

*What Makes a Catholic School “Catholic”?:
An Analysis of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago
and Their Strategies for Mission Knowledge and Integration
in the School’s Adult Community*

by

Sara Ann Spittler Conneely

Submitted to the Faculty of
Catholic Theological Union at Chicago
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
April 18, 2025

Christina R. Zaker, D. Min.
Thesis-Project Director

Copyright © 2025 Sara Ann Spittler Conneely

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Topic	1
1.2 Thesis	4
1.3 Genesis Narrative	5
1.4 Research Methodology	8
1.5 Anticipated Outcomes	11
1.6 Limitations	11
1.7 Audience	16
1.8 Overview	17

Chapter 2 – Defining Catholic Identity

2.1 Chapter Introduction	20
2.1.1 Who defines Catholic Identity?	20
2.2 Definitions	24
2.3 Who establishes the school’s Catholic identity and assists in upholding its mission, assessing its efficacy, and revising when needed?	29
2.4 What is already happening in terms of mission and Catholic identity construction, buy-in, and evaluation?	34
2.5 Existing Standards for Catholic Identity	38
2.6 Existing Data on Catholic High Schools in America	44
2.7 Common Mission Elements Defining Catholic Identity	47
2.8 Research Plan and Data Collection	50
2.9 Chapter Conclusion	54

Chapter 3 – Research Process and Results

3.1 Chapter Introduction	56
3.2 Survey Design and Process	57
3.3 Respondent Profile	58
3.4 Survey Questions and Rationale	60
3.5 Survey Results	64
3.6 Focus Group Overview and Observations	69
3.7 Effective Strategies	73
3.8 Ineffective Strategies	84
3.9 Chapter Conclusion	87

Chapter 4 – Effective and Ineffective Strategies for Adult Formation

4.1 Chapter Introduction	89
4.2 Effective Strategies for Adult Mission Formation	90
4.2.1 Rotating Topics for Mission-Focused Professional Development	94
4.2.2 Strong School Leadership	98
4.2.3 Community Service and Social Justice Elements	103
4.2.4 Retreat: Attending and Accompanying	109
4.2.5 Sponsoring Order Involvement	114
4.3 Chapter Conclusion	119

Chapter 5 – Recommendations for Improving Mission Integration Beyond Adult Formation

5.1 Chapter Introduction	121
5.2 Suggestions	123
5.2.1 Suggestion #1: Recruiting and Hiring for Mission	123
5.2.2 Suggestion #2: Budgeting for Mission	129
5.2.3 Suggestion #3: Community Building	132
5.2.4 Suggestion #4: Highlighting Successes	138
5.3 Chapter Conclusion	141
<i>Chapter 6 – Conclusion</i>	
6.1 Chapter Introduction	143
6.2 Key Findings	144
6.3 Limitations of This Research	147
6.4 Broader Ministerial Impact	150
Bibliography	155
Appendix A – Survey Questions	168
Appendix B – Focus Group Questions	170
Appendix C – Mission Statement Analysis	171
Appendix D – Eleven characteristics of good enculturation and formation	177

Abstract

The topic of this research is adult formation in Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The researcher analyzed current practices in building mission identity through adult faith formation in school communities. Several common strategies are identified as effective and suggestions are made to further incorporate a school's mission into the adult community. A survey was shared with the schools in the Archdiocese asking teachers, administrators, and staff members to reflect on their experiences of mission integration and formation. Following this, focus groups were used to elaborate on the strategies and ideas raised in the survey.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1 Topic

A Catholic school is more than crucifixes and religion classes. It is a place where faith and learning intersect, shaping minds, hearts, and souls. But what truly defines a Catholic school in an increasingly secular world? What sets a Catholic school apart from any other school? What is it about a school that displays its Catholic identity? What makes a Catholic school *Catholic*?

The Catholic identity of schools is made Catholic by a combination of factors: demographics of the student and employee populations, religious activities that take place in the school community, curriculum in theology classes, sacramental preparation, knowledge and integration of the school's mission, and overall dedication to the Gospel message and Christ's ministry. On the surface, one might notice religious symbols and artwork in the school building, a sense of community encouraged through relationship building, references to Scripture or saints, and the presence of religious persons on campus. There may be overt celebrations of feast days and sacraments, required theology classes, and prayer recited over the PA system daily. However, Catholic education is distinguished not only by its curriculum, environment, and religious instruction but by a holistic approach to human formation that seeks to integrate faith and reason, cultivate virtue, and foster a sense of community.

While Catholic mission is not necessarily school culture, the Catholic character of a school is certainly part of the culture and identity that distinguishes a Catholic school from a public or unaffiliated private school. What sets a Catholic school apart from other

schools can be attributed to the intentional growth of and investment in students, staff, and families through a shared Catholic mission. The identity of a Catholic school is a dynamic reality, shaped by its leadership, faculty, students, and broader community, all of which contribute to an environment that reflects the Gospel message and the Church's vision for education. There is no objective definition for “Catholic identity” that can be applied to every Catholic school. Catholic identity is not one size fits all; rather, it is entirely dependent upon factors specific to the group it is describing. The term “Catholic identity” is commonly used to characterize the activities, values, and practices that make evident the Catholic roots of a school. The expression of this identity encompasses the community, environment, and culture of the school, organization, or religious order to which it refers. While its origins are not within the Church, the term is frequently used in Catholic education to make concrete what is nearly undefinable.

Scholars and practitioners have investigated these distinctive elements of Catholic education. Catholic schools are made so by many important features; according to R. Jared Staudt, editor of *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision for a Secular Age*, “A Catholic school believes, teaches with a Catholic pedagogy, and forms a Catholic community that lives the faith.”¹ Considering organizations and individuals that conduct research on Catholic education and contribute resources to stakeholders at educational institutions, the National Catholic Educational Association, Archbishop J. Michael Miller, the Congregation for Catholic Education, and a myriad of institutions housed at Catholic universities provide useful guidance on leadership, governance,

¹ R. Jared Staudt, “To Change a School: A Vision for Renewal,” in *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, ed. R. Jared Staudt (The Catholic Education Press, 2020), 128.

identity, and mission. By identifying a coherent and comprehensive understanding of how Catholic schools operate, their defining elements, and common language to discuss the spiritual needs of the community, these organizations have provided practical support on such topics.

The research of these and other scholars has focused on many varied factors in distinguishing Catholic schools from their secular counterparts. It is here that I will situate the work of this project. This project focuses on one of these particular factors: knowledge and integration of the school's mission among the adults in a Catholic school community. By narrowing the focus on this project to the adults in the community and their understanding and integration of the mission of the school, this project will uncover important insights into the role of formation of adults in Catholic School identity.

Essentially, this research asks how adult buy-in is established and supported so that the mission of the school is obvious and indisputable. Adult formation and involvement in mission and community activities can set the tone for an entire school. By dedicating time, personnel, and resources to adult formation, the faculty and staff become involved in the spirituality of the school community. There are many ways that adults can shape the culture and identity of a school, and as such, studying the effectiveness of the activities used to promote mission knowledge and feelings of connection can lead to a better understanding of how a school lives out its Catholic identity.

School culture and school identity are intrinsically linked, and both are set by the adults who remain in the organization beyond the four years any given student will be present there. The adults shape the way the mission, values, and goals of the institution are expressed. This applies to all faculty and staff, regardless of how long they work at

the school; their value in defining, shaping, and embodying the culture of the school makes an impact. There is a trickle-down effect when faculty and staff are able to embrace unique characteristics about their school community and are able to see how they fit into the mission. Ultimately, the strength of a Catholic school's identity is not found solely in its external markers – crucifixes in classrooms, mandatory theology courses, or retreat programs – but in the depth of its commitment to forming students in faith. When a new employee enters the community, they are invited into this reality. The ongoing challenge for Catholic schools is ensuring that their mission remains at the heart of their work, not just in words but in the daily practices and relationships that define the school community. The faculty and staff, as stewards of this mission, bear a profound responsibility in maintaining the integrity of Catholic education now and in the future.

1.2 Thesis

Based on survey and focus group analysis of adult stakeholders at Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, this thesis will identify and analyze the adult formation activities perceived by faculty, staff, and administrators as most and least effective at cultivating mission buy-in.

This project will investigate the ministry, formation, and professional development practices of Chicago-based Catholic high schools aimed at faculty, staff, and administrators to measure effective mission integration strategies as perceived by these stakeholders. I hypothesize that when stakeholders at all levels are familiar with and understand the mission of a school and how the mission, core values, and charism pertain to the identity of that school, the community will be more rooted in its Catholic identity.

This clear identity will then be evident to all involved in the school community, those who visit the school, those who donate to the school, those on the board of trustees, and everyone in between. As adults are the main drivers of school culture, it makes sense that their formation is critical to perceivable Catholic identity in an educational setting. It is surmised that if faculty, staff, and administrators feel comfortable living into and contributing to the mission and identity of a Catholic school, then they are able to truly live out the mission in their daily service to the community. For stakeholders to become active participants in the mission of the school, they must first be aware of the mission. Then, they should see how their role in the school community fits into the overall school mission. This requires participation in effective mission integration work, ongoing formation, and activities that support the mission, values, and identity of the school.

1.3 Genesis Narrative

Having spent my entire academic and professional careers in Catholic schools, I have seen firsthand the profound impact that a school's mission can have on its community. This project is born out of those experiences and the questions they have raised. The main question for this project, what makes a Catholic school Catholic, originates from my own experience of education. I am a product of Catholic schools. From my earliest days of education, I attended a variety of Catholic schools: Loretto Convent for preschool, St. Michael Parish School for kindergarten through eighth grade, Benet Academy for high school. I attended a Catholic university, the University of Notre Dame, for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. As a student, it felt obvious that the schools I attended were distinctly Catholic. I can recall learning about the Gospel in

my 11th grade religion class, celebrating the feast day of St. Michael the Archangel at the end of September, dressing up as a saint for All Saints' Day as a second-grade student, praying at the beginning and end of each school day, and serving as a Eucharistic Minister during All School Masses. The shared experiences led me to appreciate the opportunities unique to a Catholic school setting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, more families sought out Catholic schools as an alternative to public schools, which experienced closures and teacher strikes that did not impact Catholic schools in the same way.² Before the pandemic, about 18% of students at Catholic schools in the United States were reported as non-Catholic,³ while after the pandemic, that number has grown to 21% of students. As such, a shift in student and family demographics occurred,⁴ with more non-Catholic or non-religious students and families joining Catholic communities. This led to questions about how the religious identity of the student body might impact the overall culture and identity of the school. When someone becomes part of a Catholic school community, they might experience an environment distinct from other places. The hoped-for distinction is one of welcome and holistic care rooted in the Catholic mission.

