Does Catholic Social Teaching Really Matter?

Bridging the Gap in the Formation of Student Leaders in Campus Ministry

by
Guilherme Lopes

Submitted to the Faculty of
The Catholic Theological Union at Chicago
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of
Doctor of Ministry

Apr 22, 2026

Scott C. Alexander, Ph.D
Thesis Project Director

Copyright © 2026 Guilherme Lopes

Acknowledgement Page

I begin by giving thanks to Jesus Christ and to the gift of a relationship with Him. This work flows from faith before it ever became an academic project. I am grateful for a Church that continues to call, challenge, and accompany me, and for a faith that insists on being lived as much as it is studied.

I offer special gratitude to the Roman Catholic Church, particularly as I have come to know it through a pastoral and missionary lens. I am deeply thankful for Pope Francis, whose pastoral heart and vision of a Church that listens, includes, and walks with people helped me see myself more fully within the life of the Church. His witness has shaped how I understand ministry, leadership, and hope.

I thank my parents for their courage and risk in migrating to the United States. Their sacrifices created the conditions that made this journey possible, even when they could not have imagined where it would lead. I also give thanks to the many religious women and men who formed me over the years. Their witness, patience, and presence taught me that vocation is shaped as much by accompaniment as by instruction.

I am especially grateful to the Salesians of St. John Bosco, who welcomed me, trained me, trusted me, and employed me. Through them, I learned that ministry begins with presence, that formation is relational, and that young people must always be at the center. I am thankful for the countless youth and young adults who have allowed me to accompany them—and who, in turn, have accompanied me. They have been among my greatest teachers.

I offer sincere thanks to my thesis director, Scott C. Alexander, Ph.D., for his guidance, patience, and steady encouragement throughout this process. His clarity and pastoral sensibility helped me remain grounded when the work felt overwhelming. I am also grateful to my thesis

board: Sr. Patricia Hutchison, OSF—who I publicly insist is the smartest person I know and possesses the largest brain imaginable—Angélica N. Quiñónez, EdD, and Donelle Poling. Each of them brought insight, care, and challenge that strengthened this project in meaningful ways.

I want to acknowledge the many colleagues and communities who have shaped my ministerial and professional life, including the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, Synodality in Catholic Higher Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (SCHEAP), Cabrini University, and Neumann University. I am thankful for the spaces where I was trusted to lead, allowed to learn, and encouraged to ask difficult questions. I am also grateful to anyone who ever allowed me to talk theology with them, wrestle with faith in public, or welcomed me into conversations that stretched my understanding of the Church and the world.

I offer special thanks to Victoria Weekley and Amy Marinario, who were with me at the very beginning of my ministerial formation. We began as colleagues among the Salesians, and over time our roles changed—even to the point where I became their supervisor—but their friendship never wavered. They saw something in me before I could see it myself, offered patience when I needed it most, and never gave up on me, even when it would have been easier to do so. Their accompaniment mattered more than they know.

I am grateful as well for my extended family, especially my in-laws, Fabiana Ruggiero and Mario Ruggiero, my brother-in-law Stephen Ruggiero, and all of my family and friends who supported me throughout this journey in quiet and faithful ways.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank my wife, Natalia Ruggiero-Lopes. Her love, patience, and unwavering support carried me through the long days and late nights of this work.

She believed in me when I doubted myself and walked with me through every season of this journey. This work belongs to her as much as it does to me.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Context …………………………………………………. 13

1.1 Salesian Education and the Oratory Model …………………………………… 15

1.2 The College Years and Early Vocational Discernment ………………………….. 21

1.3 Return to Ministry and the Salesian Preventive System ……………………….. 25

1.4 Integrating St. John Bosco and CST in the Salesian Gospel Roads Revision ….. 27

1.4.1 Embedding CST in the SGR Program Structure …………. ………….. 29

1.5 Recognizing the Formation Gap: From Youth Ministry to Higher Education ……31

1.6 From Experience to Research: Converging Paths Toward the Central Question …35

Chapter 2: CST as a Living Tradition …………………………………………………..40

2.1 The Emergence and Development of CST ……………………………………..42

2.2 Formation for Student Leadership as Formation for Ministry ……………………59

2.3 Understanding Catholic Social Teaching …………………………………………67

2.3.1 Life and Dignity of the Human Person………………………………… 68

2.3.2 Call to Family, Community, and Participation…………………………...70

2.3.3 Rights and Responsibilities…………………………………………… 71

2.3.4 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable…………………………………… 73

2.3.5 The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers………………………… 74

2.3.6 Solidarity………………………………………………………………. 76

2.3.7 Care for God's Creation…………………………………………………... 78

2.3.8 Honorable Mentions: Global Emphases within CST……………………... 79

2.4 Filling the Gap: CST and Student Leadership Formation……………………..…….82

Chapter 3: Methodology ………………………………………………………………84

3.1 Practical Theology as Framework ……………………………………………84

3.2 Research Design and Questions ……………………………………………..86

3.2.1 Research Questions …………………………………………………89

3.3 Data Collection Procedures ………………………………………………..90

3.3.1 Student Leader Survey ………………………………………………90

3.3.2 Website and Public-Facing Institutional Data …………………………..93

3.3.3. Directors Interview……………………………………………………94

3.3.4 Analysis of Programmatic Materials ……………………………………96

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures …………………………………………………98

3.4.1 Organization and Preparation of Data …………………………………98

3.4.2 Initial Coding and Thematic Development ………………………………98

3.4.3 Cross-Case Comparison ……………………………………………… 99

3.4.4 Integration of Four Data Sources (Triangulation) ……………………… 100

3.4.5 Practical-Theological Interpretation …………………………………100

3.4.6 Validity …………………………………………………………………101

3.5 Limitations of the Study …………………………………………………102

3.6 Conclusion ………………………………………………………………105

Chapter 4: Findings ……………………………………………………………107

4.1 Participant and Institutional Overview ……………………………………..108

4.1.1 Participating Institutions (Anonymized) ………………………………109

4.1.2 Student Participants ………………………………………………..111

4.1.3 Director Participants …………………………………………………114

4.1.4 Institutional Websites and Shared Documents ………………………117

4.2 Theme 1: Leadership Formation Centered on Community and Relationship..117

4.3 Theme 2: CST Is Largely Implicit Rather Than Explicit ……..120

4.4 Theme 3: Charism Shapes Leadership More Strongly Than CST Language…124

4.5 Theme 4: Reflection and Spiritual Integration Are Inconsistent ………………..128

4.6 Theme 5: Misalignment Between Institutional Intentions and Student Perceptions 130

4.7 Summary of Themes ………………………………………………………..133

4.8 Transition to Chapter 5 ……………………………………………………..134

Chapter 5: Interpreting CST in Student Leadership Formation …………..135

5.1 Interpreting the Findings: From Description to Implication ……………………136

5.2 Theological Implications for Leadership Formation ……………………………140

5.3 Normative Reflections: What Faith-Informed Leadership Requires …………….142

5.4 Practical Implications for Campus Ministry and Leadership Formation …………144

5.5 Conclusion ……………………………………………………………………147

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Directions…………………………………………150

6.1 Reframing the Research Question …………………………………151

6.2 Summary of Key Findings ……………………………………………152

6.3 Contributions to Practice and Ministry ………………………..154

6.4 Limitations of the Study …………………………………………156

6.5 Directions for Future Research and Formation …………157

6.6 Final Theological Reflection ………………………………………159

6.7 Closing Word …………………………………………………………162

Abbreviations

CCC — Catechism of the Catholic Church

CPM — Community Peer Ministers

CST — Catholic Social Teaching

CVN — Catholic Volunteer Network

DMin — Doctor of Ministry

FMSC — Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart

IHM — Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

IRB — Institutional Review Board

OCIA — Order of Christian Initiation of Adults

OFM — Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans)

OSA — Order of Saint Augustine

SCHEAP — Synodality in Catholic Higher Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

SDB — Salesians of St. John Bosco

SJ — Society of Jesus (Jesuits)

USCCB — United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Thesis-Project Abstract

This project examines how Catholic Social Teaching (CST) functions within student leadership formation in Catholic higher education. Using a practical theology framework informed by Don Browning’s correlation method and Richard Osmer’s fourfold process, the study analyzes leadership programs through surveys, interviews, and institutional document analysis. The research explores the gap between institutional intention and student reception of CST. Findings suggest that CST often shapes leadership formation implicitly through service, community engagement, and institutional charisms, yet it is rarely presented explicitly as a coherent formative framework. The project argues that more intentional integration of CST can strengthen leadership formation and deepen students’ engagement with the Church’s social vision.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

My passion for Catholic Social Teaching (CST) began long before I had the words to name it. As a child, my family immigrated from Poços de Caldas, Minas Gerais, Brazil, to Port Chester, New York, an unfamiliar place that became home because of the welcome we received at Holy Rosary Parish. While the parish was administered by the Salesians of St. John Bosco, the school and community were staffed collaboratively by the Salesians and the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart (F.M.S.C.), whom I will refer to simply as the Franciscan Sisters, especially Sr. Rose Cecilia Bozzo, F.M.S.C.[1], who later served as principal.

It is difficult to overstate the impact of those early encounters. The Franciscan Sisters did not treat my family as a "problem to be solved" or a statistic in a charity report. Instead, they treated us as neighbors and friends—an immigrant couple and their son trying to find our footing in a new land. Without ever invoking technical language, they embodied the core principles of CST.

In practical terms, they helped us navigate parish life: guiding us to the parish food pantry, connecting my parents with social service agencies, advising us about food stamps and housing, and even helping my father find work. Their care was relational, not transactional—far from being "served," we were welcomed and integrated into a community.

Looking back, I now recognize that what the Franciscan Sisters offered went beyond kindness—it was a lived testimony to the dignity of the human person, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor. At that time, I lacked the words, but I internalized those values through their actions: how they saw us, spoke with us, and made room for us.

---

[1] "Sister M. Rose Cecilia Bozzo, F.M.S.C.," *Catholic New York*, August 11, 2016, https://www.cny.org/stories/sister-m-rose-cecilia-bozzo-fmsc,14321.

This experience of radical hospitality inspired my parents to open our home to other immigrants—offering meals, guidance, and even a couch to new arrivals with nowhere to stay. We volunteered at the parish's St. John Bosco Soup Kitchen[2], where I began to learn that service is not an "extra"—it's woven into the rhythm of an authentic Christian life.

One of my most formative experiences came when my parents helped found Port Chester's first Brazilian Catholic community. Not born of institutional planning but of a pressing, communal need, this effort honored our language and cultural expressions of faith. It required grassroots organizing: negotiating with parish leadership, recruiting liturgical ministers, and ensuring cultural traditions were embraced within the broader parish context. In hindsight, it was a practice of subsidiarity—local people organizing for the common good, shaping the ministry that served themselves.

Even before attending Salesian schools, I was shaped by the Salesian spirit. Holy Rosary Parish lived out St. John Bosco's "Oratory model[3]"—a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares for life, and a playground where friends can meet—embodying it daily. Young people there were known, valued, and invited to participate.

From an academic perspective, these early experiences offer a living case study in relational leadership formation. The seeds of this dissertation were planted there—in the child whose parents helped newcomers navigate the bus system, in the teenager serving soup at St. John Bosco's kitchen, and in the young adult who knew—without having the words—that belonging is both a gift and a responsibility.

---

[2] "Ministries & Groups," *St. John Bosco Parish (Port Chester, NY)*, accessed August 23, 2025, https://donboscopc.org/ministries-groups.

[3] *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, Youth Ministry Department, 2014), 32

1.1 Salesian Education and the Oratory Model

The foundation laid in my early parish life deepened when I entered formal Salesian education. From elementary through secondary school, I was immersed in environments intentionally shaped by St. John Bosco's Oratory model. He envisioned the Oratory as "a home, a church, a school and a playground"[4]—a framework that has since been popularly expressed as "a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares for life, and a playground where friends can meet."

This was not a slogan on a wall—it was the lens through which educators, administrators, and pastoral leaders viewed every interaction. St. John Bosco's Oratory model was a quotidian reality. "Home" meant students were known by their names, their stories remembered, and their needs taken seriously. "Parish" meant faith was not an extracurricular activity but the heart of the community's identity, celebrated in liturgies, retreats, and daily conversation. "School" meant that academics were pursued not only for personal advancement but for the purpose of shaping men and women of integrity, capable of contributing to the common good. "Playground" meant that joy, friendship, and healthy relationships were essential to human flourishing and therefore part of the educational mission.[5]

For me, this holistic environment formed a way of seeing the world. In every space—from the chapel to the classroom to the cafeteria—there was an implicit invitation to consider how faith and life informed each other. There was also a clear expectation that one's gifts were meant to be used for others, not simply for personal gain.

---

[4] Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit, Vol. 2: Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory*, ed. Aldo Giraudo (Rome: LAS, 2007), 195.

[5] *General Chapter 24 (1996), Salesians and Lay People, Part 2*, Salesians of Don Bosco, accessed August 23, 2025, https://www.sdb.org/en/SDB_Resources/General_Chapters/CG24_%281996%29/GC_24__1996__Salesians_and_Lay_people___part_2.

The Salesian method, sometimes summarized as the "Preventive System"[6], was particularly formative. Grounded in reason, religion, and loving-kindness, it sought to create environments where young people could grow morally and spiritually without fear. Discipline was not primarily about punishment but about accompaniment—preventing harm by fostering trust, respect, and mutual care. This approach was not only effective in guiding behavior; it also modeled leadership as relational rather than positional.

During these years, I began taking on small leadership roles—helping to organize service days, leading prayer at assemblies, and mentoring younger students. While these opportunities were valuable, I noticed that the language of CST was still largely absent. We lived the values—hospitality, solidarity, and participation—but rarely named them as such.

My first explicit introduction to CST came during my senior year, at a Salesian Leadership Retreat. The retreat provided a list of CST themes, framed as guiding values for Christian leadership. It was a helpful starting point, but the presentation was more *informational* than *formational*; there was little engagement with the theological depth or practical application of those principles.

Shortly after, I participated in Salesian Gospel Roads[7] (SGR), a service immersion program for youth and young adults. In particular, I took part in SGR: Philadelphia, a weeklong experience structured around communal living, daily service, and shared reflection. While the immersion was deeply impactful—bringing me face-to-face with marginalized communities and

---

[6] John Bosco, *The Preventive System in the Education of the Young*, in *Saint John Bosco: Selections from His Spiritual Writings*, ed. Joseph Aubry, trans. Daniel Lyons (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 248–254. See also Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit, Vol. 3: Don Bosco Educator, Spiritual Master, Writer and Founder of the Salesian Society*, ed. Aldo Giraudo (Rome: LAS, 2007), 1–10; and Eunan McDonnell, *Don Bosco: A Spirituality of the Word* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), 112–130.

[7] *Salesian Gospel Roads Program Model: Final Draft* (n.p.: Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Salesians of Don Bosco, n.d.), 3–4.

engaging me in direct service—it nonetheless lacked an intentional framework connecting the work to the Church's social tradition and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We were inspired and motivated, but the theological grounding remained underdeveloped.

During that week in Philadelphia, our group lived together in residential accommodations at La Salle University, sharing meals, prayer, and daily rhythms before traveling to service sites across the city. The immersion included visits to several locations serving individuals experiencing homelessness, most notably St. Francis Inn and Saint John's Hospice.

These two sites marked the first moments in which CST moved for me from something learned indirectly into something lived concretely. Until then, my theological formation had largely taken place in classrooms, retreats, and structured ministry environments. Even when the content was challenging, it remained mediated through discussion and reflection. At St. Francis Inn and Saint John's Hospice, that mediation fell away. I was confronted not with ideas, but with people whose lives bore visible signs of poverty, addiction, illness, and prolonged neglect.

At St. Francis Inn, this encounter unfolded most clearly through shared meals. Sitting across from men and women who had not showered in days, some visibly intoxicated or coming down from substances, others with open wounds or untreated medical conditions, I felt the tension between what I professed to believe and what my instincts initially resisted. Society trains us—often subtly—to avert our eyes, to create distance, to reduce people in these conditions to problems or failures. Yet here, there was no distance. We ate together. We spoke. We listened.

At Saint John's Hospice, the challenge was no less direct. The setting emphasized shelter and safety, but it also revealed the fragility of the human body and spirit. The men there were tired, guarded, sometimes angry or disoriented, carrying stories shaped by trauma, incarceration,

and loss. Being present in that space required more than empathy. It required a refusal to accept the narratives of worthlessness so often attached to homelessness.

These encounters demanded a different way of seeing. Human dignity was no longer an abstract claim but a discipline of perception. Solidarity was no longer about helping from a safe distance, but about remaining present when the encounter became uncomfortable. For the first time, CST was not something I agreed with intellectually; it was something that asked something of me.

One moment at St. Francis Inn intensified this realization in an unexpected way. Late one evening, we participated in the Inn's midnight ministry, walking through the surrounding neighborhood distributing hot dogs and tea to people sleeping outside or moving through the streets. The ministry was simple—food, warmth, presence offered without condition.

That night, we met a woman named Cynthia. She told us plainly that she was a prostitute, visibly pregnant, and struggling with heroin use. There was no performance in her sharing, no attempt to explain or justify herself. One of the younger participants in our group sat with her, listening quietly and offering comfort without trying to fix anything. A priest accompanying us asked if she wanted to talk or pray. She asked for confession.

Standing on the street, outside of any church building, he listened to her confession with extraordinary gentleness. There was no hurry, no discomfort, only patience and reverence. I had never witnessed the Sacrament of Reconciliation outside of a confessional. Seeing it take place there—on a sidewalk, in the dark, amid poverty, addiction, and vulnerability—reframed the sacrament for me entirely.

What struck me was not the novelty of the setting, but the coherence of the moment. The food, the listening, the sacrament, and the quiet presence of the community were not separate

acts. They formed a single response to a human being whose dignity remained intact even as her life was deeply fractured. Grace was not being brought to her from the outside; it was already present, received in the midst of her reality.

That night clarified something essential. Recognizing the face of Christ is not an abstract spiritual exercise. It requires the courage to remain present when everything in our culture tells us to turn away—to affirm worth where society insists there is none. In that moment, CST ceased to be a set of principles I admired and became a way of seeing that demanded conversion. Theology, sacrament, and accompaniment were no longer separate domains. They were inseparable expressions of the Church's mission lived in real time.

Another site encountered during SGR: Philadelphia shaped my understanding of CST in a different register. We spent time with Sr. Rita Marie Martin, a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), whose ministry was rooted in long-term presence and fidelity to a neighborhood marked by persistent violence and material need.

Her work was based at the Theresa Maxis Center, located in the former rectory of Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in Philadelphia. The building functioned as a distribution point for food and clothing, serving residents of the surrounding neighborhood on a regular basis. The ministry responded to immediate needs without pretense or programming beyond what was necessary to sustain the work.

This took place in the midst of ongoing gun violence. The risks were neither abstract nor exaggerated; they were part of the daily reality of the area. Yet Sr. Rita Marie remained present. She did not operate behind layers of security, nor did she maintain distance from the people she served. Instead, her safety was bound up with her relationships. The neighborhood watched over

her. People protected the Center. They looked out for one another so that the work could continue.

What struck me was the mutual responsibility that had developed. The ministry was not something done to the neighborhood or for it, but something held in common. Residents understood that the Center mattered—not only because it provided food and clothing, but because it represented consistency in a place where instability was the norm. Preserving the ministry became a shared concern.

Here, CST was lived through persistence rather than intervention. Solidarity appeared as staying. Dignity was affirmed through reliability and trust. Subsidiarity was evident in the way the ministry took shape according to the needs and rhythms of the community itself, rather than external agendas. Sister Rita Marie's presence did not displace the agency of the neighborhood; it reinforced it.

Alongside the encounters at St. Francis Inn and Saint John's Hospice, this experience completed a pattern. These were the first moments in which I encountered CST as something enacted through space, relationship, and time. It was not taught or explained. It was practiced through shared meals, midnight ministry, sacramental grace on a sidewalk, and a sister who remained present when leaving would have been easier.

These observations planted an important question in my mind, one that would follow me into my later work as a minister and educator: *What might happen if leadership development and service immersion programs were not merely grounded incidentally and perhaps implicitly in CST, but instead were contexts for explicitly naming, exploring, and integrating CST into the faith lives of the participants?*

1.2 The College Years and Early Vocational Discernment

My undergraduate years at DeSales University introduced me to a new spiritual tradition—that of St. Francis de Sales and the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales—while deepening the formation I had received in the Salesian world. Francis de Sales's emphasis on humility, gentleness, and the universal call to holiness offered a complementary lens to the relational leadership I had experienced earlier. His conviction that *"nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength"*[8] resonated with my own experiences of accompaniment in the Salesian tradition.

At DeSales, the presence of the Oblates was felt not only in the classroom but in the culture of the campus itself. Professors and priests often reminded us that Francis's vision was not reserved for priests, monks, or cloistered women, but for "all the faithful, in every walk of life." In reading *Introduction to the Devout Life*[9], I was struck by how Francis spoke directly to lay people, businesspeople, parents, and professionals of his own time, insisting that holiness was not a special calling for the few but a daily invitation for all. His practical guidance—on prayer, simplicity, work, and relationships—gave words to something I had sensed but never fully articulated: faith was not meant to be compartmentalized, but integrated into every aspect of daily life.

That conviction shaped my involvement in campus ministry, service-learning projects, and student leadership opportunities. Retreats and liturgies were not "extra" things added onto the academic schedule; they were part of the fabric of life at DeSales, and they carried the same

---

[8] Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. and ed. John Julian (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), Part I, ch. 3, 24–26.
[9] Eunan McDonnell, *The Concept of Freedom in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales* (Rome: LAS, 2009), 198–200.

spirit Francis described when he urged believers to "be who you are, and be that well." I began to realize that leadership, at its best, is less about authority and more about accompanying others in becoming who God calls them to be.

Alongside this, I also participated in several service trips and mission experiences during my college years. We traveled to different parts of the country and sometimes abroad, working in schools, shelters, or community organizations. CST was usually mentioned in the trip pamphlet or in the orientation packet—its principles listed briefly under headings like "dignity of the human person" or "option for the poor." But rarely did the trips include intentional teaching, prayer, or reflection on those themes. The staff and student leaders who organized these experiences often focused heavily on logistics—schedules, supplies, and safety—but gave far less attention to the theological grounding of the work. The principles were present in name, but not unpacked in a way that could deepen our understanding or shape our ongoing discernment. Looking back, I can see how much more formative it might have been if someone had helped me to begin to draw clear and explicit connections between the work we were doing and the Church's rich social tradition. Instead, CST remained background information, rather than the interpretive key that could have helped my peers and me make sense of the experience.

My academic path as a criminal justice major revealed a different side of this discernment. Coursework exposed me to the legal system's inner workings—its intentions, its challenges, and its failures. I was drawn to the possibility of working with young people in the justice system, believing I could help create pathways to rehabilitation and restoration. But alongside that attraction, the words of Francis echoed: "It is an error, indeed a heresy, to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, from the shop of mechanics, from the court of

princes, or from the home of married people."[10] For him, no profession, no context, no life circumstance was exempt from the call to holiness. This reminder kept pressing on me: would a life in the justice system allow me to live that devotion fully, or would it compromise it?

After graduation, I accepted a position as a juvenile probation officer in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. It was, in many ways, the opposite environment from the Salesian or DeSales communities that had shaped me. While the penal system spoke the language of rehabilitation, the daily reality often felt more like a system of surveillance and compliance than one of restoration. The human dignity of young people—so central to both my Salesian and DeSales formation—was often overlooked in favor of case numbers, deadlines, and punitive measures.

One notable exception was our weekly partnership with the Baum School of Art in Allentown. Youth on good behavior were given the opportunity to take art classes, learning from dedicated teachers who valued their creativity and potential. In that space, young people were treated not as offenders but as artists, as contributors to a creative community. They were allowed to be young, to imagine new possibilities for their lives, and to take pride in their work. This weekly experience stood in stark contrast to the rest of the probation system and reinforced my conviction that dignity and creativity are essential to human flourishing.

During this time, I began graduate studies in criminal justice at DeSales University, earning my Master of Arts in Criminal Justice (MACJ). My coursework in criminology, ethics, and restorative justice sharpened my understanding of how systems could either uphold or

---

[10] Introduction to the Devout Life, by Francis de Sales, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 2003), 16

undermine the principles I had internalized from Catholic education—particularly human dignity, the common good, and participation.

The wisdom of Francis de Sales and his collaborator St. Jane de Chantal became important companions for me in this season of tension between ministry instincts and systemic realities. Francis modeled patient, personal accompaniment, most vividly in his years of ministry in the Chablais, where he walked village to village to speak with people face-to-face. He did not try to impose faith from a distance but instead entered homes, listened, and built trust. His words from *Introduction to the Devout Life* reminded me that devotion “spoils nothing, but perfects everything” in one’s state of life[11]—an insight that challenged me to reflect on whether the probation system allowed me to perfect my vocation or stifled it.

St. Jane de Chantal, widowed and raising four children before founding the Visitation with Francis, embodied a form of leadership that was nurturing, relational, and resilient. Her ability to lead from vulnerability and love rather than control or power revealed to me that true leadership is measured by presence and accompaniment, not domination.

Reflecting on their lives helped me to name what I was experiencing: the probation system valued compliance, but the Salesian and Salesian-inspired traditions I had absorbed valued accompaniment, encouragement, and relational presence. The contrast clarified for me what I was longing for in my own vocation: spaces where leadership was about nurturing human dignity, creating belonging, and calling forth gifts rather than controlling behavior.

It became increasingly clear to me that the path I was on—though important and impactful in its own right—was not where my vocation truly lay. I wanted to be in a role where

---

[11] Introduction to the Devout Life, by Francis de Sales, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 2003), 10.

accompaniment, formation, and leadership development were central, where systems served people rather than the other way around. This vocational restlessness set the stage for the next major turn in my life: a return to the Salesian world, this time as a professional minister.

1.3 Return to Ministry and the Salesian Preventive System

Leaving juvenile probation for ministry felt less like a career change and more like a return home. When I joined the Salesians of St. John Bosco as a youth and young adult minister, I returned to a pastoral vision that had shaped my earliest experiences of faith: the Salesian Preventive System.

