead Projector/Apple TV</td>
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### Resources

- **Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**
  

- **7 Keys Moments in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi**
  
  [https://www.franciscanmedia.org/7-key-moments-in-the-life-of-saint-francis/](https://www.franciscanmedia.org/7-key-moments-in-the-life-of-saint-francis/)

- **5 lessons from Francis de Sales**
  

### Summary

- The lives of our patron saints at Padua Academy show us ways to lead a life more focused on Christ. St. Francis of Assisi is often held up as an inspiring example of someone who most closely imitated the life of Christ in words, deeds and spirit. He had a deep love for Christ and willingly embraced poverty, chastity and a simple life of humility. St. Francis de Sales has a tremendous gift for spiritual direction, and the timelessness and practicality of his advice remains priceless for modern Christians. We must continue to focus our time and our lives on the pursuit of holiness amid the vast temptations in our every day lives.
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