It is critical to my mission as an educator, as well as the overall mission of Catholic schools,⁵ that these institutions are based on the ministry of Jesus and teach with

² Kathleen Porter-Magee, Annie Smith, and Matt Klausmeier, "Catholic School Enrollment Boomed during Covid. Let's Make It More than a One-Time Bump," The Manhattan Institute, 2022, https://images.magnetmail.net/images/clients/NCEA1/attach/Catholic_School_Enrollment_Boomed_During_COVID.pdf.

³ USCCB, "Catholic Education," 2017, <https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/catholic-education>.

⁴ Maggie Phillips, "Catholic Schools Attracted Students during the Pandemic: Can They Keep Them?" *America Magazine*, August 17, 2023, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/08/17/catholic-schools-enrollment-covid-pandemic-245875>.

⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of a Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (25 Jan 2022) §20, at Vatican City, Accessed 12 Apr 2024, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/29/220329c.html>.

the mind of Christ. Aside from my experiences as a student, this project derives from my time as an educator at three different Catholic schools. In observing the environment at the schools where I have taught, the way in which schools express Catholic identity and the charism of sponsoring orders varies greatly. I have seen unique ways of expressing Catholic identity, of living out charism, and of forming employees for the mission of the school, depending on school sponsorship, leadership, and adult community. At some schools, the charism of the sponsoring order supersedes the Catholic nature of the school. At others, being Catholic seems an afterthought or even something for which administrators apologize. As the number of practicing Catholics in the United States has decreased,⁶ I have seen students become less familiar with the concepts taught in theology courses and employees become less invested in the Catholic identity of these schools.

I have considered what similarities Catholic schools possess that make them distinctly Catholic, a nearly impossible task. This has drawn me to look at the ways in which adults within the school community perceive what makes their school unmistakably Catholic. For this project, I researched Catholic identity and mission in Chicagoland Catholic high schools. The concept of “Catholic identity” is extremely subjective depending on the community in which it takes shape, making the challenge of this project all the more interesting to me as a researcher. My overarching question is: what makes a Catholic school “Catholic”? I focused on the strategies and programs that administrators implement with their faculty and staff that lead to educator “buy-in” for

⁶ Michael Sean Winters, “Growth and Decline in the US Catholic Church,” National Catholic Reporter, April 19, 2024, <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/ncr-voices/growth-and-decline-us-catholic-church>.

the school's mission. This included the formation of adults in the school community and the ways in which they are initiated into the identity, mission, and charism of the school. The idea of adult formation stretches beyond the world of Catholic education; it is a recurring concern among pastors, ministers, and Church administrators. The lack of adult formation beyond the sacraments causes constant struggle in the Church and is potentially detrimental to Church communities which seem to shrink more each year. As Catholic schools are a primary source of religious education for children and young people, those in charge of the schools seemingly need strong formation programs and a clear identity to convey the virtues they intend to pass along to their students. Schools run by religious orders tend to have a different identity from diocesan or independently run schools, as a religious order has a particular set of values and identifying features that set it apart from other religious orders. I am curious as to what makes these schools different, if it is measurable, and what strategies and practices have been successful in bringing the adults within the community into the mission of the school.

1.4 Research Methodology

For this project, the researcher gathered information about and opinions of adult formation programs at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago in order to determine the perceived effectiveness of these programs at building a faculty and staff community that feels connected to the mission of the school. The researcher used a word analysis of mission statements and an anonymous survey coupled with online focus groups to collect data on what programs the high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago employ to form their employees for mission understanding. The first step of the research

process was gathering the mission statements of each school by finding them on the school websites, compiling them in a single document, and completing a word analysis to identify the commonly used words and phrases related to Catholic identity, mission, and values. The commonly used words were counted and examined; definitions were composed based on academic research in the realm of Catholic education.

Following this, employees at all of the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago were asked via email to share their thoughts in the form of an electronic survey. At the same time, they were invited to participate in small focus groups to expand on the thoughts given in the survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no prior knowledge of Catholic identity research was required. A Likert-style survey with a forced-choice format was utilized, compelling respondents to lean toward agreement or disagreement rather than opting for neutrality when presented with statements potentially describing their schools. Efforts were made to ensure that voices from each of the 29 schools were incorporated, however three schools opted not to participate. The survey and interview process took place over the course of three months and concluded with 111 survey responses and four focus groups of three to five people. While the survey provided a broad overview of faculty and staff perceptions, the focus groups were designed to probe deeper into key themes. These facilitated discussions allowed participants to elaborate on their responses, share personal experiences, and offer suggestions for improving mission integration. More information on the specifications of the research can be found in Chapter 2 of this project.

The Pastoral Cycle served as a framework for this project with See-Judge-Act formulating the various elements of inquiry utilized. The “See” stage of the pastoral cycle

took the form of the researcher's observations and formation of the research question. The first step was for the experiences of the researcher to be translated into survey and focus group questions. This initial stage involved gathering data through the survey and focus groups in order to explore perceptions of the effectiveness of adult formation and mission integration programs in Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. These methods allowed for a deeper situational exploration of the current state of Catholic identity and mission buy-in at these schools, ensuring that the research was grounded in real experiences and perspectives. The pastoral reality of the effectiveness of adult formation and mission integration programs in these schools was the main content of the "See" stage.

Following this, the "Judge" stage was conducted through theological reflection, analysis, and evaluation. This involved critically examining the data in light of the information shared through the survey and focus groups. By comparing the perceptions of participants to best practices in adult faith formation and mission integration, the research provided insights into how well these programs align with the Church's mission and what areas may require improvement. This reflective process sought to discern strengths, gaps, and opportunities for growth within existing programs in the Archdiocese of Chicago and in comparison to programs at various universities and other organizations.

The "Act" stage of the pastoral cycle is not fully realized in this project, as this would involve implementing concrete changes based on the findings. While recommendations are offered based on the identified strengths and areas of growth in this research, the responsibility for translating these insights into action falls to the individual

schools, dioceses, and organizations that seek to use this research for their own purposes. Their willingness to adapt and refine their adult formation and mission integration efforts will ultimately determine the impact of this project in shaping more effective strategies. The study presents these recommendations and areas for further study, offering schools a foundation for potential reforms. Individual institutions must adapt them based on their specific needs and contexts. The Pastoral Cycle, while traditionally used for theological reflection, also helps to shed light on the importance of pastoral care in a research setting. Ultimately, fostering a strong sense of mission among faculty and staff is an ongoing process that requires repeated practice of the Pastoral Cycle, intentionality, collaboration, and a commitment to the core values of Catholic education.

1.5 Anticipated Outcomes

This thesis project intends to:

1. Establish common vocabulary and elements for Catholic identity found in school mission statements.
2. List effective strategies and practices Catholic schools employ for increasing mission awareness, understanding, and investment among faculty and staff.
3. Identify initiatives aimed at increasing mission awareness and understanding among faculty and staff that were not effective and why.

1.6 Limitations

As with any project, there are limiting factors in this research. The primary limitation in this thesis project is the number and location of schools included in the

research. While all of the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago were invited to complete the survey questions, not all of the schools responded to the survey and focus group requests. As such, this project does not encompass the totality of Catholic school identity in Chicago. Additionally, schools were limited to high schools rather than incorporating elementary schools and universities. There was no time available to extend the research beyond the Archdiocese of Chicago or high schools, and as such, the project is limited by geography and age group within a particular archdiocese. Because of this, the impact of geography on Catholic school identity is a factor worth considering. Schools in different regions often develop distinct mission statements that reflect their local communities, historical contexts, and the specific needs of their student populations. For example, some schools in the Chicagoland area mention their dedication to the Chicago community. This would not be the case for schools in different cities, although they might make similar mentions about their local communities. Mission likely develops in different ways depending on the community in which it is established. While the results of this research and common features of Catholic high schools may be transferable to schools in different places, the experiences and perceptions of mission statements at Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago may not be true of Catholic high schools everywhere.

While all of the co-ed Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago were invited to participate in this research, the respondents do not represent a wide variety of races, socio-economic classes, or religious backgrounds. The NCEA reported in their 2023-2024 "Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing" that about

75% of the faculty at Catholic secondary schools identify as white.⁷ The lack of diversity in hiring at Catholic high schools can be attributed to a number of factors and might impact the results of this project. This is a larger concern that has been addressed by a number of sources in the world of Catholic education. Hiring practices, diversity initiatives, and recruiting a wider variety of faculty and staff members are the topics of many different studies^{8,9} and are an area ripe for further research. This particular project would benefit from a great number of voices representing a variety of races, ages, levels of experience, socio-economic classes, and religious backgrounds. The respondents do not mirror the greater community of Catholic school educators, as 89% of those participating in the survey identified as white, non-Hispanic or Latino. The lack of diversity in the survey results and focus group discussions limits the voices contributing to this research and, therefore, the analysis of data.

The survey was designed based on a four-point Likert scale; this intentional design was aimed at avoiding “neutral” responses or “I don't know” answers. While this system purposely produces a positive or negative skew in survey results, it does not leave room for further explanation, unknown information, or a middle ground. This may also introduce bias by forcing respondents into choosing an option that does not fully capture their perspective. This is particularly important in studies of Catholic school identity,

⁷ NCEA, "United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing," 31.

⁸ Rebekka J. Jez, Lauren Ramers, Melissa M. Burgess, and Julie C. Cantillon, "Preparing New Catholic School Educators for Inclusive Schools: An Analysis of University and Diocesan Teacher Training Research," *Journal of Catholic Education* 24 no. 2 (2021): 84–103, <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2402052021>.

⁹ Carlos Jiménez, Amanda Montez, and Deena A. Sellers, "The Jesuit Case for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in Catholic Schools," *America Magazine*, August 15, 2024, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/08/15/jesuit-schools-diversity-equity-inclusion-belonging-248474>.

where personal beliefs, theological literacy, and levels of engagement with school mission can vary widely among faculty and staff. To counteract this limitation, the survey included open-ended questions to allow for greater nuance and to provide participants with an opportunity to elaborate on their responses. However, open-ended responses present their own challenges, as they rely on participants' willingness to take the time to articulate their thoughts in detail. More information about survey and focus group design will be given in the following chapter.

