



DISSERTATION APPROVED BY

August 4, 2020

Date

*Jennifer Moss Breen*

Jennifer Moss Breen, Ph.D., Chair

*Timothy J Cook*

Timothy Cook, Ph.D., Committee Member

*Jennifer Moss Breen*

Jennifer Moss Breen, Ph.D., Director

*Gail M Jensen*

Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

THE DEEPENING OF CATHOLIC IDENTITY THROUGH A FOCUS ON MISSION  
AND SCHOOL CULTURE BY LAY LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY ON A  
DIOCESAN HIGH SCHOOL WITHOUT A RELIGIOUS ORDER AFFILIATION

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By  
CORY N. SEPICH

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in  
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## Abstract

Catholic schools across America are facing numerous challenges. The enrollment trends in Catholic high schools are dropping at larger rates and schools are closing a great deal faster than they are opening (Lackman, 2013). The decline in vowed religious educators in the Catholic Church has added to the pressures put on the lay administrators to combat these challenges (Hunt, 2005; Heft, 2011). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCBB) and other church leaders have called for Catholic schools to deepen their Catholic identity as a way to draw in the faithful and compete against the rise in charter schools and consequent decreased Catholic school enrollment (Lackman, 2013; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). Schools with a religious order have surfaced as institutions with an identity that is anchored in the charism of their order. However, schools without religious orders have greater challenges than their religious order affiliated Catholic brethren due to their lack of history and traditions that focus on mission and thus deepen the Catholic identity needed to compete and stand out from competitors. Using a qualitative case study design, this study explains how one midsized Catholic school in Omaha, Nebraska that is without a religious order, deepened its Catholic identity through the lay leaders' reinforcement of their school's mission through strategic, shared and transformational leadership practices.

*Keywords:* Catholic identity, charism, school culture, mission, lay leader, religious order, strategic leadership, shared leadership, transformational leadership

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## SECTION ONE: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

### **Introduction and Background**

Promoting Catholic identity has been a central theme in recent conversations surrounding the status of Catholic education in the United States. Cardinal Timothy Dolan (2013) of New York noted that Catholic school enrollment has declined by nearly 25% from 2000 to 2013 with 621,583 students leaving Catholic schools over that time nationwide. From 2010 to 2020, Catholic schools across the country saw 1,191 schools closed or consolidated with only 244 schools opening during that same time leaving a 12.8% decrease in the overall number of Catholic schools nationwide. With these school closings, there was a decline of 382,044 students or 18%. Of the Catholic schools most impacted were elementary schools with an overall decline of 24.1% in urban areas and 18.6% in non-urban areas (McDonald, 2020).

Due to the decline, Catholic leaders have voiced their own opinions on how to combat this crisis and carry on the mission of Catholic schools. Both Cardinal Dolan and Bishop David M. O'Connell of Trenton, New Jersey stated that, now more than ever, it is imperative that Catholic schools deepen their identity through a focus on their Catholic mission. The survival of the Catholic educational system is also critical for Catholicism as a whole, as many believe that the most successful way to evangelize the gospel and grow the Church in western countries is through Catholic schools (Dolan, 2012; O'Connell, 2011; Rymarz, 2011). This is because Catholic schools help advance the mission of the Church in a way that gives glory to God (Cook, 2015).

Researchers on Catholic education contend that Catholic schools are successful because they are faith-based and thus have a religious identity (Cook, 2015; Hobbie,

Convey & Schuttloffel, 20120). They also state Catholic schools succeed because they instill a sense of Catholic culture that is rooted in a gospel of love, service and justice within that school (Dolan, 2013). The Catholic school, as defined by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977), is a Catholic institution that teaches students how to receive Jesus in their daily lives and for the greater glory of God. Furthermore, it is this faith-based community that some maintain is the heart of what it means to be a Catholic school (Cook, 2001). Thus, the Catholic school's nurturing of its faith-based community and consequent Catholic school culture is vital to the success of Catholic schools (Dolan, 2013).

It is this distinctive Catholic school culture that brands the Catholic school and sets it apart from its competitors. In lieu of all of the obstacles facing education, such as competing charter schools and sharp declines in enrollment, it is imperative that Catholic schools overcome these obstacles with a resilient sense of mission that comes from an explicit and implicit understanding of what it means to be a Catholic (Bauman, 2011). Therefore, one may ask; if Catholic identity is so important to the survival of Catholic education, what can Catholic school leaders do to deepen the school's Catholic identity? One place to start is with the heart of a school; the mission (O'Connell, 2011).

A school's mission plays an integral role in defining who and what the school and the community are. The mission is what an organization does and who they serve (Cook, 2015; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Rooney, 2005). For the mission to truly serve its purpose in Catholic schools, the statement needs to "breathe life into curriculum, instruction, and activities as well as drive educational decision making" (Cook, 2001, p. 23). Catholic education experts assert that a valuable piece of Catholic identity in schools may be

missing from the equation when a mission is not utilized in every aspect of a school's operations. Thus, when a school community does not properly define and employ its mission, the school's collective destiny may be defined by outside perceptions. It is suggested that schools trying to implement a more effective religious mission must have great urgency in accomplishing these feats. Additionally, school leaders should conduct research about religious mission and provide evidence that their attempts to implement mission into schools can be quantifiable (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008).

A school's mission is "the way things are done around here" (Rooney, 2005, p. 86). Catholic identity is "who we most deeply are and what we bring to any endeavor or work" (Nicolas, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the connection between a school's mission and identity is clear. For a Catholic school, that identity is a Catholic institution rooted in the gospel. For the same Catholic school, mission is how that school lives out that identity in their daily interactions. Mission and identity are vital to the survival of any organization. Therefore, when organizations' mission and identity are not in sync, organizations crumble (O'Connell, 2008). However, when the mission (what we do) is in harmony with the organization's identity (who you are), then modern Catholic schools can fulfill their *raison d'être* to build relationships and consequentially build the church (Cook, 2015; O'Connell, 2011).

When schools are disconnected from their mission the community has a lesser sense of their own "way" and consequently who they truly are as a school. Studies have shown the importance of the Catholic school mission in shaping Catholic identity and in building traditions and cultural significance within the school community. It is the religious aspects of the Catholic school mission that set Catholic schools apart and help

the schools embrace Catholic evangelization (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). In 1997 the Vatican Congregation issued a letter, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, that stated: “It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its ‘structure’ as a genuine instrument of the Church” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 4). Many Catholic schools are able to find that structure mentioned by the Vatican Congregation through the religious orders that founded them.

O’Brien (2004) stated that schools “articulate their Catholicity in terms of the leadership role of religious orders” (p. 222). However, there exist many Catholic high schools in the United States without a religious order. Thus, articulating the school’s Catholic identity as a Catholic institution falls to the school’s administration. However, even with the shrinking influence of religious brothers and sisters in Catholic education, it does not mean that modern Catholic school communities cannot find their own charisms and religious traditions to recruit new students to Catholic schools.

Additionally, these charisms which are the gifts, spirit and inspirations that help schools advance the mission of Catholic schools, can materialize when needed (Cook, 2015).

Given the aforementioned challenges facing Catholic schools, the need to find and celebrate these gifts is now. New Catholic schools are left with the task of defining their own mission that will guide their institutions. Catholic schools without religious orders do not have the hundreds of years of historical perspective accessible to the Jesuits, Benedictines and other various religious designations that can help them in these vital processes. With a focus on the mission of the school and attention to the charisms that advance the mission, Catholic schools can find their distinctive voice. These leaders should also be guided by the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic*

*Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) which includes suggestions on how they can sustain and grow the mission of the Church in their schools.

Another issue facing Catholic schools are modern trends that impact many contemporary Catholic students. Catholic identity today may appear different from previous age brackets. At present, Catholic students have some differentiating characteristics and aspects of spirituality that define them and set them apart from previous Catholic generations (Heft, 2011). If Catholic school leaders want to successfully maintain schools that are driven by a strong sense of mission, they must embrace the changes in how millennial Catholic's view and make sense of Catholic identity. Some have claimed that in our ever-changing world, the purpose of Catholic schools is to foster the development of relationships in our students (Cook, 2015). This appeal to build relationships has been reinforced by Pope Francis as he has asked the world to engage in a "culture of encounter" as all are loved by Christ and our relationships with all people should reflect that love (McElwee, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Lay leaders in schools without religious orders need more guidance on how to cultivate a school culture that advances the mission of Catholic education. Additionally, there are few examples to help lay principals measure their effectiveness in deepening the school's Catholic identity through a focus on the school's religious mission (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008). This study will provide the growing population of lay leaders who are charged to *Teach as Jesus did* (1973) and adhere to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) with suggestions on how they can grow the mission of the Church in their

schools. These examples include a focus on the discovery of school charisms to deepen the Catholic identity of the school and advance the school's mission. This study will also provide lay leaders examples of applied strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories to help them grow their schools in a time of great urgency and sustain a strict adherence to what constitutes an effective Catholic school.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite the limitations of leadership previously provided by religious orders, Catholic high schools can find a way to ground their Catholicity in a way that advances that school's unique identity within the broader diocesan school structure. One Catholic school in Omaha, Nebraska, experienced a "rediscovery" of their school's Catholic mission as the school has created charisms that have created a positive school culture and strengthened their purpose rooted in Catholic identity. This school has dedicated itself to finding new ways to celebrate their mission and these discoveries have led to new lasting rituals, symbols and traditions. These rituals, symbols and traditions are defined as charisms that have galvanized their school's community. Likewise, these charisms have helped put an emphasis on the school's Catholic mission, or "how they do things." Thus, these charisms have deepened the Catholic identity or "who they are" and how they are viewed in their community. Altogether, this sharpened focus on mission has allowed the school without a religious order to brand themselves and stand out amongst their competitors.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the ways leadership at one Catholic high school deepened their Catholic identity through a focus on mission. As a result, this case study will explore the ways leaders used charisms to enhance the vitality

of the school's mission resulting in that deepening of the school's Catholic identity and the leadership qualities that the school's leaders exhibited in order to sustain those efforts to improve their school.

### **Research Questions**

In this exploration of how lay leaders at one Catholic high school advanced the mission of their school and consequentially deepened their Catholic identity, this research will be guided by this principal question: What are the factors that contribute to the advancement of a Diocesan Catholic Secondary School's mission and the deepening of its Catholic identity by a lay faculty and staff in a school without the influences of a religious order?

### **Research Sub Questions**

This case study will be guided by sub questions:

1. How do lay leaders create and sustain a school's mission and promote positive school culture and Catholic identity?
2. What role do administrators, teachers, and students play in the creation and sustainability of culture and Catholic identity?
3. What key leadership qualities are vital for lay leaders to enact meaningful change in the creation and sustainability of culture and Catholic identity?
4. How do charisms help Catholic schools without religious orders focus on mission and brand themselves to distinguish themselves from their competitors?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this dissertation was to provide a guide for lay Catholic school administrators with ways to deepen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission as well as provide a model for how lay Catholic school leaders can carve their

own specific Catholic identity without the anchor and identity of a religious order. In doing so, the aim was to provide school leaders with ideas on how they can overcome the many obstacles taking place in a contemporary Catholic world and brand themselves to stand out amongst their competitors. Lastly, this case study gives future Catholic school leaders and researchers evidence and suggestions for application on the implementation of strategic, shared and transformational leadership attributes in leading and sustaining effective Catholic schools.

### **Methodology**

I used a case study approach within the social constructivism, interpretivist framework. Within this framework, realities are created between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, these realities are shaped by the experiences shared by the two parties. This framework also ensures the values of the participants are honored, respected and subject to negotiation. Within this qualitative research, validation of the research and its findings were a partnership between myself and the participants. This qualitative case study approach allowed me to spend extensive time in the field and study the school and allowed me to get in close with the participants and help add accuracy to the study (Creswell, 2013).

I chose a case study methodology because the approach allowed me to explore a real-life situation within a real-life setting Creswell (2013). The case study methodology also afforded me the ability to explore this experience in context while using a wide variety of data-collection tools, including onsite participant observations, participant interviews, the collections of artifacts and texts. Also, this methodology allowed me to explore the selected school simply through multifarious associations and communities.

Specifically, the case study methodology afforded me the opportunity to cover contextual conditions, as they were extremely pertinent to the study (Yin, 2003).

The approach to this case study is on a constructivist paradigm in accordance with Yin's (2003) assertions that truth is qualified and varies depending upon one person's perspective. This research paradigm recognized that humans can be subjective and create their own meaning in situations but does not reject that humans can also be objective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This design is appropriate for this study as the participants viewed each situation through their own lens and experiences. Thus, the data provided by the participants when checked for reliability and validity helped me form my conclusions for this research.

### **Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following terms are used operationally within this study and these definitions will help the reader understand the background and framework of this study.

*Catholic Education:* Catholic Code of Canon Law (1983) defines Catholic education and a Catholic school as an institution of learning that is grounded in the Catholic faith and its principles. It is an institution in which teachers are required to have sound knowledge of Church doctrine and work closely with parents in the education of the students.

*Lay Leader:* Lay leaders are people in position of leadership that are distinct from clergy. For the purpose of this study, lay leader refers to a person in Catholic education who assumes the roles and responsibilities of leading a school but have not taken the religious vows to that of priest or religious sister.

*Catholic Identity:* Catholic identity is “who we are” and is the unique way of teaching in which Catholic schools invite students to have a relationship with Jesus Christ in a community where "faith, culture and life are brought into harmony" (Cook, 2015, p. 10; CCE, 1988, n. 34; Convey, 2012)

*Organizational Culture:* Organizational culture “points to a group’s ‘soul,’ giving meaning to a group’s existence and experience” (Cook, 2001, p.5). It also defines the group’s individuals whilst “providing a framework for thinking and feeling, a code for relationships, and a lens for interpreting events and the world” (Cook, 2001, p. 5).

*Mission:* Mission is the school’s purpose or “the revered focus of what people do” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p.61). Furthermore, mission includes the “intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 61). In addition, mission shapes and reflects “what the school hopes to accomplish” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 61).

*Religious Order Schools:* Schools that are sponsored by a group of Catholic brothers and sisters who share the same religious vows.

*Schools without Religious Orders:* Schools that belong to a particular diocese but do not have the direction or influence of a religious order or group.

*Charisms:* Charisms, as defined by Cook (2015), are “gifts we give away, not gifts we keep” (p. 5). Cook (2015) adds to this definition in that Catholic school charisms are a school’s “special gifts, particular spirit and focused identity” (p. 9). Charisms can include religious traditions, symbols, icons and stories.

*Strategic Leadership:* Successful strategic leadership is defined as a leader's realization in communicating the vision and moral purpose of one's organization and turning it into achievement. Similar to transformational leadership, strategic leadership focuses on establishing a direction for the organization and providing the capacity for change that goes beyond a transactional relationship between leaders and their followers (Davies & Davies, 2004).

*Shared Leadership:* Shared leadership is a concept of leadership that offers a "team-level phenomenon where behaviors are enacted by multiple individuals rather than solely by those at the top or by those in formal leadership roles" (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, p. 297). Shared leadership is counterpart to self-leadership which focuses on an independent and self-sufficient leader who sets the goals and is responsible for monitoring the followers whereas shared leadership focuses on "the ability to connect with others in achieving team or group objectives" (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, p. 297).

*Transformational Leadership:* As defined by Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011), successful transformational leadership is based "on a capacity to develop and promote values and goals that are shared by both leaders and followers" and assumes that successful leadership is not the transactional approach but instead "pursues a higher-order sense of morality and purpose" (p. 251).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases**

There may exist several delimitations that could prevent the findings in this study from being applicable for all lay Catholic school leaders. The findings in this study are for a Catholic school that has a traditional Diocesan leadership structure and may not be

applicable to lay leaders under newer or more non-traditional school organizational models.

One limitation is that only one high school is included in this case study and therefore, the school may not be representative of all Catholic high schools without a religious order affiliation. In addition, the school that was studied represents only one region of the United States and therefore the findings may not be generalizable to other Catholic schools in various regions across the country. Another limitation is that only a high school was used in the study and thus the results may not fully solicit the necessary information for elementary and middle school Catholic leaders, due to this organizational difference. An additional limitation is that the selected high school for the case study does not represent a school that is at risk of closing and thus may not have specific evidence pertaining to Catholic school leaders leading a school in that specific situation, specifically more at risk of closing urban schools.

The selection of the people interviewed in the study consisted of past school leaders who helped in the formation of the school and current leaders who continue to direct the school. One limitation for this study is that the participants may have altered their answers knowing that I am a principal in the Archdiocese of Omaha and that I have a professional relationship with both the school's past and current leaders. I was also aware and understood that my own role in Catholic school leadership advised my research (Creswell, 2013).

Finally, the sample of teachers and school leaders interviewed for this study were through the recommendations from the school's current leadership team based on criteria given to me. One limitation was that the participants could have been recommended

because of the hope that they would give favorable responses that pleased the current school leadership and consequently could have led to adjusted responses.

### **The Role of Leadership in this Study**

Within leadership there exist many pitfalls and elements of governance that must be applied to one's mind and practice (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson, 2014). This study addresses the importance of ethical considerations in leadership decision making and the effect that transformational leaders have in meeting the challenges modern Catholic schools are facing (Johnson, 2014). Additionally, the importance of reflection-based practices within leadership is included in the study, through an investigation on how lay leaders analyze the decisions they make while attempting to deepen their school's Catholic identity. This investigation includes the analysis of strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories and their influences on how leaders can successfully advance the mission of their respective schools and deepen the Catholic identity within their organizations.

### **Reflections of the Researcher**

I am a principal at a Catholic school and have seen the decline in enrollment in Catholic schools, especially in the Archdiocese of Omaha both in urban and non-urban settings. I have led a school through processes aimed at strengthening the Catholic identity of the school through a re-creation of the school's mission. Those efforts resulted in a substantial increase in enrollment and improved school culture. Those successes were due to evidence-based practices, strategic planning, constant reflection and applied concepts from leadership theories. There existed few anecdotal "road maps" with real world solutions for me as a lay Catholic school leader in those aforementioned attempts

to deepen my own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008).

It is my hope that this study can serve as a model for Catholic administrators searching for ways to strengthen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission. My hope is to provide a model to all lay Catholic school leaders through the exploration of how school leaders can shape their own unique Catholic identity through the application of strategic, shared and transformational leadership concepts, especially if they are without the influence of the traditions of Catholic orders. In doing so I hope that these school leaders can strengthen their school's Catholic identities as a way to reverse the negative trends in Catholic school enrollment and brand themselves to stand out amongst the growing competition in twenty-first century education.

### **Significance of the Dissertation in Practice Study**

Since 2000, the Catholic Church and its U.S. schools have witnessed a large decline in enrollment (Dolan, 2013; Heft, 2011; McDonald, 2020). In 2013 the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) reported that 148 schools were either consolidated or closed with only 28 new schools opening nationwide (McDonald & Schultz, 2013). This trend of declining enrollment and school closings continued into 2020 (McDonald, 2020). Since this time many conferences and meetings have been held within the United States to try and combat these declines. In the face of these declines the value of Catholic education has not changed. In times where there is a climate of increasing secularism, Catholic schools continue to out produce their public and charter school competitors in test scores and other academic achievements (Dolan, 2013).

Research exists that proves that Catholic schools are needed. Although it is the mission of

the Catholic school to educate, the effects of that education on students and society as a whole depend on how Catholic schools educate in a way to continue to stand out from their public school peers (O'Connell, 2011).

Mission is what drives schools and through the deeds and actions that are lived through those missions, what delineates a school's identity. Cook (2015) states that those deeds and actions are charisms in Catholic schools. Furthermore, charisms are specific gifts that reinforce the school's mission and help deepen Catholic identity. Therefore, a fervent sense of mission is needed to reverse the negative trends in Catholic school enrollment and school closures, as it is that distinct Catholic identity that sets them apart from their competitors. However, most Catholic high schools in the United States have an affiliation with religious orders that help them delineate their own Catholic identity through those inherit charisms that reinforce a Catholic school's mission.

The rationale for this case study is to help provide a meaningful example of how these lay-led, schools without religious orders can overcome the current decline in enrollment and deepen their Catholic identity through a focus on the school's religious mission. Catholic school leaders must pay attention to changing dynamics and belief systems of the millennial Catholic students they are educating (Heft, 2011). Current research and literature do not provide these Catholic schools without religious orders real-world examples on how school leaders can deepen their students understanding of Catholic identity with appropriately applied leadership theories in a modern context and continuing the mission of the Catholic school and Church. The site selected for this case study is an example of an organization that has embodied how lay leaders can successfully transform their school's sense of mission resulting in a deepening of their

Catholic identity through those applications. This case study can serve as a model for Catholic school leaders who are looking to strengthen their school's Catholic identity through their own unique, faith-based mission with strategic, shared and transformational leadership practices.

Lastly, this case study can give future Catholic school researchers evidence on how to further research mission and Catholic identity in schools without religious orders. This case study should give these same individuals examples for further research on how to look at the modern issues of Catholic identity in schools through a variety of teacher, staff, stakeholder and administrators' perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2009).

### **Summary**

The current crisis facing Catholic schools is seemingly daunting. Catholic schools are closing at a much faster rate than they are opening. The vitality of the American Catholic school is directly tied to the Catholic church's mission as the schools are one of the main vehicles for the evangelization of the Church in the United States. In order to separate themselves from their competitors, Catholic leaders are calling for a strengthening of Catholic identity as it is the faith-based community that separates Catholic schools from their counterparts. One trend in Catholic education is the decline in people taking religious vows. With that decline, the traditional leadership source of Catholic schools has also declined. However, with the decline of the religious vowed in Catholic schools, there has been a sharp increase in lay Catholic school leadership with a great majority of Catholic schools now being lay led (Heft, 2011). Moreover, the need to grow enrollment, even in the case of opening schools, will fall to lay leadership. Those lay leaders must be stewards of the Catholic mission in their schools to celebrate Catholic

identity and use it to advance that religious mission to set themselves apart from the competition.

Some suggest that the competition between public and private schools has dominated most of the research in regard to leadership rather than faith-based leadership theories (Gros, 1999). The purpose of this case study is to provide research-based evidence on how lay leaders can successfully navigate the leadership qualities needed to guide them on this vital path to deepening their school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission. The case study gives lay Catholic leaders evidence on how to put mission at the forefront of their schools and how this placement of mission heightens the sense of Catholic identity in the schools. This case study could be a vital resource for the reopening of Catholic schools as it will show how lay leaders were able to deepen their Catholic identity without the traditions of a religious order and through the application of strategic, shared and transformational leadership. This study shows how these lay leaders can create their own traditions whilst still growing their Catholic identity that sets themselves apart from the competition. In the next chapter, I will provide a review of the contemporary challenges facing Catholic schools, the role of the lay leader as well as Catholic identity, mission and leadership theories.

## SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

The dynamics of Catholic schools are changing. These schools are facing a reduction in the number of religious members that traditionally have served as full-time faculty members in schools (Heft, 2009). Over the past three decades, the number of nuns, brothers and male seminarians have been cut in half and the decline is continuing (Stark & Finke, 2000). Coinciding with the decline in people entering religious orders is the decline in American Catholic school enrollment. Many contend that no other country has a stronger connection between the mission of the Church and the health of Catholic schools, especially after the changes made post-Vatican II. As United States Catholic schools continue to have negative trends in enrollment, the evangelical mission of the Church may be in trouble (Denig & Dosen, 2009). Furthermore, due to rise in competitors like charter schools and the decline in the religiously vowed, Catholic schools are losing their role in the evangelization of the Church as enrollment decreases (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Lackman, 2013). The future of evangelism and the Catholic school is at a critical crossroads.

Catholic schools' future and thus, the evangelization of the Church in the United States, will require lay leaders to be committed to a union between the mission of the church and the Catholic school. It is vital that each Catholic school has its own mission that is steeped in the critical elements of the Church's mission: "evangelization, community, holistic development, public worship, social justice, and service" (Denig & Dosen, 2009, p. 150). Other findings add that lay leaders must not only be professionally knowledgeable but also spiritually competent. This is principally urgent in times of

ecclesial change as lay leaders must preserve and enrich their school's Catholic identity and culture for the future of the Church (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Lay leaders can find direction with these important tasks is by adhering to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These standards include the defining characteristics of Catholic schools that are successful in preserving Catholic identity and advancing the mission of the Church.

This literature review investigates the how lay leaders can continue the calling set forth by the religious brothers and sisters who previously lead U.S. Catholic schools and how lay leaders can nurture and develop a Catholic school community through a focus on mission. This literature review will also explore Catholic education in context so as to paint a portrait of Catholic education in the United States both in the past and in the twenty-first century. Also, this literature review will investigate ways in which modern Catholic school leaders can deepen their school's Catholic identity through adherence to Catholic standards and benchmarks and through charisms that bring the school mission to life. Lastly, this literature review will examine the qualities of strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories that can help lay leaders in Catholic schools focus on mission and both deepen and sustain the school's own unique sense of Catholic identity.

### **Catholic Leadership in Educational Contexts**

#### **Pre-Vatican II**

Studies on the mission of Catholic schools suggests that there was a change in the dimensions of the Catholic school mission at the time of the Second Vatican Council (Denig & Dosen, 2009). Catholic schools have existed in North America and parts of

what would become the United States as early as the 1600's when Franciscan brothers created missions in the Southwest (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Kealey & Kealey, 2003; Walch, 2003). French Capuchins and Ursuline sisters established schools in New Orleans and in the early 1800s Elizabeth Seton established schools on the East coast of the United States and became known fondly as the Mother of Catholic Schools (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Kealey & Kealey, 2003; Walch, 2003).