Rooted in reason, religion, and loving-kindness, the Preventive System is more than just a youth work method; it embodies an anthropology rooted in hope. St. John Bosco believed in being "present among the young, in their world, and for their good, especially the poorest and most abandoned."[12] This was not an abstract principle. It required daily accompaniment, shared life, and a willingness to see potential even in the most difficult situations.

In my role, I coordinated parish-based youth ministry, retreats, service opportunities, and leadership training. Much of my work involved building spaces that embodied St. John Bosco's Oratory model[13]:

- A home that welcomes — unconditional belonging.
- A parish that evangelizes — faith integrated into everyday life.
- A school that prepares for life — holistic growth.
- A playground where friends meet — joy as a pathway to connection.

[12] *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco)* (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2015), art. 39.
[13] *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco)* (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2015), art. 40; see also Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit, Vol. 2: Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory*, ed. Aldo Giraudo (Rome: LAS, 2007), 195.

While I had experienced these elements as a student, living them as a minister brought new challenges. I was now responsible for mentoring youth and young adults in leadership, not just participating in the programs.

During this time, I began a second graduate program—Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS) at Loyola University New Orleans. My studies in pastoral theology, scripture, and spiritual leadership provided language for what I had been intuitively practicing. Courses on ecclesiology and pastoral methods deepened my awareness that ministry could not simply be programmatic—it had to be formational, intentionally connecting pastoral action to the Church's broader theological vision.

Balancing academic study with active ministry gave me both theoretical grounding and a practical testing ground for ideas. It also started to clarify the gap I was noticing specifically in young adult engagement. The Salesian ministry structure[14] at the time included two hallmark programs:

- Salesian Leadership Retreat (SLR) — for high school students, with implicit CST values but little explicit naming.
- Salesian Gospel Roads (SGR) — for both high school and young adults, built around service immersion.

In my observation, SGR had greater potential to explicitly connect with CST because it invited participants into real-world encounters with marginalized communities. Yet I noticed something troubling: young adults were not connecting deeply with the program's theological

[14] "Youth & Young Adult Ministry," *Salesians of Don Bosco*, accessed August 23, 2025, https://salesians.org/youth-young-adult-ministry; and Fr. Steve DeMaio, SDB, "Salesian Gospel Roads 2024," *Salesians of Don Bosco Blog*, August 28, 2024, https://salesians.org/blog/salesian-gospel-roads-2024.

foundations. They engaged in service work but often missed the broader context—the Church's social vision—that could transform volunteerism into vocational discernment.

These observations, grounded in both ministerial practice and pastoral studies, set the stage for a turning point: a full-scale revision of SGR to integrate explicit CST and leadership formation for young adults.

1.4 Integrating St. John Bosco and CST in the Salesian Gospel Roads Revision

When I think back to the Salesian Sisters who welcomed my family to Holy Rosary Parish in Port Chester, New York, I realize they never once said, "Our style is CST, and you are being helped through these principles." They simply lived it. They made sure we were known, provided what we needed before we knew how to ask, and treated us with the dignity and affection that anchored us in a new country.

In the same way, St. John Bosco never used terms such as human dignity or solidarity, yet his approach to education and accompaniment anticipated these principles in practice. In his letters and pastoral practice, he repeatedly insisted that young people be formed through gentleness, presence, and trust rather than fear or punishment. Writing to Fr. Giovanni Borel in 1846, he cautioned against harshness with the boys, urging instead that "every dish at the Oratory be made tasty with oil[15]," a metaphor expressing his conviction that loving-kindness must permeate every aspect of formation. This same logic shaped his preventive system, which he later described as rejecting punishments and threats in favor of reason, religion, and affection.

---

[15] John Bosco, *Letters of Don Bosco*, vol. 1, ed. Eugenio Ceria, trans. Lawrence Castelvecchi (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 2003), 184–185 (letter to Fr. Giovanni Borel, 1846); see also Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, vol. 2 (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1966), 291–296.

St. John Bosco's confidence in the dignity and potential of the young was demanding rather than sentimental. He challenged students to work hard, exercise discipline, and take responsibility for their future, while addressing them in fraternal language—encouraging educators to see the young as brothers rather than problems to be managed. This commitment took concrete institutional form in his insistence on vocational training and honest employment for poor and abandoned youth, and in his collaboration with St. Mary Mazzarello to extend education to girls who had been excluded from such opportunities. Long before CST developed its formal vocabulary, St. John Bosco was already living its substance through presence, accompaniment, education, and opportunity. The Sisters' quiet witness was an extension of that same charism—embodying CST without jargon and translating it into concrete gestures of presence, trust, and hope.

Years later, when I was entrusted with revising the SGR program, this realization guided my approach. My goal was not to add CST as an external component but to draw out what was already embedded in St. John Bosco's preventive system and make it visible, tangible, and nameable for participants.

To do this, I returned to the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*[16], reading them alongside the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*[17]. This was a careful, line-by-line analysis aimed at showing how St. John Bosco's lived ministry anticipated the formal principles of CST.

[16] Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, trans. Diego Borgatello et al., 19 vols. (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003), XVII:107.
[17] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, DC: USCCB, 2004), nos. 105–159.

Alignment of St. John Bosco's Teachings with CST

CST Principle	St. John Bosco Quote	Connection
Dignity of the Human Person	"It is not enough to love the young; they must know that they are loved." [18]	St. John Bosco insisted on active, visible affirmation of worth—mirroring CST's belief that human dignity must be respected and upheld in word and action.
Preferential Option for the Poor / Rights and Responsibilities	"Idleness is the workshop of the devil."[19] (*BM* V, 367)	St. John Bosco countered idleness with education and apprenticeships, providing structures for the poor to flourish—anticipating CST's emphasis on empowering the marginalized.
Solidarity	"Walk with the boys, play with them, and be with them in the yard."[20] (*BM* VII, 349)	St. John Bosco practiced solidarity by sharing life with youth, not only serving them but being present in their daily reality.
Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers	"Every boy should learn a trade… it is a treasure that will serve him all his life." (*BM* IV, 201)	St. John Bosco's emphasis on skill-building reflected CST's recognition of work as a path to participation, stability, and human development.
Call to Family and Community Participation	"A school without religion is a school without a soul."[21] (*BM* IX, 45)	St. John Bosco saw formation as holistic—faith, community, and skill development were inseparable, echoing CST's call for structures that foster both belonging and moral responsibility.

This analysis reaffirmed my personal experience: CST was not an afterthought in the Salesian charism but was inherently part of St. John Bosco's pastoral instincts, methods, and priorities.

1.4.1 Embedding CST in the SGR Program Structure

The revised SGR manual reflected this integration in concrete ways. Every day's schedule paired service with guided reflection, ensuring participants named the CST principles they encountered in lived experiences.

[18] Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, V:367.
[19] Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, VII:349.
[20] Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, IV:201.
[21] Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, IX:45.

From the SGR Manual – "Evening Reflections"[22]*:*

> "Think about the people you met today. How did they show you dignity? How did you show them dignity? What choices did you make to affirm their worth?"

From SGR Manual – "Morning Prayer and Sending Forth"[23]*:*

> "As you head into service today, remember St. John Bosco's words: 'Walk with the young, and you will learn from them.' Watch for moments when you are invited to walk alongside someone—not as a helper above, but as a friend beside."

From SGR Manual – "Linking Service to Faith"[24]*:*

> "Every act of service today was an act of Church—not just a project. The Compendium reminds us that solidarity is not a vague feeling but a firm determination to work for the good of all. Where did you see that determination in yourself or others today?"

This daily integration meant participants did not have to wait for an end-of-the-week "teaching session" on CST. Instead, they were recognizing the principles *as they happened*.

We began to notice a shift in the language participants used. A young adult who spent the day painting a community center didn't just say, "We helped them out." Instead, they reflected, "I saw the dignity of work today—how taking care of a space tells people they matter." Another participant, after serving at a soup kitchen, commented, "Solidarity isn't about feeling bad for someone—it's about standing in line together."

---

[22] *Salesian Gospel Roads Manual* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesian Society, Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, 2020), "Evening Reflections."
[23] *Salesian Gospel Roads Manual* (2020), "Morning Prayer and Sending Forth."
[24] *Salesian Gospel Roads Manual* (2020), "Linking Service to Faith."

By embedding CST within the lived method of St. John Bosco, the program mirrored what the Sisters of St. John Bosco had done for my family decades earlier: live the principles first, then give the language to name them.

1.5 Recognizing the Formation Gap: From Youth Ministry to Higher Education

The Salesian Gospel Roads revision was, in many ways, the most comprehensive ministerial project I had undertaken up to that point. It demanded theological grounding, programmatic creativity, and deep trust in St. John Bosco's Preventive System. Yet as transformative as the program was for high school students and parish-based young adult groups, a consistent and troubling pattern emerged: college-aged young adults were underrepresented, and when they did attend, they often struggled to connect the program's experiences to their own faith lives in a sustained way.

This was not because they lacked compassion or willingness to serve. Many of them threw themselves wholeheartedly into the week—building relationships, sharing reflections, and leading small groups. But when conversations turned explicitly to faith and CST, their engagement often became tentative. They could name themes of dignity, solidarity, and community service, but the link between these principles and their personal identity as Catholics—or even as spiritual seekers—was often weak

Part of the issue, I came to realize, was contextual. Youth ministry programs like SGR were built for adolescents and emerging young adults who were still deeply connected to their home parishes or high school campuses. For many college-aged participants, that connection had already loosened. They were navigating new schedules, social pressures, and environments where explicit expressions of faith were less common and, at times, even stigmatized.

This formation gap became most apparent in the post-program feedback. High school participants frequently spoke of wanting to be "more involved at church" or "help out at youth group." In contrast, college-aged participants often said they "weren't sure" where to take the experience next. One participant summed it up bluntly:

> *"I want to live this out, but I don't know where it fits now that I'm not in youth group and my college doesn't really have anything like this."*[25]

This disconnect was a turning point for me. I began to see that CST was not failing to inspire—it was failing to find a home in the formative structures of young adult life. For youth, parish and school ministry provided that structure. For adults, there were professional or parish-based service and advocacy networks. But for college students, especially those at secular or non-ministry-rich campuses, the bridge was missing.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* makes clear that CST is not reserved for a select few, but "addressed to all people of good will[26]". Its vision of dignity, solidarity, and participation is meant to shape the daily fabric of life, not simply inspire reflection at the margins. When young adults could only encounter CST episodically—in a week-long immersion, in a retreat, or in an occasional talk—its transformative power was blunted

This realization struck me particularly in light of St. John Bosco's vision of accompaniment. He insisted that "it is not enough to love the young; they must know they are loved"[27]. His Preventive System was not built around one-time programs, but on a daily, sustained presence. As he wrote in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, the oratory must be "a home that

[25] Salesian Gospel Roads (SGR), *Participant Feedback Review* (internal program evaluation report, 2018).

[26] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), §3.-

[27] Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Translated by Diego Borgatello et al. 19 vols. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003.

welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares for life, and a playground where friends can meet."[28] These were not discrete events, but a way of life, designed to create consistency, trust, and a culture of formation.

In SGR, young adults often encountered solidarity and dignity in profound ways. But without a community or campus structure to carry those values forward, the lessons remained isolated experiences rather than ongoing formation. The tension became clear: St. John Bosco's system anticipated a permanent culture of accompaniment, while the reality in higher education was often episodic, fragmented, and optional.

This realization deepened not only through the SGR program but also in my own ministerial work within Catholic higher education—first with the Salesians, and later at Cabrini and Neumann Universities. In both contexts, I saw firsthand how difficult it can be to integrate CST consistently into student leadership formation. It requires intentionality and sustained effort to do more than check the box of "service completed." Too often, the easier path is simply to send students out to a service site, take a photo, and count hours, without creating the reflective space to process what the experience means theologically.

Again and again, I saw students return from tutoring, serving at a soup kitchen, or participating in a service day filled with energy and stories. But unless ministry staff facilitated prayer, dialogue, and explicit connections to CST, those experiences remained incomplete. Students were left with powerful memories but with little framework for integrating them into their leadership identity or vocational discernment. The temptation in higher education—to emphasize logistics and participation while neglecting theological grounding—mirrored what I

[28] Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Translated by Diego Borgatello et al. 19 vols. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003.

had already observed in youth programs. What was needed was not more service opportunities, but more intentional accompaniment that connected service to the Church's social vision.

Here, the broader vision of CST and higher education converged. Cardinal Renato Martino, reflecting on the Compendium[29], observed that it had been called "the Church's best kept secret,"[30] yet it is meant to be widely shared because "the faithful [must] understand the social and moral teachings of the Church"[31] as part of the Catholic intellectual tradition. He emphasized that "respect for human dignity helps young minds and hearts to recognize that every person, believer or not, has been fashioned in the image and likeness of Almighty God and is called to be an artisan and cocreator of society and culture." Catholic universities, he reminded us through the words of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, are "born from the heart of the Church" [32] and therefore tasked with forming students who can contribute to the common good. Their role is not only about "reading, writing, and arithmetic,"[33] but about preparing people "who contribute to the building up of the human family in truth, goodness, justice, peace, and love"[34]

It was in wrestling with this challenge that my interest in Catholic higher education began to crystallize. If Gospel Roads could so effectively help young people see CST in action, what might be possible if similar formation were embedded directly in their college experience? What if campus ministry and student leadership programs were intentionally designed to weave CST into the daily life, decision-making, and identity formation of students—not just as a "service week," but as a sustained culture of mission?

---

[29] Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino, "Presentation of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*," *Zenit News Agency*, October 25, 2004.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), §3.
[33] Martino, "Presentation of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.
[34] Ibid.

This question began to follow me into every setting. Whether I was training new SGR leaders, mentoring a parish young adult, or presenting at Salesian gatherings, I found myself returning to the same concern: our formation models were strongest in adolescence and post-college adulthood, but thinnest during the very years when students were shaping their leadership identity.

The seeds of this doctoral research were planted in that realization. I began to imagine a context in which the best of St. John Bosco's pastoral wisdom, the rich vision of CST, and the developmental opportunities of higher education could converge into a transformative leadership formation model.

1.6 From Experience to Research: Converging Paths Toward the Central Question

Looking back across the path that has shaped me, I can now see that what first appeared as disconnected episodes—a childhood marked by the welcome of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Holy Rosary in Port Chester, the holistic formation of Salesian education, the gentle wisdom of Francis de Sales, the dissonance of juvenile probation work, the renewal of Salesian youth ministry, and the revision of the SGR program—were in fact converging threads of a single story. Each moment invited me to see the world through the lens of dignity, solidarity, community, and accompaniment. Each moment also revealed something incomplete—some gap between what our tradition proclaims and what our institutions actually form in young people.

The Franciscan Sisters taught my family that faith welcomes strangers with bread, friendship, and belonging. Salesian schools and retreats showed me that leadership is relational, rooted in joy, integrity, and mutual respect. My work in probation courtrooms exposed how systems can erode or deny human dignity when structures fail to embody hope. Returning to

ministry, I was reminded again of the Preventive System's pastoral genius—grounded in reason, religion, and loving-kindness—yet I also saw its limits when young adults left behind the safety of youth ministry and entered college spaces with no clear bridge between their leadership potential and their faith identity.

In revising the SGR program, I believed I had finally found the way to integrate St. John Bosco's charism with the Church's social vision. The revised manual explicitly wove CST into daily prayer and reflection: dignity explored in evening reflections, solidarity framed in service experiences, and St. John Bosco's own call to "walk with the young, and you will learn from them."[35] In many ways, the revision was successful: high school participants walked away with new eyes for solidarity and dignity, able to name CST in their lived encounters. But for college-aged young adults, the resonance was thinner. The program stirred them, but when they returned to campuses where leadership training was framed in generic, secular terms, the insights faded. The rhythm of CST, so alive in the week of service, often had nowhere to take root in their daily college experience.

This was the moment of realization: the missing link was not in the SGR program itself, but in the formation structures of Catholic higher education. If campus ministry and student affairs programs were not offering sustained, intentional opportunities for students to connect their leadership roles with the Church's social tradition, then no single program—however well-designed—could close the gap.

Right now, the voices of my spiritual guides are coming together in a new way. From St. John Bosco, I learned that accompaniment must be consistent and relational—"it is not enough

---

[35] Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Translated by Diego Borgatello et al. 19 vols. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003.

to love the young; they must know they are loved." From St. Francis de Sales, I inherited the conviction that holiness belongs to everyone, in every walk of life, and that leadership is exercised through gentleness and integrity. From St. Jane de Chantal, I discovered that leadership rooted in vulnerability and love can be resilient and transformative. From St. Francis of Assisi, I learned that leadership requires an integrity of heart and action—"while you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."[36] From St. Clare of Assisi, I received the reminder that identity is shaped by love itself—"we become what we love and who we love shapes what we become."[37] Their lives together remind me that leadership formation is not merely about teaching skills but about forming persons in vocation, dignity, and mission.

Here, the pastoral question crystallized: How can Catholic higher education embody that same consistency, ensuring that young adults know—through their leadership formation—that they are not only capable leaders but also loved, called, and entrusted with a mission for the common good?

This insight sharpened the larger concern: leadership programs in Catholic universities often succeed in teaching skills and building community, but they rarely connect explicitly with the Church's social tradition. The absence of this connection weakens the potential of Catholic institutions to form leaders who are both professionally competent and theologically grounded, able to carry their faith into public life.

And so, the narrative of my life becomes the foundation for the inquiry of this dissertation. The child welcomed by the Franciscan Sisters, the student shaped by the Salesians

[36] Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, ch 3.
[37] Jane Frances de Chantal, *Selected Letters*, Letter LXXII (Annecy, 1627), 171–72.

and the Oblates, the probation officer disillusioned by systemic failure, the minister revising Gospel Roads, and the educator now working in Catholic higher education—all come together in a single research concern: This thesis argues that student leadership development in Catholic higher education must be intentionally shaped by the principles of CST in order to form leaders who are both effective and faith-informed. While many campus ministry and student leadership programs embody aspects of CST implicitly, they often fail to name or integrate these principles in formative ways. Through qualitative research—including case studies of leadership training programs and interviews with student leaders—this study demonstrates how explicit integration of CST can transform leadership development into a more holistic formation of students for service, justice, and the common good.

This is not just an academic issue but also a pastoral one. It asks whether Catholic higher education can more fully live its mission by forming leaders who are reflective, compassionate, and rooted in faith. It asks whether the wisdom of St. John Bosco, St. Francis de Sales, St. Jane de Chantal, and the broader Catholic tradition can be woven into the daily experience of students preparing to lead. It asks whether the Catholic university can be a place where leadership is not only taught but embodied as vocation—an act of service that participates in the Church's mission for justice and love in the world.

This is the horizon toward which the chapters that follow will move. Chapter 2 will ground this inquiry theologically, showing how CST provides not just a moral framework but a vision of human flourishing that can transform the way we think about leadership. From there, the research will turn to the lived reality of campuses, seeking to listen, interpret, and respond. But before those steps can unfold, the foundation must be clear: this project is born from lived experience, and it culminates in the conviction that leadership formation in Catholic higher

education must not only teach skills but witness to the Church’s deepest truths about human dignity, solidarity, and the common good.

Chapter 2: CST as a Living Tradition

The first chapter traced the experiences and influences that brought this project into focus. From the welcome my family received from the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, to the holistic environment of Salesian education, to the later tensions I experienced in professional and ministerial contexts, a consistent pattern emerged: CST was often lived but seldom named. Principles such as human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and participation were embodied in the communities that formed me, yet they were rarely articulated as the theological grounding for leadership or ministry. The result, which I have observed both in my own journey and in years of campus ministry, is a formation gap: students participate in meaningful service, leadership, and community life, but without the explicit framework that connects these experiences to the Church's social vision.

This chapter addresses that formation gap by establishing the theological and ministerial foundations of this study. Its central claim is that CST provides the most fitting lens through which to understand student leadership in Catholic higher education, and that campus ministry offers a privileged context for this integration. Rather than treating CST as a specialized add-on or abstract theory, the chapter presents it as a comprehensive vision of human flourishing—one that insists on the inseparability of faith and justice, prayer and action, personal growth and social responsibility. In this light, leadership formation is not reduced to a set of transferable skills or résumé-building experiences. It is a process of vocational discernment in which students learn to see leadership as service, as accompaniment, and as participation in the mission of the Church.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize the ministerial dimension of student leadership. In Catholic higher education, *leadership* cannot be separated from *discipleship*.

Student leadership in the context of Catholic higher education should not simply be about managing organizations or executing programs. It must also be about embodying the values of the Gospel in the service of others. Campus ministry, with its rhythms of prayer, community, liturgy, retreat, and immersion, provides an especially fertile ground for this kind of leadership formation. When CST is explicitly named and integrated into these ministerial contexts, it becomes more than background information. It provides students with a language to interpret their experiences, a vision to guide their decisions, and a horizon of meaning that situates their leadership within the broader call to justice, solidarity, and love of neighbor.

CST offers the principles—human dignity, common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, and participation—that ground leadership as a vocation of service. Campus ministry offers the context in which these principles can be embodied, named, and practiced. Together, they address the formation gap by showing that leadership in Catholic higher education is not only about what students do but also about who they are becoming. It is about forming leaders who are reflective, justice-oriented, and spiritually grounded, capable of carrying their faith into public life.

What follows in this chapter will build a bridge between the Church's social teaching and the daily realities of student leadership formation. It will demonstrate the relevance of CST principles to the essential ministerial dimensions of student leadership and show how campus ministry can serve as the integrating space where faith and leadership meet. In this way, the chapter lays a foundation for the methodological and empirical work to follow, anchoring the project in the conviction that Catholic higher education fulfills its mission most fully when it forms leaders whose ministry is shaped by CST and sustained by faith.

2.1 The Emergence and Development of CST

This section traces the historical development of CST from its biblical foundations through its modern articulation in papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. This historical development is important for the present study because it demonstrates that CST has always functioned as a framework for moral leadership within the Church, shaping how communities understand justice, responsibility, and the common good.

Rather than presenting CST as a static set of principles, this overview highlights its emergence as a living tradition shaped by concrete historical crises, cultural contexts, and pastoral needs. Establishing this historical trajectory is essential for the present study, as it clarifies how CST has functioned as a form of moral leadership within the Church long before it was named as such—and how its development continues to inform contemporary approaches to formation and leadership in Catholic higher education.

Although it may sound obvious, it is important to remind ourselves that the foundations of CST are found not in late nineteenth-century magisterial proclamations, but in Sacred Scripture itself.[38] The Old Testament consistently grounds covenant life in justice, community, and care for the vulnerable. The Torah, prophets, and wisdom literature reveal a God who sides with the oppressed and calls Israel to structure its common life around dignity, solidarity, and right relationship.

Genesis declares that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God[39], establishing the bedrock of the inviolable dignity of the human person. The covenant at Sinai[40]

---

[38] All Scripture citations are from *The New American Bible, Revised Edition* (NABRE) (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011).
[39]Gen. 1:26–31
[40]Exod. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15

ties worship of God to the creation of a just community, where laws about sabbath rest protect both workers and creation itself. Prophets like Amos cry out against economic exploitation: "Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land"[41], insisting that true faith cannot be separated from social justice. Isaiah envisions a society where peace and righteousness embrace,[42] while Micah sums up Israel's vocation in the familiar mandate: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."[43]

The wisdom tradition also offers guidance for a life oriented toward the common good. Proverbs repeatedly counsels care for the poor[44], while the Psalms link trust in God with advocacy for the oppressed: "The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."[45] Taken together, these texts show that Israel's life before God was never solely a matter of individual righteousness but also of the responsibility of every individual to strive to create and maintain a righteous social order. The New Testament concentrates these teachings in the person and ministry of Jesus. In his inaugural sermon, Jesus proclaims Isaiah's vision: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."[46] The Beatitudes bless the poor, the meek, and the peacemakers, redefining leadership as service and solidarity[47]. In the parable of the Good Samaritan[48] mercy is shown to be the true measure of discipleship. In the final judgment scene[49] Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the stranger, and the prisoner, making care for the least a non-negotiable of the Christian life. The

[41]Amos 8:4
[42]Isa. 32:16–17
[43]Mic. 6:8
[44]Prov 14:31; 22:22–23
[45]Ps. 146:9
[46]Luke 4:18
[47]Matt 5:1–12
[48]Luke 10:25–37
[49]Matt 25:31–46

Acts of the Apostles depicts the early Church holding goods in common so that "there was not a needy person among them."[50] At the same time, Paul urged his communities to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."[51]

Although *in name* and with respect to the specific historical developments and challenges it seeks to address, CST is indisputably a nineteenth-century development, it is important to remind ourselves that, *in essence*, it is anything but. In essence, the modern tradition of CST represents a faithful development and adaptation of divine revelation to the newly emerging social and economic structures of the First Industrial Revolution. The concern for dignity, justice, and community at the heart of CST has its roots in the covenant with Israel and in Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, Jesus himself is the "first principle" of CST, the one who embodies in word and deed the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor.

The Church's later social teachings, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and continuing through the first encyclical of his namesake, Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi te,* do not create a new ethical system but rather extend this biblical vision into the modern era. CST, as it has developed over the past century, represents the Church's sustained reflection on the social, economic, and political realities of the modern world. Its deepest roots, however, lie in Scripture's vision of justice, human dignity, and community, as well as in the witness of the early Fathers and the Thomistic tradition. What emerges in the nineteenth century is not something entirely new, but a fresh articulation of these enduring convictions in response to new historical challenges.

---

[50]Acts 4:34
[51]Gal 6:2

Written against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and the widening gulf between capital and labor, *Rerum novarum* set the pattern for what would become a living tradition: the Church's reading the "signs of the times" and responding with moral reflection that is at once theological and social.[52] Leo XIII affirmed the dignity of work, defended the rights of workers to just wages and associations, upheld the right to private property, and insisted on the State's responsibility to protect the vulnerable while respecting the role of intermediary associations. As Charles Curran observes, these themes form the foundational pillars of modern CST.[53] What was distinctive about *Rerum Novarum* was not the novelty of its principles but the decisive way it brought the Church into the heart of the modern social question.