Finally, any survey or focus group comes with its own limitations. This survey is based on the NCEA assessment tools used to gather data on "Catholic Identity Program Effectiveness" and "Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools."¹⁰ This data depends upon the truthfulness, perception, and feelings of the faculty, staff, and administrators completing the surveys and interviews. Survey results depend on how respondents interpret the questions in the survey, their experiences and emotions at the time they complete the survey, and their own history with Catholic schools. Whether or not participants are honest in their responses also dictates the accuracy of the data. In a focus group setting, if participants do not feel comfortable sharing their perceptions, opinions, and experiences, the information gathered may be lacking. The researcher did as much as she could to ensure that survey responses were accurate; a consent to participate was located at the beginning of the survey, asking respondents to indicate their willingness to answer the survey questions.

¹⁰ "Surveys," NCEA, National Catholic Educational Association, 2023, https://www.ncea.org/NSBECS/NSBECS/Assessment_Tools/Surveys.aspx?hkey=751cfa3d-3879-4a74-8795-7af64e925362.

The same is true of the focus group; consent to participate was gathered prior to the discussion. Anonymity and confidentiality measures were put in place; all names and identifying features were separated from responses in the analysis of project data. Participants were informed before contributing their thoughts that their identities and affiliations would be protected. Although focus groups were recorded, the only copies of the recordings were stored on the researcher's personal computer. This computer remains in the researcher's house in secure conditions. The recordings of the focus groups will be deleted from the device one year after the publication of this project. In a focus group setting, the potential for social desirability bias must also be considered; respondents may have been influenced by the presence of colleagues or administrators, leading them to tailor their responses to align with perceived institutional expectations rather than their true opinions. In the focus group discussions, there was no overlap between representatives from the same schools, so it is likely that this particular concern was avoided. Regardless of these protections, there is no guarantee that participants were completely frank in their responses.

While these limitations do not diminish the significance of the findings, they do highlight areas for further study. Expanding the scope of research to include Catholic elementary schools, universities, and a more diverse participant pool would enhance the generalizability of the results. Additionally, comparative studies of Catholic school identity across different geographic regions could provide valuable insights into how local contexts shape mission, governance, and institutional culture. By acknowledging these limitations, this research contributes to an ongoing conversation about Catholic school identity while recognizing the need for further exploration of this complex topic.

1.7 Audience

The intended audience for this research is current Catholic high school stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff, and school boards. The “culture makers” of a school, for example, those who influence and sustain its traditions, values, and ethos, will ideally be curious about these findings. This research has implications for those who design, organize, and coordinate adult faith formation processes. Faculty and staff development in Catholic schools is not solely about professional expertise but also about fostering a shared understanding of the school's mission and the theological principles that guide its work. Those directly responsible for the Catholic mission and identity of schools – school administration, including mission or ministry offices or officers, principals, presidents, and directors for diversity, equity, and inclusion – may benefit from this project. Faith formation leaders such as theology department chairs, campus ministers, mission officers at school networks, and diocesan education offices can utilize this research to refine their approaches to engaging faculty and staff in meaningful mission-driven formation. Similarly, those involved in hiring and recruitment, such as human resources personnel, school presidents, and hiring committees, may find the research beneficial as they consider ways to attract and retain educators who are both professionally excellent and committed to education. Anyone who designs, organizes, and coordinates adult faith formation processes, who heads up recruiting and hiring practices, and who serves as a trustee or board member can learn from the work done here.

1.8 Overview

The following chapters explore the themes found in this introduction with an in-depth analysis of Catholic identity and its relationship to mission, the research process of this project and its results, effective and ineffective strategies for adult formation programming, and general recommendations for stronger mission integration. Chapter 2 considers how Catholic identity is built and evaluated based on research from various sources, including the National Catholic Educational Association, the Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools, and the Congregation for Catholic Education. This chapter connects Catholic identity with Catholic mission in high schools, while introducing standards and assessments that scrutinize identity in schools. It offers common definitions for important vocabulary and the kinds of adult formation that take place in Catholic schools. Based on research, it looks at the structures used to increase mission awareness in faculty and staff. This chapter also presents an analysis of common elements found in the mission statements of the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. It finishes with an overview of the research plan for this project.

Chapter 3 provides information about the research project, including the survey and focus group design, an interpretation of the survey results, and observations from the focus group discussions. This chapter provides feedback on the effective and ineffective adult formation programs aimed at mission integration. It presents the perceptions and opinions of current educators in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Those surveyed and interviewed in the focus groups shared whether or not activities they felt that the activities they had participated in at their schools were effective in growing their knowledge and understanding of the school's mission. They shared from their personal

experiences and history of what has been and is currently offered at their schools. The researcher used word analysis to identify the shared methods and ideas from focus group members; this allowed for tracking of commonly used strategies and whether they were viewed by participants as effective.

In response to the findings of the project, Chapter 4 explores recommendations for best practices in mission integration and adult formation at Catholic high schools. Common themes from the survey and focus groups are analyzed in conjunction with mission-related research from Catholic universities and organizations. From here, the activities identified in the previous chapter were set against research and common practices outside of the domain examined in this project. The suggestions made by project participants line up with common methods utilized throughout the Church, in particular at the university level.

The final chapter of content, Chapter 5, recommends further ideas for improving mission integration beyond the work of adult formation. This research stems from the results of the survey and focus groups, as well as other systems in place that do not necessarily fall under the purview of a mission or ministry office. Suggestions like recruiting and hiring for mission, community building, and celebrating present successes have been investigated as potential supports for creating an environment where faculty and staff feel that they are part of the school's mission.

The conclusion to this project recapitulates the key findings of the research, highlights broader ministerial implications that may stem from this research, and the limitations that were present throughout the process. There are many directions this research might expand, given its focus on mission-driven organizations. The conclusion

notes these areas of further research alongside the most effective strategies explored as well as suggestions that may be beneficial when building a mission-focused community.

Catholic education is the essential work of the Church. In the chapters that follow, this project will explore the heart of Catholic school identity, uncovering the ways in which mission is not merely stated but known and lived. This academic investigation reflects the heart of Catholic education and the role of faculty and staff in shaping its future. A successful school not only teaches young people, but also invests in those who are invited into its community. By examining the strategies used to foster mission integration, the Catholic school is seen as more than just a place of learning, but a family of faith. Readers are invited to consider their own experiences with Catholic education, whether as a student, educator, administrator, or interested observer, and to contemplate how intentional formation can deepen the sense of belonging, purpose, and faith in these schools. By examining these questions, this researcher takes a step toward ensuring that Catholic schools remain not only places of academic excellence but also vibrant communities of faith, committed to their mission for generations to come.

Chapter 2: Defining Catholic Identity

2.1 Chapter Introduction

Catholic identity is the foundation upon which Catholic schools build their educational mission. Catholic high schools, like all faith-based institutions, must balance tradition with contemporary educational needs, ensuring that their mission remains relevant while rooted in Gospel values. The Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education affirms that all members of a Catholic school—administrators, faculty, staff, students, and families—bear responsibility for upholding and witnessing to its Catholic character.¹¹ This chapter examines how Catholic identity is constructed, owned, and communicated in high schools, particularly in the Archdiocese of Chicago. It explores the role of stakeholders in defining and reinforcing the mission of their schools and investigates how effectively schools integrate their faith-based values into daily life. By exploring the ways in which mission is developed, embraced, and assessed, this chapter seeks to understand best practices for strengthening Catholic identity in secondary education.

2.1.1 Who defines Catholic identity?

Who builds identity in a Catholic high school? How is the Catholic identity of the school established, evaluated, and encouraged on various levels and by various stakeholders? Is there a process or plan in place to support faculty, staff, and

¹¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of a Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022) §39, at Vatican City, Accessed 12 Apr 2024.
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/29/220329c.html>

administrators in learning the mission of the school and implementing it into their work? According to the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, within the community of the Catholic school, "Everyone has the obligation to recognize, respect and bear witness to the Catholic identity of the school, officially set out in the educational project. This applies to the teaching staff, the non-teaching personnel, and the pupils and their families."¹² Simply put, everyone involved in the institution is responsible for the Catholic identity of a school.

What Catholic identity looks like is, in many ways, dependent upon the community that defines it. Different religious orders live their Catholic identity in ways particular to their charism. Priests and laypersons have different ways of expressing their Catholic identity. Universities, elementary schools, and high schools all approach their Catholic identity according to the needs of their students. Because of this, the ways various Catholic high schools, even in the same diocese, express their identity and live out their mission vary greatly. The responsibility of constructing, owning, and communicating the Catholic identity of a school lies in all stakeholders of that institution; faculty, staff, and administrators must include the views of students and families along with other community members, such as board members, in their examination and evaluation of the mission of the school and how it contributes to the culture and identity of the organization.

Using the concept of "identity" as a distinguishing feature of a Catholic organization requires an explanation of the challenges posed by this term. An essential characteristic of the Christian faith is unity, and having a distinguishing "identity" that

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of a Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, §39.

separates rather than unifies seems to go against a broader sense of ecumenism. Despite this, there is some Scriptural basis to individual identity, which builds and strengthens the whole, rather than dividing it. When considering “identity” in Scripture, 1 Corinthians 12 comes to mind. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul introduces the idea of sharing in the Body of Christ as a community. Paul writes, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many.”¹³ If the Church is the Body that Paul speaks of, then each Catholic school, organization, parish, and individual is one part of the Body of Christ. Even in their unity, each school retains some special gift, just as Paul explains that different parts of the body have different functions,

If a foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,’ it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,’ it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended.¹⁴

Each part of the body retains particular functions and operations, yet all are part of the body. Similarly, Catholic schools retain unique Catholic identities, and yet can all be considered Catholic. Because Catholic identity cannot be objective due to the specific makeup of each school, the “identity” is that which points to its belonging in the overall body. In Christ, every identity points to Jesus and is brought together. As such, the specific mission statements, cultures, and environments of each Catholic school contribute to the overall mosaic of the Body of Christ.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 12:13-14 NABRE

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:15-18 NABRE

As they are critical to the success of a school community, “Mission and identity are the heart of the school and the reason the Catholic school exists.”¹⁵ Archbishop J. Michael Miller of the Congregation for Catholic Schools indicates that this responsibility of building and implementing mission is meant to be shared across all parties in a school rather than simply an office of mission or ministry, or the department of theology; “...we must always take special care to avoid the error that a Catholic school’s distinctiveness rests solely on the shoulders of its religious-education program.”¹⁶ By incorporating all stakeholders, in particular teachers and staff members, into the mission integration and identity-building process, they are more aware of the goals the school has, the character it seeks to convey to the world, and where they personally fit into this mission. In their research, Durr, Graves, and Hales offer, “A collegial spirit and productive collaboration via teams was noted as crucial to the ability for the school to carry out its student-centered philosophy.”¹⁷ Keeping the good of students as well as the spiritual formation of the adults in the community at the heart of a school’s strategic planning, development, and progress could align the priorities expressed in a school’s mission with its overall goals. This project surmises that when all parties involved in the school community own the identity and mission of the school, each in their own unique way. A cohesive community in which everyone works together for the good of the student body is more likely to follow.