Post-colonial times were marked with strong anti-Catholic sentiments in the United States with the Protestant populations making up the majority of the United States. Overtime those demographics shifted as massive immigration made Catholics in the United States the largest denomination. The growing Catholic presence in the United States created fears about shifts in power to the Catholic Church in America and a reduction in power of the Protestant power structures. This fear led states to adopt amendments that prohibited public funding to religious schools (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Kealey & Kealey, 2003; Walch, 2003).

In response, the American Catholic Bishops met in 1884 to make sure that almost every Catholic parish had a school and required all Catholic parents to have their children attend their parish's school (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Kealey & Kealey, 2003; Walch, 2003). Consequently, the number of Catholic schools in the United States grew immensely and by 1966 there existed near 13,300 Catholic schools with over 5.5 million students (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Walch, 2003). Thus, the two key dimensions of Catholic school missions at the start of the Second Vatican Council, was to serve as a vehicle to catechize Catholic youth and to serve as a Catholic community for immigrant populations who they felt were at risk of becoming Protestant (Denig & Dosen, 2009).

## **Post-Vatican II**

The Second Vatican Council created an evolution in ecclesial thinking that changed the ministry of the Church from being inward as a means to protect Catholicism from fear of Protestantism to an outward approach to growing the faith (DeFiore, 2011; Denig & Dosen, 2009; Walch, 2003). Included in that outward approach was enrolling more non-Catholics and working to empower the poor in America's inner cities (DeFiore, 2011; Denig & Dosen, 2009; Walch, 2003). Additionally, Catholic and Protestants had a common threat in secularism and lessened their competition amongst the faiths. As Catholic schools grew outward, their goals had an emphasis on faith-based instruction and evangelization (Denig & Dosen, 2009). Additionally, Catholic schools changed from their fear of Protestant evangelization to changing society with a focus on service to others and a commitment to social justice (DeFiore, 2011; Denig & Dosen, 2009; Walch, 2003).

### **Shifts in Leadership and Rationale**

Post-Vatican II also coincided with the start of a decline in the population of the religious vowed and their leadership in Catholic schools. Popular explanations for the decline in the religious vowed include the Catholic Church's inability to respond to the traditional sacrifices that taking religious vows has on the newer generations of Catholic people. In addition, people contend that secular social changes have lessened the appeal of becoming a religious brother or sister to many young men and women. Others propose that the decline in the religious vowed is due to changes made by the second Vatican Council (Stark & Finke, 2000).

The decline in professed religious vowed has had a profound effect on Catholic schools in the United States and consequently the evangelical mission of the Church. For two centuries, the American Catholic community was nurtured and led by dedicated religiously vowed who served as the soul for the evangelization of the Church (Jacobs, 1998). Now, the evangelization within the school communities falls largely to lay leaders (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Hansen, 2001; Jacobs, 1998, McClelland, 1996). This is an audacious responsibility for lay leaders for the reason that when evangelization is carried out in the school's community, the Church can truly transform the lives of those in their community (Denig & Dosen, 2009).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 1972) stated in *To Teach as Jesus Did* that education is one of the most vital means for the Catholic Church to build a sense of community and maintain the dignity of the person. Consequently, the people entrusted with this evangelization in Catholic schools are the lay Catholic school leaders and with the decline in the numbers of the religious vowed, this role is ever present (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Heft, 2009).

### **Contemporary Challenges in Catholic Educational Lay Leadership**

Byrk (2008) stated that Catholic education in the United States faces “on the wall” issues, which include a need for resources in lower economic schools (p. 139). Other challenges include financial limitations, changing demographics, barriers for families to access Catholic schools, weak leadership, new organizational complications, staffing crises and religious pluralism (Cook, 2015; Rieckhoff, 2014; Schuttloffel, 2013). Adding to these challenges, Catholic schools have a wider arrange of competitors beyond the traditional public schools. In this modern educational climate, Catholic schools must

promote themselves to stand out from public and charter schools as well as the growing rise in home and virtual schooling (Cook, 2015). Nevertheless, the need to both recruit and develop Catholic school leaders is vital to the success of Catholic schools. Byrk (2008) added, “A school is only as good as the quality of people you have and their capacity to work together” (p. 139). Consequently, the building of that capacity is often put on the shoulders of the lay Catholic school administrator. For the Catholic school leader, findings have determined that their leadership must build the capacity in teamwork as well as cultural and spiritual capital (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006).

There exist many challenges for the modern Catholic school leader in building the cultural and spiritual capital of their schools. These challenges include more religious freedom and openness to the world post Vatican II as well as the plurality of beliefs that came with this freedom (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). The mission of Catholic schools has not fundamentally changed but ecclesial shifts have influenced the organization of the Catholic schools and how they operate (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). These ecclesial shifts, along with cultural changes, have influenced how Catholic schools are thought of. Cook (2008) noted that Catholic school identity was previously thought of in regard to classic Catholic school paradigms of nuns teaching religion classes and students in uniforms. Now, those classic associations to Catholic school identity has shifted to how Catholic schools teach, not the people who are teaching or what students wear while learning (Cook, 2008).

Twenty-first century students are living in a world that is fragmented and often dehumanizing (Cook, 2008). Additionally, modern students are showing a tendency to

reject conventional forms of religious expression (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Catholic school leaders are challenged to deepen the Catholic identity of their schools in ever changing religious and social realities and as Catholic institutions they are charged with the task to advance the Church's mission (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006).

### **The Catholic School Leader**

In an ever-changing landscape, effective leadership is needed in Catholic schools in order for the schools to realize their missions in face of the aforementioned challenges (Cook, 2008). Belmonte, Cranston and Limerick (2006) have asked a very important question; "How then do lay principals in Catholic schools, in this complex and changing context, perceive their role in promoting a Catholic culture and character?" (p. 4). Lay principals in Catholic schools are often assessed on their abilities as both an educational and spiritual leader. The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) section on "Governance and Leadership" emphasizes the role of the Catholic school leader as the person responsible for the overseeing of the faithfulness to the mission of the school.

Catholic principals are not only school leaders but also agents of the Church and therefore stewards of the heritage of the Church (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). The role of the lay leader in Catholic schools is expanding quickly. It has been noted that in many Catholic institutions, there is a chance that the charisms of the founding religious orders may no longer be underscored and there exists no promises that Catholic religious orders will always continue to exist (Heft, 2009). However, the Catholic church has continued to evolve and the challenge for the lay leaders is to distinguish "the intellectual mission of their institutions as Catholic" orders (Heft, 2009, p. 382).

Currently, over 60% of Catholic higher education institutions are now led by lay leaders. This is a drastic change when compared to before 1960 with larger amounts of religious brothers and sisters leading schools (Hansen, 2001; Heft, 2009; Gardner, 2006). Over the past 30 years, lay leaders are founding new Catholic educational institutions and these leaders desire a clearer focus on how Catholic identity plays a role in all school happenings (Hansen, 2001; Heft, 2009). These lay Catholic school leaders are searching for more training centered on school mission and identity of their Catholic schools and how they can be better evangelical leaders (Hansen, 2001; Heft, 2009). For decades, the American Catholic Church was maintained by the religious sisters and brothers who also served through Catholic education and schools and now the torch has been firmly passed (Jacobs, 1998).

Some fear that the mission of Catholic education will be changed or worsen if lay leaders fail in the cultivation of Catholic values. However, others see lay leadership in Catholic schools as a way to strengthen the Catholic school mission. Some argue that due to clergy continually sponsoring Catholic identity in their daily routines, the choices they make may not be as conscious as the lay leader in regard to how Catholic identity is carried out. Thus, some think that the choices may be less purposeful (Gardner, 2006). Research exists that states that Catholic schools distinguish themselves from their competitors because of the religious nature of their mission and the unique characteristics that pass on Catholic traditions and identity to new generations (Belmonte & Cranston, 2013). Therefore, to carry forth Catholic identity and traditions to new generations, lay Catholic leaders must be well versed and prepared for carrying out the church's mission and evangelization of the Church.

Part of this preparation for lay leaders is to understand the nature of the newer generations of Catholic students. These newer generations are often identified as Generation X or Millennials and their practices are different than previous generations. The election of Pope Francis in 2013 galvanized many young Catholics due to his message of service and is especially meaningful to the newer generations of youth who were raised in a global society and want to travel and experience the world. Some believe that Catholic school leaders must model the leadership of Pope Francis and establish Catholic school cultures that include service as part of their Catholic identity to continue the renewal of energy with Catholic youth (Schuttloffel, 2013).

### **Pastor as Principal**

The United States Catholic Conference defined the leadership roles of a Catholic school administrator as threefold: educational, spiritual and managerial (Ciriello, 1994; Rieckhoff, 2014). For Catholic school leaders, it is the spiritual element that sets them apart from their public school counterparts and is unique to the Catholic principal role. For the spiritual role, the Catholic principal must lead the faith development of the students and become a steward of the Christian school community (Rieckhoff, 2014). This emphasis can be seen in the previously described *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) *section* on “Governance and Leadership.” Additionally, the Catholic principal must be well versed in the history of Catholic schools and the teachings of the Church (Rieckhoff, 2014).

Rieckhoff (2014) found that for novice Catholic principals, there is no model to support them in the many areas that they are responsible for, including the spiritual role.

In the spiritual role, Ciriello (1994) identified four responsibilities that principals must attend to: nurturing the faith development of the school community, make certain the school provides worthy Catholic religious instruction, provide opportunities to live out and observe Catholic traditions and support consistent Catholic practices of service and worship (Rieckhoff, 2014). For new Catholic school lay leaders, this is a complex set of responsibilities and expectations.

Another issue that arises with Catholic lay leaders is the assessment of Catholic identity and culture. It has been noted that Catholic schools are facing numerous challenges so the importance of the Catholic school's religious mission in strengthening Catholic identity has never been more urgent. There exists a strong call for a significant emphasis put on assessing schools for accountability in this identity and culture urgency (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008). For Catholic schools, the effectiveness of their religious mission must also be a priority for school leaders. Making leaders aware of this urgency, convincing leaders to make improvements in areas related to mission and identity and measuring the improvements if they are made are enormous challenges (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008).

Because lay leaders are without the spiritual training of their religiously ordered ancestors, an emphasis has been put on training Catholic school leaders for the unique responsibilities of leading a faith-based schools. There is a fear among some Catholics that Catholic identity and mission in schools will change for the worse if lay leaders are not prepared to cultivate Catholic tenets and charisms. Conversely, some have asserted that because lay school leaders must be more conscious in how they personify Catholic identity in their schools than the previously religiously vowed, deepening Catholic

identity in schools by these lay leaders may pilot more purposeful activities (Gardner, 2006). Regardless, the transition from clergy to lay leaders in Catholic education is a huge shift and has led to the creation of new strategies and programs to train lay leaders on how to be stewards of their school's Catholic mission.

Novice principals have many challenges and have complex roles in being the stewards of the Catholic school's mission. New Catholic principals need support from other Catholic leaders and can benefit from consistent principal mentorship (Rieckhoff, 2014). Additionally, the focus on training lay leaders to take on the complexities of the profession as a Catholic administrator has expanded. Concerns on the proper training for principals in the role of the spiritual leader has led to universities across the country creating higher education programs specific to Catholic school leadership (Hanbury, Fox & Mitchel, 2000).

### **Preserving and Deepening Catholic Identity and Culture**

#### **National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools**

A common question that is asked in Catholic education is “What is a Catholic school?” or “What makes Catholic schools inherently Catholic?” (Groome, 1996).

Groome (1996) answered these questions, stating:

“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 Catholic schools” (p. 107).

Furthermore, the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) was created by Catholic leaders and scholars across the United States to:

“describe how the most mission-driven, program effective, well managed, and responsibly governed Catholic schools operate. They are offered as school effectiveness standards rather than curriculum content standards, although they support curriculum development with national standards and the Common Core State Standards” (p. VI).

The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012) includes defining characteristics that delineate what the identity is for Catholic schools. These characteristics are:

1. Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ
2. Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church
3. Distinguished by Excellence
4. Committed to Educate the Whole Child
5. Steeped in a Catholic Worldview
6. Sustained by Gospel Witness
7. Shaped by Communion and Community
8. Accessible to All Students
9. Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop

The defining characteristics previously listed substantiate and authenticate the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). Those standards and subsequent benchmarks elucidate elements that should be in the operations of all Catholic schools while the benchmarks make those standards measurable and add specific details to the standards. Overall, there are seventy benchmarks that provide observable and measurable signifiers

for the thirteen standards that “describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in Catholic schools in four Domains: Mission and Culture, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality” Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

Subsequently, the nine characteristics define the profound Catholic identity for Catholic schools and as a consequence provide the platform for the standards and benchmarks. The first defining characteristic, “Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ”, states that all school programs and activities need to lead the stakeholders to closer personal relationship with Jesus Christ and be communal witnesses to the Gospel’s message of love of God and a commitment to issues of social justice, like poverty. The second characteristic, “Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church”, states that Catholic schools are an evangelizing arm of the greater Catholic church and that the culture and environment of the school needs to convey, both visibly and non-visibly, signs of Catholic culture and identity. The third characteristic, “Distinguished by Excellence”, clearly expounds that Catholic schools are defined by excellence in all areas and that school leaders must have ongoing strategic processes and structures to make sure that that the school is always striving for excellence and evaluating the all aspects of the school routinely (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

The fourth defining characteristic is “Committed to Educate the Whole Child.” This characteristic reflects that Catholic schools must be rooted in educating the entire child, forming students who are well-rounded and have growth spiritually, morally, academically, mentally as well as socially and physically. Similarly, the fifth characteristic, “Steeped in a Catholic Worldview”, states that a Catholic school

curriculum should extend beyond the walls of just the school and the local community, but instead foster a world view that aims to seek wisdom, truth and promote social justice. It states this responsibility should not fall to just the religious brothers and sisters or the school's religious education, curriculum or campus ministry program. The sixth characteristic of Catholic education is "Sustained by Gospel Witness" which indicates that Catholic leaders and educators all have a role to play in being active participants in the school and modeling to the students and all stakeholders a commitment to the school's Catholic mission (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Characteristic seven continues a similar theme of community ownership to that of characteristic six. Characteristic seven explains a Catholic school is a community and thus must make it a priority to engage all school internal and external stakeholders in a true, collaborative community of faith (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The eighth characteristic, "Accessible to All Students", expresses Catholic schools need to be available to anyone who wants a Catholic education and Catholic school leaders should work to overcome all barriers to accessibility to any student who wants to attend their school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The ninth and last characteristic is "Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop." This defining characteristic delineates Catholic schools need to have a strong relationship with the Catholic Bishops and have a cooperative relationship that recognizes and respects the authority of the Bishops (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Paprocki (2011) furthered that for all Catholics, not just schools, there are five characteristics that define what it means to be Catholic. The characteristics include: a sense of sacramentality, a commitment to community, a respect for the dignity of human

life and a commitment to justice, a reverence for scripture and tradition and a disposition to faith and hope, not despair. Catholic identity also includes the distinctive aspects that make a school Catholic or the distinguishing features that affirms what it means to be a Catholic school (Cook & Davies, 2009; Paprocki, 2011). If identity is who you are, then a Catholic school's identity is a school that develops the entire child, academically, socially, physically and spiritually while also providing an education that centers on the evangelization of the church (Earl, 2012).

In observance to mission and Catholic identity, the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) highlight that exceptional Catholic schools are driven by the school's Catholic mission and encompasses a Catholic identity steeped in the same defining standards delineated by Paprocki (2011).

One of the most distinctive aspects of Catholic school identity is academic excellence (Byrk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Cook 1998; Gros, 1999, Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) underscore that superior Catholic schools provide a demanding academic curriculum rooted in and integrated with in the mission of the Catholic Church. Cook (1998) adds that one could deduce that if a Catholic school is mediocre in academics then the school is also mediocre in Catholic identity.

Cook (2001) denotes that Catholic identity and the Church's values and virtues should be seen in every aspect of the school's curriculum and daily routines (Cook, 2001). The instruction of faith and religion should not be compartmentalized into the

regular classroom block or period (Cook, 2001). Faith and religion should be intertwined into the framework of instruction and learning (Krebbs, 2012, Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) describe in the benchmarks for "Mission and Catholic Identity" that scripture should be integrated into all subjects and that the school's Catholic culture should be seen in the arts, sports and within the building's physical walls. Cook (1998) asserted that although academic excellence is important in sustaining Catholic identity, it is evangelization of the Church's mission that is the Catholic school's essential reason for existence. This evangelization should be seen in all aspects of the school.

Engel (2020) also mapped out the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) by aligning each defining characteristic with the ancient marks of the church from the Nicene Creed of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Under "one", Engel (2020) mapped "Centered on the Person of Christ" and "Shaped by Communion and Community" as a school community is one when Jesus is the center of the school's purpose and also that the school community is made up of many. Additionally, the ancient mark of the church "holy" is mapped with the defining characteristics of "Steeped in a Catholic Worldview" and "Accessible to all Students." This is because Engel (2020) shares that "the Catholic worldview insists all of creation can manifest God's presence, love, and power" and to be truly "holy" Catholic schools need to be open to all of God's creations (p. 6).

Engel (2020) adds that the ancient mark “Catholic” is mapped with the defining characteristics “Committed to Educate the Whole Child” and “Distinguished by Excellence” as “Jesus redeems the whole person, not just one’s intellect” and that to be a “Catholic” school the education provided must be transcendent like the Church itself (p. 7). Lastly, the mark “Apostolic” includes the defining characteristics “Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church,” “Sustained Gospel Witness” and “Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop” because the Catholic church exists to bring more people into the church, create living witnesses and must do so under the leadership structure set forth by the church (Engel, 2020).

### **Mission of Catholic Schools**

Cook (1998) emphasizes that a school’s religious mission is the school’s purpose. A school’s mission is the purpose of what the school is and states its existence, values and includes the school’s sense of duty to educate its students (Boerema, 2006; Slate, Jones, Wiesman, Alexander & Saenz, 2008; Ozdem, 2011). As demarcated by the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012), admirable Catholic schools adhere to their mission through: embracing the Catholic identity of the mission, providing a rigorous scholastic curriculum, actively push students to live their faith outside of the school and developing the faith formation for school staff.

The mission statement is not a vision that helps delineate the school’s steps for improvement and direction. It is instead the explanation for why a school has taken those steps to improve. Additionally, the actual mission statement bequeaths the public the image of the school and aligns the school’s community with the purpose of the school

(Wilmore, 2002). Others have described a school's mission statement as a compass that provides direction to an organization and makes sure that the organization stays on course in meeting the goals set forth by the mission (Slate, Jones, Wiesman, Alexander & Saenz, 2008; Cook, 2001).

Mission statements can often be two-fold, with the first part providing an outline to delineate the purpose of the school and the second part providing more specific detail to the purpose. The process of creating a school mission statement should be a collaborative process, involving the teachers and other school stakeholders to make it a unified statement of intent (Wilmore, 2002). The collaborative process is important because the mission sets forth the path to outcomes that the administrators, teachers, support staff, students and community members will be working towards (Boerema, 2006). The importance of a school's mission and statement of that mission cannot be understated as it is the reason for the school's existence. It is important that mission statements are not merely words that serve little purpose or have insignificant meaning to a school. Many school leaders have produced quickly written statements that are not remembered or cannot be recited by school members. Additionally, some mission statements focus solely on student academic successes and achievement and not more purposeful values that school stakeholders hold dearer (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Research on private school mission statements highlight that private schools may have great success in maximizing their school goals as they both aim to maximize for the common good of all citizens and their goals arise from "a family, church, or local community" (Boerema, 2006, p. 199). Most faith-based schools' fundamental goal is an education that includes religious and spiritual development. Catholic Canon Law on

Catholic schools states in Can. 795:

Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life.

Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski (2008) stated Catholic schools must insert the religious aspects of education into all aspects of the school and religious education must be organically harmonized with the whole of education with leaders guaranteeing the development of the entire child in a Catholic education.

For all schools, both public and private, the mission statement explains to the school's community its' purpose and the mission statement should be a guiding force in everything a school does (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). If the school's mission statement is the bedrock of a school, then it adds stability throughout the entire school (Cook, 2001). The Catholic school mission should also include aspects that make up a strong Catholic culture, identity, inspiration and destiny. Thus, a Catholic school mission statement should guide the school in those areas as well (Cook, 2001; 2015).

Because the mission statement is so important in guiding a school and creating a positive culture, the words should appear throughout a school (Cook, 2001; 2015). Lay leaders must be consciousness to discuss the mission of the school in speeches, staff meetings and other school discussions. Lay leaders should model and monitor how their staff are living out the mission and encourage all who are involved in the school's

community to integrate the mission in their daily practice (Cook, 2015; Gardner, 2006). Visitors should know right away whether a school is Catholic after reading the mission statement. One should know if a school is Catholic from the symbols and unspoken signs of Catholicity such as crucifixes, icons and art. Merely displaying a Catholic mission statement will not change the school's culture and will not enhance the Catholic identity of the school if it does not drive all that the school does or represent what the school values (Cook, 2001, 2015). A mission statement should have a higher calling and connect the stakeholders of the school to why it exists (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

### **Connecting Mission, Culture and Charism to Catholic Identity**

One way to recapitulate how Catholic identity, mission and culture connect is by associating Catholic identity with identity, or who we are. Mission is how one lives out that identity and by whom one serves (Cook, 2015). A school's mission is the clearly defined and articulated way of how things should be done within an organization and a school's mission also serves as a foundation of its culture (Rooney, 2005; Deal & Peterson, 2009). The mission is bedrock of the school and school culture is the summation of the very important aspects of that school and becomes the way things are done, or the daily routine or way of life (Cook, 1998). Catholic identity is "who we most deeply are and what we bring to any endeavor or work" (Nicolas, 2009). Therefore, the connection between a school's mission and identity is clear for Catholic schools as faith-based institutions. Although they are not the same, identity and mission need to be inseparable for a Catholic school to be successful. When an organizations' mission and identity are not in sync, organizations crumble. However, when the mission, "what we do", is in harmony with the organization's identity, "who you are", then validity is

created (O'Connell, 2011). Mission is how things are done and those deeds define the identity of what a school is.

Excellent Catholic schools have a fervent sense of their Catholic mission that has a sharp focus on the school's Catholic identity (Cook, 2015; Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Lydon (2009) asserts that the best way to maintain that focus on Catholic identity is through charisms and the grace that comes through charisms. Charisms are a variety of gifts we give away, including teaching and leadership. For many years, charisms were previously associated with the religious orders and their founders and if the future of Catholic schools will be without the presence of religious brothers and sisters, the responsibility of carrying on the traditions and charisms of religious orders and the Catholic church will fall to lay leaders. However, it is argued that this may not be a negative reality, as traditions are passed on from teachers to pupils, much like Jesus did with his apostles and the passing of charisms on to lay leaders who were inspired by religious orders can still be effective in maintaining and inspiring others with their charisms and gifts (Lydon, 2009).

The nucleus of any school's culture is the mission statement and in creating and sustaining positive school culture, it begins with the mission. In a similar manner, a strong school mission will implant the intangible dynamisms that motivates all of the educators to teach and for the students to learn (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Mission plays a large part in a school's identity that shapes how it determines its success. Catholic schools live in two worlds regarding to their mission effectiveness; academic and religious (Guerra, 2000). However, the definitions of success can vary depending upon the school or the institution (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Due to the spiritual and religious

nature of Catholic institutions, the success of the Catholic schools would be defined by their spiritual and religious purpose set forth in its missions. These goals set forth by the mission are better obtained through the gifts of school charisms. This is because the charisms provide focus, faith-based vocabulary, service to others and the celebrations of Catholic traditions (Cook, 2015). What makes the Catholic school distinctive from their counterparts is the relationship between the school's culture and the gospel (Hansen, 2001). This branding or what is distinctive about the Catholic school is something that charism provides the school (Cook, 2015).

Simonds and Cook (2020) presented a way for Catholic school leaders to lead their stakeholders in a process of discernment to discover or revitalize their school's charisms. First, the suggestion is to set up a group with invitations to a wide array of school stakeholders and meet to review aspects that make up a school's Catholic identity like mission, vision, mottos and logos. After the review, the group would suggest changes to a school mission statement based on the vision statement and then to get confirmation for the school's new charism through a thorough sharing of the group's results. Simonds and Cook (2020) also noted that schools can better claim their Catholic identity by creating timelines that denote the history of a school's Catholic practices and traditions. They expanded on this suggestion by adding that this process should be a shared process with many stakeholders including faculty and staff but also extending to parents, alumni and school board members to offer more depth and have more buy in. Much like how Engel (2020) demarcated the marks of the Church with the nine defining characteristics from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), Simonds and Cook (2020) suggested

Catholic school leaders should also work with their stakeholders to evaluate those characteristics and how they “epitomize highly effective and mission-driven Catholic schools” in all areas such as hiring practices, faculty formation and something routine like a school’s daily schedule and yearly calendar (p. 16).

### **Cultivating Catholic Identity Through Mission Based Focus**

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Vatican became worried that Catholic institutions, specifically Catholic colleges and universities, were becoming more and more independent and feared that with dissipating influence, these United States Catholic institutions were losing important parts of their Catholic identity. This fear led to Pope John Paul II creating an apostolic constitution called *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) that sought to have more accountability for Catholic educational institutions to the Church and its mission (Estanek, James and Norton, 2006). The *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) had four characteristics of Catholic identity in education deemed essential by Pope John Paul II. These four characteristics of Catholic identity in Catholic educational institutions called for Christian inspiration for every stakeholder in the community, greater contribution to Catholic research, commitment to the Church’s authority and fidelity to the Church’s Christian mission (John Paul II, 1990). Today, this call from Pope John Paul II falls greatly on the shoulders of lay leaders and these leaders need to be intentional in their planning to meet the call. School leaders can do this by connecting their Catholic school mission, which shows what the school values and holds sacred, with all aspects of the school.