What followed in the twentieth century reveals a clear pattern. Each major document built upon the previous ones, extending its insights while responding to the particular crises of its own historical moment. Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno*[54], written explicitly to mark the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Rerum novarum*, confronted the realities of worldwide economic depression, the rise of totalitarian regimes, and the growing influence of both socialism and unfettered capitalism. It introduced the principle of *subsidiarity*, a call to balance state authority with the responsibility of local communities, and warned against both collectivism and individualism. In this way, it both reaffirmed and developed Leo XIII's vision, applying it to new political and economic challenges.

---

[52]Leo XIII, Rerum novarum [On the Condition of Labor], May 15, 1891, in Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 14–39.
[53]Charles E. Curran, *CST, 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 173–175.
[54]Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* [*After Forty Years*], May 15, 1931, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 40–63.

St. Pope John XXIII advanced this trajectory in *Mater et magistra*[55] and *Pacem in terris*[56], situating CST within an increasingly global context. His writings reflected Cold War anxieties, the acceleration of globalization, and a growing awareness of human rights. *Mater et magistra* underscored the need for socialization—that is, the increasing interdependence of peoples and institutions—while *Pacem in terris*, written in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, addressed peace as a moral imperative rooted in truth, justice, charity, and freedom. For the first time, CST was directed not only to Catholics but to "all people of good will," a signal of the Church's desire to exercise leadership in a pluralistic and fractured world.

The Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et spes*[57]was itself a watershed document expressive of a watershed moment in the life of the Church. Emerging from the *aggiornamento* spirit of Vatican II, the document framed the Church's mission in terms of solidarity with the whole human family. By taking up "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" of humanity as its own, the Council placed CST on a new theological footing. It became clear that CST was not a marginal discourse but central to the Church's identity in the modern world.

While Vatican II provided a renewed theological framework for the Church's engagement with the modern world, its reception and development took distinctive forms within local churches confronting radically different social realities. In the decades following the Council, episcopal conferences in Latin America, Africa, and Asia began articulating social and pastoral

---

[55] John XXIII, *Mater et magistra* [*Christianity and Social Progress*], May 15, 1961, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.
[56] John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* [*Peace on Earth*], April 11, 1963, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.
[57] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes* [*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*], December 7, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

concerns that both drew from and expanded CST, often before these concerns were fully named or systematized in universal magisterial documents.

In Latin America, the 1968 Conference of Medellín marked a decisive moment in the reception of *Gaudium et spes.* Confronting widespread poverty, structural injustice, and political repression, the bishops spoke explicitly of institutionalized violence and affirmed that the Church must stand in solidarity with the poor not only through charity but through structural transformation. Medellín insisted that "the misery that marginalizes large groups of human beings is an injustice that cries to heaven,"[58] framing social analysis as an essential component of pastoral responsibility. This language did not invent a new doctrine, but named—often with urgency—what CST had long implied: that social sin can be embedded in economic and political systems, not only in individual actions.

That trajectory continued through *Puebla*[59] and later *Aparecida*[60], where the bishops described the Church as called to be "a Church that goes forth," attentive to the lived realities of the poor, migrants, and excluded. Aparecida speaks of discipleship as inseparable from social responsibility, asserting that "faith that does not become culture is not fully received.[61]" Notably, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio played a central role in shaping this document, which would later echo strongly in Pope Francis's emphasis on encounter, accompaniment, and social friendship.

---

[58] Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: Conclusions of the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (Medellín, 1968)* (Washington, DC: Secretariat for Latin America, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), "Peace," sec. 16

[59] Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), *The Puebla Document: Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate* (Puebla, Mexico, 1979).

[60] Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council (CELAM), *Aparecida: Final Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Aparecida, Brazil, 2007), 384.

[61]See *Aparecida*, especially sections on missionary discipleship; see also Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 20–24.

A parallel development occurred within the African Church. The 1994 Synod for Africa, convened under St. Pope John Paul II, named the Church in Africa as "Family of God," a theological image grounded in African communal anthropology.[62] The Synod's *Instrumentum Laboris* identified poverty, ethnic conflict, political corruption, and economic exploitation as central moral challenges, insisting that evangelization must address "the whole person and all peoples."[63] The bishops emphasized reconciliation, justice, and peace not as abstract ideals but as urgent pastoral imperatives in societies marked by colonial legacy and post-independence instability. Here again, CST emerges less as a theoretical system and more as a lived ecclesial response to historical suffering.

In Asia, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), established in 1970, articulated a distinctively contextual approach to social teaching. The FABC consistently emphasized dialogue—with cultures, religions, and the poor—as the primary mode of the Church's social engagement. One FABC statement describes the Church's mission as a "triple dialogue": with the poor, with cultures, and with religions. This framework foregrounds human dignity, participation, and solidarity long before these terms became standardized in global CST discourse. Asian bishops repeatedly stressed that social teaching must be embodied through presence and relationship rather than imposed through abstract formulations, particularly in religiously plural contexts.

Taken together, these global ecclesial movements reveal that CST did not develop solely through papal documents responding from Rome outward, but through a reciprocal process of discernment between the universal Church and local churches reading the "signs of the times" in

---

[62]Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 63.
[63]Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris for the Special Assembly for Africa* (Vatican City, 1994).

radically different contexts. These episcopal conferences did not replace CST; they prepared the soil for its later articulation, often naming concrete injustices and pastoral priorities before they were formally synthesized in magisterial teaching.

It is precisely within this global horizon that Paul VI's *Populorum progressio* must be read. Issued in 1967, just one year before Medellín, the encyclical reflects the same concern for global inequality, development, and structural injustice that local churches were already confronting. When Paul VI famously declared that "development is the new name for peace,"[64] he was giving universal expression to insights that had already emerged from the lived experience of the Church in the Global South.

Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*[65] brought the social question into global focus by addressing international development and inequality between nations. Responding to decolonization and the widening gap between the global North and South, the encyclical famously declared that "development is the new name for peace." This was not only a moral claim but a call for structural change, urging wealthier nations to aid poorer ones in ways that respected dignity and fostered participation. In this way, Paul VI extended CST from primarily industrial and national concerns to the global stage.

St. Pope John Paul II contributed significantly to CST's expansion with a trilogy of encyclicals: *Laborem exercens,*[66] *Sollicitudo rei socialis,*[67] and *Centesimus annus.*[68] Written

---

[64] Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967), §76.
[65] Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* [*On the Development of Peoples*], March 26, 1967, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.
[66] John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* [*On Human Work*], September 14, 1981, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem.html.
[67] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* [*On Social Concern*], December 30, 1987, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo.html.
[68] John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* [*The Hundredth Year*], May 1, 1991, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus.html.

against the backdrop of late Cold War tensions, these documents offered a rich theology of work, deepened the notion of solidarity, and provided a critical appraisal of both Marxist socialism and Western consumer capitalism. *Laborem exercens* places human work at the center of the social question, asserting that work is the key to human dignity and participation in creation. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* emphasizes the "structures of sin" that impede development and calls for a spirituality of solidarity. Finally, *Centesimus annus*, written to commemorate the centenary of *Rerum novarum* and on the eve of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union, reflected on the collapse of communism and articulated a careful defense of human freedom, responsibility, and the proper limits of market economies. Each of these texts shows how CST both conserved earlier insights and adapted them to new geopolitical realities.

An important but often overlooked text for understanding CST is *Veritatis Splendor*, issued by St. Pope John Paul II. Although not written as a social encyclical, the document provides a crucial moral foundation for the Church's social claims. *Veritatis Splendor* addresses questions of freedom, conscience, and moral truth, insisting that human dignity cannot be sustained apart from objective moral norms.[69] In doing so, it clarifies the ethical ground on which CST rests, even when CST itself is not explicitly named. The encyclical helps explain a recurring pattern evident throughout this study: CST is often assumed, embodied, and practiced in leadership formation without being articulated as a distinct theological framework.

Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in veritate*[70] integrated questions of economics, technology, and ecology, underscoring that authentic development must be rooted in charity and truth.

---

[69] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), §§32–35, 84.
[70] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* [*Charity in Truth*], June 29, 2009, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

Written during the global financial crisis, it pressed for ethical regulation of markets and highlighted the interconnectedness of economic and environmental concerns. Benedict's encyclical represents a synthesis of theological depth with urgent social critique, drawing continuity with Paul VI's *Populorum progressio* while engaging new challenges.

Although each of these documents addresses specific social, political, or economic issues, the enduring focus of CST is not only on social problems and injustices but also on the person of Jesus Christ. The encyclicals and conciliar texts derive their authority and coherence from the Gospel itself, which reveals the truth of the human person in relation to God and neighbor. As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* reminds readers, "Jesus… is the tangible and definitive manifestation of how God acts towards men and women"[71]. Every papal and conciliar intervention—from *Rerum novarum* to *Caritas in veritate*—ultimately seeks to interpret the social realities of each age through the lens of Christ's life and mission. In this sense, the evolution of CST is not a departure from its biblical foundation but a continual return to it, inviting the Church to discern anew how the Gospel must take flesh in changing historical circumstances.

The publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in 2004 is a milestone in the maturation of CST. Compiled by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, it was the first systematic effort to bring together the diverse strands of papal, conciliar, and episcopal teaching into a single, comprehensive resource. The *Compendium* is significant not only for what it contains but for what it represents: the recognition that CST had grown into a

---

[71] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), §27, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

coherent body of doctrine requiring synthesis for the life of the Church and the world. It was a massive undertaking, drawing together more than a century of teaching, and it underscores that CST is not static but dynamic—rooted in continuity yet responsive to history. Rather than presenting "themes" in a catechetical list, the *Compendium* organizes CST into major areas such as the dignity of the human person, the family, work, economic life, political community, the international community, care for creation, and peace.

Even before the *Compendium* appeared, however, a distinctive pastoral synthesis emerged in the United States. In 1998, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued *Sharing CST: Challenges and Directions*[72]. This pastoral statement did not create new doctrine but sought to make CST more accessible in schools, parishes, and universities **by** offering a pedagogically streamlined framework for teaching and formation. To do so, the bishops distilled more than a century of teaching into seven key themes: life and dignity of the human person, call to family, community, and participation, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor and vulnerable, dignity of work and the rights of workers, solidarity, and care for God's creation[73].

Other episcopal conferences and regions of the world articulate CST using different thematic groupings, sometimes identifying a greater or smaller number of principles depending on pastoral context and historical circumstance. While the substance of CST remains universal, its presentation has often been shaped by local social realities and pedagogical needs. In many parts of the world, bishops' conferences draw more directly from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which identifies four foundational principles—human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity—from which other social teachings emerge. In Latin

[72] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sharing CST: Challenges and Directions*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998.
[73] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Themes of CST." USCCB.org. https://www.usccb.org/resources/themes-catholic-social-teaching. Accessed October 7, 2025.

America, Africa, and Asia, CST has frequently been articulated through contextual emphases such as the preferential option for the poor, participation, reconciliation, dialogue, or care for creation, often before these concerns were fully systematized in universal magisterial documents.

The seven-theme framework articulated by the U.S. bishops thus reflects a contextual pastoral synthesis rather than a universal schema, developed to support teaching and formation within the American Church while remaining firmly rooted in the Church's broader social tradition. For the purposes of this study, the U.S. bishops' seven-theme framework is employed as a formative synthesis, attentive to its contextual origins and its grounding in the Church's wider social tradition.

Pope Francis continued this dynamic development with *Evangelii gaudium*[74], *Laudato si'*[75], and *Fratelli tutti*[76]. His writings respond to the crises of globalization, environmental degradation, migration, and political polarization. *Laudato si'* brought ecological issues into the very center of CST, arguing that care for creation and care for the poor are inseparable. In doing so, Francis elevated stewardship of creation from the periphery of CST to a core theme, showing that ecological responsibility is integral to human dignity, solidarity, and the common good. *Fratelli tutti* calls for fraternity and social friendship as antidotes to exclusion and conflict. Across these texts, Francis consistently reads the "signs of the times" through the lens of mercy and proximity to the marginalized, embodying CST as a living and pastoral tradition.

---

[74] Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* [*The Joy of the Gospel*], November 24, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.
[75] Francis, *Laudato si'* [*On Care for Our Common Home*], May 24, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
[76] Francis, *Fratelli tutti* [*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*], October 3, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

This effort to codify and make CST more accessible did not end there. In 2017, Pope Francis reorganized the Roman Curia, merging the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace into the newly created Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.[77] The Dicastery now serves as the custodian of CST, integrating concerns of justice, peace, human rights, health care, migration, and care for creation under a unified vision of integral human development. This reform further solidified CST as a central dimension of the Church's mission, no longer confined to a single council but embedded in a broader structure of pastoral practice.

With the election of Pope Leo XIV in 2025, the living tradition of CST entered a new and distinctive moment. A member of the Order of St. Augustine, Leo XIV brings to the papacy a spirituality rooted in community, interiority, and the search for truth—a perspective that shapes his understanding of social engagement as both contemplative and practical. His choice of the name *Leo* intentionally evokes Leo XIII, whose *Rerum Novarum* inaugurated the modern social tradition, signaling a desire to renew that legacy for the twenty-first century. From the outset of his pontificate, Leo XIV has emphasized that love is the unifying principle of social transformation: "Only a heart that loves can see the truth of another's suffering and act justly,"[78] he wrote in his first public address. That conviction sets the theological tone of his apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te: On Love for the Poor*[79], released on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 2025.

In its broader vision, *Dilexi Te* signals a new phase in the evolution of CST—one that unites the Church's commitment to justice with a renewed theology of affectivity and encounter.

---

[77] "Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development," *Vatican News*, June 5, 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-06/dicastery-for-promoting-integral-human-development.html.

[78] Vatican News, "Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost Elected Pope Leo XIV," May 8, 2025.

[79] Leo XIV. Dilexi Te: On Love for the Poor. Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican City: Holy See, October 4, 2025.

Where the early social encyclicals responded to industrial and economic questions, and Pope Francis expanded the horizon to include ecological and global concerns, Leo XIV turns to the inner movements of love as the generative source of social renewal. The exhortation's title, "I Have Loved You," evokes not only divine compassion but also relational reciprocity: a society marked by love must be capable of tenderness, mercy, and mutual belonging. In this sense, *Dilexi Te* retrieves the affective language that underlies *Caritas in Veritate* and *Fratelli Tutti*, presenting love not as sentimentality but as a demanding moral intelligence—a way of seeing the world that privileges empathy over efficiency and communion over competition.

Equally significant is *Dilexi Te's* attention to emerging ethical frontiers. Leo XIV identifies new "zones of poverty" that extend beyond material deprivation—loneliness, technological exclusion, environmental displacement, and spiritual indifference.[80] He names these as contemporary "wounds of communion," urging the Church to accompany those affected with the same attention once given to industrial workers or displaced migrants. The exhortation's references to artificial intelligence and digital culture mark a distinctive step forward: the Church's social teaching now explicitly engages the moral dimensions of technology and human agency in an interconnected world. In this regard, *Dilexi Te* does not merely extend the social tradition—it recalibrates it, calling the faithful to discern how love for the poor must take form in a century defined as much by digital inequity and ecological crisis as by material need. This integration of new ethical challenges within a spirituality of love confirms that CST remains a living, adaptive tradition—ever ancient, ever new.

[80] Leo XIV, Dilexi Te, §§117–122.

At the heart of this development is the conviction that CST is not a closed system but a living tradition animated by the Holy Spirit. The Church continues to discern the "signs of the times," and in doing so, keeps CST alive and responsive to new realities. The fruits of the Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord—guide this ongoing discernment, enabling the Church to address emerging issues with both fidelity and creativity. This dynamism is clearly visible in the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV, whose writings and pastoral emphasis have already extended the social tradition into new moral and cultural frontiers. His symbolic choice of name links his teaching to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, while his apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te: On Love for the Poor* renews the Church's social vision for the twenty-first century. By uniting the classical concerns of dignity, solidarity, and the common good with contemporary issues such as artificial intelligence, environmental displacement, and digital exclusion, Leo XIV confirms that CST remains what it has always been at its best—a living dialogue between faith and history, continually translating the Gospel into new forms of justice and hope.

This development in Leo XIV's early pontificate is reinforced by his 2025 apostolic letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, issued for the 60th anniversary of *Gravissimum educationis*. In that text, Leo XIV explicitly links CST to the Church's educational mission, describing education as "one of the highest expressions of Christian charity".[81] The letter presents Catholic education as a dynamic constellation of charisms and institutions that must place the human person—created in the image of God[82]—at the center of their mission.[83]

[81] Leo XIV, *Drawing New Maps of Hope*. Apostolic Letter on the 60th Anniversary of *Gravissimum educationis*, October 28, 2025, no. 1.3.
[82] Genesis 1:26.
[83] Leo XIV, *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, no. 3.1.

Echoing themes from CST, Leo XIV warns against reducing education to technical training or economic utility, insisting instead on an integral humanism rooted in dignity, justice, participation, and the common good.[84] His call to "put the person before the algorithm" in navigating the digital environment[85] extends CST into the emerging moral terrain of technological development. In this way, *Drawing New Maps of Hope* situates education itself as a privileged arena for the Church's social mission, confirming the central thesis of this chapter: that CST is inseparable from the formation of human persons capable of service, solidarity, and leadership.

Throughout its history, there have been consistent efforts to solidify CST as a normative and indispensable Catholic praxis: the establishment of episcopal conferences issuing social letters, the teaching of CST in seminaries and Catholic universities, the incorporation of CST into catechesis and parish life, and the proliferation of lay movements and religious orders committed to justice and peace. Each of these initiatives reflects the Church's determination to ensure that CST is not merely a body of texts but a living tradition that shapes Christian discipleship and public witness.

Taken together, these developments reveal a clear pattern. Each major document both conserves what came before and extends it into new contexts. From *Rerum novarum's* response to industrialization, to *Gaudium et spes'* embrace of modernity, to Pope Francis's urgent call for ecological and social conversion, and now to Pope Leo XIV's *Dilexi Te*—which situates love for the poor and attention to emerging global challenges such as technological inequality at the heart of Christian discipleship—CST demonstrates the Church's ongoing effort to provide moral and

---

[84] Leo XIV, *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, nos. 4.1–4.3; 5.1–5.2.
[85]Leo XIV, *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, nos. 9.2–9.3.

theological leadership amid changing historical realities. Establishing this historical baseline is essential for the present study, because it shows that CST has always been about leadership: about how the Church exercises moral authority in society and how it calls the faithful to lead their communities with integrity, justice, and love. Just as Leo XIII addressed the plight of workers in the nineteenth century, and Francis spoke to the ecological crisis and global migration, Leo XIV now calls the Church to a spirituality of love that meets the new forms of poverty and exclusion shaping the twenty-first century.

As this tradition continues to unfold, the Church is discovering that the renewal of her social teaching is inseparable from the renewal of her own way of being. The ongoing Synod on Synodality reflects this development, inviting the People of God to embody within the Church the same principles that CST proposes for the world—dignity, participation, subsidiarity, and solidarity. In many respects, synodality represents the next horizon of CST: a Church that not only teaches justice but practices it through listening, discernment, and shared responsibility. Although a fuller exploration of this theme lies ahead, it is worth noting here that synodality offers a model for leadership and formation grounded in dialogue, accompaniment, and communal discernment. It gestures toward the kind of ecclesial and educational culture this study envisions—one in which students, ministers, and educators "walk together" in pursuit of truth, justice, and holiness.

With this horizon in view, the next task is to consider the core principles of CST as they pertain to leadership formation in Catholic universities. These principles—life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God's creation—represent the synthesis of more than a century of papal, conciliar, and episcopal

teaching, confirmed most clearly in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and reiterated by the U.S. bishops in *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching.*[86] They serve not only as an anchor in the Church's teaching but also as a practical roadmap for forming students whose leadership is faith-informed, justice-oriented, and spiritually grounded. In what follows, each principle will be examined in turn, with attention to how it both emerges from the Catholic tradition and offers a foundation for leadership formation within Catholic higher education today.

2.2 Formation for Student Leadership as Formation for Ministry

This section begins by examining three pivotal documents—the Land O'Lakes Statement,[87] the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter *Empowered by the Spirit*,[88] and John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*[89] to show how Catholic higher education and campus ministry came to frame leadership as integral to their shared mission. Building on this foundation, it then considers how student affairs scholarship, pastoral best practices, and contemporary theological reflection continue to shape the ministerial dimensions of student leadership formation today. Together, these sources reveal both the opportunities and the gaps in explicitly grounding leadership development in CST.

The Land O'Lakes Statement was a defining moment in U.S. Catholic higher education. Drafted by U.S. Catholic university presidents and theologians at a meeting in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, under the leadership of Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., then president of the

---

[86]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998).
[87]"The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University" (*The Land O'Lakes Statement*), July 23, 1967, https://library.nd.edu/landolakes/.
[88]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985).
[89]John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* [*Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities*], August 15, 1990, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

University of Notre Dame, the document declared: “The Catholic university of the future must be a true modern university, with a strong commitment to academic excellence. It must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical.”[90] Issued only two years after the close of Vatican II, the statement reflected the Council’s call for *aggiornamento*—an updating of the Church’s life and mission to engage the modern world. For Catholic colleges and universities, this meant embracing their role as serious academic institutions within the broader higher education landscape. Yet the strong emphasis on autonomy created tensions with the episcopacy and the Holy See, as questions arose about how such institutions would preserve fidelity to the Church while simultaneously upholding the important secular value of “academic freedom.” For the purposes of leadership formation, this moment is significant. The Land O’Lakes Statement opened the door for Catholic colleges to see themselves as agents of academic leadership in society, but it did not explicitly anchor that leadership in CST or the Church’s pastoral vision. The tension it generated between autonomy and identity would reverberate for decades.

Indeed, two decades later, the U.S. bishops issued *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future*. Recognizing the challenges of secularization, religious pluralism, and shifting cultural norms, the bishops sought to articulate a comprehensive vision for campus ministry that could meet the needs of students in Catholic and secular institutions alike. They insisted that “Campus ministry is not a peripheral service but integral to the life of the academic community”.[91] The document outlines six dimensions of campus ministry - evangelization, catechesis, forming community, pastoral care, justice and service, and leadership

[90] “The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University” (*The Land O’Lakes Statement*), July 23, 1967, in *Theological Studies* 29, no. 4 (1968): 623–626, https://library.nd.edu/landolakes/.
[91] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985), §12.

development—and stressed that these aspects must be interrelated rather than siloed. Of particular importance for this study is the explicit naming of leadership development: *"Campus ministry should assist students in developing their gifts of leadership so they can contribute to the Church and society"*.[92] By placing leadership alongside evangelization and justice, the bishops signaled that forming leaders was not simply about equipping students with organizational skills but about shaping disciples who would embody faith, justice, and service in their daily lives. This was a decisive moment in framing student leadership as a pastoral responsibility rooted in the mission of the Church.

Five years later, Pope St. John Paul II issued the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which offered a global vision for Catholic higher education. Written in the shadow of the Land O'Lakes Statement and amid concerns about secularization worldwide, the document reaffirmed the essential identity of Catholic universities as institutions *"born from the heart of the Church"*.[93] It aimed to ensure that Catholic universities would not only maintain academic rigor but also preserve their distinctive ecclesial mission. St. John Paul II insisted that their fundamental task was *"to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world"*.[94] The constitution underscored the formation of the whole person: students are called to become *"men and women outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder society's heavier burdens, and to witness to the faith."*[95] By placing leadership for the common good at the core of Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde* made clear that forming leaders is not an optional outcome but a defining element of a university's Catholic identity.

---

[92] *Empowered by the Spirit*, §38.
[93] John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* [*Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Usets the framework, it is often the student affairs divisions that most directly shape students' livesniversities*], August 15, 1990, §1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.
[94] Ibid., §13.
[95] Ibid., §21.

Building on these ecclesial foundations, scholarship in Catholic higher education and student affairs has wrestled with how to translate this vision into daily practice. While papal and episcopal teaching set the framework, it is often the student affairs divisions that most directly shape the lives of students. Sandra Estanek has argued that student affairs is "the most student-facing expression of Catholic mission" on campus.[96] Through residence life, retreats, service opportunities, co-curricular programming, and mentoring, student affairs provides the contexts where mission comes alive in student experience. In this sense, student affairs represents one of the Church's greatest gifts to higher education: a place where the values of CST are embodied in practice and where leadership is cultivated in lived community rather than abstract principle.

Scholars have also examined how Catholic Social Teaching itself can serve as a unifying framework for mission integration across the broader university. Erin Brigham and Kathryn Getek Soltis note that CST offers "a point of entry into conversations on mission and identity that bridges the Church and the world, diverse religious identities, varying political perspectives, and multiple academic disciplines."[97] Their analysis of faculty engagement initiatives across Catholic institutions demonstrates that programs centered on CST often become key sites where mission, pedagogy, and institutional identity intersect. Such efforts highlight the potential for CST not only to inform student programming but also to shape the wider intellectual and pedagogical culture of Catholic higher education.

[96] Sandra M. Estanek, *Understanding Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 41.
[97] Erin Brigham and Kathryn Getek Soltis, "Engaging Faculty Around the Catholic Social Tradition," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 37, no. 2 (2018): 89–110.

This relationship between practice and formation echoes recent reflections in Catholic Social Tradition scholarship. Erin Brigham and Maureen H. O'Connell argue that "the praxis of relational organizing embodies the Catholic Social Tradition and could be better known and appreciated among parishioners, church leaders, and in classrooms teaching CST."[98] They describe organizing as a "pedagogy of encounter" that teaches leadership through listening, relationship-building, and shared responsibility. Their analysis shows that the Church's social vision is most fully realized when it is practiced, not merely proclaimed—a claim that parallels the formative work of campus ministry and student affairs. In both contexts, people learn to lead through participation and accompaniment, discovering that leadership itself can become a ministry of communion.

Yet the very strength of student affairs also exposes its vulnerability. Research demonstrates that many Catholic colleges employ professionals formed in secular graduate programs where Catholic mission and CST are not emphasized. Michael Schaller and Diane Boyle describe the resulting tension as "honoring two philosophies": the developmental language of the profession, which prioritizes autonomy, choice, and individual growth, and the Catholic intellectual tradition, which emphasizes community, solidarity, and the common good.[99] They note that "the language of the profession and the language of Catholic higher education do not always converge."[100] Sandra M. Estanek likewise found that mission statements frequently affirm Catholic identity, but in day-to-day practice, student affairs often defaults to parallel discourses

---

[98] Erin Brigham and Maureen H. O'Connell, *Empowering People through Encounter: CST and Community Organizing* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2023), 2.