¹⁵ Staudt, “To Change a School,” 128.

¹⁶ J. Michael Miller, *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools* (Sophia Institute Press, 2006), 52.

¹⁷ Tony Durr, Nicole Graves, and Patrick D. Hales, “Family Matters: Teachers’ Perceptions of Community and School Culture after Seven Years of Personalized Learning Reform,” *Middle Grades Review* 10, no. 1 (June 2024): 5.

The content of this project surveys Chicago area co-educational Catholic high schools to determine the perception of their Catholic identities and religious charisms. The religious programming of these schools will be evaluated based on their efficacy in raising awareness of the school's mission and values. This project asks stakeholders about the best practices their schools use to make sure the adult community within the school, specifically the faculty, staff, and administrators, has bought into the mission and identity of the school. This project asks about what the programming has done for the school community and if it has better rooted the community in its Catholic identity. This project examines what strategies are most efficacious when raising awareness of a school's mission, goals, and identity.

2.2 Definitions

It is helpful to define terms that will be used frequently in the course of this thesis. Many of these terms are commonly used in the mission statements of the Catholic schools examined in this project or in research pertaining to Catholic identity and formation.

Catholic identity: the Catholic character of a school and all activities that contribute to the overall goal of the school as an instrument of witness to the Gospel, as a community dedicated to the formation of the whole person, and as an academic entity set on encouraging knowledge, wisdom, and understanding in its students. Researcher Lorraine A. Ozar and her companions offer a thorough explanation of Catholic identity in their article, "Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards.":

The Catholic identity of Catholic schools, expressed in the Defining Characteristics of the NSBECS and rooted in the theology which informs and

grounds Church teachings on Catholic education must be measured not only by religious education, faith formation, and academic excellence, but also by the nature and quality of the school culture. This is a culture formed by the mission and shaped by the practices manifested in its curriculum and instruction, board recruitment and formation, human resource policies, transparency of program and student evaluation, careful and competent stewardship of resources, financial planning, and collaboration across all sectors.¹⁸

It is the understanding of this researcher that school culture and mission are separate entities that work together in establishing the nature of a school's Catholic identity. This "identity" element is the all-encompassing, defining "what" of a school – what makes it unique and what makes it Catholic.

Mission: the work of an organization, based on the ideals, vision, and motivation, that drives the goals of the organization. In theological terms, the idea of "mission" finds its roots in *missio*, or "sending forth."¹⁹ From here, the terms "missionary" and "emissary" stem; following this etymology, an organization's mission is what that organization is sent forth to accomplish, in other words, the work it does to develop the Kingdom of God. "Mission" and "mission statement" are used interchangeably in this project.

Mission is the main focus of this project, as it is the driving force behind planning, decisions, and fundraising efforts at many organizations. Having a mission by which an administration can launch future initiatives, support the school culture, and identify values that are important to the community. An organization's mission is the guiding light by which all decisions are made, pointing to the identity of the organization.

¹⁸ Lorraine A. Ozar, Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill, Teresa Barton, Elizabeth Calteaux, Cristina J. Hunter, and Shiya Yi, "Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School Standards," *Journal of Catholic Education* 22, no. 1 (May 28, 2019): 159.

¹⁹ Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "Eucharistic Adoration and *Missio*," *Liturgical Ministry* 13 (December 31, 2004): 88–95, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=9057335f-9983-379d-aae4-e8f4bc6bc093>.

Mission statement: a statement of purpose that guides all the activities of an organization. In a Catholic school setting, mission-related activities encompass the entire school community and help to define the identity of the institution. In their study of how Catholic identity was perceived by students at their university, researchers Lauren A. Milner and Professor Joseph R. Ferrari of DePaul University provide details on how to define a mission statement:

Mission statements are usually brief in length, clear in purpose, and positive in approach. These statements define the institution's purpose, distinctiveness, and future; drive the institution's operations by providing guidelines for day-to-day decision making; and help members connect and identify with the organization. Mission statements are active and are tailored toward moving an organization forward in achieving future goals. Within higher education settings, mission statements focus the energies of employees to balance the relationship between educational goals and the needs of the outside world across diverse stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, and staff). Mission statements help everyone work toward common goals and provide an overarching vision toward which each member may strive.²⁰

In this research, “mission statement” and “mission” are used as synonyms; both refer to the work a school does to obtain its vision and construct its identity.

Charism: the unique character or spirit of a particular individual, group, organization, or religious order, which extends to the organizations sponsored by that order. All Christians have gifts and character that can be shared for the good of the community. For the purpose of this project, the understanding of charism is attached to the sponsoring religious orders of the schools included. The University of Portland, a Holy Cross school, offers this helpful definition:

In some ways, you can think of an order’s “charism” as its personality, although that is an oversimplification. “Charism” is the inspirational purpose that starts communities and keeps them going. It is their community mission and animating spirit. It gives religious communities distinctive flavors and imbues their daily

²⁰ Lauren A. Milner and Joseph R. Ferrari, “Embracing the Institutional Mission: Influences of Identity Processing Styles,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (2010): 258.

practice with meaning. In times of change, communities turn back to their founding charism or spirit—their purpose—to discern how to move forward and sustain themselves.²¹

Charism expands beyond this definition, but in regard to Catholic schools considered in this project, charism distinctly refers to how this character is applied in the school context, which may be through formation programs or activities that focus on a sponsoring religious order.

School culture: policies, values, behaviors, and beliefs that define an educational community. School culture is made up of fundamental beliefs and assumptions, shared values, norms, patterns, and behaviors, and the physical space of the school,²² according to the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This is not specific to Catholic school communities; rather, every school has a palpable culture that results from “both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices,” and “is heavily shaped by a school’s particular institutional history.”²³ School culture is directly tied to its identity as expressed by Leah Shafer of Harvard, “In a strong culture, there are many, overlapping, and cohesive interactions among all members of the organization. As a result, knowledge about the organization’s distinctive character — and what it takes to thrive in it — is widely spread and reinforced.”²⁴ When considering how school culture impacts mission, Staudt states, “The school culture gives flesh to this mission and enables others to experience it concretely, bringing all the various elements of school life into a

²¹ “What Do They Mean When They Use the Word ‘Charism’?,” University of Portland, accessed January 2025, <https://www.up.edu/garaventa/did-you-know/meaning-charism.html>.

²² Leah Shafer, “What Makes a Good School Culture?,” Harvard Graduate School of Education, July 23, 2018, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/07/what-makes-good-school-culture>.

²³ Great Schools Partnership, “School Culture Definition,” The Glossary of Education Reform, November 25, 2013, <https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/>.

²⁴ Shafer, “What Makes a Good School Culture?.”

coherent whole.”²⁵ For more details on school culture, researchers from South Dakota State University – Tony Durr, Nicole Graves, and Patrick Hales – give a compound definition of school culture in association with community:

School community and culture encompass the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize interactions within educational settings (Phillips, 1996). Van Houtte (2005) stated that school climate encapsulates the shared beliefs and experiences among colleagues. “School culture is the shared experiences both in school and out of school (traditions and celebrations) that create a sense of community, family, and team membership” (Wagner, 2006 p.41).²⁶

School culture is *how* the identity of a school is lived out.

Stakeholders: in education, those who have invested their time, talent, and treasure into ensuring the welfare of a school, the well-being of its students, and its overall success as an institution can be referred to as stakeholders. Generally speaking, stakeholders can include a broad spread of individuals or groups: “administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives.”²⁷ In this project, the term is limited to the adult community of a school made up of administration, faculty, and staff.

Formation: within the Catholic Church, refers to the process of spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and personal development which deepens one’s relationship with God and enhances one’s ability to live out the Christian vocation. This process is essential for clergy, religious, and laity, as it fosters a deeper understanding of faith and equips individuals to fulfill their roles within the Church and society.²⁸ In the context of Catholic

²⁵ Staudt, “To Change a School,” 133.

²⁶ Durr, Graves, and Hales, “Family Matter,” 1.

²⁷ Great Schools Partnership, “Stakeholder Definition,” The Glossary of Education Reform, September 25, 2014, <https://www.edglossary.org/stakeholder/>.

²⁸ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, (Rome, 1990).

education, formation is important for building knowledge and understanding of the unique character of a school.

2.3 Who establishes the school's Catholic identity and assists in upholding its mission, assessing its efficacy, and revising when needed?

School culture, mission, community, and identity are tied together, and all are established and encouraged by the adults who remain in the organization outside of the four years any given student will be present there. Many faculty and staff remain with the community longer than any student will; because of this, they shape the way the mission, values, and goals of the institution are expressed – that is, the identity of the school. This applies to all faculty and staff, regardless of how long they remain at the school; their value in defining, shaping, and embodying the culture of the school makes an impact, whether or not they spend their whole career at the same school. However, it takes time for the ripple effects of administrative decisions to be felt among the student population. As such, the responsibility of continually assessing school culture and adapting it to fit the needs of the present students lies in the hands of the adult community within the organization. While Catholic mission is not necessarily school culture, the Catholic character of a school is certainly a key part of its culture that distinguishes a Catholic high school from a public high school.

The Catholic school ... should be an environment that is truly catholic. This will become apparent in the attitude of administrators, teachers, and students, guided and shaped by faith and charity. The community must instantiate the shared mission and values of the Catholic school, becoming a sacramental embodiment of them.²⁹

²⁹ Staudt, "To Change a School," 133.

The faculty, staff, and administration of a school are responsible for translating its mission into strategies, curricula, and programs that strengthen the Catholic identity of the school. Archbishop Miller commented on the necessity of proper preparation for the adult community in a Catholic school:

To be effective bearers of the Church’s educational tradition, however, laypersons who teach in Catholic schools need a ‘religious formation that is equal to their general, cultural, and, most especially, professional formation.’ It is up to the ecclesial community to see to it that such formation is required of and made available to all Catholic-school educators, those already in the system and those preparing to enter it.³⁰

Without this formation, the adult community may not be equipped to contribute to mission building activities, they may not feel that they are part of the school’s mission, or they may not feel connected to the community if they are not part of the Church.