Research has also provided insight into how teachers and administrators perceive what aspects are most important in composing Catholic identity in schools in the twenty-

first century. These perceptions also reflect the previously stated changes in modern Catholic schools. The acuties are that faith and religious culture are the most important features in Catholic identity in schools. The aspect of faith within the school community has been found to be the most important dimension according to teachers and administrators. Many Catholic school teachers and administrators believe that the lowest priorities in promoting Catholic identity are that the participants (students, teachers, administrators and support staff) had to be of the Catholic faith. Likewise, many Catholic educators believe the most important part of Catholic identity is not the presence of Catholic iconographies or the percentage of Catholics attending the school. Instead, these Catholic educators believe that Catholic identity in schools is defined by the Catholic ethos which is manifested in how they love and treat each other and what the school chooses to celebrate (Convey, 2012). However, this manifestation of love can be exemplified by the presence of charisms that convey this Catholic ethos (Cook, 2015).

Lay school leadership has a major role in shaping schools' Catholic identity, especially in times of ecclesial change (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). Researchers have found that teachers who are Catholic and teach in Catholic settings are able to be more flexible and comfortable when they work in a school with a strong Catholic identity and at a school where the mission is prevalent in their daily activities. It has also been found that school relationships amongst staff improve with a principal that was focused on mission and valued the importance of Catholic identity in regard to organizational leadership (Hobbie, Convey & Schuttloffel, 2010). Others have asserted that context is a major factor for school leaders, especially lay leaders, attempting to strengthen their school's Catholic identity (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006).

School leaders must understand the dynamics of the school's social environments and constructs before trying to shape elements of Catholic identity in their schools (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). As Catholic school leaders are facing challenging cultural contexts, one way lay Catholic school leaders can meet the challenge is through understanding their purpose and "change the world by building relationships instead of fences" (Cook, 2001, p. 330).

Lay leaders also need to reflect the importance of a school's mission and Catholic identity through the recruitment of new staff. In the efforts to improve the Catholic identity of a school through a school's mission, the school must establish a process of hiring and recruiting qualified people who have a strong sense of the Catholic school mission. The best place to start in helping both current and future employees understand the identity of a Catholic school is with the mission and the mission statement. In the hiring and interview processes, the leaders of a Catholic school should intentionally speak about Catholic identity and question applicants about the importance of Catholic identity in schools in order to recruit staff members who will sustain the school's mission in the future (Gilroy, 2009; Simonds, 2020).

### **Schools without a Religious Order and the Role of the Lay Leader**

Cook (1998) noted that in the past, the complexities and challenges of preserving and deepening a school's Catholic identity was not a major obstacle "because Catholic culture was transmitted, almost through osmosis, by women and men religious who staffed the schools" (p. 133). However, due to the sharp decline in religious women and men leading Catholic schools, lay leaders are now tasked with transmitting the Catholic culture and advancing the Catholic mission of their respected schools (Cook, 1998).

As aforementioned, charisms are ways in which schools can more effectively meet their school's Catholic mission and deepen their Catholic identity. For schools founded by a religious order, these charisms originate from the order and its founder. Cook (2015) stated that a founding story or newer traditions can still empower a school community, especially for schools without a religious order. Because most lay Catholic school leaders do not have formal religious training, the lay leaders must be more conscious of deepening the Catholic identity in their schools and make efforts to train themselves in these areas. However, resources are needed for these leaders to become "builders of faith" and have professional preparation in how to develop spirituality in one's school (Earl, 2012). With Catholic school charisms, school leaders must live out the charisms and the charism must be seen throughout all school policies and exercises. Charisms can advance the school mission and deepen the Catholic identity in an abundance of ways including the prevalence of: symbols, traditions, mythology, programs, policies and practices (Cook, 2015).

The lack of resources that are available to lay school leaders to measure their effectiveness in areas related to mission, culture and identity leave them "feeling their way through the dark" (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008, p. 22). For example, there exist schools that are sponsored by a religious order, such as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), Sisters of Mercy and the Marianist Province of the U.S. that have established teams to assess and appraise whether their schools are meeting the religious mission set forth by that order (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008). Thus, lay school leaders must not be satisfied with subjective examples of religious mission effectiveness but instead should create their own systematic processes to monitoring and assessing their school mission and lay leaders

should not proverbially “reinvent the wheel” but instead investigate the best practices that have already been set forth (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008).

Earl (2012) believes that for a Catholic school, spirituality starts with the principal and flows through the school into all that are involved in the school’s community. This Catholic school leadership profile includes instilling this spirituality with the staff and teachers and “building the builders” (Earl, 2012, p. 13). Gardner (2006) also stated that because lay leaders may have more autonomy from the Church than previous religious leaders, lay leaders may have more freedoms and creativity in showing support for staff and students, creating a more welcoming and inclusive school.

Another adherence for lay leaders is the recruitment of the teachers that will take the spirituality from the mission and bring it into the classrooms. The hiring of teachers who are strong in character and faith is a powerful prognosticator of those teachers’ commitment to the religious mission of the school. The mission of the school is a unifying factor that must serve leaders in the hiring of staff who actively live out the school’s mission at school and more broadly into the community, not just when teaching in the classroom (Cho, 2012; Gilroy, 2009). Gilroy (2009) stated that lay leaders need to be deliberate in the recruitment of staff, making sure that the school’s mission is seen in a variety of forms and potential applicants should be asked about mission, Catholic identity and the candidate’s fit into the school’s Catholic culture in the hiring process.

Simonds (2020) conveyed that if Catholic schools are to be mission centered and be a good evangelizing institution then deep discernment is needed when hiring qualified, educational professionals. He furthered that the “hiring for the apostolate must be the number one focus of every hire in a PreK – 12 Catholic school” (Simonds, 2020, p. 42).

Simonds (2020) adds to this by stating that the hiring process should unequivocally require qualifications and standards for people being hired to work in an apostolate school and the interview questions and decisions should reflect that as well as the job descriptions and advertisements for any potential job openings. It is also argued that not only do lay Catholic school leaders need to be attentive to hiring someone with apostolic and professional qualifications but also the apostolic spirit should also be evaluated when assessing school personnel, like teacher observations and subsequent decisions on retaining faculty and staff (Simonds & Fussell, 2020).

Catholic school researchers like Fussell and Brock (2020) denote that the process of improving Catholic school identity in schools is similar to the process that encompasses many school improvement plans and provided a plan for Catholic school leaders to improve their Catholic identity and build on what is already established. This plan includes recalling previous efforts and the outcomes before beginning a collaborative and shared leadership process that evaluates the school's mission, identifies strengths and weaknesses, develops goals and mission-based plan for improvement, ascertains the people needed to implement the plan and lastly discerns a process to continually monitor the results.

As a school sets up this process of evaluation for something like the school's mission or even a particular charism, that evaluation should be examined in the light of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* and the four domains of "Mission and Catholic Identity", "Governance and Leadership", "Academic Excellence" and "Operational Vitality" (Fussell & Brock, 2020; Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Another major part of Catholic school leadership is providing the necessary and proper professional development for the faculty and staff. As a Catholic school, this professional development must align and enhance the school's Catholic mission as well as create "a team of well-prepared mentors who can become your future school leaders, teacher leaders, staff leaders, and volunteer coordinators" (Simonds & Hearn, 2020, p. 65). This professional development should be all encompassing and not singular in nature to only faculty. Professional development on school mission and vision should extend to the school's governing board, the school's leadership team as well as teachers, staff and coaches. Schools should also have a professional development plan that is grounded in the school's Catholic identity and aligns with the spiritual and faith formation for all stakeholders (Fussell & Simonds, 2020; Simonds & Hearn, 2020).

The development of the "spiritual, intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral, aesthetic and religious capacities" of each student is also a defining characteristic of a Catholic school, "Committed to Educate the Whole Child" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Fussell and Cook (2020) took those eight educational capacities of education and gave descriptions and questions to consider helping guide Catholic leaders in assessing the student experience in their schools. In assessing the school's educational operations, a Catholic school leader should evaluate who successful the school is in meeting the spiritual or psychological needs of a student and then use that reflection to guide school improvement planning in those areas. Fussell and Cook (2020) also suggested ideas for Catholic school leaders by having each department that affects student life in the school to have their own distinct mission statement to provide spirituality and focus as well as providing more student opportunities for prayer and service to others.

It is also extremely important that Catholic school leaders pay close attention to the academic curriculum as one of the defining characteristics of a Catholic school is “Distinguished by Excellence” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). Being exceptional in academics is vital for Catholic school success and the proper planning and assessment of the school’s academic curriculum. Fussell (2020) asserted curriculum planning and assessment requires “intentional planning that begins with Catholic identity” and that Catholic schools need to avoid having a “secular curriculum where Catholic identity is just ‘sprinkled on’” (p. 97). Catholic school leaders must guide the school’s academic curriculum and subsequent student learning by intentionally having a curriculum plan that connects the content to the Catholic social teaching and other areas of Catholic identity (Fussell, 2020).

### **Leadership Theories**

As mentioned earlier, there are a lot of roles and responsibilities for lay Catholic school leaders to attend to in order to successfully navigate a deepening of Catholic identity in their schools. With these roles and responsibilities, many different leadership approaches and strategies are needed to be stewards of the Catholic school mission in an ever changing and dynamic future. Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) acknowledge that leadership theories seemingly reduce the art of leadership to routine and easily repeatable practices that in turn devalue the importance of leadership qualities. They also acknowledge that although many view a leader as someone who has power over their followers through control or the ability to exert rewards and punishments, true leadership in enacting meaningful change is with power through their followers and inspiring one’s stakeholders to follow the path set by the leader. There exist many leadership theories

with subsequent research on each theory, but this study will focus on the connection and impact of strategic, shared and transformational leadership on the lay leader's ability to enact meaningful change and deepen their schools' sense of Catholic identity through a focus on the mission of their schools.

Catholic schools must aim to educate students who are not only academically successful but also thrive spiritually, morally and socially. This aim to create well-rounded students must also be modeled by Catholic school lay leadership while also embracing a multifaceted and intentional approach to leadership. In order to create well-rounded learners, Catholic school leaders must be intentional in their approach to school improvement while utilizing a team approach to problem solving and forming relationships and inspiring their stakeholders.

### **Strategic Leadership**

The nature of strategic leadership is hard to define as it is traditionally a very broad concept. This is due to the very large scope of research on the topic of strategic leadership and it is hard to describe strategic leadership in detail although we can recognize the concept in action as well as strategic leadership's relationship with minute and planned details with very large macroscopic expectations (Guillot, 2003). The study of strategic leadership or strategic management is seen by many to be centuries old, dating back to ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu or comparatively more recent in a scientific study with Frederick W. Taylor's 1911 study *The Principles of Scientific Management* where Taylor stressed maximizing organizations performances based on identifying the best ways to perform tasks. Shortly after Taylor's study, higher education institutions like Harvard University started to offer courses on strategic management and

in 1962, Harvard Professor Alfred Chandler published what many strategic leadership and management scholars consider to be the first work of research into strategic management (Ketchen, Edwards, Short & Try, 2014).

Davies and Davies (2004) describe strategic leadership as not a categorization of leadership, but instead as a strategic element that fits within the wide-ranging leadership model. Strategic leadership is also viewed as a process that allows organizations to manage change effectively through careful planning, monitoring progress, being responsive to variables and participating in self-evaluation (Ketchen, Edwards, Short & Try, 2014). Davies and Davies (2004) add that there are five concepts that make up the definition of strategic leadership: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organization to the strategy, determining effective intervention points and developing strategic capabilities. Guillot (2003) defines strategic leadership succinctly as “the ability of an experienced, senior leader who has the wisdom and vision to create and execute plans and make consequential decisions in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous strategic environment” (p. 67).

Strategic leadership is not a leadership style that is concerned with simply maintaining the status-quo of an organization similar to the transactional leadership approach. Strategic leaders aim to link the organizations mission and purpose to the organizations vision and translate those two elements into action (Davies & Davies, 2004; Tregoe & Zimmerman, 1979). Tregoe & Zimmerman (1979) stated that strategy shapes where the organization wants to be in the future and focuses more on where an organization should be rather than how the organization aims to get there. They state that because strategy sets the direction, if choices are made without a strategic framework

than the organization gives up control to external factors or people who then make choices for the direction instead.

Davies (2002) presents a four-stage approach for strategic leaders to translate the strategy into action. The first step is to articulate the strategy to the organization's stakeholders. The second step is to build a shared understanding through creating a picture of what the process will look like. The third step is to engage the stakeholders in dialogue to boost participation through the process. Lastly, the fourth step is to define what the shared outcomes will be and to create a clear picture for the future. Davies and Davies (2004) state that step four can only be achieved if ample time is taken to build the shared understanding and engage the stakeholders in shared dialogue and planning. Strategic leadership is crucial to the success of an organization in order for leaders to create urgency for change, be creative in planning for the future and also building consensus needed to sustain the change over time. For Catholic schools and their leaders, there exist many aforementioned external factors and negative trends that must be attended to. Thus, it can be argued that it is vital for Catholic school leaders to have a clear-cut strategy, communicate that strategy moving forward, engage the stakeholders in that process and have a clear picture of where they want the school to be in the future. If not, those Catholic schools run the risk of failing due to unclear strategy that leads to feeble management and procedures as well as risk giving up control to external factors that may shape the organizations future instead (Tregoe & Zimmerman, 1979).

### **Shared Leadership**

The concept of transformational leadership, whereas leaders appeal more to the beliefs and principles held by the followers, was a big paradigm shift from the more

classic notion of a command-style leadership structure and belief that organizations must be led by a leader with a commanding presence and in which followers obeyed orders and carried out the leader's vision. With the new thinking that organizations could be high-performing and did not need a chain-of-command structure, some leadership theorists felt nervous about this new leadership archetype shift. This was due to the fact that multiple people could have input in the decision-making process and knowledge and skills were distributed evenly and carried out by the group and not individuals (Ensley, Hmielseki, & Pearce, 2006).

Shared leadership theory, born from transformational leadership, was an organizational structure not dominated by designated individuals, but instead focused on the rhythm of people with specific skills working homogenously towards a common goal. The term shared leadership was coined by Conger and Pearce (2003), often interchangeable with the term distributed leadership (Ensley, Hmielseki, & Pearce, 2006). Shared leadership is team-level approach or leadership theory that considers the behaviors enacted by several individuals as opposed to the hierarchal, top-down leadership model. Shared leadership encourages collaborative and mutual understanding in the decision-making processes and puts a large emphasis on individuals personally connecting with one another to meet the team's objective.

A key element of the shared leadership approach is identifying multiple leaders or temporary leaders at any given time and identifying those leaders based on specific skillsets that can maximize the team's efficiency when matched with a specific task. The influence in shared leadership is reciprocal and involves team members taking on tasks in a fluid manner that they feel best suited to take on or feel maximized in attempting to

meet the challenge before them. Bligh, Pearce and Kohles (2006) stated that for shared leadership to be successful, there are three conditions needed: trust, potency and commitment. Carson, Tesluk and Marrone (2007) added to this by saying there must be a team environment established to maximize the effectiveness of shared leadership with the three dimensions of “shared purpose, social support, and voice” (p. 1,222). Trust is vital in the shared leadership paradigm as individuals must collectively work together so that all team members feel invested in the decision-making process. If not, an organization runs the risk that some team members will not buy into the team’s plan as they will view it a risk since they do not feel that the other members are committed, honest or that they are an equally valued team member.

Secondly, the potency of each team member’s skillset is crucial within shared leadership as successful teams must have talented individuals that can be targeted towards specific challenges. Lastly, for shared leadership to work efficiently, commitment to the team’s values and vision from each team member as higher level of commitment results in a higher level of accomplishment. Some argue that shared leadership is fundamentally important for organizations trying to accomplish complex goals. It is their belief that the more complex a goal is, the less likely it becomes that a single leader or individual will have the skillset or ability to meet the goal’s challenges. Thus, as organizations set intricate and multifaceted improvement plans, those organizations subsequently need to embrace a shared leadership structure to attend to all of the complexities of required tasks (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006).

In the context of shared leadership and education, some researchers have commented that due to the lack of extraordinary leaders in schools, the “hope of

transforming schools through the actions of individual leaders is quickly fading” (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007, p. 345). Kocolowski (2010) highlighted that research into shared leadership in education has yielded mixed results where some aspects of shared leadership may help with monitoring progress but not necessarily result in an increase in performance. Kocolowski (2010) also noted that research into shared leadership in educational organizations requires leaders to be cognizant of teachers’ emotions in initiating change and there must be a collegial atmosphere with clear-communication and understanding on each individuals’ roles. If not, teachers may feel the efforts to be listened too are contrived and the shared leadership process is more based on placation as opposed to being valued in the educational change process.

Finally, for Catholic schools that are looking to set themselves apart and be competitive amongst their growing competition, shared leadership offers the chance to maximize the many talents in the school and harness the dynamism that the individuals bring to create an advantage that extolls the Catholic school’s virtues and charisms (Kocolowski, 2010; Lee-Davies, Kakabadse & Kakabadse 2007). As shared leadership involves harnessing the dynamism of the team, the next section will explore transformational leadership and leaders harnessing their own dynamism.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership was first defined by modern leadership theorist James McGregor Burns (1978). Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a way in which leaders can inspire their followers through taking ownership and participating in setting the overall goals for the group. This was counter to the top-down, hierarchal structure that was most prevalent in organizational management at the time.

Burns (1978) furthered that a transformational leader is one that also has a symbiotic relationship between them and their followers in advancing morale and motivation. He also asserted that because many have a hard time distinguishing the differences between management and leadership, the best way to separate the two is due to the leader's ability to be viewed as an idealized, moral exemplar. Burns (1978) would use the terms transformational and transactional to separate the two styles, where transformational leaders work to transform their organizations' cultures through collaboration and togetherness whereas transactional leaders do not.

As Burn's (1978) work highlighted the importance of inspiring followers to participate in the goal setting process, the concept of transformational leadership was expanded by Bass (1985) who described the role of transformational leadership in successful organizations. Shortly after, Lawler (1986) described how a non-hierarchical leadership structure allowed followers to have greater input in shaping their organizations future and thus have greater buy-in. This shift led to definition of the interchangeable terms distributed or shared leadership as discussed earlier in this study.

As noted earlier, transformational leadership is often seen as a proponent to transactional leadership. Transactional leadership theory suggests that the relationship between the leaders and the followers is one of a social exchange and that operative organizational management is one of the followers following the commands of the leaders as there is a mutual benefit for both parties if they do so (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011). Conversely, transformational leadership theory is one that goes much farther than the quid pro quo relationship in transactional leadership theory. Instead, transformational leadership suggests a more dynamic approach to the leader and follower

relationship, where leaders share the organizations vision with the stakeholders and works alongside them to create a more intrinsically motivated follower group (Barth-Farkas & Vera, 2014).

Bass (1999) stated transformational leadership has the leader's relationship with the follower not being a simple transaction where both have their own subset of interests and motivations. Instead transformational leadership requires a relationship that takes in each individual's motivation and encompasses those self-interests into the organizations shared vision and mission for a more inspired and cohesive relationship (Bass, 1999). Bass and Avolio (1997) described these important elements of transformational leadership in four sub-dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. With idealized influence, transformational leaders should work to be a mentor and set a good example for their stakeholders while garnering admiration and faith in their abilities to lead. Inspirational motivation describes the transformational leader's ability to communicate their vision and to encourage the stakeholders to participate in that vision with enthusiasm. Intellectual stimulation is harnessing participation with the stakeholders in carrying out the vision but doing so in a way that maximizes their abilities and challenges them to grow. Lastly, individual consideration is leading with empathy and respect for the followers as people and having concern for their well-being.

In the inception of transformational leadership theory, Burns (1978) area of focus was more on political leaders then educational leaders with Bass (1998) looking into a wide array of organizational structures to study transformational leadership. Leithwood (1994) later characterized what transformational leadership looks like for developing

educational leaders. Leithwood's (1994) model originally described seven dimensions for transformational leadership in schools with Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) adding an eight dimension: building school vision; establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. Later, Leithwood et al. (2006) would categorize the dimensions into four categories for school leaders: setting direction; developing people, redesigning the organization; and managing the instructional program.

Within the study of transformational leadership, there do exist some criticisms. Yukl (1999) specifically stated that there is lots of ambiguity about the behaviors identified within transformational leadership, mainly due to the diverse elements. Yukl (1999) noted that because of the overlap of these diverse elements, particularly with idealized influence and inspirational motivation, the attributes to the transformational sub-dimensions are outcomes and not observable behaviors.

For the Catholic school leader, there do exist some studies that look to link the religious and spiritual responsibilities of the Catholic school leader and transformational leadership. Lichter (2010) found that a school leader's faith had a positive correlation to a Catholic school leader's ability to be a transformational leader due to prayer and reflections connecting to the transformational dimensions noted previously. Furthermore, it was noted that Catholic school leaders must be transformational leaders but with a commitment to being a steward of the organization's Catholic mission. Spesia (2016) stated that because Catholic school leaders in the twenty-first century need to be mission-

driven and embody the Catholic Church's teachings as missionary disciples, this calling will require "a more dynamic, intentional and transformational approach to leadership formation with various sectors of the world of Catholic education" (p. 254).

### Summary

It is clear that the role of the lay leader in Catholic schools has taken on a larger focus due to the many challenges facing Catholic education in the United States and the decline in numbers of the religiously vowed brothers and sisters in American Catholic society. Lay leaders must be the educational and spiritual leader of their schools. This is difficult as many lay leaders do not have the formal training that the religiously vowed did when they were previously leading Catholic schools in greater numbers and force. One aspect of Catholic leadership is fulfilling the mission of the Catholic school and in doing so deepening the Catholic identity of the school.

This is not easy as one must be a steward of the school's mission and adhere to the crucial *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) that distinguish the characteristics of what it means to be a successful Catholic school. Additionally, the school charisms expressed by Cook (2015) must guide the leaders to have the school's mission interwoven throughout all aspects of the school's framework; academically, socially and spiritually.

Catholic schools are closing at high rate and students are leaving Catholic schools in larger number each year. Many Catholic schools are competing to survive. What is needed are Catholic leaders who understand the importance of starting with the school's mission and having that purpose cultivate a positive Catholic school culture in all areas of

the school community. This school culture must be steeped in the common Catholic identity and mission that grounds all Catholic schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Given the complex nature of these challenges, Catholic school leaders will need to employ strategic, shared and transformational leadership practices in order to enact the meaningful change needed and to meet and sustain the standards of an effective Catholic school. Catholic school leaders will need to strategically set the vision for their school, make sure that vision has shared purpose with collaboration and support from their schools' stakeholders with mutual trust and respect. The aim of this dissertation in practice is to create an evidence-based case study on how lay leaders in a Catholic high school without the historical anchors of a religious order deepened its Catholic identity through a focus on mission, with an emphasis on school charisms and the application of strategic, shared and transformational leadership qualities. The next chapter will describe in detail the research methodology used in this dissertation in practice.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The research shows that there is a sharp decline in people becoming religiously vowed than ever before (Heft, 2009). There is also a reduction in the religious vowed entering religious orders (Stark & Finke, 2000). Catholic schools are closing at much higher rates than they are opening and face firm competition for students from charter schools and other educational foundations (Denig & Dosen, 2009; Lackman, 2013). The responsibility of improving Catholic schools and advancing the mission of the Catholic Church now falls to lay leaders in greater numbers than ever before and potential new Catholic schools have a greater chance of not having the anchors of a religious order. Schools with a religious order are institutions with an identity that is anchored in the charism of their orders, which for most have years of service in Catholic education. However, schools without religious orders have greater challenges than their religious order affiliated Catholic brethren due to their lack of history and traditions. Adding to the challenges is the ever-changing landscape of Catholicism and teaching Catholic students in a contemporary society (Heft, 2011).

In an effort to explore how lay leaders can advance their schools' Catholic missions, especially in schools without a religious order, this dissertation in practice aimed to show how leaders can strengthen their school's Catholic culture and identity through the reinforcement of their school's mission. This case study also explored how school leadership led a school without the anchors of a religious order in a process of developing their own distinctive charisms and traditions to deepen their Catholic identity through a focus on mission and through the adoption of specific leadership theories.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how one Catholic high school overcame the struggles of advancing their school's mission and deepened their Catholic identity without the anchors or historical foundations of a religious order. As a result, this case study explored the ways leaders can influence the deepening of the school's Catholic identity through the process of focusing on the school's mission through distinctive charisms and designing and implementing school programs and procedures to enhance the vitality of the school's mission. This study also explored the key leadership traits needed for lay leaders to accomplish the aforementioned goals.

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this dissertation was to provide a guide for lay Catholic school administrators with ways to deepen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission. I also provided a model to all lay Catholic school leaders through the exploration of how schools without religious orders can carve their own specific Catholic identity without the anchor and identity of a religious order. In doing so, I have provided school leaders with ideas on how they can overcome the many obstacles taking place in a contemporary Catholic world and brand themselves to stand out amongst their competitors. Lastly, this case study gives future Catholic school researchers evidence on how to advance the mission of schools and deepen the Catholic identity in schools through the exploration of strategic, shared and transformational leadership traits. This study gives these individuals in similar organizations ideas and examples for future research on how to look at the modern issues of Catholic identity in these schools through a variety of perspectives from many stakeholders (Baxter & Jack, 2009).

The central question that guides this study is: What are the factors that contribute to the advancement of a Diocesan Catholic Secondary School's mission and the deepening of its Catholic identity by a lay faculty and staff in a school without the influences of a religious order?