[99] Michael Schaller and Diane Boyle, "Honoring Two Philosophies: Student Affairs Practice at Catholic Colleges and Universities," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 9, no. 1 (September 2005): 107-142.

[100] Schaller and Boyle, "Honoring Two Philosophies," 142.

of equity, inclusion, and holistic development.[101] These values resonate with CST but are rarely identified as such, creating what scholars have called a formation gap.

Case studies illustrate both the promise and the challenge. Andrew Hill's work at St. Mary's University in San Antonio shows what is possible when student affairs teams root their work explicitly in charism and mission. By drawing on the Marianist tradition of "educating for service, justice, and peace,"[102] the division designed leadership retreats, service-learning projects, and mentoring initiatives that explicitly formed students in both skill and vocation. Michael Hengemuhle's dissertation, "*A Charism Is a Nice Thing to Have*," notes that this work is even more critical as religious congregations withdraw from daily campus life.[103] Without vowed religious presence, lay professionals in student affairs must consciously carry forward Catholic culture, ensuring that leadership formation reflects more than generic developmental values. Lisa Wurtz's dissertation[104] strengthens this point by arguing that Catholic student affairs staff must view their work not only as a profession but as a vocation. Leadership development, in this vision, becomes an arena of evangelization: forming students for service and the common good in continuity with the Church's mission.

Professional associations have also sought to guide this work. The Association for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASACCU) issued the Principles of Good Practice in 2001, revised in 2010 and 2022. The latest edition urges Catholic colleges to "invite

---

[101] Sandra M. Estanek, "Student Affairs Professionals at Catholic Colleges and Universities: Honoring Mission and Profession," *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 75–90.
[102] Andrew Hill, "Educating for Service, Justice, and Peace: The Marianist Approach to Student Affairs," *Mission Integration at St. Mary's University* (San Antonio, TX: St. Mary's University, 2002).
[103] Michael Hengemuhle, *A Charism Is a Nice Thing to Have: Understanding the Role of Charism in the Mission Integration of Catholic Higher Education* (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2015).
[104] Lisa Wurtz, *The Vocational Dimension of Student Affairs Work in Catholic Higher Education* (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2013).

and challenge students to lives of solidarity, equity, inclusion, and justice."[105] These commitments align closely with CST principles such as solidarity, the option for the poor, and participation in community life. Yet the absence of explicit CST language is striking. As Estanek and others observe, when Catholic institutions translate their mission solely into developmental or secular terms, they unintentionally weaken their theological distinctiveness. Students may learn to value equity and inclusion, but without CST as an anchor, they do not recognize these commitments as part of a coherent Catholic worldview.

Here, the Compendium provides an important corrective. From its opening pages, it insists that CST is not reserved for Catholics alone but is addressed "to all people of good will".[106] Cardinal Renato Martino, who oversaw the Compendium as president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, later emphasized its relevance for higher education: "Respect for human dignity helps young minds and hearts to recognize that every person, believer or not, has been fashioned in the image and likeness of Almighty God and is called to be an artisan and cocreator of society and culture."[107] Explicitly naming CST in student affairs, then, is not sectarian imposition but an act of intellectual and spiritual honesty: it connects developmental values to the Catholic tradition that sustains them and invites students to see leadership as vocation, not just as skill.

Recent scholarship continues to underscore this point. In *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought*, Bernard Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley warn that Catholic

---

[105] Association for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASACCU), *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities*, 3rd ed. (2022), 4.
[106]Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), §3.
[107]Renato R. Martino, "CST and the University," address delivered at The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, April 24, 2007, in *CST and the University: Promoting Human Dignity and Integral Human Development* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, Office of University Relations, 2007).

universities risk becoming “a system adrift” without a firm anchor in CST[108]. They argue that CST provides precisely the grounding needed to ensure that mission is not reduced to generic ideals but remains distinctively Catholic. Similarly, Leonard DeLorenzo and Timothy O’Malley’s *I Call You Friends* reflecting on John Cavadini’s work, frames Catholic higher education as a “school of charity” where leadership is sustained by friendship, communion, and caritas rather than mere academic achievement. Together, these voices remind us that leadership in Catholic higher education cannot be separated from ecclesial identity: it must be rooted in CST as both anchor and horizon.[109]

Other scholars echo this urgency. Prusak and Reed-Bouley argue that CST must serve as the anchor for both academic curricula and the “hidden curriculum” of campus life—residence halls, student organizations, and service programs.[110] John Baltutis cautions that without CST framing, service-learning risks reinforcing a “rescue mentality” rather than fostering genuine solidarity.[111] John Sullivan and Ron Pagnucco describe CST as the best-kept secret on Catholic campuses: implicitly present in service and leadership initiatives, but rarely named as the guiding framework.[112] Even studies on boundaries and friendship in Catholic higher education highlight the need for relational formation grounded in accompaniment, echoing CST’s call for solidarity as lived out in community.

[108] Bernard P. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023).
[109]Leonard J. DeLorenzo and Timothy P. O’Malley, *I Call You Friends: Friendship and Community in the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2019).
[110]Bernard P. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023), 142.
[111]John Baltutis, “Service-Learning and the Risk of the Rescue Mentality in Catholic Higher Education,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 38, no. 1 (2019): 77–95.
[112] John Sullivan and Ron Pagnucco, “The Best Kept Secret: CST and Catholic Higher Education,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 199–216.

Taken together, these sources present both a gift and a warning. The gift is that Catholic student affairs provides the richest space for integrating leadership, faith, and service—it is where CST values are most naturally practiced in retreats, residence halls, mentoring, and service-learning. Yet the warning is equally clear: if these values are not explicitly connected to Catholic identity, they risk being reduced to admirable but generic ideals. Just as the Letter of James insists that "faith without works is dead",[113] Catholic higher education must also recognize the inverse: works without faith grounding risk becoming hollow. As Grégoire Catta argues, CST is not merely a "social ethic" borrowed to support existing practices but a theological discipline in its own right, offering a vision of human flourishing rooted in Christ and the Church's mission.[114] To frame student affairs only in developmental or secular terms is to sever practice from this theological horizon. Mission without identity is mission without a soul. Catholic student affairs has the extraordinary potential to form leaders who are reflective, justice-oriented, and spiritually grounded. But this requires more than implicit resonance; it requires intentional integration of CST as the language, framework, and horizon for leadership development in Catholic higher education.

2.3 Understanding Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching represents the Church's sustained reflection on how faith informs social life. Rooted in Scripture, developed through tradition, and articulated in response to concrete historical realities, this teaching offers a moral vision centered on the dignity of the human person, the call to community, and responsibility for the common good. Over time, the

---

[113]Jas 2:17.
[114]Grégoire Catta, *CST as Theology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

Church has articulated this vision through a series of social encyclicals, pastoral letters, and episcopal statements that together form a coherent—though not static—body of teaching.

To support education and formation, particularly in pastoral and academic contexts, the Church in the United States has articulated this tradition through seven interrelated themes. These themes do not function as isolated principles but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single moral vision. Together, they provide a framework for understanding how Christian faith shapes social responsibility, leadership, and action in the world.

The following subsections examine each theme in turn, presenting it as a theological commitment that informs formation rather than as an abstract ideal.

2.3.1 Life and Dignity of the Human Person

At the heart of Catholic Social Teaching is a claim that is deceptively simple yet profoundly demanding: the human person cannot be reduced. No social system, institution, or role fully captures who a person is or what they are worth. CST begins not with abstract principles but with an anthropology that insists the human person always exceeds the categories used to define them—economic, political, educational, or otherwise.

This conviction shapes how the Church approaches social life. Human dignity is not something earned through achievement, productivity, or moral success, nor is it granted by recognition or belonging. It precedes all of these. CST therefore resists any vision of society that measures human value primarily by usefulness, compliance, or contribution. When persons are treated primarily as problems to be managed, outcomes to be optimized, or means toward institutional goals, dignity is already compromised.

What makes this claim distinctively theological is not only *what* it affirms but *how* it functions. Dignity in CST is not merely a static attribute; it is a moral demand placed upon social

relationships. To affirm dignity is to accept responsibility for how systems, structures, and practices shape human lives. It requires ongoing discernment about whether social arrangements genuinely serve persons or subtly deform them.

This theme also reframes freedom. Rather than understanding freedom as autonomy alone, CST presents freedom as the capacity to live truthfully in relationship—with others and with God. Human dignity is realized not in isolation but in conditions that allow persons to participate meaningfully in community, to exercise agency, and to be recognized as more than the roles they occupy.

In formation contexts, this understanding of dignity carries significant implications. Leadership is no longer primarily about effectiveness, influence, or strategic skill. Instead, it is evaluated by how leaders attend to persons: whose voices are heard, whose experiences are taken seriously, and whose lives are shaped—often invisibly—by institutional decisions. Leadership that claims neutrality while overlooking the concrete impact of its choices risks undermining the very dignity it professes to respect.

Importantly, CST's emphasis on dignity does not idealize the human person or deny human brokenness. Rather, it insists that vulnerability, limitation, and dependence are not threats to dignity but dimensions of human life that call forth responsibility from others. This perspective challenges cultural narratives that equate worth with independence or strength and instead locates dignity precisely where human life is most fragile.

Within Catholic Social Teaching, then, dignity functions as a critical lens through which all social practices are judged. It asks not only whether intentions are good or outcomes efficient, but whether persons are encountered as subjects rather than objects. This question becomes

foundational for any form of leadership formation that claims to be rooted in a Catholic moral vision.

2.3.2 Call to Family, Community, and Participation

If human dignity names who the person is, the call to family, community, and participation names how human life is meant to be lived. CST rejects the assumption that persons are self-sufficient individuals who later decide whether or not to belong. Instead, it begins from the recognition that human identity is formed within relationships—before achievement, before autonomy, and often before conscious choice.

This theme directly challenges cultural narratives that treat community as optional or instrumental. In many contemporary settings, community is valued only insofar as it serves individual goals: advancement, efficiency, or personal fulfillment. CST offers a different vision. Community is not a means to personal success; it is the social condition that makes human flourishing possible in the first place.

Within this vision, the family holds a distinctive place—not as an idealized or uniform structure, but as the primary context in which persons first experience dependence, responsibility, and care. Yet CST does not confine the community to the family alone. The call to participation extends outward to educational institutions, civic life, workplaces, and political structures. Human dignity requires more than belonging; it requires the ability to participate meaningfully in shaping the communities and institutions that affect one's life.

Participation, as CST understands it, is not merely presence or inclusion in name. It involves voice, agency, and the capacity to contribute to shared discernment and decision-making. This theme, therefore, draws attention to how power functions within social systems—who is invited to participate, who is excluded, and whose participation remains

symbolic rather than substantive. Structures that claim inclusivity while limiting real agency fail to meet the moral demands of this commitment.

This understanding also reframes authority. Authority is not exercised *over* others as control, but *with* others in service of the common good. Leadership, then, is measured not by speed or efficiency alone, but by whether communal processes allow persons to be seen, heard, and taken seriously. Participation becomes a moral practice rather than a procedural formality.

In formation contexts, this theme carries particular weight. Educational institutions often emphasize individual achievement while overlooking the communal conditions that make learning, leadership, and growth possible. CST calls attention to the formative power of shared life: mentoring relationships, peer communities, and institutional cultures that either foster participation or quietly inhibit it. Leadership formation shaped by this theme attends not only to personal development but to the health of the community itself.

Finally, this theme resists the fragmentation of social responsibility. It challenges the separation of faith from public life and rejects the reduction of moral responsibility to private intention alone. By insisting on participation, CST affirms that engagement in communal and social life is not peripheral to faith, but integral to it. Community is not an accessory to human dignity; it is one of the primary ways dignity is lived, tested, and sustained.

2.3.3 Rights and Responsibilities

Within CST, rights are never treated as isolated claims asserted against others. They emerge instead from a relational understanding of the human person and are sustained only within a web of mutual responsibility. To speak of rights, therefore, is always to speak simultaneously about obligations—toward individuals, communities, and the broader social order.

This approach stands in contrast to dominant cultural frameworks that emphasize rights primarily as protections of individual autonomy. While CST affirms the importance of protecting persons from harm or coercion, it resists framing rights solely as boundaries that shield individuals from one another. Rights are understood as conditions that make participation in social life possible. They exist so that persons can live, contribute, and belong in ways that honor their dignity.

Responsibilities, in this vision, are not secondary or burdensome additions to rights. They are intrinsic to what rights mean. To recognize one's own rights is to acknowledge corresponding duties toward others—especially when one holds social, institutional, or economic power. CST therefore challenges moral frameworks that emphasize entitlement while minimizing accountability.

This theme also introduces a structural dimension to moral responsibility. Rights may be formally acknowledged yet practically inaccessible due to social arrangements, economic inequality, or institutional practices. CST is attentive not only to the recognition of rights in principle, but to whether social conditions actually allow people to exercise them. Responsibility thus extends beyond individual conduct to include collective accountability for the systems that enable or constrain human flourishing.

In leadership formation, this understanding reshapes how authority and decision-making are evaluated. Leadership informed by CST does not ask only what leaders are permitted to do, but what they are answerable for. Ethical leadership is measured not simply by compliance with policies or procedures, but by attentiveness to impact—particularly on those with limited voice or influence. Responsibility becomes a defining feature of leadership rather than an optional virtue.

This theme also resists the temptation to reduce responsibility to personal intention alone. CST insists that good intentions are insufficient when systems consistently disadvantage certain groups. Responsibility includes the willingness to examine and challenge practices that appear neutral yet produce unequal outcomes. Leaders are called not only to act justly themselves, but to take responsibility for the environments they help create.

Ultimately, CST's pairing of rights and responsibilities reframes freedom itself. Freedom is not the absence of obligation, but the capacity to act in ways that sustain the dignity of others and the integrity of the community. In this sense, responsibility is not a limit on freedom but one of its most authentic expressions.

2.3.4 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The option for the poor and vulnerable introduces a necessary disruption into the moral vision of CST. It refuses neutrality. Rather than treating all social concerns as equally weighted, this theme insists that moral attention must begin with those whose lives are most shaped by injustice, exclusion, or instability. It is not an optional emphasis within CST, but a criterion by which social arrangements are evaluated.

This option is often misunderstood as a call to preferential treatment or individual generosity alone. CST understands it differently. The priority given to the poor and vulnerable functions as a moral lens, directing attention to how social, economic, and institutional systems affect those with the least power. It asks whose needs are being centered, whose voices are missing, and whose suffering remains normalized within existing structures.

Crucially, this theme shifts moral concern from intention to impact. Well-intended practices may still perpetuate harm if they fail to account for structural inequality. CST therefore challenges approaches that reduce justice to acts of service without examining the conditions that

make such service continually necessary. Charity remains essential, but it is not sufficient. The option for the poor calls for critical engagement with the causes of poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability.

Within formation contexts, this theme reshapes how leadership is understood and practiced. Leadership informed by CST cannot remain comfortable with systems that function well for some while excluding others. It requires attentiveness to those who experience institutional life from its margins—those whose access, participation, or sense of belonging is limited by economic, cultural, or social barriers.

This theme also exposes the moral cost of indifference. CST does not require that every leader possess the same expertise or authority to address complex social problems, but it does insist on responsibility for awareness and response. To ignore the realities of the poor and vulnerable is not a neutral act; it is a moral failure rooted in distance and disengagement.

Importantly, the option for the poor is not grounded in pity, but in solidarity. It affirms that the flourishing of any community is inseparable from the well-being of its most vulnerable members. Leadership formation shaped by this theme cultivates not only compassion, but moral imagination—the capacity to see how decisions, policies, and priorities shape lives beyond one's immediate experience.

In this way, CST situates the poor and vulnerable not at the margins of moral reflection, but at its center. Their experiences become a measure of justice and a source of insight into how social life might be reordered toward greater dignity and participation for all.

2.3.5 The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

CST approaches work not simply as an economic necessity, but as a fundamental dimension of human life. Work is one of the primary ways persons participate in society, express

responsibility, and contribute to the common good. Because of this, work carries moral weight. It shapes identity, relationships, and the conditions under which people live with dignity.

This theme challenges cultural assumptions that treat work primarily as a commodity or workers as interchangeable units of productivity. CST resists economic frameworks that measure human worth by output, efficiency, or profitability alone. Instead, it insists that the meaning of work must be evaluated in light of the person who performs it. When work degrades, exploits, or renders people invisible, dignity is compromised regardless of economic gain.

The rights of workers emerge directly from this understanding. These rights are not concessions granted by institutions or markets, but moral claims rooted in the dignity of the person. Fair wages, safe conditions, reasonable hours, and the ability to organize are not external demands imposed on economic systems; they are necessary conditions for work to remain genuinely human. CST therefore evaluates economic success not only by growth or innovation, but by how labor is experienced by those whose lives depend on it.

This theme also reframes success and leadership within organizational contexts. Leaders are often praised for maximizing outcomes or streamlining operations, yet CST asks a different set of questions: How are people treated in the process? Whose labor is undervalued or hidden? What forms of work are considered essential, and which are taken for granted? Leadership shaped by this theme must attend to these questions as moral concerns, not merely managerial ones.

In formation settings, this perspective invites deeper reflection on vocation and responsibility. Work is not merely preparation for future employment or advancement; it is already a site of moral formation. The ways students learn to value labor—both their own and that of others—shape how they will exercise authority, allocate resources, and make decisions

later in life. CST encourages a vision of leadership that honors labor as participation rather than exploitation.

Finally, this theme highlights the interdependence of workers, institutions, and society. Economic arrangements that prioritize profit over persons may appear successful in the short term, but they erode trust, community, and long-term sustainability. CST insists that just work is not a private concern but a social responsibility. The dignity of work becomes a measure of the moral health of the communities and institutions in which it takes place.

2.3.6 Solidarity

Solidarity names the moral posture that emerges once dignity, community, responsibility, and justice are taken seriously together. It is not sentiment, empathy, or goodwill alone. In CST, solidarity describes a deliberate way of seeing and acting that recognizes the deep interdependence of human lives and refuses the illusion that one's flourishing can be separated from that of others.

This theme challenges cultural habits of distance. Modern social life often allows individuals and institutions to remain insulated from the consequences of their choices. Decisions can be made efficiently precisely because those affected are unseen or abstracted. Solidarity interrupts this pattern by insisting that social relationships carry moral weight even when they are indirect or invisible. It calls attention to how actions taken in one place reverberate across communities, generations, and borders.

Solidarity also resists the reduction of social concern to isolated acts of assistance. While compassion and generosity are essential, CST insists that solidarity moves beyond episodic help toward sustained commitment. It involves standing with others in ways that acknowledge shared

responsibility for social conditions—not as saviors, but as participants in a common moral project. This posture reshapes how power, privilege, and agency are understood.

Within leadership formation, solidarity reframes authority and influence. Leaders shaped by this theme do not approach others primarily as beneficiaries, competitors, or obstacles, but as partners whose lives are bound up with their own decisions. Solidarity calls leaders to remain attentive to voices that are easily ignored and to experiences that challenge comfortable assumptions. It demands proximity—not necessarily physical, but moral and relational.

This theme also carries a corrective dimension. Solidarity exposes the moral inadequacy of neutrality in situations of injustice. CST does not require uniform agreement on every issue, but it does insist that indifference in the face of suffering is incompatible with a commitment to human dignity. Solidarity names the responsibility to respond, even when solutions are complex or incomplete.

In formation contexts, solidarity cultivates moral imagination. It invites students and emerging leaders to recognize connections between personal choices and social realities, between local contexts and global consequences. Leadership shaped by solidarity is less concerned with preserving distance or control and more attentive to relationship, accountability, and shared vulnerability.

Ultimately, solidarity expresses CST's conviction that human life is fundamentally relational. It affirms that justice is not achieved through isolated virtue alone, but through sustained commitment to one another across difference. In this way, solidarity becomes not only a social principle, but a defining disposition for leadership rooted in a moral vision of the common good.

2.3.7 Care for God's Creation

Care for creation expands the moral horizon of CST by insisting that human dignity and social responsibility cannot be separated from the condition of the natural world. This theme challenges the assumption that environmental concerns are secondary or external to questions of justice, leadership, and moral responsibility. Instead, it situates creation itself within the web of relationships that sustain human life.

CST approaches creation not as neutral material to be managed, but as a gift entrusted to human stewardship. This framing resists both exploitation and romanticization. Creation is neither an object to be consumed without limit nor a reality detached from human needs. It is the shared context in which human life unfolds, and its health directly shapes the possibilities for dignity, participation, and flourishing—especially for the poor and vulnerable.

This theme introduces a strong sense of moral accountability across time. Decisions made in the present carry consequences for future generations, often in ways that are difficult to reverse. CST therefore challenges short-term thinking that prioritizes convenience, growth, or efficiency at the expense of sustainability. Responsibility is no longer limited to immediate outcomes, but extends to long-term impact and intergenerational justice.

Within this vision, environmental degradation is never only a technical problem. It is a moral issue because it reflects patterns of domination, neglect, and inequality. Those least responsible for environmental harm are often those most affected by its consequences. CST draws attention to this imbalance and insists that care for creation must be linked to concern for human dignity and social justice.

In formation and leadership contexts, this theme disrupts narrowly human-centered approaches to decision-making. Leadership informed by CST must consider how policies,

practices, and institutional cultures shape not only people's lives today, but the conditions under which future life will be possible. Care for creation becomes a measure of whether leadership is oriented toward stewardship or short-term gain.

This theme also reshapes how responsibility is understood. Stewardship does not require mastery or control, but attentiveness, restraint, and humility. CST challenges leaders to recognize the limits of human authority and to approach creation with reverence rather than entitlement. Such an approach fosters practices of care that are relational rather than extractive.

Taken together with the other themes, care for creation completes CST's moral vision by locating human social life within a broader ecological context. It affirms that leadership committed to dignity, justice, and the common good must also attend to the world that makes such commitments possible. Care for creation is not an additional concern alongside others; it is integral to a moral vision that understands human life as embedded within, not separate from, the created order.

2.3.8 Honorable Mentions: Global Emphases within CST

While the seven themes articulated by the bishops in the United States provide a clear and accessible framework for education and formation, they do not exhaust the breadth of CST. As a global tradition shaped by diverse historical and pastoral contexts, CST has been articulated with different emphases by episcopal conferences and theologians responding to particular social realities.

One such emphasis is subsidiarity, a principle highlighted more explicitly in several international and European articulations of CST. Subsidiarity affirms that decisions should be made at the most local level capable of addressing an issue effectively, while higher levels of authority exist to support—not replace—local initiative. This principle resists both excessive

centralization and unchecked individualism, insisting instead on a proper ordering of responsibility within social life.

Subsidiarity carries important implications for leadership and institutional life. It challenges models of authority that concentrate power unnecessarily and instead affirms the dignity, agency, and competence of local communities. Within CST, subsidiarity functions as a safeguard against systems that undermine participation by removing decision-making from those most directly affected by it. At the same time, it recognizes that solidarity requires coordination and support when local capacity is insufficient.

Other global emphases include peace and reconciliation, particularly in regions shaped by conflict or political violence, where CST has developed sustained reflection on nonviolence, social healing, and restorative justice. In many contexts of the Global South, CST has also foregrounded integral human development, emphasizing the inseparability of economic, cultural, spiritual, and political dimensions of human flourishing.

Additionally, concerns related to structural injustice, migration, and forced displacement have emerged prominently in regions experiencing economic instability, postcolonial inequality, or humanitarian crises. These emphases draw attention to how systems and historical patterns shape human lives, reinforcing CST's insistence that moral responsibility extends beyond individual action to include social and institutional transformation.

These global perspectives do not stand apart from the seven themes but deepen and complicate them. They highlight CST's dynamic and contextual character, demonstrating how the tradition responds to concrete social realities while remaining grounded in a consistent moral vision. Acknowledging subsidiarity and other international emphases reinforces that CST is not a

fixed list of principles, but a living tradition capable of informing leadership, formation, and discernment across diverse contexts.

2.4 Filling the Gap: CST and Student Leadership Formation

The preceding sections have demonstrated that CST provides a comprehensive vision for leadership, that this vision has developed through more than a century of magisterial teaching, and that Catholic higher education—especially through student affairs—represents the most immediate setting for its implementation. These insights show that leadership development in Catholic higher education is best understood not simply as a professional competency but as a form of ministerial formation, one that must be intentionally grounded in the Church's social vision.

At the same time, questions remain. How are these commitments embodied in practice? Do students themselves recognize CST as integral to their leadership development, or do they only encounter its values in generic language of inclusion, equity, and service? To answer these questions requires moving beyond theoretical claims into the lived experiences of students and practitioners. Here the discipline of practical theology provides a crucial bridge between vision and reality.

Don Browning's correlation method emphasizes that theology and experience must remain in dialogue. As Browning argued in *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, "theory and practice interpret each other".[115] CST offers a normative vision, but its meaning becomes most vivid when tested against the concrete experiences of young adults in leadership roles. Conversely, student experiences raise questions that push the tradition to speak with renewed

---

[115] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 7.

clarity. Without this correlation, CST risks becoming abstract, while student affairs risks mission drift.

Richard Osmer's fourfold process offers further guidance. Osmer describes the task of practical theology as moving through four interrelated movements: the descriptive-empirical ("What is going on?"), the interpretive ("Why is this happening?"), the normative ("What ought to be happening?"), and the pragmatic ("How might we respond?").[116] This project builds on that process to move from the broad theological and ministerial framework outlined in this chapter to the on-the-ground realities of Catholic higher education. The descriptive and interpretive tasks will enable the voices of students, campus ministers, and student affairs professionals to be heard; the normative and pragmatic tasks will engage those voices in dialogue with CST and propose ways forward for leadership development.