Support of a mission may be more likely when stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, administration, and parents, have a hand in formulating or revisiting the mission statement and in creating or contributing to a strategic plan to uphold the mission and identity of the organization. “Articulating a strong mission and communicating it clearly keeps the goal of education at the forefront of the school's life and ensures fidelity to it. The mission of the school does not need to be discovered but rather accepted from the Church and applied to the dynamics of the local school.”³¹ When the adults in Catholic high schools are invited to invest in their institutions' strategic goals in regards to mission and identity, there is ownership over the culture of the school and an interest in certifying that others buy into the mission as well. Additionally, “a wide range of school effectiveness research has consistently shown that commitment to a shared mission

³⁰ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 5.

³¹ Staudt, “To Change a School,” 128.

statement is one of the leading factors differentiating more effective schools from less effective schools.”³² The construction element is derived from administrator, board, and community involvement in designing or revising a school’s mission statement. This implies thoughtful input from school administration, board members, and other stakeholders into the purpose of the school, its defining features and attributes, and the population it intends to serve. Many Catholic high schools in the Chicago area have existed for decades, boasting well-established mission statements that may have been reexamined through the years with changing demographics and dynamics. Because of this, current faculty, staff, and administrators may not have had a hand in the original creation of the mission statement. Schools often revisit their mission statements when they participate in a strategic planning or accreditation process. The re-examination process allows for adjustments to be made based on the needs of the school community. Regardless of when a mission statement was established, the adults in the school community should understand the mission of the school and recognize their own contributions to that mission.

One of the newer Catholic schools in the Archdiocese was able to share about the process they utilized for creating their community’s mission statement. The researcher interviewed the President of DePaul College Prep, Mary Dempsey, about the process used to formulate a mission statement that would be functional for the school. The school president, principal, board members, and some faculty members engaged in the brainstorming and design of the mission and vision statements for the new school. They

³² Steven E. Stemler, Damian Bebell, and Lauren Ann Sonnabend, “Using School Mission Statements for Reflection and Research,” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2010): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x10387590>.

were able to imagine what they hoped for the school, solicit advice and feedback from members of the community, and put into words the vision that remains tied to the history of the school. Prior to adopting a Vincentian identity in partnership with DePaul University, the school was run by the Congregation of the Resurrection under the name Gordon Technical High School. The shift in identity brought an opportunity to consider the goals of the school as well as the community being served by the school. The process of configuring a new mission statement was “very collaborative”³³ and set the tone for the school to be a “community anchor for Chicago.”³⁴ Collaboration and inclusion of voices is a common trend in developing mission statements for high schools.³⁵ As DePaul Prep is now over ten years old, it has completed two strategic planning periods during which the mission was reexamined, however there was no need to adjust the statement at those times. As most schools do not share in this experience of creating a mission statement from scratch, it might be a hope of the institution that a sense of ownership over the mission begins in the moments a potential employee begins the hiring process. In onboarding procedures and oftentimes initial job interviews, the mission statement of a school takes center stage as new hires and potential employees learn the significance of the statement to a school’s identity, heritage, and charism.

Hiring for mission, while not a new concept, has allowed administrators to reinvigorate the identity of a school by highlighting the importance of the mission from the very beginning. Miller shares the significance of this practice by saying, “Recruit

³³ Mary Dempsey, “The DePaul Prep Mission Statement,” Interview by Sara Conneely, January 24, 2025.

³⁴ Dempsey, interview.

³⁵ Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend, “Using School Mission Statements for Reflection and Research,” 407.

teachers who are practicing Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the gospel, and who can contribute to the achievement of the school’s Catholic identity and apostolic goals.”³⁶ Catholic colleges and universities have been at the forefront of mission-driven recruitment and hiring as leadership roles previously held by religious men and women have been impacted by the lower rates of vocations since the 1970s.³⁷ The hiring for mission process is essential to the overall culture and identity of the school, as “it is the faculty who ultimately express and define a university’s deepest convictions.”³⁸ More information about hiring for mission can be found in Chapter 5. Along with hiring practices, the formation of all employees is key to the identity-building process and to mission awareness and understanding.

The formation process for employees of Catholic high schools takes many forms but most schools begin introducing their mission, values, and culture during the onboarding process. The process continues through the course of employment with a variety of activities, listed in detail below. Chapter 3 discusses at length the formation programs, methods, and strategies in use in the Archdiocese of Chicago, based on the survey given through this project and focus group discussions held for this project. With this responsibility held in the trust of the school employees, the institution “needs to create a variety of faculty development programs that help to form and sustain faculty as

³⁶ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 55.

³⁷ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, “Catholic Religious Vocations: Decline and Revival,” *Review of Religious Research* 42 no. 2 (2000): 125.

³⁸ Don Briel, Kenneth E. Goodpaster, Michael Naughton, and Dennis H. Holtschneider, *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education*, (The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 103.

they develop their own roles within the [institution's] Catholic mission.”³⁹ The foundation built in the formation process may lead to much more than institutional knowledge and mission awareness; formation can lead to community, trust, and success for the entire school. Programs focused on instilling mission understanding take various shapes and are aimed at developing different areas of the employee such as spirituality, service and social justice, and community.

2.4 What is already happening in terms of mission and Catholic identity construction, buy-in, and evaluation?

The development of programs supporting mission recognition and building Catholic identity often derives from adult formation offices, mission and ministry departments, the school's sponsoring order, or directly from the administration of the school. Designing and implementing the programs falls on the shoulders of individuals who are usually responsible for the formation of the entire school, not just the adult community. Oftentimes, the mission of a school remains the daily work of school administrators, rather than trickling down to students and staff.⁴⁰ Many schools do not have dedicated personnel for mission work, campus ministry, or identity. Of the high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, seventeen have an administrative position dedicated to mission. However, these individuals rarely have a department behind them. If anything, they work with the campus ministry team or the theology department, despite

³⁹ Briel, Goodpaster, and Naughton, *What We Hold in Trust*, 115. This book is geared toward Catholic colleges and universities, however, the methods, suggestions, and information shared can be applied to Catholic schools more broadly.

⁴⁰ Paul Young, "Finding Your School's Mission and Vision," Edutopia, November 8, 2023, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/forming-schools-vision-mission-statements/>.

the full-time roles these employees already hold. Four schools rely on theology teachers to also serve as campus ministers, and three schools have no ministry department listed on their websites. As with other professional development opportunities, a lack of enthusiasm in and even resentment toward mission-centered events are quite common.⁴¹ Yet, creative and dedicated individuals constantly attempt to develop programs that will engage, inform, and inspire their colleagues in both active and passive ways. Formation activities are any strategies, programs, or initiatives with the goal of increasing mission awareness and engagement, teaching about the charism and Catholic identity of the school or inviting the faculty and staff into a closer relationship with the sponsoring order of the school. As Catholic schools are intended to form the whole human person of their students, the adult community of a Catholic school may also benefit from such formation:

Holistic formation integrates a number of goals, beginning, of course, with the formation of the mind and truth, as we can form our minds to the reality of the created world and to God's revelation. It also includes growing and goodness, as we shape our desires and form the will and emotions through virtue.⁴²

The strategies for mission integration among faculty and staff can be categorized as related to spirituality, community, or service and social justice. Professional development for new employees often revolves around the congregation or order that sponsors the school and how it has shaped the school's identity.

Formation can take different shapes; for the purposes of this project, the researcher has defined formation as either passive or active. In terms of active versus passive approaches to adult formation and identity knowledge, the researcher would

⁴¹ Alina Eugenia Iancu, Andrei Rusu, Cristina Măroiu, Roxana Păcurar, and Laurențiu P. Maricuțoiu, "The Effectiveness of Interventions Aimed at Reducing Teacher Burnout: A Meta-Analysis," *Educational Psychology Review* 30, no. 2 (2018): 373-396, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9420-8>.

⁴² Staudt, "To Change a School," 130.

classify existing programs to build and encourage mission identity knowledge and buy-in as follows:

Passive Formation: Any reading or listening activity that does not require participation, feedback, or collaboration. For example, newsletters, required or optional reading, online courses or certification programs through sponsoring order or other organizations, lectures, “talks” or other listening sessions, institute or professional development days where the majority of the time is spent listening to others, new employee onboarding that does not involve hands-on activities, and visible signs and symbols around the school that emphasize the mission and charism of the school.

Active Formation: Programs and activities that require hands-on engagement or participation from participants. For example, faculty-staff retreat, chaperoning student retreats, Mass or other sacramental opportunities, service projects, social justice projects, pilgrimage experiences, book club or readings that involve a discussion group, mentorship opportunities, and community building events that focus on spirituality such as “Theology on Tap,” “Soup and Substance,” “Agape Latte Talks,” or “Coffee and Conversation” events.

Of these many programs, each can be categorized in several ways; the researcher has found three main categories to which each activity might belong: spirituality, community, and service and social justice. These categories are adapted from the tasks of catechesis found in the National Directory for Catechesis and the four areas of formation explained in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. According to the National Directory for Catechesis, catechesis is comprised of six fundamental tasks:

1. Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.

2. Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and sacraments
3. Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.
4. Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ
5. Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.
6. Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society.⁴³

Spirituality activities, which might fall under the first, second, or fourth task of catechesis, include any activities that directly connect to the spiritual life of the school and its sponsoring religious order, for example Mass, prayer, retreats, meditation, spiritual direction, Bible study groups, faith sharing groups, and other sacramental opportunities. ***Community*** activities, which might fall under the fifth or sixth task of catechesis, include any opportunity to gather with colleagues – formally or informally – in which kinship is built through invitation or proximity, for example mentorship activities, “Lunch and Learn” sessions, newsletters, school sponsored book clubs, new employee onboarding, attending student retreats as a chaperone, and professional development opportunities where effort is exerted to build a sense of mutuality among employees. The ***service and social justice*** activities, which might fall under the third task of catechesis, include community service events that faculty and staff partake in together, social justice advocacy projects hosted by the school, and diversity, equity, and inclusion programming. Of course, many strategies and programs mentioned here may fit into multiple categories; for example, a retreat might include both passive (listening to a member of the sponsoring religious order speak about the founder of the order) and active (discussing in small groups the impact of that founder on the school community)

⁴³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*, (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), #20.

formation activities and incorporate community building and service (shared lunch and a service activity) as well as practices of spirituality (opening with a prayer on the theme of the day and closing with mass).

Using the structure offered by the six fundamental tasks of catechesis also aligns with the four areas of formation laid out in *Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord* by Sherry A. Weddell. While Weddell's categories of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation⁴⁴ are intended for lay ecclesial ministers, they can be applied to the formation of Catholic school employees as well. The types of formation expressed above align with the definitions Weddell gives for human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. For example, community activities might be human or pastoral in nature. Formation activities aimed at spirituality align easily with spiritual in Weddell's system. Activities with a social justice or service bend might be human or pastoral as well. Passive formation activities often fall into the category of intellectual or spiritual formation, while active formation activities are more likely to be pastoral or human in nature. These frameworks provide a useful starting point for directors of formation, mission integration personnel, and ministers serving adults in a school community.