The central question is specifically broad so that the sub-questions evolve into specific areas of inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Evolving from the approximate central question are the sub-questions: How do Catholic, lay leaders create and sustain a school's mission and promote positive school culture and Catholic identity? What role do administrators, teachers and students play in the creation and sustainment of culture and Catholic identity in schools? What key leadership qualities are vital for lay leaders to enact meaningful change in the creation and sustainability of culture and Catholic identity? How do charisms help Catholic schools without religious orders focus on mission and brand themselves to distinguish themselves from their competitors?

### **Research Design**

I used a case study approach within the social constructivism paradigm. The purpose of using the interpretive framework of social constructivism was to allow myself to gain an understanding of the selected site and the study's participants and thus form an interpretation based on the participant's views (Creswell, 2013). Within this framework, realities were created between me and the participants and were shaped by the experiences shared by the two parties through open ended questions. This framework also made sure that the values of the participants were honored, respected and subject to negotiation. Within this qualitative research, validation or accuracy of the research and its findings was a partnership with the participants. This qualitative case study approach

allowed me to spend extensive time in the field and study the school through detailed reporting and also allowed me to get in close with the participants and help add accurateness to the study (Creswell, 2013).

This study is an intrinsic case study as defined by Stake (1995) because I attempted to gain an understanding from one specific case. This study is also a bounded case study focusing on the central research question. This case study methodology afforded me the ability to explore this experience in context using many types of data, including participant observation, interviewing and collections of artifacts and texts from the site (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). It also allowed me to explore the selected school through multifarious interventions, associations and communities. This diversified approach to the collection of data allowed me to experience how change has been enacted by the school's leaders over time and was permeated into all areas of school activities. This flexibility was crucial to answering the central question proposed earlier. Specifically, the case study methodology afforded me the opportunity to cover contextual conditions, as they may have been extremely pertinent to the study (Yin, 2003).

This social constructivist paradigm case study was conducted under Yin's (2003) belief that truth is qualified, and truth varies depending upon one person's perspective. Additionally, this research paradigm recognized that humans can be subjective and create their own meaning in situations but did not reject that humans can also be objective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This design was appropriate for this study as the participants viewed each situation through their own lens or perspectives and their insights could still be objective and reinforce the validity of the data collected and problem being studied.

### **Participants/Data Sources and Recruitment**

The Catholic school selected for this case study was recommended by the Director of Educational Leadership at Creighton University because of the lay leadership's reputation and excellence in Catholic identity and school culture. The population of this study included a cross-section of participants identified by the president at the time of the study's initial start and the current principal of the selected school. As these participants were selected through recommendation and availability of the school's gatekeeper, this would be a convenient sample. A total of 18 participants were selected including the school's principal, assistant principal, director of admissions, one service coordinator, one campus minister, five classroom teachers, two athletic coaches/teachers, and two school activity club leaders. Additionally, two former school presidents and two parents were interviewed.

This cross section included both past and present school leaders to provide the context needed for how the school began the process of focusing on mission including the early stages of opening the school without the foundations of a religious order. The inclusion of past and present school leaders helped identify the aforementioned need for sustainability of mission stewardship in Catholic schools. The wide arrange of participants represented stakeholders who are authentic witnesses to the focus on mission and the deepening of Catholic identity in multiple stakeholder groups and over a longer period of time. Because the mission of the school should be seen throughout the school and all stakeholders enculturated in the school mission, the participants in this study represented adults who have been "called to be a steward of mission and charism" for the selected school in some respect (Cook, 2015, p. 83).

This cross-section of participants was also an effort to reduce bias or one group's influence on the validity of the data collected. Permission to conduct the study at the site was approved by the school's leadership and contact was first made through said leadership (see Appendix A). The school's leadership also agreed to be included in the list of participants for data collection. After initial communication was made through the school's leadership, communication between myself and the participants were made via email to establish the times and places for the personal, face-to-face interviews and data collection. All additional communication after the initial face-to-face interview between myself and the participants were tailored to the participants' preference of communication.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected through the following methods: onsite participant observations, participant interviews and the collections of artifacts and texts within the boundaries of an eleven-month period, from June 2017 through April 2018. In an effort to improve the understanding of the case study, participant observations were used. These observations included areas in which all participants engaged in their daily businesses as the central question and the purpose of the case study was to investigate leadership within the entire school (Stake, 1995). These observations allowed for me to gain a sense of the site and its people given the passage of time (Stake, 1995). Semi-structured, personal interviews were conducted with the following participants: (1) two former school presidents (2) school principal; (3) assistant principal; (4) director of admissions; (5) service counselor; (6) campus minister; (7) five classroom teachers; (8) two athletic coaches/teachers; (9) two activity club leaders and; (10) two school parents

representing a variety of experience, subjects of instruction and stakeholder groups (see Appendix B).

The semi-structured interview approach was used for two considerations. First, they allowed for me to explore the participants' answers and opinions more deeply. Secondly, the semi-structured interview process fit with the varied schedule of school administrators, teachers, other stakeholders and me (Barriball & While, 1994). The majority of the interviews took place at one diocesan Catholic high school in Omaha, Nebraska while some interviews took place via the phone or in-person but off the campus of the school that was studied.

At the onset, I was a stranger with the majority of those being interviewed with no previously set relationships. I was familiar with some of the school's leadership due to my own standing in the Omaha community as a Catholic school leader. I tried to establish a membership role that was more than outlying in the studied school but also tried to maintain the balance of a neutral, un-biased researcher (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011). The gatekeeper for this study was initially the diocese's superintendent of Catholic schools. During the study, the initial gatekeeper moved out of state and the new gatekeeper became the school's principal. Both gatekeepers were included as participants in the interview processes. Before arriving on site and conducting research, I emailed an introduction letter to the participants. Prior to each interview I explained the study and its purpose as well answered any questions prior to the interviews to address any potential concerns.

The interview questions and protocol were formulated with the help of a template or assessments given to me early in studies at Creighton University. The template was

adapted by Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Ehrlich from Creswell (2013) (see Appendix C). This interview assessment and template was structured to focus on questions related to mission and defining characteristics of Catholic schools as delineated from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) and Timothy J. Cook's (2015) reflections about charisms and culture from his book, *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools*. The first twelve questions on the interview protocol were scripted and focused on mission, Catholic identity and charisms. I allowed for follow up questions to add depth to the interviews relating to the specific details in the defining characteristics of Catholic schools in *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) and mining for specific details related to charisms.

The semi-structured interviews were between 30-60 minutes and were recorded using an interview recording application on my smart phone device. Before the interviews started, I sought out the participants' consent to record the interviews. Field notes and observations were recorded using a field notes recording template (Appendix C). During the interviews, I used an observational protocol recording tool (see Appendix D) adapted from Creswell's (2013) sample observational tool to take descriptive and reflective notes during the recorded interview. This allowed for the organization of note taking on any thoughts that may occurred during an interview and for any reminders on procedures that needed to be followed throughout the interview (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Case study research is not necessarily a methodological choice but rather a carefully selected element that is to be studied or in this case study, the school and its participants (Stake, 2005). This case study is an exploratory case study used to investigate and determine how the lay leaders at the Catholic schools without a religious order created their own Catholic identity through their focus on mission and with certain, specific leadership qualities. Through my exploration of the Catholic high school, data was collected in a variety of ways and provided multiple sources of data. The multiple sources of information were pursued and implemented because no single foundation of information can provide a far-reaching point of view. By using the multiple forms of data collection, I used the interviews, observations and journaling to validate cross-check findings (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). By using a multitude of different data collection processes, this made sure that one single lens or perspective did not dominate the research. Instead, through a variety of perceptions, more findings were explored and found (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

After the data collection process, the data was analyzed, and participant checks were used. I followed a systematic, analytic strategy presented by Huberman and Miles (1994) and described by Creswell (2013). This strategy included taking reflective notes on the data, drafting a summary of the field notes taken and making metaphors. I also noted patterns and found emerging themes in the data analysis process and categorized the data through the use of Dedoose, a cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative data in research.

In this data analysis process, I noted variables and displayed the data using comparisons, contrasts and then used thematic coding and grouped the content and emergent themes (Creswell, 2013; Huberman & Miles, 1994). The data integration of the interviews, literature and observations added validity and generalizability to the data gathering process and corroborated the data collected with the literature and other sources of information (Tellis, 1997). The data was analyzed through explanation building which required me to pay special attention to the data being collected and subsequently explain the case study through building an explanation through the analysis of the emerging themes gathered (Yin, 2003).

I developed naturalistic generalizations so others can learn from the data collected (Creswell, 2013). The data was organized using the cross-platform data analysis application, Dedoose, which served as a database to improve the dependability of the case study. This tool allowed me to track and organize the multifaceted forms of data that was collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Before any questions were pre-coded or thematic coding, in which I identified texts or passages linked by a common theme where I would create a framework of themes, I organized the data into units of social organization as delineated by Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland (2005). Some of these units of social organization included pieces crucial to this study and that were outlined in the literature review and purpose of the study. These units included but were not limited to cultural practices, encounters, social and personal relationships, organizations, settlements and habits (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005). Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) noted that when these units are combined with cognitive, emotional and hierarchical aspects, then first cycle of coding can begin.

The data was pre-coded using Dedoose to find passages and quotes from the participants that proved noteworthy to the research. Next, I then coded the raw data into preliminary codes and ultimately the final code. I used thematic coding because it is a flexible data analysis tool that allowed me to better familiarize myself with the raw data and then synthesize the data provided by the participants. I started with broader themes in the initial coding process and then I was able to integrate all of the themes into the final code. Lastly, the data was coded into categories to lead to themes and ultimately, a theory (Miles, Huberman, Saldaña, 2014).

### **Ethical Considerations**

I was granted an exempt review from the IRB committee as it was believed that the research involved very little risk of “stress, discomfort, embarrassment, invasion of privacy, or potential threat to reputation” (Madsen, 1992, p. 80 as cited in Roberts, 2010) I was also granted permission to conduct the study at the site from the gatekeepers; the diocese’s Catholic school superintendent and the school’s principal (see Appendix A).

Confidentiality for the participants and the school was one of the most important ethical considerations to promote honest answers and reflections from the participants. I requested permission to interview each participant and also to record the interviews. No identifying names of the interviewees or the school was used in the case study in order to keep the anonymity of the participants and the community. Instead, pseudonyms were used for both the school and the group of participants. The pseudonyms used were the names of the positions the interviewees currently held at the school or the position in which they belonged to in the community. After the conclusion of the interviews and

prior to the completion of the dissertation, the participants were given the opportunity to validate their answers and check for any errors or mistakes in their meaning or intent.

Ethical concerns do exist for the research in conducting the research, especially researcher bias. At the time of the research, I was a principal in the Archdiocese of Omaha and had strong opinions on the benefits of Catholic education and the importance of mission and culture in schools. In order to avoid researcher bias, I was careful to not engage in leading questions and include a reminder on the interview protocol recording tool (see Appendix D).

### **Timeline of the Study**

I was granted approval from Creighton University's Institutional Review Board, the Catholic schools superintendent and the selected site's principal. After receiving those approvals, the selected school's leadership introduced me to the potential participants via an introductory email and I began the onsite indirect and direct observations in June of 2017. In June of 2017, the initial interviews began after the participants were identified. Concurrently, field notes, journaling and observations occurred at the time or before the interviews to make sure these steps take place while school is in session. By the end of April of 2018, all interviews and other data collection methods were complete.

### **Reflections of the Researcher**

Over my time as a doctoral student and a Catholic school leader, I have been intrigued with leadership theories centered on school culture and how leaders can effect positive change in their schools. As a Catholic school principal, I cogitated on how I wanted my dissertation to be applicable to my own interests and profession. I also wanted the topic of my dissertation to be pertinent to my peers in Catholic education.

Through conversations with my professors at Creighton in the doctoral program, I was able to identify the topic of my dissertation by connecting my role as a Catholic educator and my own interests of study. I reflected on how I was interested in how leadership theories play a role in Catholic school leadership and how leaders can shape a school's culture. As a lay Catholic school principal at an urban school, I was aware of the struggles to keep Catholic schools open and the challenges leaders face in growing Catholic schools. I was engrossed in my own journey to deepen the Catholic identity of my own school through a recreation of our school's mission and my attempts to improve the culture of my school. This personal experience combined with the leadership theories that I learned in my doctoral program under the direction of my Creighton professors and advisors led me to this investigation and qualitative case study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how one Catholic school, without the anchor to traditions from a religious order, focused on the school's mission in the attempt to deepen the school's Catholic identity. This study serves as a guide for lay leaders looking to strengthen their own school's Catholic identity and give those leaders concrete examples of the leadership qualities needed to accomplish these goals and serve as a road map in that process.

The case study used the interpretive framework of social constructivism, which allowed me to form an interpretation from the data collected from the 18 selected research participants. The data collected included observations, interviews and the collections of artifacts and texts. The purpose for using a multitude of different types of data was to explore the case study through a variety of ways and to make sure that one

form of data did not dominate the research analysis. The data was collected over an eleven-month span after the IRB approval. In the data collection process, the participants and school remained anonymous and the participants had the opportunity to have a participant check through reviewing the data. The data was analyzed with the use of a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative data in research and with explanation building to form naturalistic generalizations so readers can learn and apply the lessons learned within their own profession. The next chapter will present the results of this study with a discussion and summary of the data that was collected and analyzed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of this study was to examine how one Catholic high school advanced their school's mission and deepened their Catholic identity without the anchors or historical foundations of a religious order. This case study explored the ways leaders can influence the deepening of the school's Catholic identity through the process of focusing on the school's mission through distinctive charisms and designing and implementing school programs and procedures to enhance the vitality of the school's mission. This study also explored the key leadership traits needed for lay leaders to accomplish the aforementioned goals.

A total of 18 participants were interviewed using semi-structured, personal interviews. The participants chosen included the school's principal, assistant principal, director of admissions, one service coordinator, one campus minister, five classroom teachers, two athletic coaches/teachers and two school activity club leaders. Additionally, two former school presidents and two parents were interviewed. Chapter four of this study presents the results from the data gathered from the interviews with analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis plan included taking reflective notes on the data, drafting a summary of the field notes taken and making metaphors (Creswell, 2013; Huberman & Miles, 1994). The data was pre-coded, as I looked for notable passages and quotes from the participants that were deemed noteworthy. The raw data was subsequently coded into preliminary codes and ultimately the final code. The data was then coded into categories which lead to themes and ultimately a theory which is presented in this study's findings

(Miles, Huberman, Saldaña, 2014). After the first analysis of the data collected, patterns and themes emerged, and the interview transcripts were coded using those emergent themes and sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes included:

1. Mission Centered
  - a. Evidence of Catholic Identity & Culture
  - b. Evidence of Mission Statement
  - c. Evidence of Service
2. Strategic Leadership
3. Shared Leadership
4. Transformational Leadership
  - a. Inspirational Appeal

In analyzing the data collected, I looked for codes connecting the school used in this case study to the standards and benchmarks set forth in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These benchmarks include the defining characteristics that delineate what the identity is for Catholic schools. The defining characteristics of a Catholic education for these standards and benchmarks are as follows:

1. Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ
2. Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church
3. Distinguished by Excellence
4. Committed to Educate the Whole Child
5. Steeped in a Catholic Worldview
6. Sustained by Gospel Witness

7. Shaped by Communion and Community
8. Accessible to All Students
9. Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop.

The defining characteristics previously listed substantiate the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Those standards elucidate elements that should be in the operations of all Catholic schools while the benchmarks make those standards measurable and add specific details to the standards (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Catholic identity includes the distinctive aspects that make a school Catholic or the distinguishing features that affirms what it means to be a Catholic school (Cook & Davies, 2009; Paprocki, 2011). If identity is who you are, then a Catholic school's identity is a school that develops the entire child, academically, socially, physically and spiritually while also providing an education that centers on the evangelization of the church (Earl, 2012). In analyzing the data collected, I looked for codes connecting these distinctive characteristics similarly to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

## **Results**

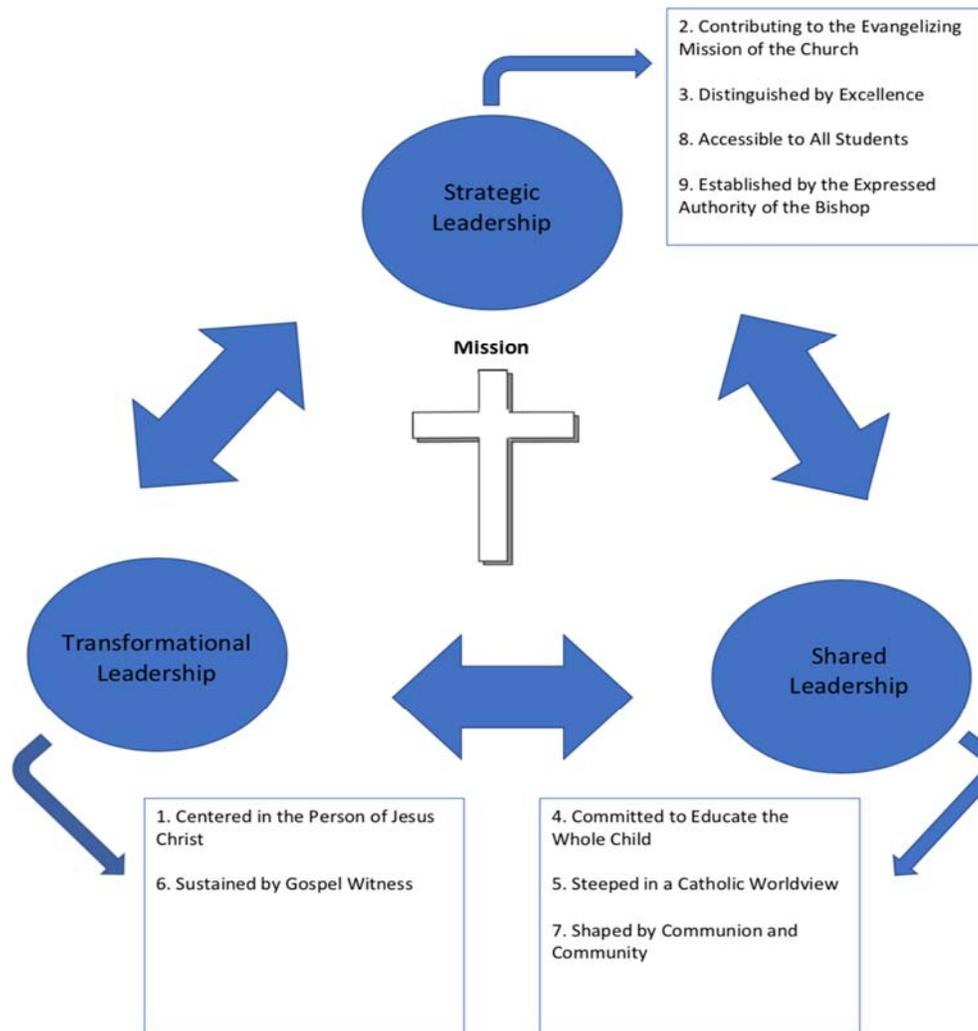
Early in the research processes the main purpose of this study was to examine how one Catholic high school advanced their school's mission and deepened their Catholic identity without the anchors or historical foundations of a religious order. It was my intent to investigate the ways leaders can influence the deepening of the school's Catholic identity through the process of focusing on the school's mission through distinctive charisms and designing and implementing school programs and procedures to

enhance the vitality of the school's mission. This area of interest was primarily due to my own professional role as a Catholic school leader.

Through the interviews and data collected, themes emerged that led to this study also exploring the key leadership traits needed for lay leaders to accomplish the aforementioned goals. These emergent themes started in the interviews with the two former school presidents and dynamism of their leadership and adherence to the school's mission, culture and Catholic identity was very evident. These themes were reinforced in the interviews with the school's other stakeholders and that can be seen later in the research's findings showing both former school presidents to exemplify strategic, shared and transformational leadership skills while being rooted in the school's Catholic mission.

Lastly, the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) highlight exceptional Catholic schools are driven by the school's Catholic mission and encompasses Catholic identity. The strategic, shared and transformational leadership themes found prevalent through the data collected were seen as vital leadership traits needed by lay Catholic school leaders, specifically within the defining characteristics of Catholic schools. After the analyzing the data, I added the correlating leadership themes with each defining characteristic needed to allow lay Catholic school leaders to be more adaptive in their meeting the defining characteristics. These leadership themes and the correlation to the defining characteristics of Catholic Schools are represented in *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Relationship between Mission, Strategic, Shared and Transformational Leadership and the Corresponding Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools from the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012)



## Former School Presidents

### *School President #1*

One of the research participants was the school's founding president who was hired to lead the school two years before its opening. Years later, the school president would become the archdiocese's Catholic schools' superintendent. He was tasked with

the hiring of the first staff of the high school and organizing and establishing the school's curriculum. Initially, the first thing that School President #1 did was to form a committee of educators to come together on all curriculum and other areas of the school. School President #1 stated there were two main realities that helped the committee begin the plans to form the culture of the school which was the collection of shared experiences the committee brought to the team but also the study of two other schools School President #1 had experienced and believed had good systems, procedures, values and cultural aspects that their new high school could adopt and emulate. Many of these characteristics were defined by School President #1 as "character education" and "the skills of Christian character." The committee used their shared experiences and the experiences of these other two former high schools to craft, assess and build culture of the school.

School President #1 also noted this early attention to culture and character rooted in Christian values and Catholic identity was reflected in the school's original mission statement, the school's traditions and in the school's graduation outcomes. The strategic planning and embedding the school's mission in all areas of the school was a purposeful and intentional process. One of purposeful inclusions the committee included in the school's original mission was the aspect of service, especially service in a context outside of the Midwest city and aiming to get their students and stakeholders to think more globally. Another distinguishing factor that was established early on was making sure the school was accessible to all learners and the sense of social justice. School President #1 believes this intentionality was rooted in the fact the school's namesakes and benefactors were very dedicated to the city's school for students with developmental and intellectually disabled students and wanted a school that was accessible to all learners.

School President #1 reflected on the fact that much of the school's Catholic identity came from the school's namesake/benefactors and their service to others, promotion of social justice and how they lived their lives.

School President #1 further shared anecdotes and stories that showed the students living out the school's original mission and the sense of community. These stories included the community of students, staff and parents rallying around a student who died of cancer and when another student suddenly lost his life. One of the anecdotes had the baseball team forfeiting a very important game to attend the funeral mass of their friend they lost. Both of the students who lost their lives also are remembered with memorials at the school. Additionally, one very evident theme in this research that was seen throughout all interviews is the aspect of service and "Community Involvement Day" where students go all around the city and volunteer with various local organizations and charities. This tradition has grown since the school's original inception was student created and driven. School President #1 shared this sense of identity and culture the students emulated came from the intentionality of the school's original mission but also the imbedded character skills classes that the students were required to take. He stated:

Well, I think that, I go back to that freshman year, which is such a formation year for the kids, and they have that class where they are focusing on the traditions of this school, the values of this school, the skills that will promote them through the leadership, the sense of service to others that are part of the religious environment and that is all just pushed, pushed, pushed all the time.

One major finding in School President #1's interview was there was intentionality and strategic thinking into everything that was done early on at the implementation of the

new school and creating the sense of mission and culture. This is evident in the implementation of classes to teach and establishing the school's core values. School President #1 stated that building the school's culture was strategic but also there was shared buy-in in how they formed the committee at the onset and also how they shaped the school's mission and identity off of the values set forth by the school's founding patrons. School President #2 furthered that it was also important that as the school grew that he was present and model the school's mission and values through interacting with the students, faculty, staff and parents on a regular basis. School President #1 shared in regard to school's focus on mission and culture identity, it was his job to enforce or reinforce the school's values:

Well, we had to be sure that everybody was paying attention to the original thrust of the set in those early days. As more and more people came on the scene, we had to integrate them into the reality, but we were fortunate that a lot of the core groups stayed with us and helped to then form the new people that came along. So, gradually we enforced that culture every year by the in-service programs that we use with people and then just live that experience that people saw going on. So, I think that we just, we definitely had to pay attention to it though. Couldn't just forget about it.

### ***School President #2***

The next school president interviewed was a school principal before stepping into the role as school president. School President #2 had previously been a K-8 Catholic school principal at another local Catholic school before stepping into the role as the school principal. He was hired by the aforementioned School President #1. Early in the

interview, it was apparent that School President #2 had strong opinions and beliefs in having a school that was Catholic with a “capital C” and people needed to know the “culture, the mission, everything that we were doing was because we truly are a Catholic school, not just a private school.” School President #2 shared an anecdote that this was reinforced early on by School President #1 when he set to write his first introduction or welcome letter to his community after taking the job. School President #2 wrote in the letter that he looked forward to being part of the school community and he was corrected by School President #1 to share he needed to state he was looking forward to being part of the “school’s Catholic community.” School President #2 shared this might be seen as something small but it served as a vital reminder of who they were and deepening the school’s Catholic identity. He stated:

And that trickled into a million other things in terms of what we would do to help embrace that Catholic identity and all the different extracurricular and academic programs, so I think it was a very healthy Catholic identity when I got there and then I'm sure we'll jump into it and there were a lot of things that we did do under my tenure and largely driven by my staff to continue to embrace that and strengthen that.