This framework underscores the central claim of this study: student leadership development in Catholic higher education is not merely extracurricular programming but a form of ministerial formation. It is a privileged space where CST can move from text to lived practice, shaping students as reflective, justice-oriented, and spiritually grounded leaders. To determine whether this potential is being realized, an empirical investigation is required.This study therefore asks not only whether CST is present within leadership formation, but whether students themselves recognize and internalize that tradition as part of their leadership identity.

For that reason, the next chapter turns to methodology and field research. Chapter 3 explains how qualitative case studies—using interviews and document analysis—will examine whether CST is currently being incorporated into student leadership development at Catholic

---

[116] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4.

universities. In this way, the practical theological framework of Browning and Osmer provides not only a bridge between theory and practice but also the scaffolding for the research design itself.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding this study, which examines how CST principles are embodied in student leadership formation in Catholic higher education. Grounded in the discipline of practical theology, the research follows Don Browning's correlation method, which views theology and lived experience as interpretive partners, and Richard Osmer's fourfold process, which structures practical-theological inquiry through its descriptive, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks. By bringing these approaches into conversation, the project moves back and forth between the theological vision of CST and the lived realities of leadership formation on university campuses.

The study employs a qualitative, multi-case design, drawing on four interrelated sources of data: an online survey of student leaders, publicly available institutional materials (such as websites and mission statements), semi-structured interviews with campus ministers and mission directors, and document analysis of leadership and formation resources. This approach reflects the conviction that faith-informed leadership formation cannot be understood apart from the people, practices, and institutional contexts that embody it. In this way, the methodology itself participates in the practical-theological task—allowing theory and practice to interpret one another and revealing how CST is lived, taught, and sometimes overlooked in Catholic higher education today.

3.1 Practical Theology as Framework

Practical theology provides the methodological foundation for this study because it holds together the dynamic relationship between faith, experience, and action. Within this discipline, theological reflection does not remain abstract or detached from daily life; rather, it emerges through sustained dialogue with concrete experience. Don Browning describes this as a

"theory–practice–theory" movement in which theology moves "from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held practices." [117]In other words, practical theology listens to lived experience, retrieves the wisdom of the Christian tradition in response, and generates renewed forms of ministry and leadership for contemporary contexts. This cyclical process provides a theological rationale for studying how the principles of CST are understood and lived in Catholic higher education.

Browning's correlation method insists that theology must remain in conversation with the lived practices of faith communities. He argues that theology begins with "the questions that emerge from the practical circumstances of our lives" and then seeks responses that are faithful to the tradition while critically engaging the modern world.[118] This insight aligns closely with the aims of this project, which examines how the Church's social vision—especially themes of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, the common good, and participation—is embodied within student leadership programs and campus ministry formation. Through correlation, this study interprets the experiences of students and campus ministers not merely as empirical data but as theological texts that illuminate how CST is enacted, misunderstood, or reshaped in practice.

Richard Osmer complements Browning's work by offering a process model that structures the movement of practical theology. Osmer identifies four interrelated tasks: the descriptive-empirical ("What is going on?"), the interpretive ("Why is this happening?"), the normative ("What ought to be happening?"), and the pragmatic ("How might we respond?").[119]These tasks guide the methodological choices of the study. The descriptive and

---

[117] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 7–9.

[118]Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 47–49

[119] Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds., *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 1–6.

interpretive tasks shape how data are collected and analyzed through surveys, website review, interviews, and documents. The normative task places these findings in dialogue with CST, using its theological principles as evaluative criteria. Finally, the pragmatic task invites reflection on how Catholic universities might strengthen faith-informed leadership formation in light of what the study reveals.

Together, Browning and Osmer provide the scaffolding for this project's methodological approach. Browning establishes the why—the conviction that theology must engage lived experience—while Osmer provides the how—a structured process for doing so. The correlation of CST with the real experiences of student leaders thus becomes both the subject and the method of the research. Practical theology offers a fitting framework for such work because it refuses to separate faith from context, formation from practice, or doctrine from lived discipleship. By situating this study within that framework, the research honors both the rigor of theological inquiry and the pastoral realities of leadership formation in Catholic higher education.

3.2 Research Design and Questions

This study is designed as a qualitative, multi-case project that would examine how CST is integrated into student leadership formation across a range of Catholic higher education settings. The intention of the research design was to include institutions that differed in size, charism, regional context, and campus ministry structure, in order to capture the diversity of Catholic higher education in the United States.

Specifically, the study sought to include:

- Different Catholic charisms (e.g., Franciscan, Augustinian, Vincentian, Jesuit, etc.), recognizing that charism shapes leadership formation, spirituality, and mission language.
- Different institutional types, such as small liberal arts colleges, mid-size regional universities, and urban commuter campuses.
- Different ministry models, including campus ministry housed under Mission & Identity, Student Affairs, or independent ecclesial sponsorship.
- Schools with active leadership structures, such as peer ministers, retreat teams, immersion trip leaders, liturgical ministers, or service/justice fellows.
- Geographical diversity, with an initial focus on the Northeast (due to density of Catholic institutions) and openness to additional regions as participation allowed.

These characteristics were selected because they offered the strongest likelihood of comparison: institutions with different charisms, structures, and cultures often approach leadership formation differently, and thus provide a valuable spectrum for analyzing how CST is understood or embodied in student roles.

This study employs a qualitative, multi-case design rooted in the discipline of practical theology. Because the aim is not to measure outcomes but to understand meaning, formation, and lived experience, a qualitative approach allows for deep engagement with the perspectives of both campus ministers and student leaders. Within Catholic higher education, leadership formation should not be simply a programmatic outcome but a process of theological reflection-in-action. For this reason, the study seeks to interpret how the values and principles of CST are embodied—explicitly or implicitly—within student leadership development.

As alluded to above, the research design is shaped by Browning's correlation method, which insists that theology and experience remain in dialogue, and by Osmer's descriptive-empirical task, which asks, "What is going on?" The purpose of this chapter is therefore to describe how the study investigates that question through a structured process of data collection and analysis. Each participating institution—understood as an individual case—represents a distinctive context in which leadership formation and CST interact. Taken together, these cases create a composite picture of how faith-informed leadership is understood and practiced across Catholic higher education.

Data were gathered through four complementary methods:

- An online survey of student leaders, exploring their understanding of leadership, faith, and CST.
- A review of publicly available institutional materials, especially websites, to establish how Catholic identity, mission, and leadership values are presented to students.
- Structured interviews with Directors of Campus Ministry, examining their philosophy, practices, and theological framing of student leadership formation.
- Document analysis of mission statements, leadership training materials, reflection resources, and program descriptions that articulate institutional approaches to leadership and formation.

These methods were selected because they reveal both intentional and experiential dimensions of leadership formation—what institutions aim to develop, how campus ministers interpret and implement that mission, and what students themselves perceive and internalize. The

multi-case design allows for comparison across institutional types while preserving the distinctive character of each setting.

The data collection unfolded in ways that required flexibility and adaptation. While the study sought participation from a broad range of Catholic institutions—varying in charism, size, and ministry structure—the level of response ultimately depended on access, availability, and institutional capacity. These realities do not diminish the integrity of the design but shape its implementation, resulting in a final set of cases that, while smaller than intended, still offer valuable insight into how CST is communicated and embodied within student leadership formation. The adjustments required in the field are addressed later in the limitations section, but they also affirm a central assumption of practical theology: research grounded in lived experience must remain responsive to the real conditions of ministry and institutional life.

3.2.1 Research Questions

The central purpose of this study is to understand how do student leaders in Catholic universities understand and apply Catholic Social Teaching within leadership formation programs? This inquiry is guided by the following primary and secondary research questions.

Primary Question

1. How are the principles of CST integrated into student leadership formation within Catholic higher education?

Secondary Questions

1. How do campus ministers and formation directors describe their philosophy and approach to student leadership development?
2. To what extent do student leaders recognize and articulate the values of CST in their leadership experiences?

3. What convergences or gaps exist between institutional intentions and student perceptions regarding faith-informed leadership formation?

These questions reflect a practical-theological posture: listening to lived experience, interpreting that experience in light of the Church's social vision, and discerning implications for pastoral practice. As Osmer observes, practical theology "is concerned with the reflective understanding of practice in light of theological norms." The aim of this study is therefore *not* to generalize across all institutions, but to offer a contextually grounded portrait of how CST is being lived, named, formed, and at times overlooked within student leadership today.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Once again, this study draws upon four complementary sources of data: (1) an online survey of student leaders, (2) publicly available institutional information from university websites, (3) semi-structured interviews with campus ministers and mission directors, and (4) internal programmatic and mission-related documents. Taken together, these sources provide a comprehensive descriptive-empirical portrait of how CST is understood, named, and embodied within student leadership formation across Catholic higher education.

The sequencing of these data collection—beginning with student experience and then moving toward institutional structures—follows Browning's insistence that practical theology must begin with lived practice and aligns with Osmer's first task: "What is going on?"

3.3.1 Student Leader Survey

The first source of data was the online survey "Faith-Informed Leadership and CST in Campus Ministry." The survey was distributed to student leaders engaged in campus ministry and mission-oriented co-curricular roles. It was designed to assess students' familiarity with CST,

their experience of leadership formation, and how they interpret the relationship between faith and leadership.

Survey Content

The survey included six sections:

1. Background & Leadership Involvement

   (year in school; ministry roles; semesters involved)

2. Understanding of CST

   Sample items included:

   – "Before your involvement in campus ministry, how familiar were you with CST?"

   – "My leadership formation in campus ministry has helped me better understand CST."

3. CST in Leadership Formation

   Sample items:

   – "In my leadership role(s), I was taught how CST relates to leadership."

   – "I can identify specific ways CST was integrated into my leadership formation."

4. Experiences of Service and Reflection

   Sample items:

   – "My service or leadership activities intentionally integrated opportunities for reflection or discussion."

   – "The reflection opportunities I experienced helped me connect service to my Catholic faith and values."

5. Leadership Identity and CST

   Sample items:

   – "My leadership role helped me see leadership as part of my faith journey."

– "I feel prepared to carry CST values into leadership beyond my undergraduate experience."

6. Closing Reflections

Narrative questions on leadership, faith, and CST; invitation for optional follow-up.

Likert Scale and Narrative Responses

Most questions used a 1–5 Likert scale. Four open-ended questions invited deeper reflection, including:

- "Describe a leadership or service experience that deepened your understanding of CST."
- "Describe a moment in formation when CST was named explicitly or implicitly."
- "How would you describe the relationship between your faith, your leadership, and CST?"

These narrative responses yielded rich qualitative data on how CST is experienced, interpreted, and sometimes overlooked.

The survey was shared through campus ministry and student affairs offices at participating institutions. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. Respondents represented multiple leadership roles and institutional types.

In Browning's framework, survey responses represent "present theory-laden practice"—the lived assumptions, frameworks, and interpretations shaping how students understand leadership, service, justice, and mission. Practical theology begins here, in the concrete realities that ground theological reflection.

Within Osmer's model, the survey is the core of the descriptive-empirical task, identifying patterns of meaning that require interpretation. Because CST is often lived implicitly,

the survey clarifies whether students recognize its presence, conflate it with generic service language, or remain unaware of its theological grounding.

Thus, the survey is not simply an assessment tool. It is theologically diagnostic, offering insight into how Catholic social imagination is (or is not) being formed in emerging leaders.

3.3.2 Website and Public-Facing Institutional Data

The second data source consists of publicly available materials from each institution, including mission statements, charism descriptions, campus ministry webpages, leadership program materials, student life webpages, and any explicit or implied references to CST . Because these materials are crafted for external audiences, they serve as a key indicator of how institutions publicly frame Catholic identity and leadership values.

Institutional websites shape how students first encounter their university's Catholic identity, leadership philosophy, and mission commitments. For many students—particularly those not already connected to campus ministry—public-facing language forms their initial understanding of what leadership means within that institution. Website materials therefore reveal the narratives, priorities, and theological cues that frame student expectations long before they take on leadership roles.

The website analysis provides several essential forms of data:

1. A baseline of each institution's stated identity: Public-facing language clarifies the theological, charism-driven, and educational commitments that institutions claim to prioritize.
2. Evidence of whether CST is explicitly named or implicitly present: Some institutions use the formal language of CST, while others employ adjacent concepts such as justice, community, dignity, or service without referencing CST directly.

3. Context for interpreting survey responses and director interviews: Public narratives often reveal institutional intentions and self-descriptions that help make sense of student perceptions and practitioner reflections.
4. Insight into institutional consistency and clarity: Because websites often serve as a primary communications tool for prospective and current students, the presence, absence, or ambiguity of CST-related language provides a useful indicator of how accessible the institution's Catholic mission is to the wider campus community.

In this way, public-facing materials help reveal not only the alignment between mission and practice but also potential dissonances—where institutions articulate values that students do not recognize, or where CST appears in practice but not in institutional messaging. This layer of data contributes to a fuller descriptive-empirical understanding of how CST is communicated and embodied across diverse institutional contexts.

3.3.3 Director Interviews

The third source of data consists of semi-structured interviews with directors of campus ministry at the participating institutions. These directors were selected because they serve as the primary architects of student leadership formation in Catholic higher education. Their work—shaped by charism, institutional mission, and pastoral priorities—plays a central role in determining how leadership is framed, resourced, and theologically grounded. Their perspectives offer a crucial complement to student responses, providing insight into the institutional and ministerial intentions behind leadership development.

Each interview followed a standardized guide, ensuring consistency across institutions while allowing directors the freedom to elaborate. The guide included questions organized around five areas:

1. **Role and Responsibilities**

   Directors described their leadership formation responsibilities, the programs they oversee (such as peer ministers, retreat teams, and immersion leaders), and how their offices structure student involvement.

2. **Philosophy of Leadership Formation**

   Directors articulated their foundational vision for developing student leaders, including the goals they hold for formation and the Catholic or institutional values—charism, mission, spirituality, or the Franciscan tradition—that inform their approach.

3. **CST Connections**

   Directors were asked whether and how CST principles are intentionally integrated, whether CST is named explicitly or appears implicitly through practice, and for examples of CST in action within programs or formation contexts.

4. **Strengths and Gaps**

   Directors identified what they believe works well, where they see room for growth, and what obstacles limit deeper integration of CST, including structural, cultural, or resource-related challenges.

5. **Impact and Vision**

   Directors reflected on the long-term goals of leadership formation, the kind of leaders they hope students become after graduation, and what practices or resources could strengthen CST integration.

Directors did not have access to the student survey results, ensuring that their responses represent independent institutional and theological insight rather than reactions to student perceptions.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, ranged from 45–60 minutes, and were recorded with informed consent. Each interview was transcribed and coded with a participant identifier (D1–D5).

Initial descriptive codes captured major themes aligned with the interview guide (e.g., “charism influence,” “implicit CST,” “reflection practices”). Through iterative review, these codes were refined into broader thematic categories that enabled comparison across institutions and charisms.

The directors’ reflections correlate with Browning’s “theory-laden practice retrieved and interpreted.” They articulate the often unspoken theological commitments, ministerial intentions, and pastoral strategies that shape student leadership formation. Their voices reveal how CST—with its emphasis on dignity, community, solidarity, and mission—is understood at the institutional level and how it is translated (or not translated) into daily formation practices. Within Osmer’s framework, these interviews primarily resource the interpretive task (“Why is this happening?”). Directors’ narratives illuminate the theological and charism-driven roots of formation practices, institutional constraints that shape what students experience, reasons why CST may be named explicitly in some programs and not in others, and the broader mission logic behind leadership development.

Independent from but in concert with the student survey data, the interviews enable a robust correlation of institutional intention and student reception, a central component of the practical-theological method guiding this study.

3.3.4 Analysis of Programmatic Materials

The final data source includes internal programmatic materials such as leadership training manuals, student leader handbooks, retreat outlines, reflection resources, service-immersion guides, and charism-specific formation materials.

These materials articulate what institutions believe they are forming, valuing, and teaching. They reveal the intended theological grounding of leadership formation—even when students do not perceive or articulate it.

The analysis of programmatic materials make it possible to compare four layers of institutional communication:

- institutional intention (documents),
- public presentation (websites),
- practitioner interpretation (interviews), and
- student reception (survey).

This form of triangulation—examining a single phenomenon through multiple sources—revealed where CST is explicitly taught, implicitly assumed, inconsistently communicated, or largely absent.

The programmatic materials also correlate with Browning's "normative theory-laden practice"—the articulated commitments, values, and theological claims that guide formation. These materials demonstrate how institutions imagine the moral, spiritual, and social dimensions of leadership, even when those commitments are not fully realized in practice. Considered alongside surveys and interviews, the programmatic materials highlight points of convergence and divergence between mission and lived experience.Together, these data sources provide the

descriptive-empirical foundation for the study and lead directly into the analytic process described in the next section.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis procedures for this study adhere to established qualitative research practices and were shaped, once again, by the practical-theological frameworks of Browning and Osmer. Because the purpose of the study is interpretive—seeking meaning rather than measurement—the analysis examined how CST is understood, named, embodied, or overlooked within student leadership formation across multiple Catholic university settings. The following sections outline how the data were organized, coded, compared, and interpreted.

3.4.1 Organization and Preparation of Data

All survey responses, interview transcripts, website excerpts, and institutional documents were compiled into a unified qualitative dataset. Survey data were divided into:

- Quantitative Likert-scale responses, used descriptively to establish general trends in student familiarity with CST and perceptions of formation; and
- Narrative responses, which served as the qualitative core of the survey and were analyzed through thematic coding.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Public-facing and internal documents were converted into analyzable text and organized by institution (Sites A–H).This systematic preparation created a structured dataset that supported both within-case depth and cross-case comparison.

3.4.2 Initial Coding and Thematic Development

Data analysis began with open coding, an inductive process that identifies recurring concepts, language, and ideas without imposing prior categories. The data was coded across all textual sources—survey responses, interview transcripts, website text, and documents.

Examples of first-cycle codes included:

- *"CST unnamed," "implicit values," "charism emphasis,"*
- *"reflection practices," "service as logistics,"*
- *"leadership as faith," "lack of vocabulary,"*
- *"disconnect between intention and experience,"*
- *"formation through community," "mission language."*

Following this cycle, codes were clustered into broader categories through axial coding, which organized related concepts into emerging themes aligned with the research questions. This step highlighted key patterns in how CST shows up—or fails to show up—in leadership formation.

3.4.3 Cross-Case Comparison

Each site (A–H) functioned as an individual case. After completing within-case analysis, findings were compared across institutions through cross-case analysis, a process that illuminates patterns not evident in isolated contexts.This comparison revealed distinct configurations of CST integration, including:

- Institutions with strong charism identity but implicit CST formation;
- Institutions naming CST explicitly but lacking consistent formation structures;
- Programs where CST was communicated primarily through service immersion;
- Contexts where mission language and spirituality were emphasized without connecting them clearly to CST.

This step clarified both institutional diversity and recognizable trends across Catholic higher education.

3.4.4 Integration of Four Data Sources (Triangulation)

Triangulation refers to examining a single phenomenon through multiple data sources to enhance credibility and reduce the limitations of any one perspective. In this study, triangulation brought four distinct voices into conversation:

1. Student Perspective: What students say they experienced (surveys).
2. Institutional Voice: What the university publicly claims (websites).
3. Practitioner Insight: What campus ministers believe they are forming (interviews).
4. Documented Intention: What programs officially teach or prioritize (documents).

The phenomenon under examination—the integration of CST into student leadership formation—was thereby interpreted from multiple vantage points. This process highlighted both areas of convergence (e.g., consistent emphasis on community and belonging) and notable dissonance (e.g., CST implicitly practiced but rarely named; strong theological intentions paired with low student recognition).

3.4.5 Practical-Theological Interpretation

Once descriptive themes are established, the analysis moves into theological interpretation. Two frameworks guide this step:

Browning's Correlation Method

This method facilitates dialogue between lived experience ("present theory-laden practice") and the normative commitments of the Christian tradition. In this study, student and practitioner experiences were correlated with the principles of CST to identify both alignment and gaps.

Osmer's Fourfold Process

Osmer's model provided the conceptual structure for the interpretive movement:

- Descriptive: What is happening within leadership formation?
- Interpretive: Why is this happening in these institutional contexts?
- Normative: What ought to be happening in light of CST and Catholic higher education's mission?
- Pragmatic: What practices, structures, or theological emphases could strengthen CST integration?

This stage ensured that analysis moved beyond categorization into genuine theological reflection, consistent with the aims of practical theology.

3.4.6 Validity

To ensure the credibility, dependability, and rigor of the study, several qualitative validation strategies were employed:

- Triangulation across four distinct types of data to counterbalance the limitations of any single source.
- Cross-case comparison to avoid unwarranted generalizations based on one institution.
- Thick description that preserved the nuance of student and director voices, allowing readers to understand context and meaning.
- Audit ability, supported by clear documentation of coding decisions, analytic memos, and theme development throughout the process.

These strategies support the qualitative aim of producing a trustworthy and contextually grounded account of how CST is communicated, embodied, and received in student leadership formation.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

Every research design carries limitations, and it is important to name these clearly, especially in qualitative inquiry, where depth is prioritized over scope. This study encountered several methodological and practical constraints that shaped the final dataset and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Although the design proposed a multi-site case study including three institutions representing different Catholic charisms, recruitment proved significantly more challenging than anticipated. Over a two-month recruitment period, 98 Catholic colleges and universities in the Northeast were contacted using multiple methods:

- Direct emails to campus ministry directors and mission offices
- Follow-up emails and reminder messages
- Phone calls and voicemails
- Invitations to join via Synodality in Catholic Higher Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (SCHEAP) and professional networks
- Offers to attend student leadership meetings to explain the study
- Personal Zoom introductions to directors to build trust and rapport

Despite these efforts, student participation remained low. Even when directors incentivized participation or personally encouraged their students, survey response rates did not significantly increase. This reflects a well-documented challenge in higher education research: student

leaders—especially those deeply involved in ministry or service—often experience time constraints, survey fatigue, or hesitancy to share reflective or faith-based experiences in writing. Ultimately, the dataset consisted of:

- ten student participants across several institutions
- five campus ministry directors representing a meaningful but smaller-than-planned range of institutional contexts

While the number of participating institutions was smaller than originally anticipated, the data nonetheless provide meaningful qualitative insight into how CST is experienced within student leadership formation. The purpose of this study is not statistical generalization but practical-theological interpretation of patterns emerging within the lived experience of campus ministry leadership programs.

Uneven Institutional Participation

Not all directors or institutions responded to recruitment attempts. In some cases, directors declined due to staff turnover, competing responsibilities, or lack of time. In other cases, emails went unanswered, or institutions indicated that they were not currently engaging in leadership formation work connected to campus ministry. The result is that the institutions represented in this study reflect those who were willing and able to participate, rather than a systematic sample of all Catholic colleges and universities. This is consistent with qualitative methodology but limits the generalizability of the findings.

The survey generated far fewer responses than originally planned. While the responses that were received were meaningful and reflective, the sample size does not allow for quantitative analysis or broad claims about student perceptions across Catholic higher education. Instead, the

survey primarily serves as a qualitative data point within a multi-source design, offering narrative insights rather than numerical generalizations.

The original methodology included the possibility of observing leadership formation sessions, retreats, or meetings. However, access to these programs proved difficult due to scheduling conflicts, institutional privacy concerns, and geographic limitations. While interviews and documents provided substantial insight into program structures, the lack of observational data limits the study's ability to describe real-time formation dynamics.

As noted earlier, my role as a campus ministry director within Catholic higher education is both a strength and a limitation. While my insider understanding of formation practices enriches interpretation, it may also shape how I read or emphasize certain themes. Reflexive journaling, triangulation, and cross-case comparison were used to mitigate this limitation, but it remains an important factor. Finally, the inherent limitations of qualitative case study research apply here as well:

- The findings are contextually grounded rather than statistically generalizable.
- The experiences captured represent specific institutional cultures, not universal patterns.
- The goal is interpretive insight, not predictive modeling.

These boundaries align with practical theology's focus on meaning, context, and pastoral application, but they must be acknowledged.

Despite these limitations, the study offers important insight into the lived reality of leadership formation in Catholic higher education. The voices of the students and directors who did participate provide a meaningful window into how CST is understood, embodied, and at

times overlooked within campus ministry contexts. In practical-theological research, even a small number of rich cases can illuminate patterns, raise critical questions, and suggest pathways for strengthened pastoral practice.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework guiding this study and described in detail how the research was designed, implemented, and analyzed. Rooted in Browning's correlation method and Osmer's fourfold practical-theological process, the design intentionally moved from lived experience toward theological interpretation. The multi-case approach, shaped by an initial aim to engage institutions of different sizes, charisms, and ministry structures, reflects the conviction that student leadership formation in Catholic higher education is best understood through multiple perspectives and contexts.

The four data sources—student surveys, public-facing institutional materials, director interviews, and internal programmatic documents—provided a multilayered descriptive-empirical foundation. Through systematic coding, cross-case comparison, and triangulation, the analysis surfaced recurring patterns, points of convergence, and areas of dissonance across institutions. These procedures ensured that the study's findings would be both analytically rigorous and theologically grounded, honoring the complexity of institutional practice and the pastoral intentions shaping leadership formation.

While the actual fieldwork required flexibility due to the challenges of recruiting both students and directors, the resulting dataset remains robust for qualitative analysis. The voices captured—students, campus ministers, and institutional documents—offer a meaningful window

into how CST is communicated, embodied, and, at times, only partially recognized within leadership programs.

The themes emerging from this analytic process form the structure of the following chapter. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, organized around the major themes that arose from this multi-stage analysis, and offers a detailed account of how students, campus ministers, and institutions understand, interpret, and live the relationship between leadership formation and CST.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the study's findings, drawing on data from four sources: student surveys, interviews with Directors of Campus Ministry, publicly available institutional materials, and internal formation documents. Its purpose is to describe what is happening on the ground in student leadership formation and how CST is experienced, named, or left unnamed within those contexts.

Guided primarily by the descriptive-empirical task of Richard Osmer's practical-theological framework, this chapter focuses on patterns that emerged across institutions rather than on individual programs or isolated experiences. Through inductive coding and cross-case comparison, several recurring themes emerged from the data. These themes reflect how students understand leadership, how practitioners frame formation, and how institutions publicly and internally articulate their Catholic mission.