2.5 Existing Standards for Catholic Identity

Many organizations and individuals have worked to uncover the defining characteristics of a Catholic school. Documents and information from various dioceses, the Vatican, and Catholic organizations offer an examination into the current state of

⁴⁴ Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path of Knowing and Following Jesus*, (Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2012), 34.

Catholic education in the United States. In 2006, the Holy See published a document, written by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, stating the defining characteristics of a Catholic school. In *The Five Essential Marks of a Catholic School*, Miller identifies the foundational elements that set a Catholic school apart from any other school. His guiding characteristics provide a foundation from which Catholic educators can ensure that the work they do is aligned with the overall goal of Catholic education. Mission-driven institutions are concerned with educating students not just in their spiritual and academic lives, but in all facets of the person. To do so well requires proper training and formation of educators within the community, dedication to the process on the part of those educators, and a commitment to the Gospel that infuses every aspect of the community.

According to Miller, all Catholic schools must be:

1. Inspired by a supernatural vision
2. Founded on Christian anthropology
3. Animated by communion and community
4. Imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum
5. Sustained by Gospel witness⁴⁵

The text sponsored by the Congregation for Catholic Education expresses the influence that the faith must have on all areas of a school. Miller states, “Authentic Catholic educators recognize Christ and his understanding of the human person as a measure of a school’s catholicity.”⁴⁶ The extent to which Christ’s Gospel message and ministry are active parts of the rhetoric, strategic planning, development, and curriculum determines the visibility and viability of the school’s mission and identity. It is not the sole responsibility of the sponsoring religious order, the Theology department, or the campus

⁴⁵ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 17.

⁴⁶ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 26.

ministry team to live out the Catholic identity of the school. As such, proper formation of all stakeholders, regardless of their personal belief systems, is a priority.

Miller is not the only person who has noted the importance of a Christ-centered foundation for Catholic education. Others have researched, compiled, and suggested what they believe separates a Catholic school from public, charter, and other private schools. As Jared Staudt shares in *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*,

The Catholic faith makes a Catholic school distinct from any other school. Therefore, we can describe distinctive elements of a Catholic school from that perspective. The Catholic school:

- Is a community of believers, expressing the faith of its students, teachers, and administrators.
- Teaches about God and the Catholic faith.
- Prays in the classroom and in the liturgy.
- Adheres faithfully to all that Jesus has given to his Church.
- Serves others within and outside of the school community.⁴⁷

Based on these guiding principles from Miller and other sources, the National Catholic Educational Association created its own benchmarks and standards for Catholic education in 2012. The standards put forth by the NCEA are very similar to those established by Archbishop Miller. The NCEA took Miller's suggestions and expanded upon them within the four domains of Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) utilize two different assessment tools to measure Catholic Identity Program Effectiveness and Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools in 13 different standards. Individual schools

⁴⁷ R. Jared Staudt, "Teaching the Catholic Tradition," in *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, ed. R. Jared Staudt (The Catholic Education Press, 2020), 64-65.

and dioceses are invited to use the NSBECS as a way to gather information on the performance of their programs in the four domain areas. The NCEA itself does not evaluate using the NSBECS, but the program has been used by various organizations for accreditation, accountability, leadership training, strategic planning, evaluation of principals, professional development, and recognition of schools.⁴⁸ The researcher for this project used the assessment tools published by the NCEA as a guideline for her own mission and identity perception survey.

The first domain of the NSBECS, Mission and Catholic Identity, most directly relates to this project. There are four standards within this domain, each of which breaks down into about five or six specific benchmarks. This researcher drew from these standards the mission statement must be the heart of the school, “An excellent Catholic school is driven and guided by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic identity that includes gospel values, a focus on the Eucharist, and a commitment to communal faith formation, academic excellence, missionary discipleship, and service.”⁴⁹ Reflections of Miller’s guidelines are evident in the NSBECS, as are other sources utilized for the creation of the standards and benchmarks. Standard four in particular highlights the importance of formation for the adult community of a school: “An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for Christ-centered adult faith formation and action in service of missionary discipleship and social justice.”⁵⁰ By examining these elements, the NSBECS assists in evaluating how effective

⁴⁸ “Applications,” NSBECS (NCEA, 2023), <https://www.ncea.org/NSBECS/NSBECS/Applications/Applications.aspx?hkey=d40128a0-efcd-4e9d-9dc9-b31272969c42>.

⁴⁹ NCEA NSBECS Advisory Council, ed., “National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, 2nd Edition” (Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association, 2023), 12.

⁵⁰ NCEA NSBECS Advisory Council, 15.

present programs are in increasing mission integration, understanding, and application among faculty, staff, students, families, and administration.

The dioceses and schools that have utilized the NSBECS have published reports of their findings. However, the Archdiocese of Chicago is not one of the groups. Rather, the Archdiocese of Chicago has utilized similar assessment and survey tools to evaluate the Catholicity, mission identity, and academic excellence of its elementary schools.

Using the foundation of the NSBECS, Dr. Melissa Link spearheaded a mission and identity review process of the Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese.

Ultimately, what was produced by the Archdiocese varied slightly from the NSBECS but helped to establish similar baselines for the perception of Catholic identity and presence of mission by key stakeholders such as parents, faculty, and administrators in the surveyed schools. Nearly all of the elementary schools in the Archdiocese are attached to a parish community and therefore practice a dual leadership structure with the pastor and principal sharing responsibility for decisions made in the school. The surveys used by the Office of Catholic Schools offer space for all leaders to share their perspectives.⁵¹

The reports produced by existing organizations assisted in the design of this project. Additionally, examining various methodologies for research in “Practical Theology and Qualitative Research” by Swinton and Mowat gave the researcher a more robust knowledge of potential approaches to this project. Swinton and Mowat present research methods and case studies for practitioners of theology; they cover ministry in a variety of modes and issues, examining the methodologies that can be used in theological reflection. The background they give on the discipline of practical theology, practices

⁵¹ Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools, *Catholic Identity Survey*, 2022.

used to explore theology, and the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative research methods in practical theology lays important groundwork for a practical theologian asking research questions.

Swinton and Mowat draw on the work of Pattison's "mutual critical conversation," a cycle of reflection that mirrors the pastoral cycle used in this project. This model of theological reflection is as follows: Experience – situational exploration – theological reflection – revised practice. For this project, the experience came in the form of the researcher's observations and research questions. This led to the situational exploration of surveying perceptions of how effective adult formation and mission integration programs are at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The focus group element of this project would also fall under situational exploration. Both the initial experience and situational exploration would align with the "See" function in the pastoral cycle. Theological reflection and analysis came next in this project; this would fall under "Judge" in the pastoral circle. Finally, what is not encompassed in this project is the "Act" or revised practice portion of the cycle. Although suggestions are made based on best practices that surfaced during this research, individual organizations would be responsible for revising their practices based on the results here. The work of Swinton and Mowat draws a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods, which was enlightening. "It may be helpful to think of qualitative methods as offering a particular way of *seeing* and *discovering*."⁵² Their practical approach to theological reflection sets a framework for this research. This project attempts to do just that – understand what is seen and discover the best practices involved.

⁵² John Swinton and Harriett Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (SCM Press, 2013), 30.

2.6 Existing Data on Catholic High Schools in America

The National Catholic Educational Association publishes a report on schools, staffing, and enrollment every year; this information allows us to glimpse what the broader picture of Catholic identity at all Catholic schools in the United States looks like presently. According to the NCEA, about 75% of all Catholic high school students and about 60% of Catholic high school faculty identified as Catholic in the 2023-2024 school year.⁵³ The report gives some insight into the number of Catholic community members at Catholic schools, the factors contributing to shifting demographics in these schools, and the way in which schools have been able to adapt.

Amidst societal upheaval and educational instability, Catholic schools have emerged as beacons of stability, reversing years of enrollment decline. Faced with challenges such as technological shifts, demographic changes, and the pandemic's impact, these institutions have adapted strategically. ... This resilience underscores their enduring commitment to providing a grounded, faith-based education in a world that often seems in flux.⁵⁴

In spite of challenges faced by all schools, Catholic schools have been able to remain true to their ideologies and values, providing stable places for student growth in the midst of societal changes. Given the influx of students and newly hired professionals at Catholic schools, a strong Catholic identity is more important than ever, as it is the main differentiating factor between religiously affiliated schools and public schools. Around 21% of students and 16% of faculty at Catholic schools surveyed by the NCEA identify

⁵³ NCEA, "United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing" (Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association, 2024), 27, 30.

⁵⁴ NCEA, "National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," VIII.

as not Catholic.⁵⁵ These individuals add to the diverse community of Catholic schools; their presence is valuable, important, and necessary for the growth and development of Catholic schools. Despite changing demographics, the Catholic identity of the institution must be preserved and supported. With this shift in religious identity among people within the school, it is wise to share the beauty of Catholic culture and heritage with all members of the community through mission integration and identity work, such as adult formation programs, student retreats, theology curriculum, and parent events. In order for this reality to be present, the adult community must be prepared to contribute to the mission and charism of the school community.

The present state of Catholic schools, as observed by the NCEA, provides insight into how Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago may look. The Archdiocese of Chicago has the second-highest enrollment in Catholic schools of all dioceses in the US. There are currently 29 Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, 16 co-educational schools, seven all-girls schools, and six all-boys schools. Beyond this, there is not much information on the demographics of the high schools within the Archdiocese. Individual schools occasionally publish data briefs with breakdowns of their student body's race, gender, and religious identity, usually for recruiting and admissions purposes. Aside from generalities, it is difficult to decipher information about student and faculty religious affiliations. There could be a number of reasons for this; the researcher presumes that the central factor in the lack of centralized information rests in the reality that schools are sponsored by different orders rather than the Archdiocese. While cooperation with the Archbishop is necessary in many ways, the Archdiocese is not

⁵⁵ NCEA, "National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," 27 & 30.

responsible for collecting data on high schools in the same way it is for elementary schools.