School President #2 also shared that because of the school not having the cultural anchors of a religious order or a patron saint, the school had to seek creative ways to answer the question, “What is our Catholic identity?” In order to define who they were as a school, he stated it was vital the school had a “well-verbalized mission” and the mission had to be seen in all things academically, athletically and extra-curricular but especially on the spiritual side. School President #2 stated “Just because a school calls itself a

Catholic school, doesn't mean it's doing it well or truly embracing Catholic faith and Church doctrine" so the school early on had to prove they were Catholic and they "really meant it." Furthermore, this task was not something that School President #2 felt was just on the chaplains, the campus minister or those tasked with teaching theology classes.

Instead he asked then stated:

Whose responsibility is it to ensure it's a Catholic school?" What I never wanted to hear was somebody say, "Well, that's the chaplain's responsibility or that's the theology department's responsibility. If that's how a Catholic school sees their identity as this is the responsibility of those folks in that area, they're missing the boat and that Catholic school is not doing all it should. The Catholic identity of a school is the responsibility of every single employee in that building, from maintenance all the way up to president, they all better be on board with the mission, with the Catholic nature of that school and supporting Church doctrine and supporting that overall mission. That's a healthier Catholic school environment. It's not departmentalized, it cannot operate departmentalized when it comes to the Catholic identity of the school.

School President #2 shared that although intentionality with shared leadership was important, there was also a need to strategically measure how well the school was doing in its efforts to deepen the Catholic identity of the school through the focus on everyone living out the school's mission. When School President #2 stepped into the role at president, one of the first things he did was survey the school community about how well they knew the school's mission statement. Initially, both the student body and parents surveyed could not paraphrase or state the mission statement greater than 30%. This was

alarming to School President #2 and immediately in the school improvement process, he formed committees tasked with improving the school's sense of Catholic identity and started with focusing on the school's mission statement. School President #2 described this process as "a full-court press with just idea after idea of really embracing that mission statement and employing it in every aspect" of the school. This included starting and ending the day with prayer that was created by the school improvement team to be rooted in the school's mission statement.

Additionally, the athletic department embraced this idea before and after practices and games as well. School President #2 also made sure the mission statement was not just visible in places in the school where stakeholders gathered, but also in every single classroom. School President #2 shared this focus did not just end with prayer and mission statement visibility:

It was in all of our communications. Again, just made a very conscious effort from everything from academics to extracurriculars. Parent-teacher night, I would ask all of my staff to talk about how they embrace the mission statement in their classroom and the mission of this school and Catholic identity of this school. So, it was all of these things. It was a thousand different things that we made a conscious effort to do when about a year or two later, we ran the same exact survey. Again, I don't remember the exact numbers, but it was nearly like 90 percent of the students could either identically repeat word-for-word the mission statement or a real close paraphrase of it. 100 percent of the staff could do it word for word and the parents and stakeholder groups all had said that the emphasis on mission, on Catholic identity was just far more visible, they could hear it, they

could see it. So, again the data showed us that yeah, things did work and again, it wasn't weak to begin with, but I think we took it to a whole other level.

School President #2 said the success of having more recognition and knowledge led to more buy-in and participation in people coming to him with ideas on how to improve the school. With a greater sense of the school's mission then the school improvement and strategic planning grew due to more opportunities for shared leadership both with staff and faculty but also with students. He shared not only would staff members use it in communications or weave it into their daily operations, but students would choose to tie in the school's Catholic mission into class presentations and projects. School President #2 said this was something he learned from graduating from two Jesuit universities where those two institutions were intentional and purposeful in infusing Ignatian spirituality and culture into every aspect in the universities and doing so on day one. It was also highlighted that after strategically focusing on the school's mission there was a sense of buy in and more opportunities for shared leadership to cultivate that improvement in Catholic identity. School President #2 stated his role and focus shifted more to a transformational style in being a steward of the improved mission and school culture:

Yeah, I mean our mission statement talked about empowering others and yet if this were all top down, I'm not living the mission statement, so we had a shared vision of how we need to address this and then I empowered others, myself, and I'm living out the mission statement saying, yes, I need to be a spiritual leader as president of the school, but our very mission statement, it challenges me to empower all of you to be a part of this.

The next progression School President #2 described was the focus on service, specifically with the students. Service and promoting social justice are key phrases in the school's mission statement and to have the mission be an active and living statement there needed to be opportunities for students to actively live out this mission and their faith in action. School President #2 explained that onus was on the school to make sure the students were actively serving their communities but also thinking globally and reflecting on systemic, real world issues like poverty. To do this, the school provided service trips in the summer to volunteer and serve in impoverished places both in the United States and also abroad. School President #2 reinforced that in order for the students to truly understand systemic injustices, the school needed to get the students "out of their comfort zones" and "be proactive and ensuring that we provide opportunities and encourage opportunities for kids to understand the world as a heck of a lot larger" than what they see in their hometown or the media they consumed.

### **School Principal**

For this research, the current principal of the school in this case study was interviewed. School Principal has served for over 20 years in a variety of different roles at his school, starting off as a teacher, coach and then moving into an assistant principal role before taking on his current position. What was evident early on and is indicative of the comments made previously by School President #2, is the School Principal knew the school's mission statement and all of the ways in which the mission is integrated through the school community. When he was asked about how the mission is lived out by the stakeholders on a daily basis, School Principal stated with all of the integration of the school's mission into religion curriculum and the aforementioned character skills classes,

there is a “real strong emphasis towards service learning” at his school and “We are hopefully inspiring our kids to look at the world around them, understand the world around them, and be willing to jump in, roll up their sleeves, and make a positive change in our community.” School Principal described this emphasis on mission-based service listing the service trips, a dedicated day of all-school community service and a recently created program where students spend the weekends away from their homes and in the city volunteering in six or seven different service-based projects.

School Principal also laid emphasis on the school’s mission is intentionally and strategically evaluated every five years through the strategic planning process where the deepening of the school’s Catholic identity through a focus on the school’s mission statement is prioritized and analyzed. Part of this importance School Principal stated is that when anybody walks through the door, whether it’s a student, guest, parent, staff member that they know they are in a Catholic school. He furthered this notion by affirming, “I think that, kind of cycling back to the beginning there, we do want all of the people that are a part of this community to know, respect, acknowledge, embrace the Catholic nature of our community.”

School Principal reflected heavily and was candid when asked to describe his role in promoting a positive culture and Catholic identity in his school. He affirmed there was a learning curve in his first couple years as school principal and although he supported the existing programs and initiatives of his predecessors, he had only put his own identity on the role and, as he stated, “taken it a step further in the last year” in regards to his role as the steward of the school’s mission. The major difference, according to School Principal, is he is becoming more active in the service groups and trips and actively

participating in the school's service trips. He also noted that he took a more proactive approach in his role as one of the school's spiritual leaders in talking after school masses and actively praying in front of the school community more. He stated:

So, in a leadership capacity, you're promoting, you're assisting wherever you can.

Right now, I'm trying to as often as I can, be there right next to the students while they're going through the journey, too. Which is, again in year five, a little easier to do than in years one and two for sure.

When asked about the students' role in promoting a positive culture and Catholic identity in the school, School Principal shared an anecdote when a student had a seizure and while she was receiving help, the entire class kneeled and prayed for the student without prompt from an adult. He shared that their role is much like his in that the students are actively living out the school's mission in how they treat and interact with people within the community.

Another area of emphasized by School Principal was his school stood out because they accept students from all different backgrounds, especially learning backgrounds and students with a large variety of learning needs can still attend the school. He stated in his time the school is constantly evolving which is vital so that the school can continue to educate students who "are prepared to enter a world and empower others, promote justice, and initiate change."

### **Assistant Principal**

The school's assistant principal has served at his school for the past five years. Assistant Principal described his role as one that is more traditionally aligned with the title "Dean of Students" although many other roles and responsibilities he has done do

not traditionally fit that title. Before coming to this school, Assistant Principal had only experience in the area's public schools so there have been some adjustments with his lack of previous experience in a religious school environment. Comparatively within that context, he stated that one major cultural difference was there seemed to be a much stronger sense of community at his current Catholic school than his previous public high schools.

In addressing the questions regarding mission, Catholic identity and the school's culture, a big theme in Assistant Principal's answers centered on growth. This was noted in his opinion that the teachers and staff do a great job modeling the Catholic identity piece in the school in how they treat each other and have a growth mindset in working with students, peers and families. In teaching the students, it was Assistant Principal's hopes they were successful in focusing on the school's mission and deepening the school's Catholic identity and culture by preparing and empowering students to "be agents of change, and who make a difference in our world." This was underlined in an anecdote he shared about how the basketball team had a visually impaired team manager play in a game last year because the players advocated for him and how he was moved by the reaction of the students in the crowd and how they all supported him.

Assistant Principal noted that his role, much like the aforementioned students on the basketball team, is to model for staff, students and the stakeholders that the school's mission is lived out and continually practiced. He stated, "You always got to start with trying to be a good role model and model those things that you want to see in other by doing them yourselves." Lastly, he imparted that in his role as the assistant principal or dean of students that policies are important and aspects of the school's Catholic identity

and mission need to be integrated into every area of the school, especially policies and rules. He explained that:

I think that has to be the prevalent undercurrent to everything we do, is, when you strip it all away, is it still in line with the teachings of the Catholic church? Because, ultimately, that's who we are. If you stripped away everything else, that has to be the one constant that never goes away. Right? Is that we are an extension of the Catholic church. That has to be at the core and the center of everything that we do. I guess I would hope that all policies that we have in place at their core have some sort of bit of that Catholic identity in them, or at least that was taken into consideration.

### **Director of Admissions**

The school's Director of Admissions (DA) has served as a leader in many different areas of the school, including as interim president for the school during a nationwide search for the school's vacant president position. DA has been at the high school for eight years, serving all of those years as the director of admissions alongside the one year as interim president. Furthermore, DA provided a unique perspective on the questions of Catholic identity as he is also an ordained deacon who helps the school's pastors celebrate mass at the school.

The DA interview provided fruitful information connecting Catholic identity and mission to the traits and qualities of strategic, shared and transformational leadership. DA highlighted the school's culture has transformed into one where the expectation of the staff and community is not to have its stakeholders meet the school "where they are at" or where the school expects them to all be, but instead, raises everybody up by adapting to

where everyone is at their own educational and spiritual journey. Additionally, DA used the term, family, that has been a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews in this research project.

In regard to strategic leadership, DA discussed the school does very well when it comes to providing opportunities for students and community stakeholders to live out the school's Catholic mission through service. However, it was noted by DA this was an intentional process by the school's leadership to deepen the school's sense of Catholic identity as there was previously area for growth in this part of the school's mission statement. DA also highlighted the school's previous leadership instituted Catholic identity into the school's two professional learning community (PLC) structures, which includes one that is departmental and one that was described as "component based." Within that component-based PLC structure, a diverse group of stakeholders within the school review and plan to improve certain components of the school, including Catholic identity, which DA oversees and leads. Within this strategic structure includes a shared leadership component that includes the opinions and insight of a multitude of stakeholders.

In regard to strategic leadership, DA noted that the school's previous leaders did a very good job of focusing on the intentionality and review of the school's strategic plan and that after their departure, there may have been a little dip in that area and that it is starting to improve but that their, in his opinion, room for additional growth in that arena of leadership. DA also observed that the school's previous leadership, specifically School President #2 with whom he had more working interactions, was very strategic and intentional with the school's direction and his vision but would not micromanage and set

up strategic procedures and processes, like the schools two PLC structures, to include the school's faculty and staff in the decision-making processes. DA further noted that School President #2, with his strategic leadership and the shared leadership traits, was always present and accessible to the school's leadership team and the community members.

A noteworthy part of DA's interview was the connection between the school's leadership impact and transformational leadership. DA noted when the school's current principal started to take a more active and participatory role in the school's established service opportunities, the impact of his overall leadership on the school community deepened. Although DA still thinks there is area for growth in the school leadership's overall participation in the school's religious ceremonies, the impact of the school's current leadership in being a more transformational leader could not be overlooked. For instance, if transformational leadership suggests a more dynamic approach to a leader and follower relationship, where leaders share the organizations vision with the stakeholders and works alongside them to create a more intrinsically motivated follower group as Barth-Farkas and Vera (2014) suggest, the school leaders' participation in mission focused events is vital. DA noted how this deepens the experience of the service aspect of the school's mission:

You can teach what the church teaches about helping immigrants and helping the poor, but until they experience it and see it live, and see the emotion and the struggle of people, I think that you don't move them past judgment of person to compassion. I mean you can, but it really makes a big difference when you're actually across the counter from a homeless person who's got a five-year-old little kid and they just came in off the street. I think that that's the big thing.

DA also expanded that beyond the participation in service trips, community involvement day or the service trips, he also tries to model for the students in his participation in morning masses, his presence in the chapel and, in his words, focusing “on the kid who’s not there” and mentor the student in a way that gets them to participate in their own, individual capacity.

Lastly, DA touched upon the balance he said in some of the school’s previous leaders, including a former chaplain, who embraced the balance of strategic, shared and transformational leadership in the Catholic school. DA noted that when a Catholic school is solely focused on catechizing stakeholders, it loses a sense of its true mission but when a school leader is grounded in the Church’s teachings, shares the responsibility for deepening Catholic identity with others and encounters the community’s stakeholders in a personal way, the impact is prodigious:

It's not that it's not important to catechize, it's very important to catechize and it's very important for the Church to remain grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ, but when that's all we do, the people who are outside, they're just like, "Oh, it's a Church full of rules." Show them why what we believe makes us joyful, happy, and confident and that's what attracts them.

### **Service Coordinator**

The interview with the service coordinator did not yield as rich and robust data as the previous interviews but she did give some insight into the school’s mission, service while also highlighting some important leadership traits seen at the school. Service Coordinator previously served as the school’s campus minister for twelve years before serving in her current position for the past six years. Service Coordinator discussed that

she sees the school's mission lived out through the students through service. Service Coordinator believes because service is a part of the school's mission, the intentionality behind the required service hours helps the community to not lose sight of that aspect of the school's culture. Additionally, the position of service coordinator is not common in many schools, whether private or public, so position itself highlights the school's strategic plan to make service an active and living part of the school's mission. Additionally, with the position of service coordinator, it is Service Coordinator's job to analyze and review the service aspect of the school's strategic plan and plan accordingly for improvement.

In accordance with most of the interviews in this research, Service Coordinator highlighted all of the service-based opportunities the school's leadership provides the students, including the month focused on service, the schoolwide community service day as well as the school's domestic and international service trips. Service Coordinator also described the impact the school's leadership plays in those service trips and how powerful the participation is with the leaders serving alongside the students. Service Coordinator shared as the school has grown in age, many alumni have returned to staff and faculty positions and now lead the service trips they once went on as students, deepening the school's sense of mission, culture and community. Service Coordinator emphasized the positive impact on the school's culture that this shared leadership has on growing the service program and how the transformational participatory approach has deepened the impact of the service opportunities for the school's community.

## **Campus Minister**

The interview with the campus minister highlighted many aspects of strategic, shared and transformational leadership as well as providing evidence of the school's focus on mission. Campus Minister has been at the high school for three years, all as the campus minister. Campus minister describe the school's culture, like most, as a family and one focused on achievement and excellence in all areas. She emphasized this focus on excellence in all areas in describing how the school's leadership set high expectations for growth and then relied upon faculty and staff to carry out the school's strategic plan and vision alongside them. Campus Minister gave credit to the school's strong mission statement as a moral compass and the core of what guides the community.

Campus Minister shared she is a part of the school's Catholic identity formation committee through the school's strategic plan and the impact the committee has on the shaping of the school's culture. Although Campus Minister feels the culture and mission are strong, there is lots of room for improvement. She shared as a committee, they feel the mission statement should be more linked to being a Catholic school:

It's (school mission statement) not actually rooted enough in our identity as a community of faith, and how our relationship with Christ should affect us and how we live and what we do. And that really is that our mission should be about getting kids on fire with their faith because that will get them to heaven and also, it will affect their holiness in their life right now and how they impact the community right now. So, the impact of the community is almost a side effect of that personal holiness. And I think that that's kind of lacking right now in our mission statement in general.

Campus Minister also verbally shared the Catholic identity formation committee's portion of the school's strategic plan and the five goals with subcategories. The first goal was to communicate the Catholic school mission statement and ensure the Catholic faculty and staff are faithful to their Catholic identity and mission. Under that goal, Campus Minister shared the four objectives they believed were needed to meet those needs. Campus Minister explained those objectives:

The first objective was that we would clarify the mission statement to align it with the Archdiocese's mission and values. Our second objective was development methods and a plan to recognize staff who exemplify being faithful to this new mission. The third thing is to provide recommendations on ways faculty and staff can incorporate the spirit of the Catholic mission into their ongoing responsibilities. The fourth objective was to utilize the School of Faith program that we do in our Catholic schools to energize the staff and help get them on fire.

Campus Minister also shared the other four goals under the strategic plan. The other goals included: practicing Catholic traditions within curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities; providing students and their families with the ability to connect to their parish ministries; increasing the encounters that our students, faculty, and staff can have with Jesus Christ; and increasing curricular opportunities through elective options addressing Catholic identities.

Similarly, to the director of recruitment, Campus Minister felt the greatest impact she has seen the mission of the school have on the students is the realization the Catholic faith is so much more than rules that need to be followed but instead how the students, faculty and staff interact with their fellow man. She described a weekly program at the

school called “Theology Thursday” where students eat lunch in the campus ministry offices and talk about “hot button topics” in an honest and open setting. It was through this program that Campus Minister shared she felt the school’s mission lived out the most effectively because the students worked together, they learned from each other and they internalized the lessons they learned from each other. She shared that they felt this helped meet the fifth goal of the committee to offer more theology electives to “address kind of the deeper spiritual hunger that the students have.” As Campus Minister shared, “I think that’s how real education, real Catholic education, should be.”

The campus minister also highlighted the impact school leadership’s attendance on service trips had on the culture of the school and how the transformative approach to that part of leadership galvanized the school community. Campus Minister shared when the current school principal came back from a service trip with students, he said to the staff, “This is what we’re about. We’re a Catholic school.” Campus Minister stated “I’ve never heard him talk that way. Like the way he said it, it just really touched me. It was from our main leadership, it was public, it was decisive” and she drew “a ton of strength and energy from that.”

Additionally, the shared leadership aspect was noted as the current school president tasked the campus minister with making it a priority to research what schools across the United States do well with Catholic identity and Catholic culture. As she stated, her president looked at her and said, “This is a problem. We want our school to be Catholic. We want it to have this strong identity. Find where they’re doing it the best. We want to be better at this.” Thus, Campus Minister was able to travel to a few other Catholic school systems to learn from their leaders and bring the learned information

back to her high school. One of these programs that she is working on is learning from a visiting school that is helping to establish a discipleship program at her high school. Campus minister shared another area of growth she learned from another school is establishing a few “intentional weeks where we’re really highlighting our Catholic identity.”

## **Classroom Teachers**

### ***Teacher #1***

Teacher #1 has taught at her school for 9 years and has served as the theology department chair for the past 6 years. Furthermore, Teacher #1 also serves as the relationship coordinator at the school, a specific position geared to help young teen students navigate adolescent relationships in a healthy and safe manner. Teacher #1 described she was sought and hired by School President #2 because of her expertise in her field and she had written several books on teen relationships and dating as well as her previous experiences at other schools. The relationship coordinator position was one that did not previously exist and was seen as a need by School President #2 and co-created in collaboration with Teacher #1.

Teacher #1 also described the culture at her school as a “Catholic family” even though many students and faculty are not Catholic but are still welcome and embraced. Teacher #1 shared that part of the welcoming and Catholic family atmosphere stems from the strategic drive to begin and end each day with a prayer rooted in the school’s mission statement. Teacher #1 described the mission-based prayer as one of the “coolest things” at her school because “it keeps the mission statement present in all of our minds as adults, but then it also refreshes the memory of the kids as far as what we’re doing.”

Teacher #1 discussed in great detail the important of service opportunities at the school and the impact it has on the students and the community. The goal, in Teacher #1's opinion, is to make service something the students don't feel is a task and it becomes part of who they are and they continue to enjoy service and incorporate it into their daily lives when they leave the school.

One major takeaway from the interview with Teacher #1 was the reverence and respect for School President #2, especially in regard to strategic, shared and transformational leadership traits. Teacher #1 shared that School President #2 was her favorite leader to work for because he was her favorite principal ever to work with because of how he treated and supported the teachers as well as setting the cultural expectation of personal and professional support. She expanded on that although he was a strong strategic leader, he set the expectation of how teachers should also model the school's mission and culture for others. Teacher #1 also noted that the current school's principal has improved in his transformational leadership approach and it has had a large impact on the school's community.

Teacher #1 also explained one of the school's strengths is the trust school leadership puts in its teachers and the shared leadership opportunities given for staff and students. Teacher #1 described the school's campus minister and her department as a major strength in improving school programs and the Catholic identity and culture of the school. Additionally, she explained the students are given many opportunities to live out their faith through service, and this builds student ownership in the school. Teacher #1 also shared this ownership of the school's culture and Catholic identity does not just come from the Catholic students. As a theology teacher, she shared one of the most

memorable moments in her long career of teaching came from a classroom conversation. In that conversation, a student who described himself as an atheist said because of the conversations with his teachers and peers, he was thinking that there may be a higher power in the world and that “he was looking into Buddhism.” She described it as a beautiful conversation and one of respect and support for each other. Additionally, Teacher #1 shared an anecdote about a non-Catholic student who actively participates in the school’s campus ministry and leads prayer in the school. She stated, “This is why I teach and especially teach theology because you see their hearts changing and their hearts changing their minds.”

Lastly, Teacher #1 shared that this school’s culture and Catholic identity is not just seen in the classrooms where teacher are present, but also in the school’s extracurricular activities like athletics and club competitions. Teacher #1 shared the school is “always getting letters from different coaches who are saying ‘We’re impressed with how our kids handled this or that,’” and that the school is “showing our Catholic identity on the court, and on the field, and in the robotics competitions, and in cheer, wherever the kids are and the adults are with them, that were showing our Catholic identity.”

### ***Teacher #2***

Teacher #2 has taught science at the high school for 15 years. She described the culture at the school as very caring and compassionate and also as a family. She attributed this familiar relationship to the fact that the faculty and staff feel like they know each individual student who graduates on a personal level due to there being so many opportunities to interact with the students outside of the traditional classroom

experience, including grade level retreats and service learning opportunities. Teacher #2 also described the strategic, shared and transformational leadership shown by the school's leaders as a major strength in building her school, especially in building the school's Catholic identity. Teacher #2 described the implementation of the school's PLC procedures, the opportunity to give shared responsibility and the leadership's inspirational appeal in participating in these opportunities as major reasons why:

As we've taken on these professional learning communities, and all been a part of it, we've always made sure there's a Catholic identity learning community. And we are given the opportunity to move from one PLC to another, so it's not just always the same teacher, staff members on it, so you get different opinions. Everything we do, we're encouraged to always start with prayer, so it's not just something we do in our classrooms. At our sporting events, we pray before all of our varsity matches too. I've seen our administrators be involved in service trips. Our principal just went on the March for Life, so that's, I see leadership taking advantage of these opportunities or going outside their comfort zone when they're very busy people, and they take the time to experience those same things that we offer our students.

Teacher #2 also shared the shared leadership is seen throughout the school and she has been lucky to be able to lead service trips for her students as well as lead two school sponsored clubs. The opportunity not only got the students out of their comfort zones, but also affected the adults and shared feeling created a sense of togetherness and deepened the experience for everyone. Teacher #2 remarked that the experiences the students have to live out the mission through service has a profound impact on the community. Additionally, the school's leaders show transformational leadership through

how they recognize the faculty and staff for their commitment to the school community and also the school's leaders are active participants in the school activities and also invest in the community by sending their own students to the school.

***Teacher #3***

Teacher #3 is a theology teacher who also is an alumnus of the school and also serves as a coach for the theatre and drama department. He has taught for two years, both at his current high school. Teacher #3 shared that being a teacher, coach and alumnus gives him a unique perspective and it allows him to “evangelize in a kind of different way, by building stronger relationships with students throughout their years” at the school.

Teacher #3 described the school's culture differently than many of the other people interviewed. Teacher #3 described the school as one where many students arrive without a lot of faith or personal relationship with Christ and the culture reflects that many students may not see faith as all that important upon arrival. Additionally, he stated his belief that many students do not feel like the school is a home or get a familiar sense as others may have described, partly because they do not feel like they can be themselves or have to “put up a false exterior.” Teacher #3 believes this is the case because many students are not happy with the Catholic church and “their domestic church, is not good and that has a big impact on them.” Teacher #3 stated the culture at the school is not bad, but the connection between the school's culture, Catholic identity and mission is an area for growth.

Teacher #3 remarked that although he is on the Catholic identity or faith formation PLC/committee, he feels there is more talk about changes than actual

implementation and that the evangelizing to the staff cannot just fall to that particular committee, but instead must have the entire school community play an active role.

Teacher #3 shared he believed the school used to be stronger in those areas, but “has kind of lost that” since his time attending the school and feels “teachers can only do so much” in improving the school. Most specifically, Teacher #3 hoped the Catholic identity PLC had more of an impact and promoted and initiated more school wide change. He believes this is because of a lack of specific purpose or narrow focus. He stated:

A lot of what the meetings consist of is like, "Well, here's all the problems." We look at the big problems, and so we come out of those meetings like, "Wow, we've got a lot of work to do." But I want to narrow the focus a little bit more. Let's focus on how we can improve. For incoming freshmen, how can we make their life a little better through faith? I don't know. Something like that.

Teacher #3 also denoted the Catholic identity and culture can improve with a more transformational approach from the school's current leadership and living out their faith in a more active and visible manner. For instance, Teacher #3 shared he would like to see the school leaders lead prayer at the faculty and staff meetings instead of asking someone else to do it. He shared, “It's okay that the prayer's not great as not a lot of people are good at just whipping out a prayer ad lib” but feels it is important to see leaders do that.