This chapter is intentionally descriptive. It does not yet assess whether these practices adequately reflect CST norms, nor does it propose strategies for improvement. Instead, it allows the voices of students, campus ministers, and institutions to be heard alongside one another, highlighting areas of alignment as well as points of disconnect.

Five themes emerged from the analysis:

- leadership formation centered on relationship and community;
- the largely implicit role of CST; the formative dominance of institutional charism;
- inconsistency in reflection and spiritual integration;
- and misalignment between institutional intentions and student perceptions.

When I share direct quotations from research participants, my aim is not to highlight individual stories but to underscore recurring patterns that align with the cross-case focus of my analysis. In doing so, the chapter establishes a clear empirical foundation for the theological interpretation and practical recommendations that follow in Chapter 5.

4.1 Participant and Institutional Overview

Before turning to the recurring themes central to the analysis, it is important to situate the findings by briefly describing the institutional contexts and participants whose voices shape this analysis.

The study includes data from five Catholic colleges and universities in the northeastern United States, identified as Sites A–E, along with student leaders and campus ministry directors who participated in surveys and interviews. Institutions were selected to reflect variation in institutional size, type, and Catholic charism, while sharing a common emphasis on leadership formation connected to campus ministry or mission-driven co-curricular programming. To preserve confidentiality and avoid drawing conclusions tied to specific campuses, institutions, and participants are described using general characteristics rather than names.

Participants in the study include ten student leaders and five campus ministry directors, each engaged in leadership formation within their respective institutional contexts. Student participants were actively involved in campus ministry leadership roles that included service, formation, reflection, and peer leadership. Director participants held responsibility for shaping, overseeing, or implementing leadership formation initiatives within campus ministry or related mission-focused offices.

The uneven distribution of participants across institutions reflects the realities of qualitative field research and is addressed in greater detail in the limitations section. These

themes do not represent isolated observations but recurring patterns that emerged through triangulation across four data sources.

Nevertheless, the participants who responded offered substantive and reflective accounts of leadership formation as it is practiced and experienced in their contexts. Their voices provide a textured window into how CST is communicated, embodied, and interpreted at both student and institutional levels.

Together, the institutional contexts and participant perspectives described in this section provide the necessary grounding for the thematic analysis that follows. The sections that follow examine these contexts in greater detail, beginning with institutional characteristics (Section 4.1.1), then student participants (Section 4.1.2), and finally campus ministry directors (Section 4.1.3). This layered overview ensures that the themes presented in the chapter are read in light of the concrete settings and lived experiences from which they emerged.

4.1.1 Participating Institutions (Anonymized)

This study draws on data from five Catholic colleges and universities, identified throughout the chapter as Sites A–E to preserve institutional anonymity. Institutions were selected to reflect diversity in institutional type, size, region, and Catholic charism, while sharing a common commitment to student leadership formation connected to campus ministry or mission-driven co-curricular programming.

The working definition of "student leadership" in this study was not limited to activities such as task-based participation or event coordination. The "student leaders" who participated in this study held roles that included intentional formation, such as theological reflection, communal discernment, accompaniment, and sustained service commitments. In several cases, leadership roles required ongoing training, regular reflection sessions, and accountability to

mission-based expectations. This distinction is important, as the study examines leadership formation as a process of personal ministerial growth rather than as a set of discrete activities.

Although the study initially sought participation from institutions representing a wide range of Catholic charisms, including Franciscan traditions, none of the participating institutions identified institutionally as Franciscan. The final sample includes colleges and universities rooted in Augustinian, Jesuit, diocesan, and Sisters of St. Joseph traditions. Any resonance with Franciscan themes—such as service, community, or care for others—should therefore be understood as expressions of shared Catholic commitments rather than indicators of a specifically or exclusively Franciscan charism.

To maximize confidentiality, the analysis deliberately avoids identifying specific campuses and instead describes focal institutions by using general characteristics rather than names. These characteristics include things like enrollment size, institutional type, geographic region, and founding tradition.

- Site A is a small Catholic liberal arts college in the northeastern United States, founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph. Enrollment is under 2,000 students. Leadership formation is closely connected to campus ministry and emphasizes relational accompaniment, service, and reflection grounded in the institution's mission.
- Site B is a mid-sized Catholic liberal arts college in the Northeast with an Augustinian charism, enrolling approximately 3,000–4,000 students. Leadership development is structured through campus ministry programs that integrate service, community life, and theological reflection, though CST is often communicated implicitly rather than explicitly.

- Site C is a large Jesuit Catholic university in the Northeast, enrolling over 7,000 undergraduate students. Leadership formation occurs across multiple structures, including campus ministry, service-learning, and student affairs initiatives, with explicit attention to justice, reflection, and formation, though student recognition of CST varies.
- Site D is a mid-sized diocesan Catholic university in the Northeast with undergraduate enrollment of 3,000-5,000 students. Leadership formation is shaped by a strong emphasis on mission, Catholic identity, and pastoral care, with CST present primarily through service engagement and reflection practices rather than systematic instruction.
- Site E is a large Augustinian Catholic research university in the Northeast, enrolling more than 6,000 undergraduates. Leadership development is distributed across campus ministry, student leadership programs, and mission-oriented initiatives, with institutional language emphasizing community, vocation, and social responsibility.

Taken together, these sites represent a range of Catholic higher education contexts in which student leadership formation is actively pursued, though articulated and implemented in distinct ways. The diversity of institutional size, structure, and charism allows for meaningful comparison across cases while avoiding claims of representativeness. Rather than offering a comprehensive picture of Catholic higher education, these sites provide contextually grounded insight into how CST is communicated, embodied, and interpreted within varied leadership formation settings.

4.1.2 Student Participants

Student participants in this study were undergraduate students actively involved in campus ministry–related leadership roles at their respective institutions. Participation was limited

to students who had held leadership positions that included some combination of service, formation, peer leadership, or ministerial responsibility. These roles included peer ministers, retreat leaders, service or immersion leaders, liturgical ministers, and students engaged in mission-oriented leadership programs.

In total, ten students completed the survey and contributed qualitative narrative responses used in the thematic analysis. Participants represented multiple institutions and leadership contexts. Students ranged across class years, with representation from sophomores through seniors. Most reported involvement in leadership roles spanning more than one semester, with several describing participation over multiple academic years.

Students reported varying degrees of leadership responsibility. Some held formal, designated roles with defined expectations, regular meetings, and formation requirements, while others described leadership as emerging through sustained participation in service teams, retreats, or ministry communities. Several students reported holding more than one leadership role simultaneously or sequentially, such as serving as both retreat leaders and peer ministers, or combining liturgical ministry with service leadership.

Student motivations for involvement, as described in open-ended survey responses, varied. Some students referenced personal faith development or a desire for community as primary motivators, while others described being invited into leadership by peers or campus ministers. Several students noted that leadership involvement began informally and became more structured over time. One student described leadership as something they "fell into after being around long enough," while another noted that leadership "grew out of showing up consistently rather than applying for a position."

Students also described varying levels of familiarity with Catholic language and formation before assuming leadership roles. Some indicated previous exposure to Catholic teaching through high school, parish involvement, or prior ministry experience, while others described campus ministry as their first sustained encounter with faith-based leadership formation. These differences shaped how students described their leadership experiences and the language they used to interpret them.

The students who participated were not selected to be representative of the general undergraduate population. Rather, they were purposefully situated within leadership and formation contexts where engagement with faith, service, and mission was expected to be more explicit. This focus reflects the study's aim of examining how CST appears within leadership formation spaces rather than assessing general student awareness of CST across the broader student body.

Student participation varied across institutions, and not all participating sites yielded student responses. This uneven participation reflects challenges encountered during data collection and is further addressed in the limitations section. Nevertheless, the students who responded provided substantive narrative accounts, particularly in open-ended survey questions addressing leadership identity, service experiences, reflection practices, and the relationship between faith and leadership.

Taken together, these student participants provide descriptive insight into how leadership formation is experienced by students engaged in campus ministry. Their responses reflect the range of leadership pathways, levels of responsibility, and formative contexts present within Catholic higher education leadership programs examined in this study.

4.1.3 Director Participants

The director participants consisted of five directors of campus ministry serving at Catholic colleges and universities included in this study. These individuals were selected because they hold primary responsibility for the design, implementation, and oversight of student leadership formation within their respective institutions. In each case, directors supervised leadership programs such as peer ministry, retreat leadership, service immersion experiences, faith-based student organizations, and mission-oriented leadership initiatives.

The participating directors represented institutions of varying size and scope, including small Catholic colleges, mid-sized Catholic universities, and large Catholic universities. All participating institutions identified as Catholic and articulated commitments to mission integration. None of the participating sites was identified institutionally as Franciscan in charism.

Directors brought diverse professional and educational backgrounds to their roles. All participants had prior experience in ministry or student-facing leadership roles before assuming directorship positions. These experiences included campus ministry, parish ministry, retreat ministry, service-learning coordination, or student affairs. Several directors held graduate degrees in theology, pastoral ministry, divinity, or related fields, while others had graduate training in higher education administration or student development.

In addition to formal education, directors described professional formation shaped by years of ministerial practice. Participants referenced experience working directly with students in formation settings, navigating institutional expectations, and responding to changing student needs. Directors described their preparation for leadership formation as cumulative, shaped by both academic training and ongoing ministerial experience.

Directors also referenced various forms of ongoing professional and ministerial formation. These included participation in diocesan or institutional professional development, engagement with national or regional campus ministry networks, conference attendance, peer collaboration, and personal practices of reflection. The extent and structure of ongoing formation varied across participants.

Director interviews were conducted independently of student participation. Directors did not have access to student survey responses prior to or during interviews. This ensured that director responses reflected their own perspectives on leadership formation practices rather than reactions to student feedback.

The director participants described leadership formation programs, institutional priorities, and formation practices as they are currently structured and implemented within their contexts. Their responses provide descriptive insight into how leadership formation is organized, articulated, and supported at the institutional level.

4.1.4 Institutional Websites and Shared Documents

Institutional websites and shared documents were analyzed as distinct sources of data to understand how CST is formally communicated and positioned within leadership formation. These materials included public-facing webpages—such as mission statements, campus ministry sites, leadership program descriptions, and academic offerings—as well as internal documents shared by directors for this study.

Across all participating institutions, explicit references to CST were limited. While several universities offered academic coursework related to CST, typically housed within theology or religious studies departments, these courses were rarely connected directly to co-curricular leadership formation or campus ministry programming. In director interviews, this

separation was sometimes described as a matter of institutional messaging or marketing rather than intentional formation.

On public-facing websites, CST most often appeared as a brief reference point rather than a developed formative framework. In several cases, CST was presented as a hyperlink directing readers to the USCCB website, with little additional explanation or contextualization. These references tended to assume prior familiarity with CST and did not articulate how its principles shaped leadership development, service, or student formation in concrete ways.

More commonly, institutional language emphasized values such as service, justice, dignity, community engagement, and mission without explicitly naming CST. While these values closely align with CST, they were typically presented as standalone commitments or as extensions of institutional mission rather than as part of a coherent Catholic social tradition. As a result, students encountering these materials were exposed to CST-aligned language without being introduced to CST as a distinct theological framework.

Internal documents—including leadership handbooks, retreat materials, formation outlines, and immersion program resources—provided additional insight into the institution's intentions. These materials were shared with explicit instructions that they were to be used solely for research purposes and not incorporated into personal or professional ministry practice. Within these documents, CST appeared more frequently than in public-facing materials, though it was still uneven.

When CST was referenced in internal documents, it was most often presented through narratives, case studies, or thematic reflections rather than through step-by-step formative processes or clearly articulated learning outcomes. CST principles were embedded in stories,

service contexts, or reflection prompts, but were rarely accompanied by structured guidance that helped students name, integrate, and sustain CST in their leadership identity over time.

Taken together, these institutional materials reveal a consistent pattern: CST is present but underdeveloped as a formative framework. It is referenced academically, linked digitally, and narrated experientially, yet seldom integrated as a sustained or explicit component of student leadership formation. This institutional context provides important background for the thematic findings that follow.

4.2 Theme 1: Leadership Formation Centered on Community and Relationship

While all four data sources informed the thematic analysis, student survey responses and director interviews served as the primary sources for identifying patterns of lived experience and institutional intention. Public-facing materials and internal documents functioned as contextual and corroborating sources rather than as independent drivers of themes.

Across all data sources, leadership formation emerged not primarily as skill acquisition or positional authority, but as a relational process grounded in community, accompaniment, and belonging. This theme was most clearly articulated in student survey responses and consistently reinforced by director interviews and institutional materials. While CST was rarely explicitly named, the values of human dignity and solidarity were repeatedly embodied through relational practices that shaped students' understanding of leadership.

Student survey responses revealed that leadership formation was most strongly associated with relational experiences rather than formal instruction. In Likert-scale responses, students consistently affirmed statements indicating that their leadership roles helped them feel connected, supported, and integrated into a community. Open-ended responses further clarified that students

experienced leadership formation primarily through relationships with peers, mentors, and campus ministers rather than through explicit theological or conceptual frameworks.

When asked to describe meaningful leadership or service experiences, students frequently emphasized:

- feeling welcomed into a community,
- being accompanied through challenges,
- learning leadership by walking alongside others, and
- developing confidence through trust-based relationships.

One student reflected, "I didn't feel like I was being trained to be a leader as much as I felt like I was being invited into something."[120] Another shared, "Leadership for me came from being part of the group and knowing people had my back."[121] These responses suggest that leadership was understood less as a role to be assumed and more as a posture formed through participation in community life.

Students often described leadership as something they "grew into" through participation in community life rather than something they were taught directly. Even when CST was not named, students articulated values closely aligned with CST—such as mutual responsibility, care for others, and attentiveness to the needs of the community—suggesting that formation occurred implicitly through relational engagement.

Notably, in responses to questions asking whether CST was explicitly integrated into leadership formation, students expressed lower confidence in their ability to name or identify CST, even when they affirmed that their leadership experiences were faith-filled or value-driven.

---

[120] Student Leadership Formation Survey, open-ended responses from student participants, administered by the author, 2025.

[121] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.

This discrepancy suggests that while students were formed in ways consistent with CST, the theological language of CST was often absent from their interpretive framework.

Director interviews strongly corroborated the student survey findings. Directors consistently described leadership formation as accompaniment rather than instruction, emphasizing presence, listening, and long-term relationships as foundational to their work.[122] Several directors explicitly rejected transactional or outcomes-based models of leadership development, instead framing formation as a pastoral process rooted in trust and shared life.

One director explained, “If students don’t feel known, nothing else matters. Formation starts with a relationship.”[123] Another noted, “We can teach skills later, but first they need to know they belong.”[124] Directors described leadership formation unfolding through practices such as sustained mentoring relationships, small-group leadership communities, regular check-ins, and informal moments of presence during discernment or crisis. Directors described practices such as:

- sustained mentoring relationships,
- small-group leadership communities,
- regular check-ins and reflection conversations, and
- intentional presence during moments of discernment or crisis.

Some directors explicitly linked accompaniment to theological commitments such as Catholic identity, spirituality, or pastoral theology. Others described it in more pragmatic or pastoral terms influenced by student needs and institutional culture. Throughout the interviews,

[122] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.
[123] Director Interview D2, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.
[124] Director Interview D3, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.

however, accompaniment was consistently seen as a deliberate formative strategy, even if not always explicitly identified as CST-based.

Importantly, several directors acknowledged that CST was often assumed rather than articulated within these relational practices. One director reflected, "I think we form students really well in the values, but I'm not sure they always know where those values come from."[125] This observation mirrors the gap identified in student responses.

Analysis of public-facing websites and internal documents further reinforced this relational emphasis. Leadership programs were consistently framed around language such as community, belonging, welcome, hospitality, and shared mission. Institutional materials presented leadership formation as participation in communal life rather than as individual achievement.

However, explicit references to CST were limited. While concepts such as justice, service, inclusion, and care for others appeared frequently, they were rarely connected directly to CST as a coherent theological tradition. This pattern mirrors the student survey findings: students recognized and experienced the values but lacked a shared theological vocabulary to interpret them.

4.3 Theme 2: CST as Largely Implicit Rather than Explicit

A second theme emerging across the data is that CST functions more as an implicit influence than as an explicitly named or systematically taught framework within student leadership formation. Students consistently described leadership experiences shaped by values closely aligned with CST—such as service, justice, responsibility to others, and attentiveness to marginalized communities—yet they often expressed limited confidence in identifying CST itself

[125] Director Interview D5, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

or articulating its principles as part of their formation. At the same time, directors described intentional commitments to CST-informed leadership development while also naming significant structural and formative limitations that shaped how CST could be presented. This pattern appeared consistently across student survey responses, director interviews, and institutional materials.

Student survey data suggest that leadership formation was experienced as meaningful and faith-integrated, while CST as a theological framework remained less clearly named or recognized. On Likert-scale items directly related to CST instruction and understanding, student responses tended to cluster around the midpoint rather than at the upper end of the scale. Students reported only moderate agreement that their leadership formation helped them better understand CST or that they were explicitly taught how CST relates to leadership. Similarly, students expressed mixed confidence in their ability to identify specific ways CST had been integrated into their leadership formation. These responses stand in contrast to higher levels of agreement on items related to belonging, faith integration, reflection, and leadership identity, indicating that students experienced formation aligned with CST values without consistently recognizing those experiences as part of CST as a coherent tradition.

Open-ended survey responses further illustrate this dynamic. When students were asked to describe formative leadership or service experiences, many referenced themes such as care for others, service to marginalized populations, awareness of injustice, and personal growth. Explicit references to CST or its principles, however, were infrequent. One student reflected, “We talked a lot about serving others and being aware of people who are struggling, but I don’t remember CST

really being named."[126] Another shared, "I know the values we're supposed to live out, but I wouldn't feel confident explaining CST to someone else."[127] In these responses, students were often able to describe the effects of formation—how leadership shaped their values and actions—more readily than the theological tradition informing those experiences.

Director interviews help clarify why CST appeared implicitly rather than explicitly in student responses. Directors consistently stated that CST influences their leadership development, especially highlighting human dignity, community, justice, and service. At the same time, several directors acknowledged that CST is not always named directly in formation settings. Some described relying on experiential learning, reflection, and relational accompaniment rather than formal CST terminology. One director explained, "CST absolutely informs what we do, but I don't always lead with that language. I want students to experience it first."[128] Another noted, "Sometimes the terminology feels like too much, too fast. We focus on the practice and trust that the meaning will come later."[129]

Directors also described practical constraints that shaped this approach. Several noted the absence of a shared manual, framework, or step-by-step guide for integrating CST into student leadership formation. CST was frequently described as a living tradition transmitted through mentoring, practice, and institutional memory rather than through standardized training or onboarding processes. Directors spoke about entering their roles with expectations of broad theological competence across scripture, sacramental life, pastoral care, justice, and student development, often without sustained opportunities for specialized or ongoing formation in CST

[126] Student Leadership Formation Survey, open-ended responses from student participants, administered by the author, 2025

[127] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.

[128] Director Interview D2, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

[129] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

itself. While some had encountered CST in graduate theological education, they noted that few programs offer focused preparation in CST as a formative discipline, particularly as applied to co-curricular leadership development.

This gap was reflected in how CST appeared within institutional materials. Across institutions, public-facing websites emphasized leadership for service, justice, community engagement, and mission, all of which closely parallel CST principles. Explicit references to CST, however, were limited. In several cases, CST appeared primarily as a hyperlink directing readers to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' overview, without further explanation or connection to leadership programs. Internal documents shared by directors referenced CST more frequently, but often through narrative examples, reflection prompts, or service stories rather than through clearly articulated formative processes or learning outcomes. In some instances, these materials were shared with explicit instructions that they were not to be used beyond internal training contexts, further limiting their visibility within broader leadership formation.

Taken together, the data reveal a consistent pattern of partial connection. Students encountered CST-aligned values through leadership experiences grounded in service, relationship, and reflection, yet were rarely equipped with the language or framework to name those experiences as CST. Directors, meanwhile, articulated intentional commitments to CST-informed formation but operated within contexts shaped by limited resources, diffuse expectations, and the absence of shared formation structures. As a result, students and directors often spoke past one another—not in opposition, but in parallel—each engaging the same values through different languages, assumptions, and levels of articulation.

This theme illustrates how CST is present within student leadership formation while remaining largely under-identified. CST is lived more often than it is named, experienced more readily than it is articulated, and assumed more frequently than it is taught. The findings do not suggest a lack of commitment to CST, but rather a structural and formative gap between intention, language, and reception that shapes how leadership formation is understood and carried forward by students.

4.4 Theme 3: Charism Shapes Leadership More Strongly than CST Language

Across student survey responses, director interviews, and institutional materials, leadership formation was shaped more consistently and visibly by institutional charism and spirituality than by the explicit language of CST. While CST-aligned values were present across leadership experiences, students and directors overwhelmingly described formation through charism-based narratives, institutional identity, and communal culture rather than through CST as a named or organizing framework.

Student survey responses reflected this pattern with striking consistency. When students described how they understood leadership, what they were being formed for, or what shaped their approach to service and responsibility, they rarely referenced CST directly. Instead, leadership was framed through language tied to institutional identity and shared culture. One student described leadership formation as learning “how to show up for people in a way that fits who we are as a campus,”[130] while another explained that leadership meant “living the mission we talk about all the time, not really learning a list of principles.”[131] In these responses,

[130] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[131] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.

leadership was not experienced as engagement with a formal theological tradition but as participation in a communal way of life shaped by the institution's spiritual ethos.

Several students described leadership formation as something absorbed rather than taught. One student reflected that leadership came from "being around people who live it,"[132] while another shared that "you start to pick up what matters here just by being involved."[133] Even when students articulated values closely aligned with CST—such as care for marginalized communities, responsibility for others, or attentiveness to injustice—those commitments were described as expressions of institutional culture rather than as applications of CST. As one student noted, "We talk a lot about justice and service, but it's more about who we are than where it comes from."[134]

Director interviews strongly reinforced this emphasis. Directors consistently described leadership formation as emerging from their institution's charism, spirituality, or founding story, often presenting these elements as the primary language through which formation is communicated. One director explained that leadership formation "comes out of our charism first — that's the language students actually hear and remember." Another noted, "If I start talking about CST, I usually have to translate it back into our mission language anyway."[135]

Several directors described charism as a practical and pastoral entry point into formation. One director shared that "students don't come in asking for CST — they come in asking what this place stands for."[136] Another explained, "Charism gives us a story and a posture. CST is there, but it's not usually how we introduce the work."[137] In these accounts, charism functioned as

[132] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[133] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[134] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025
[135] Director Interview D5, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[136] Director Interview D4, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[137] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

the dominant interpretive framework shaping leadership expectations, communal norms, and formative practices.

Directors also spoke candidly about the limits of CST language in practice. One director reflected, “There isn’t really a manual for how to teach CST in leadership formation. Most of what we do is inherited — you learn it by being here.”[138] Another noted, “I was expected to know CST right away when I stepped into this role, but no one hands you a playbook. A lot of it is oral tradition.” Several directors described learning CST informally through experience, mentorship, or prior ministry rather than through formal training. One director stated, “I didn’t take a class on CST in grad school. I learned it by doing ministry and listening to people who had been around longer.”

This lack of formal formation pathways shaped how CST appeared in leadership programs. Directors described relying on charism-based language because it felt more accessible, more embodied, and more readily integrated into daily practice. One director explained, “Charism lives in our rituals, our stories, our way of gathering. CST feels more like something you reference than something you live unless you’re very intentional.”[139] Another noted, “We assume CST is there, but we don’t always slow down enough to name it.”[140]

Several directors also described a structural disconnect between CST as an academic subject and CST as a formative framework. While some institutions offered undergraduate or graduate courses related to CST, directors noted that those courses were rarely integrated into co-curricular leadership formation. One director observed that CST “lives in the theology

[138] Director Interview D5, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[139] Director Interview D4, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[140] Director Interview D2, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

department, not in the leadership meetings,"[141] while another explained that CST "shows up more in institutional statements than in how student leaders are trained week to week."[142] In this context, CST was often experienced as abstract or curricular, while charism shaped the lived formation of leaders.

Institutional websites and shared documents reflected similar dynamics. Public-facing materials consistently emphasized the mission, spirituality, and charism-driven values of service, justice, hospitality, and community engagement. These commitments were often framed as defining characteristics of leadership at the institution. Explicit references to CST, however, were sparse. In several cases, CST appeared only as a hyperlink directing readers to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' overview, without additional explanation or connection to leadership formation practices.

Internal documents offered slightly more engagement with CST, but still reflected the same pattern. CST appeared most often through narratives, service stories, or reflection prompts rather than through articulated learning outcomes or step-by-step formative processes. One director noted that internal materials "assume you already know what CST is," while another explained that documents were written "for people already in the culture, not for onboarding or formation from scratch." In some cases, materials shared for the study included explicit instructions that they were not to be used outside internal contexts, further limiting their role in shaping broader leadership formation.

Across data sources, charism functioned as the primary organizing language through which leadership was communicated, practiced, and evaluated. Students encountered leadership

[141] Director Interview D3, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[142] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.

formation through institutional spirituality, communal norms, and inherited narratives, while CST values were embedded within those experiences without being consistently named or structured. As a result, leadership formation reflected CST-aligned commitments, but those commitments were mediated almost entirely through charism rather than through CST as a distinct or explicit framework.

4.5 Theme 4: Reflection and Spiritual Integration Are Inconsistent

Across student survey responses, director interviews, and institutional materials, reflection and spiritual integration emerged as unevenly structured components of student leadership formation. While some students described regular opportunities for theological or spiritual reflection connected to leadership and service, others experienced reflection as sporadic, optional, or disconnected from leadership responsibilities. This inconsistency appeared both within and across institutions.