The researcher designed the survey based on questions from the NSBECS and the Archdiocese of Chicago. The survey consisted of thirty-two questions, the first seven of which collected demographic information: gender, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, school represented, relationship to school, and years at school. After gathering this basic information, the survey was split into two main sections: Mission and Identity Questions and Formation Questions. In an effort to make the survey process as simple as possible, the majority of the questions posed a statement and offered a Likert-style of four responses for participants to choose from: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The goal of using four response options as opposed to five was to force a positive or negative reaction to each statement. This compelled respondents to agree or disagree with statements rather than remaining neutral when describing their schools. Honest responses are more present in an even-number Likert-style survey.⁵⁶ Survey questions can be found in Appendix A. Having the foundation laid out in the NSBECS assessment tools on “Catholic Identity Program Effectiveness” and “Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools,” the researcher adapted questions found in these two surveys, along with the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic School “Catholic Identity Survey” given to parents, students, and teachers annually. The adaptation was necessary as the elements being assessed were not formation programs or ministry initiatives for the student body. The NSBECS and Archdiocese surveys were concerned

⁵⁶ Rodrigo Schames Kreitchmann, Francisco J. Abad, Vicente Ponsoda, Maria Dolores Nieto, and Daniel Morillo, “Controlling for Response Biases in Self-Report Scales: Forced-Choice vs. Psychometric Modeling of Likert Items,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02309>.

primarily with the experience of students and their perceptions of Catholicity at their schools. The researcher, however, examined the perceptions and opinions of the faculty, staff, and administrators at those schools. While gauging an overall impression of the Catholic environment in these places is useful, it was not directly related to the thesis of this project. More important were the questions aimed at assessing how faculty and staff perceived the Catholic identity of the school. The questions in the research survey, which explored specific formation programming, were created by the researcher. More information about the design of the survey and focus group questions can be found in Chapter 3.

2.7 Common Mission Elements Defining Catholic Identity

Before gathering survey and focus group data from individuals, the researcher performed an analysis of the mission statements of all Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. These statements were gathered from the individual websites of each school and compiled in a document for analysis. From here, commonalities between the statements were identified and defined, allowing for observation of the elements that are consistent between different Catholic communities. Having a comprehensive list of terms used in the various mission statements allows the researcher to highlight what these Catholic schools hold in common when determining what defines them as Catholic schools. There are 29 Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago; 16 of these schools are co-educational and 13 are single gender. Of the single gender schools, six are all-men and seven are all-women. There are 13 different religious orders represented at these schools; schools under the orders of the Augustinians, Carmelites, Christian

Brothers, Congregation of St. Joseph, Dominicans, Holy Cross Order, Jesuits, Lasallians, Sacred Heart, Salesians, Sisters of Mercy, Viatorians, and Vincentians are present in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Unique approaches to Catholic identity are defined by the charism of each individual religious order. Charism dictates a large part of the mission and identity of the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. As all 29 high schools are operated by religious orders, the virtues and values sacred to each order drive their mission. Several schools share sponsorship and as such their charism is similar, yet the distinct nature of each school can be sensed in the community. While formation in charism is important to the identity of the school, “We cannot forget that a school is first Catholic before it can be molded according to the specific charism of a religious institute.”⁵⁷ If mission statements are an indication of the priorities of a school, which is an assertion made in this research, then the schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago affirm their Catholicity as a priority before their charism.

In examining the mission statements of these 29 schools through a textual analysis, several common elements appear. Unsurprisingly to the researcher, the word “Catholic” appears most frequently in the mission statements examined, and in fact is present over thirty times between 29 statements. After analyzing the statements, several words stood out as appearing most frequently across the 29 mission statements. After the word “Catholic,” the most commonly used terms are “faith,” “education,” or “educational,” and “college.” Given these factors, the priority of these schools – their responsibility as Catholic institutions to educate their students – takes center stage. Their tradition and history are frequently cited, along with mentions of their specific religious

⁵⁷ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 6.

orders and charism. Values commonly associated with Christian virtue, such as “service,” “leadership,” “diversity,” and “community,” are each included in at least one-third of the mission statements. These institutions strive to instill in their students the confidence it takes to be leaders and the compassion to make service part of everyday life, preparing them to contribute positively to society. The emphasis placed on diversity and inclusion conveys a dedication to creating safe environments built on respect and embracing differences, which is seen as integral to their identities. In keeping with the clear shared goal of every Catholic high school, “God” is mentioned ten times, and “young men,” “young women,” “young people,” or “students” are mentioned fifteen times among the mission statements. At the center of each of these statements is the Catholic faith and concern for the well-being and development of adolescents in the city of Chicago. These mission statements emphasize the identity of these schools as Catholic institutions, highlighting their commitment to faith, community, and service. From these frequently mentioned words, the call of these schools can be deduced as shaping the young people in their care, serving the community of which they are part, and working toward a world led by Gospel values.

An analysis of key terms used in mission statements assists in identifying the priorities of a school. The terms found in multiple mission statements correlate to the pillars of formation found in “Co-Workers in the Vineyard.” Human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral are named as the four areas of formation for lay ecclesial leaders. However, these areas of formation are reflected in the commonly used terms found in Catholic high school mission statements. Catholic schools seek to holistically approach education, ensuring that their students are prepared for lives of service, justice,

and virtue. As noted above, some of the most frequently used terms are Catholic, faith, and God, which can be associated with spiritual formation. Community, young men/women/people, community, and leadership speak to human formation. The terms education and college prep incorporate intellectual formation. Finally, service, tradition, and diversity reflect pastoral formation. The spiritual foundation upon which each of these schools is built strongly shines through in their visions for their institutions. Through specific mentions of the sponsoring organizations and their unique characteristics, a strong sense of community and attachment to the broader spiritual family appears to be essential to the mission of most schools. The various elements of these assertions demonstrate that each of these schools cares deeply about the development of the whole person, as the majority of the schools mention growth beyond just academic prowess. They assert the importance of spiritual, ethical, physical, social, emotional, personal, intellectual, and moral progress while maintaining significant focus on academic pursuit. Overall, these mission statements collectively aim to develop students who are not only academically prepared for a higher education, should they choose to pursue further schooling, but also spiritually grounded, morally responsible, and socially conscious on a local and global scale. A full assessment of the content analysis of the 29 mission statements is available in Appendix C.

2.8 Research Plan and Data Collection

The researcher rooted her ideas in the pastoral circle of see, judge, act and modified the terms to specifically account for the action taken by the adult community in a school as the primary professionals responsible for carrying out the school's mission

and charism. Following this line of reasoning, the revised pastoral circle of construct, buy-in, and evaluation targets the need of the adults in Catholic high schools to invest in their institutions' strategic goals regarding their mission and identity. According to Miller, “Catholic educators are expected to be models for their students by bearing transparent witness to Christ and to the beauty of the gospel.”⁵⁸ Therefore, their formation is essential to the work and mission of the school. Without a knowledge and understanding of the reason a school is Catholic, the way it lives out that Catholicity, and active participation from adults in the school community, the Catholic identity of the school is bound to be superseded by other areas of focus.

The research plan began with an exploration of current literature and data regarding the governance, identity, and demographics of Catholic schools. Following this, the researcher decided to gather both objective and subjective information first in the form of a survey, based on the surveys offered by the NCEA and the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools, and then in focus groups with representatives from various Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese. The tools used for gathering data were a survey and small focus groups. The survey was sent to principals, campus ministers, mission-identity personnel, department chairs, theology departments, and various other faculty and staff at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through the survey and focus groups. Waves of email invitations for the survey and focus groups were sent out throughout the months of August and September. The process for gathering survey responses and focus group participants took the form of emails, phone calls, and peer invitations to employees at

⁵⁸ Miller, “The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools,” 59.

each school. The initial hope was that initial invitations would lead to the passing on of the survey to more employees, and those who participated would invite others to do the same. This led to a grassroots method for collecting data. The rationale behind sending the survey and focus group information to principals and mission identity leaders was to encourage a top-down approach to participation. The researcher anticipated that principals and administrations would identify other employees to participate in the research. The results of this project will most likely be interesting to administrators, thus their intentional inclusion in both survey and focus group research. The response rate of this survey was 22%.

By the end of September, over 500 individuals from 29 different schools were invited to participate. This resulted in 16 volunteers for focus groups and over 100 survey responses, representing 26 of the schools in the Archdiocese. Volunteers freely chose to participate without any incentive or personal benefit and contributed thoughtful information about their experiences of adult formation at their schools. The qualitative research completed in this project is evaluative in nature, meaning that the analysis will appraise “the effectiveness of what exists.”⁵⁹ This refers to the fact that existing programs were considered and weighed based on the perceptions of participants and whether they felt those programs supported their understanding of the school’s mission. The survey, posed to an employee of a Catholic high school in the Archdiocese, examined the knowledge and awareness adults in the school community had about their school’s mission statement and adult formation programs.

⁵⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 49.

Four focus groups took place, each with a variety of faculty, staff, and administrators contributing to the conversation. The focus groups certainly illuminated the results of the survey, coloring the digital record of formation and experience with human stories and rich interactions between peers at different institutions. According to Swinton and Mowat,

For the qualitative researcher, narrative knowledge is perceived to be a legitimate, rigorous and valid form of knowledge that informs us about the world in ways that are personally and publicly significant. Stories are not simply isolated anecdotes; they are important sources of grounded knowledge.⁶⁰

Stories and experiences were shared in the focus groups, allowing the researcher to decipher the way in which elements of mission integration and understanding are perceived and how individuals at these schools interact with the mission of the school and associated formation activities.

To prepare for the focus group element of the research, “Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice” by Kathryn Roulston gave structure to focus group questions and prepared the researcher to compile information from a number of people about Catholic education, identity, mission, and formation. Using qualitative data as opposed to quantitative data does make the research process a bit daunting, as there is less “objective” information that can be gathered.⁶¹ The focus group format provided more opportunity for individuals to converse with peers in various roles and share their experiences of formation at their schools. Comparing and contrasting programs that were effective in different communities, learning from strategies that did not succeed as expected, and building on the experiences of others provided a more in-depth exploration

⁶⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 49.

⁶¹ Kathryn Roulston, *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014).

of the realities noted in the initial survey. The researcher was able to ask follow-up questions about information that arose in the survey, as well as gain valuable insight into the tone, emotion, and attitude of the participants. The questions prepared can be found in Appendix B. These questions served as the foundation of the conversations as they cover the basic ideas explored in the survey.

2.9 Chapter Conclusion

The Catholic identity of a school is not a static characteristic but a living, evolving reality shaped by the people who embody its mission. As this chapter has demonstrated, faculty, staff, and administrators play a critical role in constructing, implementing, and maintaining the school's faith-based mission. When stakeholders actively engage in formation programs, mission-driven hiring, and strategic planning, Catholic schools are better equipped to maintain their distinctive identity in an increasingly secular world.