Lastly, Teacher #3 shared that the school community does a good job of living out the mission on a daily basis. He stated:

The mission is forming young men and women to be Christian leaders. Essentially, on a daily basis, I think what we do really well is we hold students accountable for

actions and that prepares them in a really good way for being leaders and being productive citizens. So that's good. These students work so hard, and I think helping them to develop that work ethic is really good, and that's another way we accomplish that. I think that's two of the things that we are really good at, is when these kids work super hard in their activities and their academics, not all of them, but most of them, and so I think teachers are really good at that. And students are generally really good at responding to that and wanting to be a part of this.

#### ***Teacher #4***

Teacher #4 has taught at her school for 17 years in the social studies department and has also served as a coach for many educational clubs. Like many of her peers, Teacher #4 used the word “family” to describe the school’s culture and stated this stems from the students knowing the mission of the school. Additionally, Teacher #4 described the culture of the school positively because the students are required to do community service and are given opportunities to serve others on mission trips abroad. Teacher #4 commented that the integration of the school’s mission and focus on social justice in the “Senior Studies” course helps students to make a connection between the school’s mission and the world beyond their school walls. The course is required for graduation and Teacher #4 described that the course combines theology, government and social studies with a focus on issues of social justice. The students are required to pick a topic where there is an injustice in the world “they have to take it through the circle of social action where they have an awareness.” As the “promotion of justice” is a part of the school’s mission statement, Teacher #4 felt that there is intentionality in connecting the school’s mission to the students’ application and work:

They research and analyze the injustice through both the social studies side and the theology side and then ultimately have to do an action plan where they try to set change for that particular injustice. So, I'm kind of lucky I'm on this end. I get to see seniors take everything that they've gained through their years here, through all of their classes, theology and others, and bring it all together and actually try to live out the mission statement.

Teacher #4 also emphasized, in her 17 years as a teacher at the school, she has seen a conscious and intentional effort by the school's leadership to make the mission statement a major part of the school. When she started teaching, she shared she did not believe any of her students could tell her what the school's mission statement was. However, Teacher #4 stated the intentionality of the school's leaders in making the mission more visible and understood and through the PLC process, the Catholic identity of the school has grown in her time. She reiterated that at first, they started with the students understanding and memorizing the school's mission statement and then would expand little by little, growing the school community's sense of mission and Catholic identity. Teacher #4 shared:

I feel like it's (school mission statement) a much bigger part of who we are now than it was. Not that I don't feel like people didn't think it was important back then, but I think we make sure that the kids know what it is. I think because they know, it helps them identify what they are doing, that sort of moves in that mission statement.

#### ***Teacher #5***

Teacher #5 has taught at the school for three years, teaching theology, sponsoring a boy's religious formation group as well as coaching baseball at a few different grade

levels. Teacher #5 described the Catholic identity and sense of mission at the school as “definitely on the upswing” due to the “intentional efforts being made to distinguish this is not just a private school, but a Catholic school.” Teacher #5 believed he had good context when looking at the Catholic identity of his school as he had previously taught at two different Catholic schools in other parts of the country. Whereas he felt that all the Catholic schools he had been at were good at educating the students and he described them as “good private schools” but his current school is better at being a Catholic school. Teacher #5 attributes this to the strategic plan and the intentionality to review the Catholic identity goal.

Teacher #5 also shared he believes the school’s current leadership fosters a sense of shared leadership and collaboration at the school. He believes the shared leadership encourages collaboration amongst the school’s staff as they are forced to depend on each other and, in doing so, begin to form relationships and even form deep, lasting relationships amongst both faculty, staff and students. Teacher #5 believes this is due to the many programs and clubs teachers lead and have for the students to participate in. Teacher #5 underscored not only the club he leads, but the work of the campus minister and the prayer groups, theology discussions and other opportunities she leads for the students.

Teacher #5 also attributed the sense of mission to the amount of service the students are required to do and also the plethora of opportunities, not only on the day of celebration of service in the community or the month dedicated to the school’s mission, but also the service trips. Teacher #5 believes service is so important because it’s part of the school’s mission and mission statement, which is to promote justice, empower others

and initiate change. Additionally, Teacher #5 stated service has become part of the school's culture because although the service hours are required, he sees many students go way beyond the required hours needed. He stated in his junior homeroom, the majority of his students are way over the required 15 hours per year, with many tripling the required hours.

In addition, Teacher #5 touched upon how the current school's leadership promoted a positive culture and deepened the Catholic identity in the school by participating alongside the students on service trips and the March for Life in Washington D.C. He explained that although the current school principal is not a person who gives "big speeches," he feels his leadership style has been great especially as he supports the teachers, embraces shared leadership and has been more transformative in his presence at school events and trips. He also added within the shared leadership domain, the current administration is open to teachers and their new ideas, and in Teacher #5's opinion, always embrace his new ideas, if the idea is focused on student improvement, by saying "Try it. How can I help you?"

Teacher #5 also believes his role in promoting a positive culture and deepening the Catholic identity of the school has been through welcoming and embracing the differing faiths of all of his students, not just the Catholic students. He stated:

So, I've seen my focus kind of shift from just pure knowledge, like, "If you know all these facts, then you will be a good Catholic," to, "Do you know who you are? Do you know yourself? Do you know what you want?" So, I've seen kind of a shift to self-awareness and that's kind of reflected in some of my practices like journal-writing, discussions, this kind of stuff. But I want the students to walk out of my

class with a sense of awareness that they know how to ask questions about life and seek answers, but not necessarily feel like they have to have them all before they can be a complete human being.

In addition, Teacher #5 discussed many daily routines and practiced traditions like the morning and afternoon all school prayers, starting each class or game with prayer as well as daily mass as visible and invisible reminders of the school's Catholic identity.

Teacher #5 also highlighted he feels the focus on the school's Catholic mission has led to a more accepting culture between the students and how they treat each other. Although he acknowledges there are friend groups and social cliques, they are not as prevalent as he has seen in other schools and that "more students than not are accepting of others and reach out to others and kind of have an eye out for students on the margin. That's something I've really been impressed by."

### **Athletic Coaches**

#### ***Coach #1***

Coach #1 has coached volleyball at the high school for seven years where she has also served as a teacher for the same amount of time. Prior to her experiences at her current Catholic high school, she taught and coached for nine years in a local public school. Coach #1 described the culture of the school as "a positive small town" where there is not a lot of negativity in the community. Coach #1 attributes this partly to the spiritual and moral compass the school embraces as a Catholic school centered on Jesus Christ, but also there has been a strategic investment in having a positive Catholic school culture. She added that because of this investment her school has had lots of academic and athletic successes and success has fueled a continual desire to be excellent.

Coach #1 also explained the school's motto which expresses the goal of making a difference in the world, stems from the school's mission and is lived out "every second" as it is "embedded everywhere in these kids." She explained this is a succinct desire of the school to have the students and athletes be self-reflective learners who ask themselves if they are making a positive difference in every action. Conversely, Coach #1 stated she has surveyed the coaches and the athletes at the school in regard to Catholic identity and the school's mission for her own research in her Masters in Leadership program. In that research, she explained the majority of the coaches and players stated the part of the mission they see lived out most in athletics is empowering others. Coach #1 ascertained that because the motto stems from this mission, she sees a direct correlation between how embedded the school's motto of making a positive difference is to how the players empower others and live out the mission in athletics.

Coach #1 also shared that, in her opinion, School President #2 was a great leader who if School President #2 said, "go out and dig trenches back there, I would have done it for him as he's a guy you wanted to work for." She added not only was School President #2 a dynamic and relational leader, but he was also very strategic and always seemingly thought things all the way through and had multiple plans if something didn't work out. Additionally, she shared that School President #2 and the current school leadership embrace the talents of the people in the building and empower them to lead by not micromanaging them. She explained in other schools where she has worked, micromanaging stifled the individuals being led and also led to a negative school culture.

In defining her own role as a steward of the school's culture and promoting Catholic identity, Coach #1 shared she feels it is modeling for the students and athletes

the same expectations she has for them. For instance, if she asks them to not be on her cell phone, she must also model for them too. Coach #1 explained every time she steps on the volleyball court to coach, she feels empowered to live out the school's mission. She shared:

I feel like I'm empowered every time we step on the court for volleyball. How I act is direct correlation to how the school is perceived, so if I'm up screaming, yelling, cussing, people are going to think that's what we're like here. If I'm calm, cool, collected, keep myself together, then they'll think that's what we're like here. So, I feel every time I'm on that big stage, whether it's presenting at a clinic that I just did this weekend, or if it's in the State championship game that's on TV and in front of thousands of people, whatever, I feel like that's my opportunity to exhibit positive culture and exhibit Catholic identity is not cussing, not freaking out and doing things that we do here. That's probably the best.

Part of this modeling also comes with building in the same religious practices in the classroom into her coaching routines. Coach #1 explained she not only starts her classes with prayer, but as a team, they start practice, warm-ups and games with prayer. Mainly, Coach #1 describes her top priority as a coach is to build relationships with the students and to empower her players:

I try to build relationships. That's my number one priority. I feel like how you act around kids and the expectations you set are all kind of ways of living the mission. I want to give them chances too, my volleyball players for example, if they feel that we need to make a change, I want them to tell me. Then, let's see if we can make that work. Sometimes their ideas aren't good but that's okay. Why wouldn't I give

them a chance? Our seniors think of our motto. Our seniors think of our shirts. The more investment you have the kids give, the more they feel like they're making it, I think you get more out of them.

### *Coach #2*

Coach #2 has coached the girls' basketball team for sixteen years, three as an assistant and thirteen as head coach. He has also taught at the high school for all sixteen of those combined years. Coach #2 described the culture of the school as very positive although he explained he felt that when School President #2 left, there was a bit of a morale and culture dip. Part of this dip was due to the fact School President #2 did a great job of setting the vision for the school and he had command of the strategic plan. He shared the school was "a little spoiled" with School President #2's leadership and his departure "created a power vacuum" where the staff didn't know "who's answering to who and who's really in charge and what's really going on here." He attributed this dip to the potential thought that school leadership believed "we're just going to keep this train rolling." Coach #2 explained the school culture and leadership has picked back up recently, as he feels the current school leadership has become more transformative and approachable and the culture has thus improved and is "back to where we want it to be."

Coach #2 shared very similar sentiments to Coach #1 in that his role as a model for the school's mission and culture is paramount and he sets high expectations and standards for his players to do the same. Additionally, he touched upon the numerous service opportunities and service requirements for the students as major strengths in living out the school's mission. Consequently, one interesting opinion Coach #2 shared is the responsibility for the stewardship of the school's mission and Catholic identity may

fall too much to the campus ministry department. Although Coach #2 is trusting and appreciative of the school's leadership, he is fearful that some faculty or staff members may feel alienated or not entirely able to have ownership in being stewards of the school's Catholic mission if there is an imbalance in who is responsible for that obligation.

### **Club Leaders**

#### ***Club Leader #1***

Club Leader #1 is a former parent who has served in a variety of different roles for the past fourteen years. Currently, he is the robotics club coach and has worked in this position for three years. Club Leader #1 described the school community as very supportive and that, even as a non-athletic club coach, he gets great support from the administration and the booster club. He also shared that evidence of the school's mission and Catholic identity is seen in his experiences with the robotics team. Club Leader #1 shared an anecdote where he felt this was evident. While on a trip to Beijing, China for a robotics competition, he and his students were on a tour with other schools and the encountered a gentleman with obvious mental challenges. Whereas other students from other schools laughed at the man, Club Leader #1 described how he felt this was a learning opportunity for the students and pulled them aside to remind them of this man's challenges and how they need to be sensitive and grateful for all of the gifts God had given them. Subsequently, the entire team decided to pray for the man and also "say a prayer for everybody else on this bus that doesn't understand" the man's challenges. He reinforced this anecdote with an explanation of his role in promoting a positive, Catholic culture at the school:

I remind myself, or my other parent volunteers remind me and we also remind each other too that, it's just the attitude we have towards our kids. The attitude we want our kids to have toward other people. So, my biggest role is to lead by example and to find teachable moments when they come up and embrace the teachable moment. We're not afraid to say a prayer before we do something, we're not intimidated to think about even saying, "What would Jesus say about that?" or I even say, "hey did you remember last Sunday the gospel was about this, this and this?" We're seeing it right here. We are able to point that out.

Club Leader #1 also described his role as a steward of the school's Catholic mission through his participation with the school's service days and service trips. He reiterated the sentiments of others interviewed, sharing the service opportunities at the school help the students live out the school's mission because "that's really where you see the mission because you're putting these kids out of their comfort zone into a situation where when you're out of your comfort zone, you show your true colors."

Lastly, Club Leader #1 shared School President #2 was the most impressive school leader during his time as a community member. He shared that School President #2 had the "ability to know you and remember you, which is unbelievable and he always took the time to talk with you." Most importantly to Club Leader #1, he shared that School President #2 always had the students' interests and well-being as his top priority and that he was able to have an individual relationship with everyone in the school community.

***Club Leader #2***

Club Leader #2 has served at the school for sixteen years at the school with three of those years as the club leader for the mentoring program at the school. The mentoring program is designed to help incoming freshmen to have a mentor or “go-to person” as Club Leader #2 explained. She explained that throughout the year, and with administration’s help and support, they build in time monthly for the mentors and mentees to meet and interact socially. The mentorship program arose from the school’s mission statement, specifically the part about “empowering others” and from the school’s motto to “make a difference.” Club Leader #2 shared that this is a strategic and intentional initiative to build a sense of community with the newer students. Likewise, she explained the goal is having someone to show kindness and she witnesses the elements of the school’s Catholic identity in “seeing Christ represented through the actions and the talks” that the mentors have with their mentees.

**School Parents*****Parent #1***

Parent #1 had four students attend the high school over a period of six years. She explained over that period of time, since her students were so close in age, she was involved heavily in the sports and activities her students participated in and thus was engrossed in the academic, athletic and social aspects of the school. Immediately, Parent #1 described she saw the school’s mission and Catholic identity extremely evident through the opportunities the students are given for service and, specifically, the entire day the school has annually dedicated for service in the community. She shared that:

To make a day like that, where they put 700 kids out into the city, providing service all in one day, at all these different places, I just think that's a phenomenal undertaking. I just always thought that was a really cool thing that they did, that that service piece was there. And of course, they all do service year-round, and are required to do service, but that day was just always a special day. The kids always looked forward to it.

Parent #1 noted that during her students' time at the school, there was many athletic achievements, including many league and state championships. However, thorough it all, there was rarely a time where she felt embarrassed by the students' actions and she believes that is because of the prayers before, during and after games as well as the expectation that Catholic identity and Christian values should be seen in how you behave when you win or you lose.

Parent #1 also shared she felt the school's leadership, specifically School President #2, aimed to strike a true balance between academics, faith and athletics. She shared during a time of great athletic success for the school, School President #2 would work to share with the community and celebrate the successes in academics and faith equally. She expanded upon School President #2's leadership by sharing his transformative nature as a leader and how the students responded to his leadership:

I mean, for the president to come out and have that kind of relationship with the kids, you expect the principal to know the students, but when the president does too, I think just shows, again, that they are out there modeling for the kids, how to behave and how to treat other people, in being so involved in the daily activities, instead of just sitting in an office. Which is what, I guess, I would have thought a

president would do. Maybe it's that way everywhere, I don't know. But our experience there was even that top leadership was involved with the kids.

Parent #1 also shared a certain tradition at the school she felt promoted a positive school culture and deepened the sense of Catholic identity where, towards graduation, the seniors turned over the leadership responsibilities to the juniors in a candlelight mass or “Light of Leadership” mass. She explained she felt it was a nice tradition that was symbolic of the school’s mission and motto to “make a difference.” She also shared she felt blessed her students were able to have a school with a campus minister as well as club opportunities, specifically drama and the fine arts. She expounded on this notion that a well-rounded school adds to the Catholic identity because:

It's amazing what they do out there with their plays and things like that. I think those roles for leadership, and then of course in the athletics, and just the other clubs that they have, well I think anytime a student is in a leadership role, that Catholic identity piece is coming through, if that's the kind of people they are.

***Parent #2***

Parent #2 had four students attend the high school over a ten-year span. Over that time, she described the culture of the school as positive and supportive. Similar to Parent #1, Parent #2 described the service opportunities at the school as the first and most defining characteristic of the mission being lived out by the school community and the students promoting social justices. Parent #2 described in detail many of the same service trips highlighted by others and the impact they had on her students and their Catholic worldview. She also shared how during her student’s time at the school, the school’s popular motto was formed from the school’s mission and using the lyrics of a popular

Christian song, “Go Make a Difference.” Moreover, Parent #2 explained the impact that the senior studies project had on her four children and how impactful the social justice aspect of the piece was for their learning.

Parent #2 was also a part of a group of parents, teachers and other stakeholders who were invited by School President #1 and School President #2 (at the time the school’s principal) to be on the school’s initial Catholic identity strategic planning sessions. She shared the group looked at Catholic identity, the service projects, the student retreats and all other religious and faith-based components of the school to offer suggestions or ideas on how to improve those areas of the school. Parent #2 shared that she felt empowered by the invitation, and similar to others interviewed, spoke highly about School President #2 and the impact he had on the school, her students and herself as a parent. She shared an anecdote about the card of condolence she was sent from School President #2 when her mother passed away and how much it meant to her and the family. She further explained the impact School President #2 had on the school’s culture and his leadership:

His level of expectation was high for the students. What he, I don't want to say demanded, but it was you just knew that he had standards and the kids, I think, were fine at meeting those standards in regards to appropriate behavior at games and treating other players respectfully and parent-to-parent involvement. To me, he was a really good listener, which showed. It reminded me of Jesus in the sense of how Jesus listened and then responded. He's never quick on the “let me tell you how it’s going to be.” You know? It was “thank you and I'll get back to you,” but I always felt like he listened and that was really important.

Lastly, Parent #2 shared evidence of the school's Catholic identity and Catholic culture through the visible religious symbols and iconographies. Parent #2 described how the school did a good job of remembering the students and community members who have passed away tragically with plaques, memorials and gardens as well as how the community supported each other in times of tragedy. Ultimately though, Parent #2 shared the school's mission was most lived out, in her opinion, through the focus on service and the service trips:

It was such an intimate, small group and that the kids were all okay with being there, so singing the Kumbaya songs that we sang, and being reflective about their day's work and how it affected them, and who they saw the face of Jesus in at the Indian Mission.”

### **Findings**

From these interviews, themes emerged about the importance of the key leadership qualities needed, specifically in the areas of strategic, shared and transformational leadership that helped advance the school's Catholic mission and deepened their Catholic identity. These themes emerged in discussion of both former and current leaders at the school as I looked for notable passages and quotes from the participants that were deemed noteworthy to the research. Next, I then coded the raw data into preliminary codes and ultimately the final code. I used thematic coding to better familiarize myself with the raw data and then synthesized the data provided by the participants. I started with broader themes in the initial coding process and then I was able to integrate all of the themes into the final code. Alongside these three important leadership qualities, it was also discovered that in order for the school to successfully

advance the school's Catholic mission and deepen its Catholic identity, lay Catholic leaders must also make sure a school has a strong, Catholic mission that clearly articulated the purpose of the school and is embraced by all of the school's stakeholders in order to successfully meet the standards and characteristics that define an effective Catholic school.

After analyzing the data, one unexpected finding was that lay Catholic school leaders must also be highly adaptive in their approach to leading their followers. This is because of the importance of lay Catholic leaders adapting strategic, shared and transformational leadership traits to successfully fulfill the defining characteristics of a Catholic school. A lay leader needs to be able to move fluidly between the three aforementioned leadership traits and this inherently in itself can prove to be difficult in an ever-changing educational landscape if that leader is not able to also be fluid in their approach.

### **Strategic Leadership**

A common theme that emerged from the interviews with the participants was strategic leadership is vital to contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church (2), being distinguished by excellence (3), making sure education is accessible to all students (8) and making sure that the school is established and respects the authority of the bishop and the Catholic Church (9). The data gathered highlighted the school leaders' adherences to having a mission rooted in the Catholic faith, striving to be excellent in all aspects of the school, aiming to serve a wide array of learners and not delineating from the Catholic faith and its social teachings.

As noted, strategic leadership is viewed as a process that allows organizations to manage change effectively through careful planning, monitoring progress, being responsive to variables and participating in self-evaluation (Ketchen, Edwards, Short & Try, 2014). School President #1 described the careful planning that went into creating a team to strategically plan on all areas of the school improvement and specifically paid astute attention to setting the culture and character of the school imbedding the school's mission statement in all areas of the school. School President #1 stated the schools strategic planning "reinforced that culture every year by the in-service programs."

School President #2's interview yielded many examples of strategic leadership, especially in the five concepts that make up the definition of strategic leadership: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organization to the strategy, determining effective intervention points and developing strategic capabilities (Davies & Davies, 2004). This was no more evident in School President #2 surveying the school early in his tenure around stakeholder's knowledge of the school's mission and was alarmed by the results. Thus, School President #2 described the "full-court press with just idea after idea of really embracing the mission statement and employing it in every aspect" of the school.

The word vision is often associated with strategic leadership and School President #2 set a strategic vision by making the mission of the school a focus and then executing the plan to make the mission a living and breathing aspect of the school with clear intentionality and planning. This included School President #2's description of how he needed to align the organization and all of the people in the school with the direction he strategically set forth.

School Principal also acknowledged the process set forth of evaluating the school's mission and Catholic identity every five years in their strategic planning process because "we do want all of the people that are a part of this community to know, respect, acknowledge, embrace the Catholic nature of our community." Assistant Principal noted the strategic leadership not only contributed to the evangelizing mission of the Church but also making in alignment with the authority of the Church and the Bishop as "that all policies that we have in place at their core have some sort of bit of that Catholic identity in them, or at least that was taken into consideration." Director of Admissions highlighted how the school's previous leaders (School President #1 and School President #2) instituted Catholic identity into the school's two professional learning community (PLC) structures, one was departmental and one was component based. He furthered the school's previous leaders did a very good job of focusing on the intentionality and review of the school's strategic plan and that after their departure, there may have been a little dip in that area when the strategic leadership they embraced left.

The interview with Campus Minister underlined examples of how strategic leadership was seen in the school's culture to be distinguished by excellence in all aspects of the school community. This was demarcated by her comments on how the school's leadership set high expectations for growth and relied on the school's strategic plan to set forth the vision for the school. She described how the school's strategic plan made the school's Catholic identity a priority and that she participated on the Catholic identity formation committee. On that committee, four objectives were set and they centered on the school's Catholic mission.

The interviews with the teaching faculty yielded more examples of strategic leadership, especially in regard to reverence for School President #2. Teacher #1 noted that School President #2 was her favorite leader due to his high expectations for excellence and his strategic visions. Teacher #2, Teacher #4 and Teacher #5 noted the impact of School President #2's implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) and its impact on deepening the school's sense of mission and Catholic identity. Teacher #3's opinions highlighted the importance of strategic leadership but differed from the interviews with his peers as he noted the loss of this area of leadership when School President #2 left and wish that the school could improve in this area again. Teacher #4 and teacher #5 also denoted the intentionality and strategic leadership the school's leadership took in making the mission more visible and its impact on improving the school's sense of Catholic identity.

The school's commitment to evangelization and excellence in all areas through strategic leadership was also seen in athletics and other extracurricular activities. Coach #1 believed the school's strong Catholic culture was due to the strategic investment and intentionality in planning that area. She noted that the school's academic and athletic successes they are known for is due to the expectation that all areas of the school have a role in the school's Catholic identity and culture. Coach #1 also had great reverence for School President #2 especially in how he seemingly thought things all the way through and had multiple plans if something didn't work out. Coach #2 also underscored the effectiveness of School President #2, specifically in the area of setting the vision for the school and his overall command of the school's strategic plan and the vacuum of power the school felt when he left.

The club leaders and school parents interviewed also talked specifically about the impact School President #2 played in their experiences with the school, specifically in making sure the school was distinguished by excellence in all areas. Parent #1 shared how School President #2 aimed to have a balance of being great in academics, faith and athletics and celebrating the achievements in these areas equally. Moreover, Parent #2 shared how parents were invited by the school's presidents to be on the strategic planning committee on Catholic identity, showing the importance of all stakeholders laying a part in deepening the school's Catholic identity. Parent #2 also shared how the high standards of excellence that School President #2 had for student academic, spiritual and social behaviors helped foster the school's culture of excellence.

If strategic leadership is defined as “the ability of an experienced, senior leader who has the wisdom and vision to create and execute plans and make consequential decisions in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous strategic environment” like a school, then from the data gathered, it is clear that School President #2 had a major impact as a strong, successful strategic leader at the school (Guillot, 2003, p. 67).

### **Shared Leadership**

It was also found that shared leadership is crucial to making sure that the school was committed to the education of the whole child (4), that the school provided an authentic educational experience that has a Catholic worldview (5) and also is fashioned in communion and community (7). A common theme emerged that the leaders at the studied school ensured students could participate in a variety of clubs, sports and other extra-curricular activities, provided authentic and real world learning and service opportunities that extended beyond the physical walls of the school as well as fostered a

community built on prayer and shared meaning. It was evident from the participant interviews that the positive school culture was a shared responsibility amongst all stakeholders.