Student survey responses revealed a wide range of experiences related to reflection. On Likert-scale items addressing opportunities for reflection, students' responses clustered unevenly, indicating that reflection was present for some leaders but not consistently integrated across programs. Open-ended responses reinforced this pattern. Some students described intentional reflection spaces, such as retreats, small-group discussions, or one-on-one conversations with mentors, noting that "reflection was built into everything we did"[143] or that leadership meetings "always made space to talk about why we were doing the work, not just what we were doing."[144]

Other students, however, described reflection as secondary to logistics or task completion. One student shared that leadership meetings were "mostly about planning and making sure

[143] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[144] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.

things got done," while another noted that reflection "happened sometimes, but it depended on who was leading that semester."[145] Several students indicated that while service was central to their leadership roles, opportunities to reflect spiritually on those experiences were limited or informal, often occurring only during retreats or end-of-semester gatherings.

Director interviews echoed this unevenness. Directors consistently affirmed the importance of reflection and spiritual integration, yet described different levels of structure and consistency in how reflection was implemented. Some directors spoke about reflection as a core expectation, embedded into leadership meetings, retreats, and formation sessions. One director explained that leadership formation "doesn't make sense without reflection,"[146] describing it as essential for helping students connect action, faith, and identity.

Other directors acknowledged challenges in sustaining consistent reflective practices. Several noted constraints related to time, student availability, or competing program demands. One director remarked that reflection "often gets squeezed when things get busy,"[147] while another observed that students sometimes resist reflection if it feels disconnected from immediate responsibilities. In these cases, reflection was described as present but not always prioritized or systematically planned.

Institutional documents and public-facing materials reflected similar variation. Some leadership manuals and formation resources included structured reflection questions, prayer prompts, or theological framing connected to leadership and service. Other documents emphasized participation, responsibility, and outcomes, without explicitly referring to reflection or spiritual integration. Where reflection appeared, it was often described broadly—such as

---

[145] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[146] Director Interview D4, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[147] Director Interview D3, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.

encouraging students to reflect on their experiences—without specifying processes, frequency, or formative goals.

Across data sources, reflection was more consistently present in certain contexts, particularly retreats, immersion experiences, or milestone moments within leadership programs. However, students and directors alike described fewer structured opportunities for ongoing reflection integrated into the regular rhythm of leadership responsibilities. As one student noted, *"The deeper reflection usually happened at retreats, not in the day-to-day leadership stuff*,"[148] highlighting a distinction between formative moments and routine leadership practice.

4.6 Theme 5: Misalignment Between Institutional Intentions and Student Perceptions

Across the combined data sources, a recurring pattern emerged indicating misalignment between how institutions and campus ministers understand student leadership formation and how students themselves experience and interpret that formation. While directors articulated intentional approaches to leadership development grounded in mission, values, and Catholic identity, students did not always perceive these intentions clearly or consistently in their lived leadership experiences.

Student survey responses revealed that many students found leadership formation meaningful and supportive, yet struggled to identify clear formative goals or theological frameworks that shaped that experience. In open-ended responses, students frequently described leadership in relational or practical terms—such as "showing up," "helping others," or "being dependable"—without referencing broader institutional aims or formation objectives. One student noted that leadership "felt important, but I wasn't always sure what we were being

[148] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.

formed toward,"[149] while another shared that expectations were "more about doing the role well than about growing as a leader in faith."[150]

Likert-scale responses further reflected this ambiguity. Students expressed stronger agreement with statements about belonging, support, and personal growth than with items asking whether leadership formation had clear connections to CST, the institutional mission, or long-term leadership identity. This suggests that while students experienced leadership as positive and formative, they were less confident in articulating how those experiences aligned with institutional or theological intentions.

Director interviews, by contrast, emphasized clarity of purpose and intentionality. Directors consistently described leadership formation as mission-driven and value-centered, often referencing institutional charism, Catholic identity, and the formation of students for lives of service and leadership beyond college. Several directors spoke about leadership programs as "formational spaces" rather than functional roles, noting deliberate efforts to shape students' values, faith commitments, and sense of vocation.

However, directors also acknowledged that these intentions were not always perceived as such by students. One director observed that students "often experience the formation without realizing it's formation,"[151] while another reflected that "we know what we're trying to do, but we don't always say it out loud."[152] Several directors noted that students tended to focus on responsibilities, scheduling, and performance, even when programs were designed with deeper formative goals in mind.

---

[149] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[150] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[151] Director Interview D4, audio interview conducted by the author, November 2025.
[152] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

Institutional documents and websites further illuminated this misalignment. Public-facing materials often articulated ambitious formation goals, emphasizing leadership grounded in mission, justice, service, and faith. Internal documents similarly outlined desired outcomes related to student growth, reflection, and values-based leadership. Yet these articulated intentions were not always reflected in students' language or self-understanding as leaders.

In some cases, students described leadership roles as primarily operational, even when directors described those same roles as deeply formative. One student remarked that leadership "felt like a job I cared about,"[153] while a director from the same institution described the program as "one of our primary formation pathways."[154] This contrast underscores a gap between institutional framing and student reception.

Across institutions, this misalignment did not suggest the absence of formation, but rather differences in perception and language. Directors tended to articulate leadership formation in theological, pastoral, or mission-oriented terms, while students more often described their experiences through relational, emotional, or practical lenses. The data indicate that institutional intentions were present and articulated among practitioners, but not always clearly communicated or internalized by students as part of their leadership identity.

Together, these findings demonstrate that student leadership formation often operates within a space of partial visibility: institutional goals and theological commitments shape practice, yet students do not consistently recognize or name those intentions as formative frameworks. This misalignment appears across multiple institutions and data sources, suggesting a structural pattern rather than an isolated occurrence.

---

[153] Student Leadership Formation Survey, 2025.
[154] Director Interview D1, audio interview conducted by the author, October 2025.

4.7 Summary of Themes

This chapter presented the study's findings through five major themes that emerged from student surveys, director interviews, institutional websites, and shared programmatic documents. Taken together, these themes describe how CST and leadership formation are currently experienced, communicated, and perceived within selected Catholic higher education contexts.

First, leadership formation was consistently experienced as relational and communal rather than technical or skills-based, with students emphasizing belonging, accompaniment, and shared life as the primary sources of formation. Second, CST functioned more as an implicit influence than an explicitly named framework, with students often experiencing CST-aligned values without being able to identify or articulate CST as a coherent tradition. Third, institutional charism emerged as a more visible and formative influence on leadership identity than CST language itself, shaping leadership culture through spirituality, narrative, and institutional history. Fourth, opportunities for reflection and spiritual integration were uneven across programs, with variation in frequency, depth, and intentionality. Finally, a recurring misalignment appeared between institutional and practitioner intentions and student perceptions, with directors articulating clear formative goals that were not always recognized or internalized by student leaders.

These themes do not represent isolated findings but rather interrelated patterns that together describe the current landscape of student leadership formation in relation to CST. They provide a descriptive account of what students experience, how practitioners frame formation, and how institutions communicate leadership and mission.

4.8 Transition to Chapter 5

While Chapter 4 focused on presenting the study's findings, the following chapter moves to interpretation. Chapter 5 engages these themes through the lens of practical theology, bringing the descriptive patterns identified here into dialogue with CST's normative vision. Guided by Browning's correlation method and Osmer's interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks, Chapter 5 examines what these findings suggest about the strengths, limitations, and possibilities of faith-informed leadership formation in Catholic higher education. It considers not only why these patterns may be present but also how institutions might respond in ways that deepen theological clarity, formation, and practice.

Chapter 5: Interpreting CST in Student Leadership Formation

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study through a descriptive analysis of student surveys, director interviews, institutional websites, and internal formation documents. That chapter intentionally focused on what is happening within student leadership formation in Catholic higher education, particularly in relation to how CST is experienced, communicated, and understood. Several consistent patterns emerged across institutions, revealing both strengths and gaps in how leadership formation is practiced and defined.

This chapter 5 moves from description to interpretation. Drawing on the practical-theological framework guiding this study, this chapter engages the findings through interpretive and normative reflection. The goal is not to evaluate individual programs, and certainly not to extol or assign blame, but to ask why these patterns exist and what they reveal about the role of CST in faith-informed student leadership formation in the context of higher education Catholic campus ministry in the U.S. In particular, this chapter examines the recurring tension between CST as a lived reality in leadership formation and CST as a named theological tradition that students can recognize, articulate, and carry forward.

The analysis that follows attends closely to the voices of both students and campus ministry directors. Students described leadership formation shaped by community, accompaniment, and service, yet often expressed uncertainty about CST as a coherent framework. Directors articulated intentional commitments to CST-informed formation, while also naming structural, institutional, and professional constraints that shape how CST is taught—or left implicit. This chapter brings these perspectives into dialogue, interpreting the findings in light of CST itself and the Church's understanding of formation.

The chapter proceeds in four movements. First, it interprets the implicit presence of CST within leadership formation practices. Second, it considers the theological implications of forming leaders in CST-aligned values without sustained engagement with CST as a tradition. Third, it reflects normatively on what faith-informed leadership formation requires within Catholic higher education. Finally, it identifies practical implications for campus ministry and leadership formation that emerge from this analysis.

Together, these reflections prepare the way for the concluding chapter, which will synthesize the study's contributions and consider future directions for leadership formation grounded in CST.

5.1 Interpreting the Findings: From Description to Implication

Chapter 4 presented the primary findings of this study through thematic analysis of student survey responses, director interviews, and institutional materials. Taken together, these findings reveal a complex and often subtle relationship between CST, student leadership formation, and campus ministry practice in Catholic higher education. Leadership programs in Catholic universities often assume students are implicitly absorbing Catholic Social Teaching, but students frequently interpret leadership primarily through secular frameworks. Rather than pointing to a lack of commitment to CST, the data reveal a pattern in which CST is widely present but unevenly articulated, variously mediated, and inconsistently received.

Across institutions, leadership formation was shaped by clear commitments to service, justice, community, reflection, and care for others—values closely aligned with the principles of CST. Students regularly described leadership experiences that emphasized responsibility to others, attentiveness to marginalized communities, and personal growth through service. Directors likewise articulated intentional efforts to form students who understand leadership as

relational, ethical, and oriented toward the common good. Institutional materials reinforced these commitments through language emphasizing mission, service, dignity, and engagement with social realities.

At the same time, the data consistently revealed that CST itself functioned more as an implicit influence than as an explicitly named or systematically integrated framework within leadership formation. Students demonstrated moderate confidence in their understanding of CST and in their ability to connect CST directly to their leadership experiences. Likert-scale responses clustered around the middle range when students were asked whether CST had been explicitly taught or clearly connected to leadership, even as higher levels of agreement appeared in questions related to faith integration, leadership identity, and reflection. Open-ended responses further confirmed this pattern: students readily named the outcomes of formation but rarely named CST as the theological source shaping those outcomes.

Director interviews help illuminate why this pattern persists. Directors consistently affirmed the importance of CST for leadership formation and articulated a strong theological alignment with its principles. However, many described intentional decisions to rely on experiential learning, relational accompaniment, and reflection rather than formal CST instruction or terminology. Several directors expressed concern that explicit CST language could feel inaccessible, overly academic, or disengaging for students, particularly in the early stages of leadership involvement. Others noted that CST was often assumed rather than taught—treated as background knowledge expected of ministers rather than as a tradition requiring ongoing formation and translation.

This dynamic revealed a notable tension between formation intent and formation reception. Directors described CST as foundational to their work, yet students encountered

leadership formation primarily through practice, charism, and institutional culture rather than through CST as a named theological framework. In this way, CST was frequently absorbed indirectly—present in values and practices but not consistently recognized by students as such.

A related finding concerns the outsized role of institutional charism in shaping leadership formation. Across the data, charism-based language—rooted in spirituality, mission narratives, and historical identity—emerged as the dominant framework for describing, teaching, and understanding leadership. Students spoke about leadership in terms of “who we are as a campus” or “living the mission,” while directors emphasized formation grounded in their institution’s spiritual heritage. Institutional documents reinforced this emphasis, frequently foregrounding charism-driven values while referencing CST only briefly or indirectly, often through hyperlinks or generalized statements rather than integrated formation pathways.

Importantly, the findings do not suggest that charism and CST are in opposition. Rather, charism functioned as the primary organizing language through which CST-aligned values were communicated. In many cases, CST principles were embedded within charism-based practices without being explicitly named as such. This approach allowed leadership formation to remain relational, accessible, and spiritually grounded, but it also contributed to students’ limited ability to identify CST as a coherent tradition informing their leadership.

Another significant finding concerns the structural conditions under which campus ministers are expected to operate. Directors described assuming wide-ranging responsibilities—program design, theological framing, pastoral care, supervision, assessment—often without formal preparation in CST beyond graduate coursework or informal professional experience. Several directors noted the absence of shared formation models, practical “how-to” resources, or sustained opportunities for ongoing CST formation. CST was

frequently described as a living tradition passed on through mentoring, experience, and institutional memory rather than through systematic onboarding or professional development.

This context helps explain why CST often remains implicit in leadership formation. Directors are expected to know and apply CST while simultaneously adapting it pastorally to diverse student populations, institutional constraints, and competing priorities. The result is formation programs that are deeply values-driven but unevenly articulated—a pattern that mirrors the living, adaptive nature of CST itself, but that also risks leaving students without the theological language needed to fully interpret their experiences.

Finally, the findings reveal a consistent misalignment between institutional intentions and student perceptions. Directors articulated clear hopes that leadership formation would help students internalize CST values and carry them into future professional and civic contexts. Students, however, often experienced formation as meaningful without recognizing its broader theological grounding. This misalignment does not indicate failure; rather, it points to a critical formative threshold that remains underdeveloped. Students are being shaped by CST-informed practices, but they are not always being equipped to name, reflect upon, or extend that formation beyond their immediate leadership roles.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the central challenge facing leadership formation in Catholic higher education is not whether CST is present, but how it is mediated. CST operates across institutions as a lived tradition—embodied through service, reflection, accompaniment, and charism—yet it is not consistently framed as a shared theological lens for leadership. This gap between lived practice and explicit articulation forms the core problem this chapter addresses.

Chapter 5 builds on these findings by shifting from description to integration. Drawing on practical theology, it asks how campus ministry might more intentionally name, interpret, and sustain CST within leadership formation without reducing it to abstract theory or displacing the relational and experiential dimensions that students find most formative. In doing so, this chapter considers how CST might function not only as a background influence but as an explicit horizon of meaning through which students come to understand leadership as vocation, service, and participation in the Church's social mission.

5.2 Theological Implications for Leadership Formation

The findings of this study raise significant theological questions about how leadership formation is understood and enacted within Catholic higher education. Across institutions, students were clearly shaped by values that closely align with CST—service, responsibility, community, care for others, and attentiveness to injustice—yet they were far less confident in naming CST itself or in situating their experiences within the Church's social tradition. This gap suggests that leadership formation is occurring at the level of values and experience without being consistently rooted in tradition, raising concerns about the depth, durability, and ecclesial character of that formation.

CST is not simply a set of moral intuitions that happen to overlap with contemporary justice language. It is a living theological tradition grounded in Scripture, articulated through magisterial teaching, and sustained within the life of the Church. When leadership formation emphasizes CST-consistent values without explicitly naming their theological source, those values risk becoming detached from the Church's broader moral vision. Students may come to understand leadership as ethical, relational, and service-oriented, yet fail to recognize those

commitments as flowing from a distinctively Catholic social imagination. In such cases, formation succeeds pastorally but remains theologically underdeveloped.

This dynamic carries implications for how leadership identity is shaped. The data indicate that students most often understood leadership as something they grew into through participation, belonging, and relationship rather than through explicit instruction or theological reflection. While this relational model of formation is deeply consonant with pastoral practice, it also means that leadership identity is shaped primarily by experience rather than by sustained engagement with the Church's social teaching. Without intentional theological naming, students may internalize justice-oriented commitments but lack the language, framework, and confidence to articulate why those commitments matter within the life of the Church.

The risk, then, is that CST becomes situational rather than ecclesial. When CST is encountered mainly through particular programs, mentors, or moments—service trips, immersion experiences, leadership roles—it may be interpreted as context-bound rather than as a tradition that accompanies the student beyond the university. In this way, CST can become associated with campus ministry as a setting rather than with the Church as a moral teacher. Students may carry forward a general desire to "do good" without a clear sense of how CST and even the Gospel itself inform decision-making, public engagement, or leadership in new and unfamiliar contexts.

This has particular consequences for the continuity of CST beyond the university. Leadership formation that relies heavily on implicit transmission assumes that values absorbed through experience will endure on their own. Yet tradition requires more than absorption; it requires interpretation, articulation, and intentional handoff. Without these elements, CST risks fading from view once students leave the formative environment in which it was first encountered. The values may persist, but their ecclesial grounding may not.

From a theological perspective, this weakening of the ecclesial foundation is significant. Formation does not take place in a neutral cultural space or in a broader secular context where commitments to justice are often disconnected from explicit faith commitments; leadership formation that remains largely implicit may unintentionally allow that separation to persist. Students may continue to act with generosity and social concern, but without a clear sense of how those commitments arise from and remain accountable to their relationship with Christ and the mission of the Church. Over time, this can leave leaders well-formed ethically yet less equipped to integrate their faith explicitly into public life, vocational discernment, or ecclesial participation beyond the university.

5.3 Normative Reflections: What Faith-Informed Leadership Requires

If CST is to function as more than a background influence within student leadership formation, it must be received and practiced as a formative tradition rather than as a loose collection of values. CST is not interchangeable with generic justice language, nor is it reducible to ethical consensus around service or inclusion. It represents the Church's sustained theological reflection on social life, grounded in Scripture, developed through magisterial teaching, and embodied within ecclesial practice. Faith-informed leadership, therefore, requires more than alignment with CST-consistent outcomes; it requires intentional formation within the tradition itself.

Central to this formation is the practice of theological naming. The findings of this study suggest that students are often deeply shaped by experiences that reflect CST principles, yet lack the vocabulary to interpret those experiences within the Church's social tradition. Normatively, leadership formation in Catholic higher education must help students make that connection explicit. Naming CST does not mean overwhelming students with technical language or abstract

theory, but it does require introducing CST as a coherent framework that gives meaning to what students are already doing and experiencing. Without such naming, formation risks remain intuitive rather than reflective, experiential rather than interpretive.

Faith-informed leadership also requires clarity about the relationship between institutional mission, charism, and CST. Charism plays a vital and legitimate role in shaping leadership formation, offering concrete spiritual language, historical narratives, and pastoral sensibilities that resonate with students. Yet charism is not a substitute for CST, nor is CST merely one expression of charism. Normatively, CST provides a shared ecclesial grammar that allows diverse charisms to remain in communion with the wider Church. When leadership formation relies exclusively on charism-based language, students may be formed deeply within a particular institutional culture while remaining underformed in the broader Catholic social tradition. Faith-informed leadership requires holding these dimensions together rather than allowing one to eclipse the other.

This responsibility does not rest solely with individual campus ministers or directors, many of whom operate with limited formation, resources, or institutional support. It belongs to the Catholic institutions themselves. Universities that claim Catholic identity assume a formative responsibility not only to inspire students toward justice but to equip them to articulate why that commitment matters within the life of the Church. Leadership formation that is truly faith-informed must enable students to speak with confidence about CST, to recognize its relevance across diverse contexts, and to carry it beyond the university into professional, civic, and ecclesial life.

Normatively, then, faith-informed leadership formation must move beyond implicit transmission toward intentional theological integration. It must treat CST as a living tradition to

be handed on, not merely as a set of values to be absorbed. It must foster leaders who are not only motivated to act justly, but also able to locate their leadership within the Church's social vision and articulate that vision with integrity. Such formation honors the depth of the tradition, the intelligence of students, and the Church's responsibility to form leaders capable of bearing CST into the complexities of the contemporary world.

5.4 Practical Implications for Campus Ministry and Leadership Formation

The findings of this study suggest that contemporary campus ministry operates within a markedly different formative landscape than that of previous generations. Students are not resistant to faith-based leadership or service; rather, they approach these commitments with heightened expectations for coherence, credibility, and demonstrable impact. Leadership formation that relies on assumed trust, inherited ecclesial language, or implicit moral frameworks is increasingly insufficient. What emerges instead is a generation that expects transparency, seeks alignment between stated values and actual practice, and evaluates formation opportunities through ethical, communal, and institutional lenses.

This shift places new demands on campus ministry practitioners. Students today are more likely to ask questions about the long-term impact of service on local communities, the distribution of power within organizations, and whether programs unintentionally reinforce harm rather than solidarity. Many students demonstrate a willingness to disengage entirely if they are not convinced that an experience aligns with their ethical formation. While this can be misinterpreted as disengagement or reluctance to serve, the data suggest the opposite: students are deeply concerned with integrity and impact, even when that concern leads to hesitation or withdrawal. Leadership formation must therefore help students move from ethical concern toward faithful commitment, without dismissing the seriousness of their questions.

These dynamics are further complicated by changes in how students experience community and commitment. Digital connectivity allows students to remain closely tethered to home networks, often limiting their rootedness in local communities and shared living environments. At the same time, the sheer volume of information available to students contributes to a kind of discernment fatigue, making it difficult to commit to a single leadership or service opportunity amid many competing options. For campus ministry, this underscores the importance of framing leadership not as a perfect or final choice, but as a provisional, formative commitment sustained through reflection, accompaniment, and growth.

A central implication of this study is that these challenges are exacerbated when CST remains implicit rather than explicit. When CST is present only as a background influence or as an assumed value, students often lack the theological language to interpret their experiences meaningfully. As a result, leadership formation risks becoming situational—responsive to immediate concerns or emotional resonance—rather than ecclesial, rooted in the Church's living tradition. Without intentional theological naming, students may internalize values aligned with CST while failing to recognize them as part of the Church's social vision, limiting the continuity of that formation beyond the university context.

These conclusions were reinforced through conversation with Cecilia Flores, Executive Director of the Catholic Volunteer Network, whom I met during the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies held at the Vatican in October 2025. This gathering, dedicated to affirming synodal participation and shared responsibility in the life of the Church, provided an appropriate context for discussing leadership, formation, and ecclesial accompaniment. During our conversation, I shared the core questions and emerging findings of this project, and Flores

offered reflections drawn from her broad, national-level perspective on faith-based service and leadership formation.

Flores confirmed that many students now approach service with a strong concern for intention versus impact, asking whether programs genuinely empower local communities and examining organizational leadership, funding sources, and diversity. She also noted that students frequently prefer nonparticipation over engagement in experiences they perceive as ethically ambiguous. From her vantage point, these tendencies reflect not apathy but a desire for alignment between belief, action, and institutional integrity. Her observations mirror the student narratives in this study, particularly the expectation that leadership opportunities demonstrate credibility rather than assume it.

Flores also highlighted ongoing challenges faced by program directors, especially around perseverance, shared living, and commitment. She observed that many practitioners lack formal theological formation and struggle to name CST explicitly, often defaulting to isolated service experiences or generic justice language. In her assessment, CST is frequently treated as optional or supplemental rather than as a foundational lens for Christian life. When it remains siloed within particular offices or ministries, students encounter CST as fragmented rather than formative.

Reflecting on generational differences, Flores contrasted her own formative experience—shaped by a readiness to respond to perceived calls—with what she sees in many students today. In conversation, I proposed describing the present generation as a “doubting Thomas generation,” a phrase Flores affirmed as capturing a central dynamic: students often need to see, experience, and verify before they can trust. This posture does not negate faith; rather, it reflects the cultural and formative conditions that shape contemporary discernment. Leadership

formation, then, must respond not with frustration but with clarity, tangible examples, and credible narratives that foster trust.

Taken together, these insights point to several practical imperatives for campus ministry. Leadership formation must be intentional but restrained, integrating CST language in ways that are accessible without being diluted. Practitioners require ongoing formation and support to name CST confidently and coherently. Experiential learning must be consistently paired with theological reflection, enabling students to interpret their actions within the Church's social tradition. Above all, leadership formation must be aligned with institutional mission in a way that students can recognize, articulate, and carry forward beyond their time in higher education.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has interpreted the study's findings in light of CST and the broader theological question of how leadership is formed in Catholic higher education. Across institutions, leadership formation emerged as relational, experiential, and often deeply meaningful for students. Yet the data consistently revealed a tension between experience and articulation: students were shaped by values closely aligned with CST but were rarely formed within CST as a named, coherent tradition. The result is not a failure of formation, but an incomplete one—rich in practice, limited in theological continuity.

The findings suggest that when CST remains largely implicit, leadership formation risks becoming dependent on context, personality, or program design rather than anchored in the Church's enduring social vision. Students may develop strong commitments to service, justice, and community, yet lack the interpretive framework necessary to understand these commitments as ecclesial rather than merely personal or situational. Without such grounding, the formative

power of leadership experiences may diminish once students leave the structured university environment.

Institutional charism plays a significant, often positive role in shaping leadership identity, offering language and practices that resonate with students and foster a sense of belonging. However, when charism functions independently of CST, it can unintentionally narrow students' understanding of the Church's social mission. Rather than serving as an entry point into CST, charism may become the primary interpretive lens, leaving CST embedded but unnamed. This dynamic underscores the importance of intentional integration, where charism and CST are presented not as competing frameworks but as mutually illuminating dimensions of Catholic identity.

This chapter also highlights the practical realities facing campus ministry practitioners. Directors and staff are tasked with forming students amid generational shifts marked by heightened ethical awareness, skepticism of institutions, and a demand for transparency and impact. Many practitioners lack formal theological training in CST and operate without shared formation resources or models. These conditions help explain why CST is often communicated through experience and narrative rather than through explicit theological naming. The challenge, therefore, is not to impose abstract language but to develop practices of formation that connect lived experience to tradition in ways that are accessible, credible, and pastorally grounded.

Taken together, the interpretive insights of this chapter point toward a central conclusion: faith-informed leadership requires formation not only in values and action, but in tradition and meaning. CST offers a durable framework capable of sustaining leadership beyond the university by situating service, justice, and responsibility within the Church's ongoing moral and social

witness. When CST is named, taught, and reflected upon alongside experience, it equips students to understand leadership as a vocation rooted in discipleship and oriented toward the common good.

Chapter 6 brings this study to a close by synthesizing its contributions, reflecting on its limitations, and identifying implications for future research and practice. It considers how CST might be more intentionally integrated into leadership formation in Catholic higher education and how campus ministry can continue to serve as a vital space where faith, leadership, and social responsibility converge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Directions

This final chapter brings the project to a close by drawing together its central insights and considering their implications for Catholic higher education, campus ministry, and student leadership formation. The preceding chapters traced the development of CST as a living tradition, examined how it is embodied within institutional mission and charism, and analyzed how it is received—often implicitly—by students and practitioners. What emerges is not a failure of CST, but a complex picture of how it is practiced, interpreted, and sometimes obscured within contemporary formation contexts.