As noted earlier, shared leadership is team-level approach or leadership theory that considers the behaviors enacted by several individuals as opposed to the hierarchical, top-down leadership model also encourages collaborative and mutual understanding in the decision-making processes and puts a large emphasis on individuals personally connecting with one another to meet the team's objective (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006). From the beginning of the school's inception, its leadership paid particular attention to engaging the school's stakeholders in all areas of leadership and trying to maximize the talents of the people in the community. School President #1 early on formed a committee to use all of the shared experiences at other area schools in creating their own future. School President #1 also shared many anecdotes of how the school's sense of community was formed through a strong sense of the mission that stressed the importance of service to others.

School President #2 strongly emphasized the importance of shared leadership in the school when trying to answer the question "Whose responsibility is it to ensure it's a Catholic school?" and how he never wanted anyone to say or believe that the responsibility to deepen the school's Catholic identity fell to one person. He stressed the expectation was set forth with shared responsibility and teamwork when it came to the school's mission and after strategically assessing the school's culture and understanding of the mission, he created a multi-disciplinary, school improvement team to get better in that area. School President #2 also in doing so, the school had greater buy-in and

participation in improving the school's sense of mission, culture and Catholic identity. As he stated, the responsibility to deepen the Catholic identity of the school could not be departmentalized. School Principal also noted this buy-in and participation was not just with the faculty and staff, but with the students as they were able to have more well-rounded education and a Catholic worldview through participating in service opportunities outside of the school's four walls.

The Director of Admissions described the importance of shared leadership through the leadership of School President #2 and how he would always be present and accessible to the school's leadership team but would not micromanage every area of the school. Instead, School President #2 would set up strategic procedures and processes in place, like the school's PLC structures, to ensure leadership was distributed throughout the school to maximize the abilities of all those in the school community. This was also highlighted in the conversations with the Service Coordinator and the Campus Minister, specifically in their roles serving on committees specific to Catholic identity and formation.

The impact of shared leadership was also evident in the conversations with the school's teachers. Teacher #1 discussed how School President #2 entrusted her with the relationship coordinator position and its role in culture and Catholic identity. Teacher #1, Teacher #2, Teacher #4 and Teacher #5 also stated a major strength of the school was the leadership's trust in giving staff and students opportunities to lead in all aspects of the school and this led to deeper relationships and a family-like atmosphere. Teacher #2 emphasized students are able to have an authentic worldview because faculty are able to lead many service trips and students have many opportunities for service throughout the

year. Teacher #3 did share there are opportunities for shared leadership at the school but that shared leadership in the school may be lacking effectiveness due to his belief the school had lost the specific purpose or narrow focus needed with better strategic leadership.

Lastly, the school's coaches, club leaders and parents all emphasized how within the school's culture, everyone is depended upon to take ownership and leadership in advancing the school's mission. All of the coaches, club leaders and parents emphasized the expectation that they must model and carry out the expectations the school's leadership has in regard to service, prayer and other areas of Catholic identity and culture

### **Transformational Leadership**

It was also was revealed that transformational leadership is necessary to ensure the school is centered on Jesus Christ (1) and that the school is sustained by gospel witnesses (6). One of the important findings in this research was that school stakeholders looked to the school's lay leaders to be moral exemplars who tried their very best to model Jesus Christ in their interactions with the stakeholders and they did not shy away from participating in the school's activities and traditions.

As was documented earlier, transformational leadership suggests a more dynamic approach to a leader and follower relationship, where leaders share the organizations vision with the stakeholders and works alongside them to create a more intrinsically motivated follower group (Barth-Farkas & Vera, 2014). School President #1 discussed the importance of being present in the school and his vital role in interacting with all of the school stakeholders on a regular basis. One very important takeaway was School President #2's assertions that once he had set the schools strategic vision and set

structures in place for shared leadership to thrive, he shifted more into a transformational style of leadership where he had to empower others and grow as a spiritual leader of the school. If he expected staff and students to live out the school's mission than he had to model that as an authentic witness too.

Additionally, this was one of the major areas of growth and improvement for School Principal, who noted that his standing as a leader and his impact on the school's culture improved as he became more intricately involved in working alongside the faculty, staff and students. School Principal noted he had a strong learning curve early on as the principal of the school and when he had a more proactive approach in participating in school service trips, masses and being a better spiritual leader, his capacity to lead grew. This reflection was also highlighted by many of the interviews with his faculty and staff who noted his standing grow as a leader when he displayed more transformational leadership attributes, specifically Service Coordinator, Campus Minister, Teacher #5. Director of Admissions noted this improvement in transformational leadership but also explained he felt the overall participation of the school's leadership in the school's religious ceremonies could improve.

### **Mission-Centered**

Alongside these aforementioned leadership qualities, it was also discovered that in order for the school to successfully advance the school's Catholic mission and deepen its Catholic identity, lay Catholic leaders must also make sure a school has a strong, Catholic mission that clearly articulates the purpose of the school and is embraced by all of the school's stakeholders in order to successfully meet the standards and characteristics that define an effective Catholic school. Throughout all of the interviews,

the intentionality to mission awareness set forth by School President #1 and School President #2 was seen. Deep conversations and answers were given in relation to the importance of the school's Catholic mission. School President #2's strategic focus on making the school's mission statement known by all stakeholders and the emphasis on all stakeholders having shared responsibility in the implementation of mission-centered practices was evident in all of the data collected.

### **Adaptive Leadership**

After finding that lay leaders need to be mission-centered and employ strategic, shared and transformational leadership approaches to meet the defining characteristics of a successful Catholic school, one unexpected finding emerged in regard to adaptive leadership theory. The participants in the study noted the distinct ability of School President #2 to be able to successfully employ these leadership qualities in differentiating circumstances. The basis for the framework of adaptive leadership was formed by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) for leaders to respond to changing environments and be more effective in leading in a non-static world. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) note that it is important for leaders to understand that every situation that requires leadership is not identical and no context is exactly the same or is every stakeholder or stakeholder group the same within an organization. In each of these different contexts, lay Catholic leaders need to be able to deconstruct a situation and know what application of leadership needs to be applied when most appropriate.

As can be seen in *Figure 1*, the defining characteristics of successful Catholic schools require specific leadership traits for each characteristic. Thus, a leader must know how to understand the complexity of the situation they are leading and be able to

diagnose the skills needed to lead in that moment. With the changing dynamic in Catholic education and the stresses that face lay Catholic leaders, adaptive leadership requires the implementation of a multifaceted approach and with a strong sense of mission and values to do what is ethical (Yukl & Moshad, 2010). It is my belief that adaptive leadership is the model needed for lay Catholic school leaders to successfully implement strategic, shared and transformational traits in meeting each defining characteristic of a successful Catholic school and in doing so, deepening Catholic identity in their community.

### **Discussion**

Catholic school enrollment is declining across the United States and Catholic school leaders are faced with a challenge of growing Catholic education given unique challenges and doing so in a way to stand out amongst their competitors. Research shows to do this, Catholic schools need a strong sense of Catholic mission and Catholic identity. *The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) includes defining characteristics that delineate what the identity is for Catholic schools and what constitutes an excellent Catholic school. However, what is not defined is the leadership traits and qualities are needed by lay, Catholic school leaders to ensure these defining characteristics are seen throughout the school.

In analyzing the collected data, it emerged School President #2 served most as an adaptive leader who had a good combination of strategic, shared and transformational leadership abilities. School President #2's ability to set forth to deepen the school Catholic identity through a focus on mission through very strategic means including evaluating the school's knowledge of the mission statement, careful planning and

intentionality on how to make sure there was improvement in this area and re-evaluating the gains made in this area to track progress. School President #2 extolled the five concepts make up the definition of strategic leadership: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organization to the strategy, determining effective intervention points and developing strategic capabilities (Davies & Davies, 2004). This strategic approach helped the school meet the defining characteristics of a successful Catholic school by contributing to the evangelizing mission of the church by strategically placing visible and non-visible signs of Catholic culture and identity in all areas of the school and also being distinguished by excellence in all areas of the school and that the school was not defined by excellent in only one area or was unbalanced. Furthermore, this strategic approach helped the school be accessible to all students so that there were fewer barriers to those wanting all that encompasses a Catholic education and also having a cooperative relationship with the school's Archdiocese.

While School President #2 exhibited strong strategic leadership, connections were also made to organizational structure he put in place with focus on the rhythm of people with specific skills working homogenously towards the common goal and vision he set forth. The theme of the collaborative environment and mutual understanding in the decision-making processes was evident in analyzing the data as multiple leaders were identified throughout the school, including campus ministry, service, academics, athletics and with the parents. This shared leadership structure helped the school form well-rounded students with growth spiritually, morally, academically, mentally as well as socially and physically through delineating certain responsibilities and shared expectations to a variety of faculty, staff and even parents. This shared leadership also

required shared ownership and buy-in and created a familial sense noted by almost all who were interviewed. Additionally, the focus on service to others and fostering an education that is imbued with a Catholic worldview was set forth in the mission but was carried out by not just the religious faculty but was seen as a responsibility of all stakeholders and put a majority of that responsibility on the students to prepare them for a life of service as they sought to seek wisdom, truth and promote social justice. Lastly, this commitment to shared leadership and responsibilities was evident in the sense of community as the term “family” was used by almost all stakeholders, both externally and internally.

Another key finding was when School President #2 left the school, there was a dip in culture or a void in leadership that was felt by many. School Principal noted this dip too and not until he began to come into his own with a more transformative approach, did the leadership void start to improve. Whereas School President #2 extolled the transformational leadership sub-dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration, it wasn't until School Principal participated in the school's vision with more enthusiasm and zeal did he see his impact on the school's culture and identity grow with the school's stakeholders. This improvement and attentiveness in transformational leadership helped make sure Jesus Christ's commitment to social justice and service to others was being lived out by everyone in the school and the school's leadership was there alongside the followers in collaboration and community.

Lastly, within the three themes of leadership, there was a binding component that was necessary in all three; the commitment and focus to the school's Catholic mission

and a strong, clearly articulated mission statement. It was clear that without the school's strong sense of mission, the ability to strive and meet the defining characteristics of a Catholic school would have been difficult and potentially rudderless, as the "intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school" would not be in place for the school's leaders to nurture and lead (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 61).

I believe these findings will be beneficial for Catholic school leaders to use as a guide in their own attempts to deepen their school's Catholic identity and do so with a strong focus on mission. As a result, I believe Catholic school leaders can also better understand this process by using a strong commitment to mission as a way to intentionally strive to adhere to the defining characteristics of a Catholic school while also being intentional to adaptive leadership qualities (strategic, shared and transformational) the school's leaders exhibited in this study. There are some limitations to this study in that the school and leaders in this study may not be representative of all social and economic standings for all Catholic schools needing to get better in the aforementioned areas. The school studied may not be as affected by the negative trends and external factors that are more prevalent in other areas of the United States and focuses only on a Catholic high school and not elementary and middle schools.

I believe one major strength in these findings that can be applicable to all leaders and within Catholic schools is that the standards and benchmarks set forth in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* are broad specifically to apply to all areas of Catholic education and the defining characteristics that delineate what the identity is for all Catholic schools (Ozar &

Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). In using the defining characteristics of a Catholic education for these standards and benchmarks alongside the study of the leadership qualities needed to implement and maintain strong mission-centered practices, the findings will hopefully be universal to all areas of Catholic school leadership.

### **Summary**

The aim of this study was to examine how lay Catholic school leaders at one Catholic high school advanced their school's Catholic mission and deepened their Catholic identity as well as to explore the leadership traits and qualities needed in order to effectively navigate this very important responsibility given the current challenges Catholic schools face. In an effort to provide a meaningful example of how these lay-led, schools without religious orders can overcome these challenges, I interviewed 18 participants from a diverse stakeholder group at a lay-led, Omaha Catholic high school that was without the traditions of a religious order that is historically common in Catholic schools.

From this research, themes emerged about the importance of the key leadership qualities needed, specifically in the areas of strategic, shared and transformational leadership. This led to the realization that in order to successfully accomplish these applications, one must be adaptive in their leadership style. Furthermore, this adaptive approach utilizing strategic, shared and transformational leadership was identified as vital to leading a school towards continued improvement and growth in meeting the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* and the corresponding nine defining characteristics of Catholic schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). With this adaptive leadership approach, it was also discovered that in

order for the school to successfully advance the school's Catholic mission and deepen its Catholic identity, lay Catholic leaders must also ensure a school has a strong, Catholic mission that clearly articulates the purpose of the school and is embraced by all of the school's stakeholders in order to successfully meet the standards and characteristics that define an effective Catholic school. In the next chapter, I will present Catholic school leaders with a proposed solution on how they can overcome the many obstacles taking place in a contemporary Catholic education, advance the mission of their respective schools and deepen the Catholic identity in their schools based on the findings from this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

### **Introduction**

Lay leaders in schools without religious orders need more guidance on how to cultivate a school culture that advances the mission of Catholic education. Additionally, there are few examples to help lay principals measure their effectiveness in deepening the school's Catholic identity through a focus on the school's religious mission (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008). In this chapter, I will provide solutions on how Catholic school leaders can deepen the Catholic identity of the school and advance the school's Catholic mission. Also, I will also provide lay leaders examples of applied strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories in a Catholic school setting and how these applications can help to grow Catholic schools in a time of great urgency. Lastly, in this chapter I will describe procedures for implementation of the proposed solutions as well as discuss leadership-related implications.

### **Aim Statement**

The aim of this dissertation was to provide lay Catholic school administrators a guide to deepen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission. The purpose is to provide a model to all lay Catholic school leaders through this study's exploration of how schools without religious orders can carve their own specific Catholic identity without the anchor and identity of a religious order. In doing so, the aim was to provide school leaders with ideas on how they can overcome the many obstacles taking place in a contemporary world and brand themselves to stand out amongst their competitors. Lastly, this case study aims to provide future Catholic school leaders and researchers evidence and suggestions for implementation of strategic, shared and

transformational leadership attributes in leading and sustaining effective Catholic schools.

### **Proposed Solution(s)**

In order for Catholic school administrators to craft and deepen their own school's Catholic identity, leaders can find direction with these important tasks by adhering to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These standards include the defining characteristics of Catholic schools that are successful in preserving Catholic identity and advancing the mission of the Church and serves as a guide in the school's strategic plan for school improvement. This is because these standards and defining characteristics highlight that exceptional Catholic schools are driven by the school's Catholic mission and encompasses Catholic identity. Table 1 describes the strategic steps for the proposed solution.

**Table 1**

*Description of Strategic Steps for Proposed Solution*

<b>Step 1</b>	Assess whether the school has a mission that is rooted in the Catholic faith and is well known throughout the entire school community.
<b>Step 2</b>	Engage in the strategic process of creating, re-creating or re-vitalizing the school's mission.
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>Catholic school leaders should make the <i>National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools</i> (Ozar &amp; Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) a part of its strategic planning. This strategic planning must include an assessment of the school's successes and gaps in these four standard domains (Engel, 2020; Simonds &amp; Cook, 2020):</p> <p><u>Standard Domains and Benchmarks</u>            Mission and Catholic Identity            Governance and Leadership            Academic Excellence            Operational Vitality</p>

<b>Step 4</b>	A plan for assessment of the school’s planning with the assessment tools that align with the <i>National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools</i> (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012) in order to provide baseline data to set long term, strategic and measurable goals for school improvement in deepening Catholic identity in the school.
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Before Catholic school leaders can put procedures in place to gauge their effectiveness in meeting those standards and also establish plans to improve, the school’s leaders must assess whether their school has a mission that is rooted in the Catholic faith and is well known throughout the entire school community. If the mission and the statement of the mission is not a living and breathing element of the school’s community, the leaders of that Catholic school must engage in a process of creating a mission that helps delineate the school’s purpose. This is because the mission represents “intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 61). If the mission shapes and reflects the vision for the school, then it must be a vibrant and well-understood part of the school community, or any efforts to enact meaningful change will be rudderless. Engel (2020) stated that a Catholic school’s purpose is based on Jesus Christ and is the essential purpose of the Catholic church and its mission. Therefore, a school must be able to name its Catholic identity before it can then begin the process of claiming its Catholic identity (Engel, 2020; Simonds & Cook, 2020).

After a school engages in the process of creating, re-creating or re-vitalizing their mission or “naming” it’s Catholic identity through that sense of mission, Catholic school leaders should make the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic*

*Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) a part of its strategic planning. This strategic planning must include an assessment of the school's successes and gaps in these four standard domains (Engel, 2020; Simonds & Cook, 2020):

Standard Domains and Benchmarks

1. Mission and Catholic Identity
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Academic Excellence
4. Operational Vitality

Additionally, Catholic school leaders can self-assess if they are effectively obtaining the defining characteristics and authentically meeting the Catholic school standards and benchmarks through assessment tools provided by the same standards and benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These assessment tools align with the benchmarks and standards and provide baseline data to set long term strategic and measurable goals for school improvement in deepening Catholic identity.

After going through the process of mission re-vitalization and aligning the school's improvement plan with the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), Catholic school leaders must then begin to think about how to make their sense of Catholic identity distinctly their own. This is especially necessary for the Catholic school that does not have the religious traditions and anchors of a religious order as Catholic leaders will need to be creative and ready to build something distinctly their own. Simonds and Cook (2020) referred to this process as "claiming" a school's Catholic identity. After centering the school's mission and purpose, Catholic school leaders must intentionally plan and

continually re-evaluate its Catholic identity as part of the continual school improvement plan. One suggestion for how school leaders can do this is through using Simonds and Cook's (2020) examples of aligning the nine defining characteristics of effective Catholic schools with the school's specific characteristics and using that reflective process to build upon for ongoing Catholic identity improvement.

After being able to better "claim" the school's specific characteristics (charisms, traditions, etc.) that make up a school's Catholic identity and connect with the mission of the Catholic church, Catholic school leaders should use the examples from Fussell and Brock (2020) on how to build and deepen the school's Catholic identity. These examples include a schoolwide cycle for ongoing Catholic school identity improvement as well as a tool for synthesizing and prioritizing the school's Catholic identity. With this tool, Catholic school leaders and their school improvement teams can prioritize areas of need for improvement and growth in Catholic identity. This plan for improvement will lead to a shared process of asking specific questions about where they can grow in Catholic identity, why they know they can grow in that area, how they can begin to strengthen in that area and how they will know they are strengthening the Catholic identity in that area (Fussell & Brock, 2020).

After going through these steps to re-vitalize the mission and strategically put schoolwide improvement procedures to "name", "claim" and "build on" a school's Catholic identity, Catholic school leaders need to be highly cognizant of the nine defining characteristics of highly effective Catholic schools. This knowledge includes understanding what leadership strategies are needed for continual progress and maximizing the school's efforts to deepen and sustain Catholic identity in their schools.

The nine defining characteristics identify what is considered to be profound Catholic identity in schools. As noted in this study, many believe that a strong sense of Catholic identity and sense of mission is what is vital for Catholic schools to overcome the many obstacles facing them today. Catholic school leaders must also be aware of their role in championing the importance of these defining characteristics in deepening their school's mission. Catholic leaders must also be intentional in using an adaptive leadership approach and apply strategic, shared and transformational leadership qualities in the following nine defining characteristics of a Catholic school as seen in *Figure 1*.

Engel (2020) mapped the ancient marks of the Catholic church in alignment to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) because he believed that it would be a mistake to overlook the ancient marks in the school improvement process as the marks are what align schools with Jesus Christ and the Catholic church. I assert Catholic school leaders must be accountable and stress the importance of adaptability and situational leadership in their leadership and management of school wide improvement plans, specifically to include the nine defining characteristics of a Catholic school. This is an important step for Catholic leaders to help keep the evaluation process in alignment with the Catholic mission and Jesus Christ.

### **Evidence that Supports the Solution**

The data revealed that School President #2 was held in high esteem by the stakeholders and many participants indicated a void in leadership when he left the school. School President #2 exuded adaptable leadership with situational awareness when using strategic, shared and transformational leadership abilities. This combination of leadership

abilities resulted in a positive growth in the school's sense of Catholic mission and the formation of the school's distinct Catholic identity. School President #2 took steps to survey the school's stakeholders on the community's ability to recite the school's mission statement. In making that the main priority in the school improvement process, School President #2 was able to "name" the school's Catholic identity through that focus on mission (Engel, 2020).

After those initial steps, School President #2 set up specific strategies and procedures to be able to "claim" the school's unique sense of mission and Catholic identity only after everyone was united in that understanding of the school's mission (Simonds & Cook, 2020). With these steps the school was able to begin what was described by the interviewed participants as an important time in the school strengthening its Catholic identity and better meeting the defining characteristics of a Catholic school. School President #2 took very strategic means in deepening the school's Catholic identity and extolled the five concepts that make up the definition of strategic leadership: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organization to the strategy, determining effective intervention points and developing strategic capabilities (Davies & Davies, 2004). Additionally, School President #2 deepened the school's Catholic identity through strategically placing visible and non-visible signs of Catholic culture and identity in many areas of the school. He also distinguished excellence through attentiveness to deepening Catholic identity in all areas of the school, including academics, faith formation and athletics.

The data highlighted that School President #2 established a strong collaborative environment and mutual understanding in decision making processes. This was seen in

the hiring and implementation of leadership opportunities throughout the school, including campus ministry, service, academics, athletics and parent/volunteer involvement. The data also showed that School President #2's shared leadership strategies helped those in the school, whether students, faculty, staff or parents better grow spiritually, morally, academically, mentally as well as socially and physically through delineating certain responsibilities. School President #2 displayed confidence and trust in the school stakeholder's abilities. His leadership also required shared ownership and buy-in in school's improvement and created a familial sense noted by almost all who were interviewed. This was revealed in the data as the word "family" was referenced and was a continual theme.

As noted earlier, when School President #2 left the school, there was a noticeable dip in culture and a void in leadership felt by many. In the interview with School Principal, this void was noted and that not until developed a more transformative approach, did that leadership void start to dissipate. Whereas School President #2 exemplified transformational leadership through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration, it wasn't until School Principal grew in his role as a transformational leader that he saw his impact on the school's culture and identity grow with the school's stakeholders. This growth in School Principal was also described by the other participants interviewed in this study. This improved attentiveness to transformational leadership helped assure that Jesus Christ's commitment to social justice and service to others was being lived out in the school community and the school's leaders were there alongside the followers in commitment to service.

Lastly, within the three themes of leadership, there was a binding component necessary in all three; the importance of adaptable leadership combined with the commitment and focus to the school's Catholic mission and a strong, clearly articulated mission statement. Without the school's strong sense of mission, the ability to strive for and meet the defining characteristics of a Catholic school would have been more difficult and erratic.

The findings highlighted the importance of having a strong sense of mission and this impact was evident in the literature and also the descriptions of School President #2's steps to focus on the school's mission statement. The importance of strategic thinking and intentionality was evident in those processes as was shared leadership in being able to maximize the talents of all those who belong to the school community. The data also revealed the importance of transformational leadership in deepening Catholic identity as seen in School President #2's abilities to lead through setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional programs in the school, especially through his collaboration and presence (Leithwood et al., 2006). However, one suggested area for improvement was highlighted by the dip in culture and Catholic identity when School President #2 left the school. For other schools to better combat similar leadership vacuums through transitions of leadership, it is vital to align the school's improvement plan with the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* and continually imbed the nine defining characteristics for Catholic schools in that continual process of evaluation and improvement (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). For that process of maintenance, Catholic school leaders should continually evaluate their role in being stewards of their school's

Catholic mission through identifying and applying strategic, shared and transformational leadership virtues. This is because these leadership virtues align with the nine defining characteristics. By not highlighting and adhering to those leadership responsibilities the result could be short-lived or solely dependent upon the need for a transcendent personality to lead the school.

### **Evidence that Challenges the Solution**

Engaging with the school's mission will not be a straightforward process and there are likely obstacles to any proposed solution. There will exist school presidents and principals who are ill-prepared to carry out the engagement required to get this school improvement process started. These same leaders may also lack the needed self-awareness to realize when they are confusing their acts of leadership as noble when instead are at best ineffective and at worst divisive. This process may also require lots of time, patience and fortitude as cultural changes in organizations can often take many years. This is because organizations may have stakeholders who are so steeped in the past that they have become "toxic followers", people who have been so damaged by a prior administration that they almost require a deprogramming to become engaged with a new way (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Finally, a school may have faculty who are lukewarm in their spiritual journey and cannot significantly engage with the school's sense of Catholic identity and merely go through the motions to remain employed.

### **Ill-prepared Leaders**

Ill-prepared leaders are leaders who lack self-awareness about their own weaknesses or have blind spots in their aptitude for leadership. The proposed solution in this study requires that a school's leadership understands the relationship between

leadership and power. Power is often associated with the ability to influence one's stakeholders and true leadership is not able to happen without power. This is because leaders shape their groups attitudes and behaviors. However, the ability to influence others does not translate directly to leadership as the power to influence others must be in pursuit of the organization's goals. Therefore, the solution proposed in this study can quickly be eroded by a school's leader who confuses the relationship between power and leadership, as well as confuses transactional acts of leadership as transformative. A leader may feel that they are being transformative but instead are engaging in a model of "reward power" through delivering something they feel that their stakeholder values. This confusion is a model that relies on power related to the school leader's position of authority rather than the leaders power related to who they are as a person (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). This confusion can lead some leaders to feel that followers must comply with the mission instead of engaging with the mission in which stakeholders are free to be able to question the school's purpose and the leadership's judgment (Lipman-Blumen, 2006).