Chapter 6 serves three purposes. First, it revisits the study's guiding question in light of the findings, clarifying how the original formation gap—CST lived but unnamed—has been confirmed and further specified through empirical research. Second, it synthesizes the key themes that emerged across interviews, documents, and institutional practices, highlighting patterns of alignment and misalignment between intention, practice, and perception. Finally, the chapter gestures toward future directions by naming what these findings suggest for ongoing formation, institutional responsibility, and further research.

Rather than offering a detached summary, this concluding chapter remains grounded in the experiences of students, campus ministers, and institutional leaders. It affirms CST as a vital and enduring resource for leadership formation while acknowledging the pastoral, theological, and structural work required for it to function more fully as a formative tradition. In doing so, the chapter situates this project within the broader mission of Catholic higher education: forming leaders whose faith, leadership, and commitment to justice are coherently integrated and sustained beyond the university context.

6.1 Reframing the Research Question

This study began with a guiding question rooted in lived ministerial experience: How does CST function within student leadership formation in Catholic higher education, particularly within the context of campus ministry? More specifically, the project sought to examine whether CST operates as an explicit formative framework for leadership development or primarily as an implicit influence through experience, charism, and practice.

The findings of this study confirm that the initial formation gap identified at the outset of the project—CST lived but seldom named—remains a defining characteristic of student leadership formation across the institutions examined. Students consistently engaged in service, leadership, and community life that reflected core principles of CST, yet they often lacked the theological language or interpretive framework to recognize these experiences as part of the Church's social tradition. In this sense, the study does not reveal an absence of CST, but rather a pattern of under-articulation.

Reframing the research question at this stage does not require altering its focus, but clarifying its implications. The question is no longer simply whether CST is present in student leadership formation, but *how it is mediated*. The evidence suggests that CST most often enters formation indirectly—through institutional charism, relational accompaniment, service immersion, and community practices—rather than through intentional theological instruction or sustained reflection. While this implicit transmission can be effective in shaping dispositions and values, it also limits students' ability to claim CST as a coherent tradition that informs their leadership beyond the university setting.

This reframing underscores a central tension explored throughout the project: the difference between formation through experience and formation within tradition. Campus

ministry excels at creating formative experiences that embody Gospel values, yet without consistent theological naming, these experiences risk remaining situational rather than ecclesial. As a result, students may internalize commitments to justice and service without recognizing their roots in CST or understanding how these commitments connect to the broader mission of the Church.

With this clarified understanding of the research question, the chapter now turns to a synthesis of the study's key findings. Section 6.2 draws together the major themes that emerged across student interviews, director perspectives, and institutional documents, highlighting the patterns that illuminate how CST currently functions—and where its formative potential remains underdeveloped—within student leadership formation.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal a consistent pattern in how student leadership formation is shaped within Catholic higher education and campus ministry contexts. Across interviews with students and directors, as well as analysis of institutional documents, CST emerged as present but largely implicit. While its principles informed practices in service, community life, and leadership development, they were rarely explicitly named within a coherent theological framework.

First, leadership formation was consistently described as relational and communal. Students identified accompaniment, peer relationships, mentoring by campus ministers, and shared experiences of service as central to their formation. Leadership was understood less as positional authority and more as responsibility toward others. This relational emphasis aligns closely with CST's communal vision, particularly its commitments to human dignity, solidarity, and participation, even when these terms were not used directly by participants.

Second, CST operated primarily at the level of experience rather than at the level of articulation. Students frequently engaged in programs that embodied CST principles—service immersion, advocacy initiatives, and community-based leadership—yet many were unable to name or explain the theological foundations underlying these experiences. Directors often assumed that the values embedded in programs would be self-evident or absorbed through participation alone. As a result, a gap emerged between the formative intention and the student's interpretation.

Third, institutional charism played a more decisive role in shaping leadership identity than CST language itself. At institutions with strong religious charisms, students demonstrated a clearer sense of mission, identity, and purpose in their leadership roles. Charism functioned as an interpretive lens through which leadership was understood and practiced, often providing the moral and spiritual grounding that CST might otherwise offer explicitly. Where charism was strong, CST was often present indirectly; where charism was less articulated, CST was more fragmented or peripheral.

Fourth, opportunities for sustained theological reflection were uneven and inconsistent. While reflection was frequently incorporated into leadership and service programs, it was often episodic or focused primarily on personal growth rather than ecclesial tradition. Few students reported engaging in structured reflection that explicitly connected their leadership experiences to CST or the Church's social vision. This limited students' ability to integrate experience with theological understanding in a durable way.

Finally, the study identified a recurring misalignment between institutional intention and student perception. Directors described programs as intentionally grounded in CST, while students often perceived them as broadly values-based or justice-oriented without a clear

theological distinction. This disconnect suggests that CST, when left unnamed, risks being absorbed into generic ethical language rather than being recognized as a distinctive element of Catholic identity.

Taken together, these findings indicate that CST functions more as an implicit backdrop than as an explicit formative tradition within student leadership formation. While this implicit presence contributes meaningfully to students' values and commitments, it also limits the continuity of formation beyond the university context. Without theological naming and integration, students may leave with strong commitments to justice and service but without the ecclesial language or framework necessary to carry CST into their ongoing leadership and vocational discernment.

6.3 Contributions to Practice and Ministry

Given the limited scope of the data, this study does not aim to provide a definitive model for leadership formation or CST integration across Catholic higher education. Its contribution is more modest and, in many ways, more pastoral: it offers clarity, reassurance, and orientation for practitioners navigating a complex and demanding area of ministry.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is its affirmation that CST is not a simple or easily transmitted body of knowledge. CST is a historically layered, theologically rich, and pastorally demanding tradition that has developed over more than a century through papal teaching, conciliar documents, episcopal conferences, and lived ecclesial practice across diverse global contexts. Expecting students—or even campus ministers—to grasp CST fully through a single workshop, service experience, or a website reference places unrealistic demands on formation programs and obscures the depth of the tradition itself.

The findings suggest that many leadership programs already embody CST in meaningful ways through service, accompaniment, community life, and reflection. The challenge is not the absence of commitment, but the absence of sustained orientation and consistent formation that helps students recognize these practices as part of a broader ecclesial tradition. When CST is treated primarily as a set of values assumed to be self-evident, or as language embedded in institutional planning documents without ongoing formation, it risks becoming diffuse and disconnected from students' lived experiences.

For campus ministry practitioners, this study offers reassurance that CST formation is necessarily gradual and developmental. Formation in CST is not a one-time achievement but a long-term process that unfolds through repeated exposure, shared language, and opportunities for theological reflection. The data suggest that when CST appears only episodically—during a service trip, a justice-themed event, or a particular leadership role—students are unlikely to integrate it as a lasting lens for leadership and decision-making.

The study also contributes to practice by naming a common institutional pattern: CST often resides in mission statements, strategic plans, or public-facing materials, while the responsibility for forming students in its meaning is left largely implicit. This gap does not reflect negligence, but rather the absence of clear pathways for translating a complex tradition into accessible and sustained formation. By identifying this pattern, the research invites institutions to consider CST less as a static reference point and more as a formative tradition that requires orientation, repetition, and accompaniment.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the ministry by reframing the challenge of CST integration. The question is not whether CST is present or absent, but whether it is being treated as a living tradition that warrants time, patience, and consistent formation. In naming this reality,

the study affirms the work practitioners are already doing while also inviting institutions to support that work more intentionally, recognizing that deep formation cannot be reduced to isolated moments or institutional language alone.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

The insights offered in this study emerge from a specific set of contexts, relationships, and voices. As such, they are shaped by the realities of qualitative research conducted within active ministry and leadership environments. The findings are best understood not as comprehensive representations of Catholic higher education as a whole, but as situated reflections that illuminate recurring patterns within particular institutional and ministerial settings.

The number of student participants was necessarily limited, and their perspectives reflect individual experiences rather than a statistically representative sample. These voices, however, remain central to the study's purpose. Because the project is concerned with how CST is perceived, named, and integrated by students themselves, the depth and texture of these reflections matter more than their breadth. The student responses function as windows into the formative process rather than as measures of institutional effectiveness.

Institutional participation also varied. Some sites provided richer student data than others, resulting in moments where the director's intentions could not be directly paired with student interpretation. Rather than weakening the analysis, this unevenness reflects the practical dynamics of campus ministry and mirrors the formation gap identified throughout the study. It highlights the distance that can exist between well-articulated institutional goals and students' lived experiences.

The study relies heavily on interviews, surveys, and self-description. These forms of data are interpretive by nature and shaped by participants' language, theological familiarity, and capacity for reflection. This is especially significant in a project that examines CST, a tradition that is often lived implicitly rather than articulated explicitly. The difficulty participants had in naming CST is not merely a methodological challenge but a substantive finding that reinforces the study's central claims.

Finally, the focus of this research is intentionally narrow. By focusing on campus ministry and co-curricular leadership formation, the study does not assess classroom instruction, formal theological curricula, or broader institutional assessment structures. This choice reflects the project's practical-theological orientation and its interest in formation as it unfolds through relationship, experience, and ministry rather than through formal academic evaluation.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the study. Instead, they clarify its scope and invite careful interpretation. The findings point toward patterns of practice, perception, and formation that warrant continued attention, offering a grounded contribution to ongoing conversations about leadership, ministry, and CST in higher education.

6.5 Directions for Future Research

This study offers a snapshot rather than a comprehensive map of how CST functions within student leadership formation in Catholic higher education. As such, it opens several pathways for future research and ministerial development rather than closing the conversation. One clear direction concerns longitudinal formation. Much of the formation gap identified in this project stems from the reality that CST is introduced sporadically, often tied to isolated experiences of service or leadership, rather than sustained over time. Future research could examine how students encounter CST across multiple years—tracking whether repeated

exposure, intentional naming, and structured reflection deepen their ability to integrate faith, justice, and leadership beyond graduation.

Another important area for further inquiry involves the formation of practitioners themselves. This study revealed that many campus ministers and leadership professionals bear significant responsibility for CST formation without having received formal theological preparation in this area. Research focused on practitioner formation—particularly among lay ministers—could help identify effective models for ongoing theological development that are realistic, accessible, and integrated into professional life. Such work would move the conversation beyond expectations placed solely on students and toward a more ecclesial understanding of shared responsibility for formation.

Future studies might also pay closer attention to institutional charism and governance. The findings suggest that religious charisms often function as the primary lens through which leadership and justice are interpreted, sometimes more coherently than CST language itself. Comparative research across institutions with different charisms—or without a clearly articulated charism—could further clarify how CST is transmitted, adapted, or obscured within varying ecclesial cultures. This would be particularly valuable in an era when many Catholic institutions are increasingly staffed and led by lay professionals.

Finally, this project points to the need for research that listens more deeply to students' interpretations rather than to institutional intentions. While this study identified a consistent gap between what programs aim to communicate and what students actually receive, further work could explore how students make meaning of CST after leaving the university. In particular, longitudinal research with alumni—especially those five to ten years removed from their

undergraduate leadership experiences—could offer valuable insight into whether and how explicit engagement with CST shapes the integration of faith, justice, and discipleship over time.

Such research would also resonate with existing assessment practices within higher education. Universities routinely rely on surveys, outcomes data, and longitudinal metrics to evaluate vocational preparation, student engagement, and institutional effectiveness, often in response to accreditation requirements. A mission-centered approach could ask parallel questions of formation: not simply whether graduates are successful or engaged, but whether CST continues to inform how they understand their faith, leadership, and responsibility to the common good beyond the university context.

Taken together, these directions underscore a central conviction of this study: CST is not a content area to be mastered quickly, nor a framework to be deployed selectively. It is a tradition that requires orientation, patience, and accompaniment. When approached as such, CST has the capacity to shape not only student leaders during their college years, but faithful adults whose commitments to justice, solidarity, and the common good endure well beyond the university context.

6.6 Final Theological Reflection

This project began with a simple but persistent question: why does CST so often animate the life of Catholic institutions without being recognized, named, or claimed by those formed within them? What emerged over the course of this study is not a failure of intention, nor a rejection of the Church's social vision, but a deeper theological tension. CST is frequently treated as something to be added to formation rather than recognized as something already shaping it—implicitly, unevenly, and sometimes unconsciously.

At its core, this study affirms that CST is not first a pedagogical framework or a set of principles to be mastered. It is a way of seeing the world formed by the Gospel, refined by tradition, and tested in history. When students struggle to articulate CST, it is not necessarily because formation has failed, but because formation has not yet been named theologically. Experience precedes language; practice often precedes interpretation. The task of formation, then, is not to impose theological vocabulary prematurely, but to accompany students as they learn to recognize what they are already living.

This theological insight carries important implications for leadership formation. Leadership, in the Catholic imagination, is not primarily functional or managerial. It is relational, vocational, and ecclesial. It unfolds within community, is shaped by encounter, and is sustained by faith. When CST is integrated into leadership formation in a way that honors this rhythm—experience, reflection, naming, and return—it becomes less abstract and more credible. It becomes a tradition students can inhabit rather than a theory they must defend.

This distinction also clarifies why the question of implicit and explicit formation ultimately matters. Both play an essential role in leadership development, and this study does not argue for replacing experiential formation with abstract instruction. Implicit formation shapes disposition, commitment, and imagination; it is often where leadership begins. Explicit engagement with CST, however, carries a different weight. It is what gives experience continuity, coherence, and ecclesial accountability over time. Without explicit theological naming, the values cultivated through experience may endure, but their grounding within the Church's tradition becomes increasingly fragile. For leadership formation to sustain the Church's social vision beyond the formative context of the university, explicit theological engagement must accompany lived practice.

A number of contemporary moral philosophers have argued that modern societies often retain moral ideals such as justice, human dignity, and concern for the common good while losing clarity about the traditions that originally gave those ideals their coherence. Alasdair MacIntyre famously describes modern moral discourse as consisting of fragments of older moral traditions that persist even after the frameworks that sustained them have weakened.[155] Charles Taylor similarly argues that many contemporary moral intuitions within Western societies remain historically indebted to Christian moral sources, even when those origins are no longer explicitly recognized. In this context, explicit engagement with CST becomes especially important. It not only clarifies the theological grounding of values that may already resonate with broader social commitments but also equips students to recognize and critically evaluate areas where prevailing cultural moral frameworks diverge from the Church's social vision.

At the same time, this study calls Catholic institutions to renewed humility and patience. CST is a long tradition, developed over centuries, shaped by global voices, and refined through struggle. It cannot be reduced to a single workshop, a strategic plan, or a mission statement on a website. Formation in CST requires consistency, coherence, and trust in the slow work of accompaniment. It also requires confidence that students do not need everything resolved for them, but rather the tools to wrestle faithfully with complexity.

Ultimately, this project argues that Catholic higher education fulfills its mission most fully when it forms leaders who understand justice not as an optional concern, but as a constitutive dimension of discipleship. Campus ministry, situated at the intersection of faith,

---

[155] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)

community, and practice, remains a privileged space for this work. When CST is named carefully, integrated thoughtfully, and lived patiently, it has the capacity to shape leaders whose commitments endure beyond programs, institutions, and titles—leaders formed not only to act justly, but to see justly, in light of the Gospel.

This is not the conclusion of the conversation, but a theological grounding for its continuation.

6.7 Closing Word

This project does not end with a blueprint for leadership formation, nor does it offer a single model that can be easily replicated across institutions. That is intentional. Formation, especially faith-rooted formation, is not something that can be standardized or rushed. It happens over time, through relationships, practice, and moments of honest reflection that often resist easy measurement.

This study makes clear that CST is already present in Catholic higher education. It is present in the instincts of campus ministers, in the commitments of student leaders, and in the mission language that institutions claim. Yet it is often unnamed, inconsistently formed, and unevenly sustained. The task before the Church is not to create something new, but to slow down long enough to recognize what is already happening and to give it the theological grounding it deserves.

When students are given language that helps them make sense of their experiences, when practitioners are supported in their own formation, and when institutions resist the temptation to reduce CST to a slogan or strategic priority, leadership formation becomes something deeper. It becomes a way of seeing the world shaped by the Gospel and sustained by the Church's tradition.

If this project offers anything, it is not a conclusion but a posture—one of attentiveness, humility, and patience. CST is not mastered in a program or completed in a semester. It is learned slowly, lived imperfectly, and carried forward by people willing to stay with the work.

References

Baltutis, John, and John A. Pagnucco. *A Vision of Justice: Engaging CST on the College Campus*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2012.

Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*. Vatican City, 2009.

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

Bosco, John. *The Preventive System in the Education of the Young*. In *Saint John Bosco: Selections from His Spiritual Writings*, edited by Joseph Aubry, translated by Daniel Lyons. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989.

Brigham, Erin, and Kathryn Getek Soltis. "Engaging Faculty Around the Catholic Social Tradition." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 37, no. 2 (2018): 89–110.

Browning, Don S. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Catholic New York. "Sister M. Rose Cecilia Bozzo, F.M.S.C." August 11, 2016.

https://www.cny.org/stories/sister-m-rose-cecilia-bozzo-fmsc,14321.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM). *Medellín Documents: Conclusions of the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate*. Bogotá: CELAM, 1968.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM). *Puebla: Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America*. Puebla: CELAM, 1979.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y del Caribe (CELAM). *Aparecida Document: Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Aparecida, Brazil: CELAM, May 31, 2007.

Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco). Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2015.

Curran, Charles E. *CST, 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002.

DeLorenzo, Leonard J., and Timothy P. O'Malley, eds. *I Call You Friends: John Cavadini and the Vision of Catholic Leadership for Higher Education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.

DeMaio, Steve, SDB. "Salesian Gospel Roads 2024." *Salesians of Don Bosco Blog*, August 28, 2024.

https://salesians.org/blog/salesian-gospel-roads-2024.

Elenco cronologico delle Opere Edite di San Giovanni Bosco. *Don Bosco Santo*. Accessed August 23, 2025.

http://www.donboscosanto.eu/elenco_cronologico_oe.php.

Estanek, Sandra M., ed. *Understanding Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities: A Comprehensive Resource*. Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002.

———. "Redefining Catholic Identity: Student Affairs Professionals at Catholic Colleges and Universities." *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 2 (2006): 177–90.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). *Evangelization in Modern Asia*. Taipei: FABC, 1974.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican City, 2013.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*. Vatican City, 2020.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

Francis. *Laudato Si'*. Vatican City, 2015.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Translated and edited by John Julian. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010.

General Chapter 24. *Salesians and Lay People, Part 2*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 1996. https://www.sdb.org/en/SDB_Resources/General_Chapters/GC24_%281996%29/GC_24__1996__Salesians_and_Lay_people___part_2.

Hengemuhle, Michael. *A Charism Is a Nice Thing to Have: Catholic Culture within the Student Affairs Division of a Catholic University*. PhD diss., University of Dayton, 2015.

Hill, Andrew. "How a Student Affairs Team Helped Shape Mission and Identity." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (2002): 181–200.

Himes, Kenneth R., ed. *Modern CST: Commentaries and Interpretations*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005.

John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus*. Vatican City, 1991. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

———. *Ecclesia in Africa*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995.

———. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Vatican City, 1990.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

———. *Laborem Exercens*. Vatican City, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

———. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Vatican City, 1987. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

Land O'Lakes Statement. *The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University*. Land O'Lakes, WI, 1967. https://archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/lol/idea.htm.

Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*. Vatican City, 1891. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.

Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. 19 vols. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003.

Lenti, Arthur J. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, Vol. 2. Rome: LAS, 2007.

———. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, Vol. 3. Rome: LAS, 2007.

Martino, Renato. “Presentation of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.” Vatican City, 2004.

McDonnell, Eunan. *The Concept of Freedom in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales*. Rome: LAS, 2009.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1985.

Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

Paul VI. *Octogesima Adveniens*. Vatican City, 1971.

https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

———. *Populorum Progressio*. Vatican City, 1967.

https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

Pius XI. *Quadragesimo Anno*. Vatican City, 1931.

https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican City; Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana and USCCB, 2004.

Prusak, Bernard, and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, eds. *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023.

Salesian Gospel Roads Manual. New Rochelle, NY: Salesian Society, Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, 2020.

Salesian Gospel Roads Program Model: Final Draft. Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Salesians of Don Bosco, n.d.

Salesians of Don Bosco. “Youth & Young Adult Ministry.” Accessed August 23, 2025.

https://salesians.org/youth-young-adult-ministry.

Schaller, Michael A., and Mary Boyle. “Honoring Two Philosophies: Student Affairs and Catholic Higher Education.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 25, no. 2 (2006): 133–47.

Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*. Vatican City, 1965.

Synod of Bishops for Africa. *Instrumentum Laboris: The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission*. Vatican City, 1994.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sharing CST: Challenges and Directions*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998.

Wurtz, Lisa M. *Lay Student Affairs Professionals in Catholic Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study*. PhD diss., George Washington University, 2013.

Baltutis, John, and John A. Pagnucco. *A Vision of Justice: Engaging Catholic Social Teaching on the College Campus*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2012.

Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*. Vatican City, 2009. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

Bosco, John. “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young.” In *Saint John Bosco: Selections from His Spiritual Writings*, edited by Joseph Aubry, translated by Daniel Lyons. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989.

Browning, Don S. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Catholic New York. “Sister M. Rose Cecilia Bozzo, F.M.S.C.” *Catholic New York*, August 11, 2016. https://www.cny.org/stories/sister-m-rose-cecilia-bozzo-fmsc,14321.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM). *Medellín Documents: Conclusions of the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate*. Bogotá: CELAM, 1968.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM). *Puebla: Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America*. Puebla: CELAM, 1979.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y del Caribe (CELAM). *Aparecida Document: Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Aparecida, Brazil: CELAM, 2007.

Curran, Charles E. *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002.

DeLorenzo, Leonard J., and Timothy P. O'Malley, eds. *I Call You Friends: John Cavadini and the Vision of Catholic Leadership for Higher Education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.

DeMaio, Steve, SDB. "Salesian Gospel Roads 2024." *Salesians of Don Bosco Blog*, August 28, 2024. https://salesians.org/blog/salesian-gospel-roads-2024.

Estanek, Sandra M., ed. *Understanding Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities: A Comprehensive Resource*. Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002.

Estanek, Sandra M. "Redefining Catholic Identity: Student Affairs Professionals at Catholic Colleges and Universities." *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 2 (2006): 177–90.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. *Evangelization in Modern Asia: Papers from the First Plenary Assembly*. Taipei: FABC, 1974.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican City, 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*. Vatican City, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

Francis. *Laudato Si'*. Vatican City, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Translated and edited by John Julian. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010.

General Chapter 24. *Salesians and Lay People*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 1996. https://www.sdb.org/en/SDB_Resources/General_Chapters/GC24_%281996%29/GC_24__1996__Salesians_and_Lay_people___part_2.

Hengemuhle, Michael. *A Charism Is a Nice Thing to Have: Catholic Culture within the Student Affairs Division of a Catholic University*. PhD diss., University of Dayton, 2015.

Hill, Andrew. "How a Student Affairs Team Helped Shape Mission and Identity." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (2002): 181–200.

Himes, Kenneth R., ed. *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005.

John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus*. Vatican City, 1991. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Africa*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995.

John Paul II. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities*. Vatican City, 1990. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*. Vatican City, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Vatican City, 1987. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

Land O'Lakes Statement. *The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University*. Land O'Lakes, WI, 1967. https://archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/lol/idea.htm.

Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Translated by Diego Borgatello et al. 19 vols. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1964–2003.

Lenti, Arthur J. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit. Vol. 2: Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory*. Edited by Aldo Giraudo. Rome: LAS, 2007.

Lenti, Arthur J. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit. Vol. 3: Don Bosco Educator, Spiritual Master, Writer and Founder of the Salesian Society*. Edited by Aldo Giraudo. Rome: LAS, 2007.

Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*. Vatican City, 1891. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Martino, Renato. "Presentation of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church." Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004.

McDonnell, Eunan. *The Concept of Freedom in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales*. Rome: LAS, 2009.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1985.

Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

Paul VI. *Octogesima Adveniens*. Vatican City, 1971. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

Paul VI. *Populorum Progressio*. Vatican City, 1967. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

Pius XI. *Quadragesimo Anno*. Vatican City, 1931. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004.

Prusak, Bernard, and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, eds. *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023.

Salesian Society. *Salesian Gospel Roads Manual*. New Rochelle, NY: Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, 2020.

Salesian Society. *Salesian Gospel Roads Program Model: Final Draft*. Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, n.d.

Salesians of Don Bosco. *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2015.

Salesians of Don Bosco. "Youth & Young Adult Ministry." Accessed August 23, 2025. https://salesians.org/youth-young-adult-ministry.

Schaller, Michael A., and Mary Boyle. "Honoring Two Philosophies: Student Affairs and Catholic Higher Education." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 25, no. 2 (2006): 133–47.

Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Vatican City, 1965.

Synod of Bishops for Africa. *Instrumentum Laboris: The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000—"You Shall Be My Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)*. Vatican City, 1994.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998.

Wurtz, Lisa M. *Lay Student Affairs Professionals in Catholic Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study*. PhD diss., George Washington University, 2013.

Vita

Mr. Guilherme (Gui) Lopes

Date of Birth: June 19, 1991

Guilherme Lopes is a campus minister, educator, and practical theologian whose work focuses on student leadership formation, Catholic Social Teaching, and mission integration in Catholic higher education.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and a Master of Arts in Criminal Justice from DeSales University. He later completed a Master of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University New Orleans, specializing in Youth and Young Adult Ministry. He is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree.

Professionally, Lopes has served in a variety of leadership roles within Catholic ministry and higher education. He worked for the Salesians of St. John Bosco as Program Coordinator and later Associate Director, supporting youth and young adult formation rooted in the Salesian charism. He subsequently served as Director of Campus Ministry at Cabrini University, where he also taught as an Adjunct Professor of Theology. He currently serves as Director of Campus Ministry at Neumann University and continues to teach as an Adjunct Instructor in Theology.