These ill-prepared leaders may also have blind spots in what they deem to be shared leadership strategies that are in fact exclusive. Some leaders may believe that they are sharing leadership by delineating certain tasks and responsibilities to other followers but may in fact be deemed by other stakeholders to be "inner circles" or cronies. These stakeholders who are a part of the "inner circle" may view their role as receiving power from the school leader and are thus carrying out the purpose and goals of the leader and not a shared sense of the school's mission. (Halverson, 2008). Lastly, some leaders may also lack awareness that their application of seemingly sound strategic leadership may not

be fruitful if they ignore the influences on culture that transformational and shared leadership play. Louis Gerstner, the CEO who was famously known for positively changing the direction of IBM, stated that “Fixing the culture is the most critical-and most difficult part” of a company’s transformation and “that culture eats strategy for breakfast any day” (Zweifel & Borey, 2013, p. 136). If leaders are not balanced in their leadership, they risk the school’s culture not matching the strategic planning they put in place and thus being ineffective regardless of how sound the plans may be.

### **Toxic Followers**

The influence on a school’s culture can have a negative effect on the followers and can show up in any stakeholder group. Within a school, there may exist stakeholders who wanted a different leadership team, and as such hinders the development of a cohesive team. School leaders may also have to focus on negative issues regarding a previously established culture. School leaders may engage with followers who are cynical because of actions made intentionally or unintentionally as well as cynicism that exists due to external factors outside of the leader’s control. Some followers in the school may also be extremely dissenting or on the opposite hand, they do not feel comfortable speaking up to avoid being labeled as someone who whines. Followers can be afraid to share what they deem to be “bad news” in fear that they will be deemed responsible and either keep the information to themselves or even try to blame others. (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

### **“Followers” Versus “Disciples”**

Catholic school leaders may also have stakeholders who may be viewed more as “followers” than “disciples” in relationship to the school’s Catholic mission. In a time of

continued trends towards disaffiliation with the Catholic Church, whether for social, political or relational reasons, this trend is having not only a strong effect on the number of practicing Catholics but even the spiritual engagement with those who still do identify as Catholic. In her book, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*, Weddell (2012) describes that within the Church there are followers who may have interest or a relationship with the Church or a Catholic school, but at a distance and without the investment that will cost them something personal or requires a deep commitment. In contrast, Weddell (2012) describes that a disciple is a more active participatory member of an organization's mission and seeks a more intentional commitment to carrying out the gospel of Jesus Christ. School leaders may find it difficult to deepen the school's sense of Catholic identity and advance the mission of the Catholic Church with people who may consciously or subconsciously identify are what Weddell (2012) describes as "followers".

### **Implementation of the Proposed Solution(s)**

The aim for this study is to provide lay Catholic school administrators a guide to deepen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission while also proposing a model or roadmap on how they can effectively meet this challenge. Gobbo (2008) proposes a synergistic approach for problem solving and decision making for leaders that begins with the first step of developing problem awareness. These steps include: Developing problem awareness, gathering information, identifying alternatives, selecting a solution, implementing the solution and evaluating the outcome. Table 2 illustrates the steps needed for the implementation of the proposed solution.

**Table 2***Steps to Implementation of Proposed Solution(s)*

<b>Step 1</b>	Catholic school administrators clearly articulate to the school's stakeholders, through inspirational appeal and motivation, that deepening the school's Catholic identity is a priority for the school's success in all areas.
<b>Step 2</b>	School leadership must identify key members who they feel are truly invested in the school as "disciples" and build a team to address the problem the school faces of not having a greater sense of its Catholic identity.
<b>Step 3</b>	The school's strategic team gathers information from a variety of different sources and stakeholder groups on the problem through an environmental scan of the school's culture and sense of Catholic identity and mission. It is suggested that the environmental scan should use rubrics offered through the <i>National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools</i> to get an accurate sense of where they stand in meeting those standards as well as gather data from their stakeholders using the aforementioned Catholic identity program effectiveness surveys.
<b>Step 4</b>	The school's strategic team selects the agreed upon solution to the problem and then selects what method of implementation they will use as well as what people/groups will be both affected by the strategic plan and who will be responsible for carrying out the work designated through the plan.
<b>Step 5</b>	The strategic team must also determine a form of measurement and determine a timeline to evaluate the outcomes and the progress they are making towards deepening their school's Catholic identity (Gobbo, 2008). That form of measurement should be the same tools used in the data gathering process used in the onset as the surveys and rubrics provided the group a baseline to measure at the determined time of re-evaluation of the plans progress.

Therefore, the first step for Catholic school administrators is to clearly articulate to the school's stakeholders through inspirational appeal and motivation that deepening the school's Catholic identity is a priority for the school's success in all areas. After the school's leadership has made the appeal to the stakeholders that deepening the school's Catholic identity is a priority, the school's leadership must identify key members who they feel are truly invested in the school as "disciples" and build a team to address the problem the school faces in not having a greater sense of its Catholic identity.

The next step in this strategic process is for the school's strategic team to gather information from a variety of different sources and stakeholder groups on the problem. Through this data collection process, the school's leadership team tasked with deepening the school's Catholic identity, whether through the school's strategic planning or school improvement team or within a subcommittee dedicated to Catholic identity should begin to see a clearly defined problem emerge (Gobbo, 2008).

There exist many ways in which a leadership team can gather the necessary information and do an appropriate environment scan of the school's culture and sense of Catholic identity and mission. In conducting an environmental scan, Fordham University offers suggestions on how to track trends both internally and externally in an organization's environment in order to make changes both for the current dilemma the school faces but also in order to better predict any future hurdles. They suggest that effective environmental scans also use both qualitative and quantitative data so that the team responsible for strategic planning has considered all areas that can have an impact on the desired outcomes. Some of the environmental factors to consider include but are not limited to: demographics, politics and public policy, economies, labor market, academic interests, technology, research and philanthropy ([https://www.fordham.edu/info/26625/conducting\\_an\\_environmental\\_scan](https://www.fordham.edu/info/26625/conducting_an_environmental_scan))

The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* website provides assessment tools for Catholic school leaders to gather important information in order to assess their effectiveness to meet those standards and benchmarks. The data gathering tools provided include staff, parent and student

surveys on a school's Catholic identity program effectiveness as well as well as rubrics for tracking a school's effectiveness for each standard and domain. After the school's leadership develops problem awareness and builds a team to address the problem, the team responsible with gathering information should do a complete environmental scan, using the suggested rubrics offered through the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* to get an accurate sense of where they stand in meeting those standards as well as gather data from their stakeholders using the aforementioned Catholic identity program effectiveness surveys. It is further suggested that the team responsible for deepening the school's Catholic identity also do a complete review of the school's history of all areas pertaining to Catholic identity to take inventory of what has worked and what be added or changed as well as help in creating or re-vitalizing school charisms (Simonds & Cook, 2020). After the leadership team has compiled this information, they then must develop a statement of the goal they wish to obtain.

In the shared leadership process of building a team, it is important that the leader allows for identifying alternatives to support a broader view of the team members involved and open up the options provided by the team members to be as creative as possible. After this adherence to shared leadership is completed the group can begin to select a solution and plan on how to best deepen the school's Catholic identity. In selecting the solution, the team must then determine agree on the solution and what method they will use. After the team selects the solution and method for how they will deepen the school's Catholic identity the team must begin the strategic planning on how the plan will be implemented but also what people or groups will be both affected by the

strategic plan and who will be responsible for carrying out the work designated through the plan. Lastly, the team must also determine a form of measurement and determine a timeline to evaluate the outcomes and the progress they are making towards deepening their school's Catholic identity (Gobbo, 2008). That form of measurement should be the same tools used in the data gathering process used in the onset as the surveys and rubrics provided the group a baseline to measure at the determined time of re-evaluation of the plans progress.

Lastly, it is vital that school leaders also participate in a form of self-evaluation to make sure that the aforementioned gaps or voids in leadership transition do not happen and that they are adhering to the importance of transformational leadership in expounding the virtues the strategic plan sets forth. Lay Catholic principals must have the self-awareness and adaptability to apply transformational leadership when it is needed, especially with the delineated defining characteristic. It is recommended that principals and school leaders use the principal evaluation tool created by the Marquette University Institute for Catholic Leadership that uses the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* as the main descriptors and indicators for principal effectiveness. This principal evaluation tool uses the domains of mission stewardship, academic leadership, community stewardship and operation leadership as the main areas for evaluation. Moreover, each domain as subcategories including Catholic identity, Catholic school culture and coherence of mission implementation under the domain of "Mission Stewardship" and other subcategories under the other domains that align with specific evaluation for strategic, shared as well as transformational leadership qualities.

### **Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Implementation of the Solution**

Stakeholders who are involved in the strategic plan and mission are preferably the disciples of the school. Leaders must consider their own personal capacity as a leader, surround oneself with people who can support the mission development and those who will be willing to speak truth to power. During the implementation of the aforementioned approach, there needs to be transparent communication of the process to build trust among the stakeholders served. A leader must authentically listen to those involved and develop a structured communication plan both prior to the solution implementation, during and afterwards as well. This communication plan must have a continuous feedback loop. A school leader must use this feedback during this process to support their own growth as well as that of the team of implementors. It would be wise for the school leader to have a mentor through the process. The most critical things for a school leader are to “stay humble to learn, and stay confident to serve” (Cashman 2018).

This process takes enormous support. Being aware of the time and personnel it will take to implement the solution is essential. A leader is asking staff, faculty and community during this process, to go beyond their daily job responsibilities and be involved in the strategic process of mission integration. This requires the school leader to recognize the extra effort and acknowledge the effort. For a short period of time, this process will require external resources such as clerical support, public relations support, consultants and possibly support from the archdiocese. Finding ways to fund both the ongoing effort of the faculty, staff and community (for lunch meetings, day retreats etc.) is necessary as well as internal promotion to solidify the values and mission. Funding for

external resources listed is also required. A budget should be developed for the planning and mission integration and every school year budget should have a line for mission integration expenses as mission is an ongoing investment.

To assure the solution can take place requires a willing community, supportive governing groups, transparent and appropriate communication channels and the time required by the leadership team. If any one of these stakeholders are not supportive, the implementation of the solution can hit a roadblock. A leader needs to be aware of barriers and along the way be testing the places where support might be eroding. Again, internal and external feedback loops are crucial.

In summary, leaders need to be assured of their leadership team's ability and accessibility during this strategic planning process. All stakeholders must be informed through clear and concise communication. A trust environment must be built to support the discovery process and implementation. It is important to be committed to purpose-driven service with an air of authenticity in all stakeholders during any leadership moment (Cashman 2018). The school leaders must embrace their ability to lead change and be open to learning along the way, be present in the process, focus on present moments, trust themselves, the team and the process. This process will require developing resilience and mental stamina as it will stretch everyone on the team as well as the community served (Cashman, 2018). Being able to manage time and energy is crucial for a leader and for training those who will be leading.

### ***Timeline for Implementation of the Solution***

The timeline for implementation for the proposed solution should be vast enough to make sure to encompass the importance of the vision established by the school leaders

and respects the importance of deepening a school's Catholic identity on the school's culture. Conversely, the timeline must also be not too long so each stakeholder can actively participate in the school's strategic plan on a daily basis and be galvanized into action (Zweifel, 2013). Thus, it is recommended that the strategic plan implemented by the schools' leadership team have a three to five-year plan for implementation with a yearly evaluative process on progress using the suggested surveys as indicators for growths and areas for improvement. It is also recommended that the school's leadership use the recommended principal's evaluation tool annually and use the data gleaned from the tool for discussion and evaluation with the school's governing groups.

### **Evaluating the Outcome of Implementing the Solution**

As recommended above, the yearly usage of the rubrics provided by the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* for both creating a baseline for measuring school improvement as well as data to monitor and track progress for growth in the school's sense of Catholic identity and overall school improvement. Furthermore, the yearly usage of the staff, parent and student surveys will also provide data on the impact the school has in deepening its Catholic identity with those stakeholders. Lastly, for the individual leader, the annual principal evaluation will provide similar feedback to measure the professional growth as a steward of the school's Catholic mission as well as their growth and adherence to the necessary strategic, shared as well as transformational leadership qualities.

## **Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

For Catholic schools looking to distinguish themselves from their competitors, one area that they must make sure to be exceptional is in the very thing that makes them distinguishable; being Catholic. With the Catholic church in a crisis of disaffiliation and low enrollment, some argue that Catholic schools are the main avenue to engaging families in Catholic teaching. Thus, schools need a model in place for leaders to have a guide to take on this audacious responsibility in Catholic school leadership and keep the Catholic mission at the forefront of the school. Additionally, Catholic school leaders need to make sure that in meeting this challenge they practice the skill of adaptability when implementing strategic, shared and transformational leadership traits through a self-evaluation process and the adherence to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. This study provides both a plan for Catholic schools to deepen its Catholic identity through a focus on mission with a model that provides strategic plans to accomplish this goal while also focusing on the role of the Catholic school leader and the traits that are required to be a better steward of the school's Catholic mission.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This case study sought to determine how lay leaders in one school advanced their school's mission and deepened their Catholic identity but also determined the necessary leadership qualities that are vital to successfully leading the school's stakeholders in this process. This study found that lay Catholic leaders can successfully deepen their school's Catholic identity with the proper leadership qualities in place. This study found and

suggested the use of assessments and tools to evaluate a school's progress towards meeting benchmarks and standards related to Catholic identity and school improvement as well as an evaluative tool to measure principal effectiveness in these areas. However, this study did not have the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of a school that utilizes both an evaluative system to measure school wide improvement whilst also connecting the leadership effectiveness of the Catholic school leader. That would be an ongoing research opportunity, potentially a longitudinal study at the same school with a mixed-methods study combining the qualitative, narrative forms of data used in this study with the more quantitative data from the surveys suggested to be used in the proposed solution. This mixed-methods research would be beneficial to potentially add more statistical validity due to this study uses of convenient sampling.

Additionally, this study found that there existed a leadership void through a transition of leadership in the areas of Catholic identity and mission effectiveness. There is an opportunity for more research in leadership transitions in Catholic schools and mission effectiveness. Another area for additional research would be to do the same case study on a Catholic school in an urban setting with different external factors and limitations. Lastly, there exists the opportunity to do a comparative study on the effectiveness of Catholic identity and mission effectiveness between a school with the traditions of a religious order and that of a school without those anchors of a religious order.

### **Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice**

As noted in Chapter 2, Catholic schools are being led lay leaders in increasing trends (Hansen, 2001; Heft, 2009; Gardner, 2006). Due to these trends, many fear that the

mission of Catholic education could be changed or worsen if lay leaders fail in the cultivation of Catholic values (Gardner, 2006). Conversely, others see lay leadership in Catholic schools as a way to strengthen the Catholic school mission (Gardner, 2006). Rieckhoff (2014) found that for novice Catholic principals, which are increasingly lay leaders, there exists no model to support them in the many areas that they are responsible for, including being the steward of the school's Catholic mission and identity. For Catholic school lay leaders, this is an audacious responsibility with so many areas of leadership to be attentive too, especially with no model for how to lead in this arena.

Another issue that arises with Catholic lay leaders is the area of assessment of Catholic identity and culture. It has been noted that Catholic schools are facing numerous challenges so the importance of the Catholic school's religious mission in strengthening Catholic identity has never been more urgent. Today, there is a significant emphasis put on assessing schools for accountability in this identity and culture urgency (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008). For Catholic schools, the effectiveness of their religious mission must also be a priority for school leaders. However, making leaders aware of this urgency, convincing leaders to make improvements in areas related to mission and identity and measuring the improvements made are enormous challenges (Cook & Ostrowski, 2008).

The aforementioned challenges present a quagmire for lay Catholic leaders and the complexities of the challenges they face requires a multifaceted and adaptable approach to leadership theory and management. In order to lead a school through these challenges, a leader needs to have strong sense of mission, strategy, self-reflection, discernment and vision. The strong sense of mission helps the lay Catholic school leader to align the school's strategic plan and vision with the Catholic mission while also being

self-reflective on the skills required to lead their stakeholders such as strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories. The proposed solution creates a strategic blueprint for lay leaders to combine a strong sense of their Catholic mission and culture while practicing sound leadership theory in the fields of educational leadership.

### **Summary of the Dissertation in Practice**

Catholic schools are closing at much higher rate than they are opening and Catholic school enrollment in the United States is declining at alarming rates (Dolan, 2013; McDonald 2020). The vitality of the American Catholic school is directly tied to the Catholic church's mission as the schools are one of the main vehicles, if not the most efficient vehicle currently, for the evangelization of the Church in the United States. In order for Catholic schools to stem this alarming trend, they must seek to deepen the Catholic identity in their schools as a means to growth the Church and separate themselves from their competitors. This important task now falls to the lay Catholic school leader due to the steep decline in the numbers of religiously vowed over the past 40 years in the Catholic church. To take on this great responsibility, lay Catholic school leaders need more guidance on how to cultivate a school culture that advances the mission of Catholic education in order to deepen the Catholic identity in their schools.

This aim of this study was to provide the growing population of lay leaders who are charged to *Teach as Jesus did* (1973) and adhere to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) with suggestions on how they can grow the mission of the Church in their schools. These examples included a focus on the discovery of school charisms to deepen the Catholic identity of the school and advance the school's mission. This study also

aimed to provide lay leaders examples of applied strategic, shared and transformational leadership theories to help them grow their schools in a time of great urgency and sustain a strict adherence to what constitutes an effective Catholic school.

This dissertation in practice used a qualitative case study to explore the ways lay Catholic school leaders at one Catholic high school deepened their Catholic identity through a focus on mission. The research was guided by this principal question: What are the factors that contribute to the advancement of a Diocesan Catholic Secondary School's mission and the deepening of its Catholic identity by a lay faculty and staff? This study gives lay Catholic leaders evidence on how to put mission at the forefront of their schools and how this placement of mission heightens the sense of Catholic identity in their schools. This case study hopes to be a resource for the opening of Catholic schools as it will show how lay leaders were able to deepen their Catholic identity without the traditions of a religious order and through the adaptable application of strategic, shared and transformational leadership. Additionally, this study shows how these lay leaders can create their own traditions whilst still growing their Catholic identity that sets themselves apart from the competition.

This case study collected data from 18 selected research participants from the selected school. The data collected included observations, interviews and the collections of artifacts and texts. After analyzing the data, key findings emerged. One major finding was that in order for Catholic school administrators to craft and deepen their own school's Catholic identity, leaders should find direction through adhering to the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These standards include the defining characteristics of

Catholic schools that are successful in preserving Catholic identity and advancing the mission of the Church and serves as a guide in the school's strategic plan for school improvement. This is because these standards and defining characteristics highlight that exceptional Catholic schools are driven by the school's Catholic mission and encompasses Catholic identity.

Before Catholic school leaders can put procedures in place to gauge their effectiveness in meeting those standards and also establish plans to improve, the school's leaders must assess whether their school has a mission that is rooted in the Catholic faith and is well known throughout the entire school community. If the mission and the statement of the mission is not a living and breathing element of the school's community, the leaders of that Catholic school must engage in a process of creating a mission that helps delineate the school's purpose. After a school engages in the process of creating, re-creating or re-vitalizing their mission or "naming" it's Catholic identity through that sense of mission, Catholic school leaders should make the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) a part of its strategic planning process.

It is recommended that this strategic planning process include a plan to gather information from a variety of different sources and stakeholder groups on the school's Catholic identity and sense of mission. It is also recommended that school leaders conduct an environmental scan of the school's culture in order to better combat any internal or external factors that may be hurdles in the school improvement process. Through this school improvement process, school leaders and their leadership teams should use assessment tools provided by *National Standards and Benchmarks for*

*Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) which include internal rubrics for assessing a school's overall effectiveness in meeting the benchmarks and standards as well as faculty, student and parent surveys on Catholic identity and mission. It is also suggested that the team responsible for implementing plans to deepen the school's Catholic identity also complete a review of the school's history of all areas pertaining to Catholic identity to take inventory of what has worked and what could be added or changed as well as help in creating or re-vitalizing school charisms (Simonds & Cook, 2020). After the leadership team has compiled this information, they then must develop a statement of the goal they wish to obtain. Catholic school leaders and their teams must also determine a form of measurement and determine a timeline to evaluate the outcomes and the progress they are making towards deepening their school's Catholic identity and to provide the group a baseline to measure progress that will also be used for re-evaluation on a yearly basis. (Gobbo, 2008).

It is also proposed that through the strategic process for improvement in deepening the school's sense of Catholic identity and mission, the Catholic school leader must also participate in a form of self-evaluation to make sure that the aforementioned gaps or voids in leadership transition do not happen and that they are adhering to the importance of transformational leadership in expounding the virtues the strategic plan sets forth. It is recommended that principals and school leaders use a principal evaluation tool aligned with the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) for overall principal effectiveness in deepening Catholic identity.

It is my hope that this study can serve as a model for Catholic administrators searching for ways to strengthen their own school's Catholic identity through a focus on mission as well as provide a model to all lay Catholic school leaders through the exploration of how school leaders can shape their own unique Catholic identity through the application of strategic, shared and transformational leadership attributes. In doing so I hope that these school leaders can strengthen their school's Catholic identities as a way to reverse the negative trends in Catholic school enrollment and brand themselves to stand out amongst the growing competition in twenty-first century education.

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*Appendix A***School Contact and Permission to Conduct Research Letter**

[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]

My name is Cory Sepich and I am a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Doctorate program at Creighton University. I am also the principal at [REDACTED] in Omaha, Nebraska.

I am in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation on the deepening of Catholic identity through a focus on mission and school culture. For my doctoral dissertation I am very interested in exploring the methodologies the leaders at [REDACTED] utilizes to sustain and deepen the school's Catholic identity. Additionally, I am interested in exploring how the lay leaders at [REDACTED] nurture the Catholic identity of the school by focusing on the school's mission and celebrating the Catholicity of that mission through various traditions.

Previously, I had received permission from [REDACTED] past school leadership but during my preparation for this study, leadership changed. Thus, the purpose of this letter is to ask for your permission to allow me to study your school in this qualitative case study and agreeing to be a participant in this study. The study would require that spend a few weeks observing the school and interviewing a selection of teachers and school leaders. No students or families will be interviewed in this study.

Please ask any questions that you have about participating in this project at any time. I want you to have the information you need to make a decision that is best for you.

Thank you for your help and consideration for this study.

Regards,

Cory Nathan Sepich  
[REDACTED]

*Appendix B*

## Participants Interviewed

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years of Service at School</b>
School President #1	Male	15 years
School President #2	Male	9 years (2 years as principal; 7 years as president)
School Principal	Male	24 years (6 years as a teacher; 13 years as assistant principal; 5 years as principal)
Assistant Principal	Male	5 years
Director of Admissions	Male	7 years (6 years as director of admissions; 1 year as interim president)
Service Counselor	Female	18 years (12 years as campus minister; 6 years as service counselor)
Campus Minister	Female	3 years
Classroom Teacher #1	Female	9 years (theology)
Classroom Teacher #2	Female	15 years (science)
Classroom Teacher #3	Male	2 years (theology)
Classroom Teacher #4	Female	17 years (social studies)
Classroom Teacher #5	Male	3 years (theology)
Coach #1	Female	7 years (volleyball)
Coach #2	Male	16 years (basketball)

Club Leader #1	Male	14 years (robotics)
Club Leader #2	Female	16 years (mentoring)
Parent #1	Female	6 years with kids at school (4 students)
Parent #2	Female	10 years with kids at school (4 students)

*Appendix C*

Interview Protocol: The Deepening of Catholic Identity Through a Focus on Mission and School Culture

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Cory Sepich

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project on “The Deepening of Catholic Identity Through a Focus on Mission and School Culture.” I want to remind you that your comments will remain confidential and anonymous. Also, have you had the opportunity to review the Bill of Rights for Research Participants that I sent you? (*review/read bill of rights for research participants if not*) Please sign the consent form. Please know that you can take a break at any time and that you can ask me if you have any questions or need clarification. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions:

1. What has been your role at [REDACTED] Catholic High School and how long have you served in that role?
2. How would you describe the culture at [REDACTED] Catholic High School?
3. How do you see the mission of [REDACTED] Catholic High School lived out by the school community’s stakeholders on a daily basis?
4. Can you take me to a time when you saw the mission of the school lived out by the school community and what was it like?
5. What has been the role of [REDACTED] Catholic High School’s leadership team on the promoting a positive culture and deepening the Catholic identity throughout the school?
6. What has been your role at [REDACTED] Catholic High School in promoting a positive culture and deepening the Catholic identity throughout the school?
7. Do you attempt to integrate the mission of the school into your daily practices and classroom routines at [REDACTED] Catholic High School and if so, can you expound on those integrations?
8. What is the student’s role at [REDACTED] Catholic High School’s in promoting a positive culture and deepening the Catholic identity throughout the school?

9. Describe a memorable moment when you felt empowered in your role as a steward for [REDACTED] Catholic High School's mission?
10. What school traditions do you feel help [REDACTED] Catholic High School's community live out its religious mission?
11. Do you see elements of the Catholic faith and identity embedded into the policies and daily practices at [REDACTED] Catholic High School? If so, can explain some of these policies or daily practices?
12. What specific elements, either visible or invisible, at [REDACTED] Catholic High School do you think helps you stand out from the other competing schools?
13. If there is something more you'd like to add about [REDACTED] Catholic High School and our conversations today or if there is something that I have not asked please describe those for me.

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today for this research project. I have very much enjoyed our time today and I appreciate all the help. I will make sure to give you the opportunity to validate their answers and check for any errors or mistakes in your meaning or intent before I complete this research paper.

Additional questions for depth and breadth to the above questions:

Would you expound on that?

Tell me more.

How would you describe that in a different way?

I would like to hear more about that.

Would you clarify that for me?

What was the effect of that incident?

What were the consequences?

What was your reaction to that behavior?

Take me through your thought processes during that time.

*Appendix D***Field Notes**

Length of activity:

Description	Reflective Notes
	Map of Room

*Appendix E***Interview Protocol Recording Tool**

Length of Interview:
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<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>