The findings presented here suggest that a school's Catholic character is most effectively nurtured through a combination of passive and active formation efforts for adults, community engagement, and clear institutional commitment to mission integration. By fostering a shared sense of ownership over Catholic identity, schools create a cohesive, mission-driven environment that supports both spiritual and academic growth. The ongoing challenge for Catholic high schools is not simply to preserve their identity but to continually renew and deepen it, ensuring that their mission remains vibrant and transformative for generations to come. In the following chapter, the researcher expands on the results of the survey and focus group discussions, highlighting

what strategies were identified as effective and ineffective throughout the project. Data from the survey is shared and interpreted alongside key ideas from the focus groups. This chapter focuses specifically on the research done through this project, while Chapter 4 explores these strategies in conjunction with broader research.

Chapter 3:

Research Process and Results

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter delves into the research design and process employed to examine mission and identity formation strategies in Catholic high schools within the Archdiocese of Chicago. The chapter begins by outlining the survey methodology, which was carefully constructed to gather relevant insights. This design secured data on participants' perceptions of the formation activities at their schools. The survey's open-ended questions further enriched the data, allowing for qualitative insights into unique programs or challenges specific to individual schools. The survey and focus group results were analyzed and compared to current trends in mission integration work at various levels.

Following the methodology, this chapter provides a detailed profile of the survey respondents, including their demographic backgrounds and roles within their schools. This data reflects the composition of Catholic high school educators and contextualizes their responses, revealing trends and variations across schools. Key insights include the dominance of white, female respondents who identify as Catholic, and the significant representation of teachers compared to administrators and staff. This information highlights the primary participants in mission-related activities and their role in shaping and sustaining the Catholic identity of their institutions.

The chapter also introduces the survey's main focus areas: mission and identity, and formation strategies. These sections explore the way in which the school's mission, the integration of Catholic values, and the efficacy of professional and spiritual development activities are understood and perceived by school employees. Additionally,

the results provide valuable data on the strengths and limitations of formation practices across schools. In presenting these findings, the chapter sets the stage for a deeper analysis of effective formation strategies.

3.2 Survey Design and Process

Survey design was very intentional; the researcher utilized a Likert-style method in which each statement had four choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The intention for the four components, as opposed to a common one, was to compel respondents to choose a more positive or more negative response to each statement. This method of survey is also called a “forced choice” survey in research. This helps the researcher to gauge a positive or negative trend more clearly for each statement, leading to more accurate data. With an even number of response options, there is more of a tendency for participants to choose an honest answer, rather than an answer they think will shine a more positive light on their responses. Researchers Rodrigo Schames Kreitchmann, Francisco J. Abad, Vicente Ponsoda, Maria Dolores Nieto, and Daniel Morillo of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Instituto de Ingeniería del Conocimiento offer information regarding the benefits of a forced-choice scale: “Forced Choice Questionnaires (FCQ) could be a promising approach in an educational context for the assessment of important non-cognitive skills that might be susceptible to faking such as work ethic and teamwork.”⁶² By not including a neutral option, the researcher was able to discern the underlying feelings of the survey respondents regarding the

⁶² Schames Kreitchmann, Abad, Ponsoda, Nieto, and Morillo, “Controlling for Response Biases in Self-Report Scales,” 2.

formation activities at their schools a little more closely. Their perceptions were either mostly positive or mostly negative regarding the effectiveness of various programs.

Utilizing methods from Kathryn Roulston's "Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice," both closed and open-ended questions were posed in two parts. By incorporating open-ended questions for individuals to share their personal understanding of the formation programs at their schools, the researcher was more able to account for unique or sponsoring-order specific activities taking place. The first part of the survey asked about the identity and mission of the respondents' schools, with attention given to the knowledge and integration of the school's mission statement. This included general questions about the overall character and culture of the school. The second part of the survey focused on the formation programs and activities applied by the school to provide employees with a strong knowledge base of the goals of the school community. Respondents were asked to evaluate the presence and effectiveness of individual activities as well as categories of activities. A discussion of the development of the questions will be later in this chapter, and the entire survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.3 Respondent Profile

Over the course of two months, 111 Catholic high school employees responded to the survey for this project. Of the respondents, 104 out of 111 identified as white and 91 out of 111 identified as Roman Catholic, with 62.2% female and 37.8% male participants. The reality of Catholic high school educators is reflected in this information as the majority of these educators are white women; according to the NCEA statistics on Catholic secondary school staffing for the 2023-2024 school year, 75.8% of professional

staff at Catholic high schools were white and 50.8% were lay females, with 72.7% reporting their religious affiliation as Catholic.⁶³ The demographics of students at Catholic high schools are fairly similar; 64.6% of Catholic high school students are white, and 79% report themselves as Catholic.⁶⁴ While the racial diversity of Catholic high schools, both in professional staff and student body, is of critical importance, it is not the focus of this research. Of those responding to the survey, 67.6% of the respondents were teachers, 20.7% were administrators, and 11.7% were staff members. As they are most often taking part in formation activities, the input of teachers is significant to this research. Their perception and experience of mission integration strategies and programs help to shape the Catholic identity of a school. Teachers are often responsible for the day-to-day reminders of identity and mission that exist in a school setting, such as reading announcements, leading class prayer, and incorporating core values into lessons. Administrators, campus ministers, and mission-identity personnel are usually at the helm of creating the programs and implementing them into professional development or formation activities. While they occasionally participate in the activities, they are not always present at formation or professional development sessions.

The breakdown of survey participants by years of service went as follows: 40.5% have been at their school for 1-4 years, 21.6% have been at their school for 5-9 years, and 37.8% have been at their school for 10 or more years. While the survey was sent to individuals at all 29 Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, responses came in from 26 schools. With the most responses coming from DePaul College Prep, the

⁶³ National Catholic Educational Association, *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing*, (NCEA, 2024).

⁶⁴ NCEA, *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024*, (2024).

researcher has determined that her personal connections to this school resulted in a higher number of representatives than other schools. St. Ignatius College Prep and Loyola Academy were also represented relatively well compared to the rest of the schools. After these schools with their heavy responses, most schools had one to three employee respondents. The schools represented in the survey results are: Carmel Catholic High School, Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Cristo Rey St. Martin College Prep, De La Salle Institute, DePaul College Prep, Fenwick High School, Holy Trinity High School, Josephinum Academy, Leo High School, Loyola Academy, Marian Catholic High School, Marist High School, Mother McAuley High School, Mount Carmel High School, Nazareth Academy, Notre Dame College Prep, Our Lady of Tepeyac, Regina Dominican High School, Resurrection High School, Saint Viator High School, St. Francis de Sales High School, St. Ignatius College Prep, St. Rita High School, Trinity High School, and Woodlands Academy. There were only three schools from which no responses were received: Brother Rice, St. Lawrence, and St. Patrick's.⁶⁵

3.4 Survey Questions and Rationale

In order to determine the perception, experience, and effectiveness of mission and identity formation programs at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the researcher designed questions to cover a variety of formation and mission-identity

⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that the three schools that did not participate in this research were all-boys schools. Based on a cursory examination of faculty and staff lists present on the schools' websites, the majority of the faculty and staff at these schools are male. Further research would be required to determine if this is a coincidence or indicates some deeper information about faculty and staff at all-boys schools versus all-girls schools or co-ed schools.

topics. Based on the NSBECS and the surveys from the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools, the researcher's questions focused on the activities in which stakeholders participate to feel acquainted with the school's mission and identity. The researcher surmises that there is a connection between partaking in spiritual and professional formation based on the school's mission and knowing the mission of the school. By assessing the general temperature of respondents' feelings toward certain activities, the effectiveness of formation programs, mission integration strategies, and professional development can be deduced. The survey was intended to gather basic perceptions on where Catholic identity is evident in the respondent's school and if the formation programs utilized to introduce the identity and charism of the school to employees are effective. After a series of demographic questions, the survey was split into two main sections: Mission and Identity Questions and Formation Questions. In an effort to make the survey process as simple as possible, the majority of the questions posed a statement and offered four responses for participants to choose from: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Along with the Likert-style questions, there were four open-ended questions asking about the respondent's perception of most and least effective mission and identity programs in their community.

The first series of questions on Mission and Identity asked about prayer experiences, sacramental presence, outward signs of identity within the school building, and the perception of mission among the school community as a whole. This set of questions investigated the role of school administration in supporting and building up the mission and identity of the school community. A couple sample questions for example include: "Our school administration has authority to realize and implement the school's

mission and vision,” “Our school administration involves all members of the school community to ensure a school culture that embodies the mission and vision,” and “Administrators in our school understand, accept, and model the teachings of the Catholic Church.” It measured the general community’s knowledge and understanding of the mission. For example, “Everyone in the school community – administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians, alums, and supporters – knows and understands the school's mission,” “Everything we do in our school is guided and directed by our mission,” “The teachers in our school understand, promote, demonstrate, and teach Catholic values and beliefs,” and “Everyone connected with our school works together and respects each other's gifts, for the sake of building a strong, faith-filled learning community.” In assessing mission buy-in, the prompt “Our school’s Catholic identity is an important reason why I work here” gave insight regarding whether respondents felt Catholic identity was personally significant to their role at their school. Questions about mission, identity, and community shaped a more complete picture of the school’s commitment to implementing goals surrounding Catholic identity. By indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement, stakeholders revealed their perception of the school identity and knowledge of activities that reinforce it.

The second series of questions examined formation programs and strategies in order to grasp the current best practices for implementing mission understanding and promoting spiritual development alongside professional development and knowledge of Catholic identity. Catholic schools generally encourage and support their faculty and staff in faith formation as part of their identity as Catholic institutions. The methods they use to do this may vary depending on the school's sponsoring order, the population served at

the school, and which mission- and ministry-related positions exist at the school. The first question in this set asked participants to indicate what activities their school provides to faculty and staff for the purpose of understanding the mission of the school. The choices from which one would select were modeled after the researcher's own experiences at three different Catholic schools with varied models of mission and identity building, as well as information shared by the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools. Common practices include learning sessions or lectures on the Catholic identity of the school, learning sessions or lectures on the school's sponsoring religious order, faculty and staff retreats, prayer opportunities for the school community, spiritual direction, and ongoing formation in the core values or charism of the school. Space was offered for survey participants to include items other than those listed if their school or sponsoring order provided additional opportunities for formation.

Respondents were asked open-ended questions in this section in addition to statements with Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree responses. The open-ended questions were intended to offer space for idea sharing and identification of the opportunities provided by a school that are most and least effective in building the Catholic identity of the school. The Agree/Disagree questions for this section followed the same format: "Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in:" with specific statements for retreats, prayer, Mass, sacraments, service activities, and social justice activities. This portion of the survey collected the most common formation activities and assessed their effectiveness according to those who participated.

3.5 Survey Results

Over 500 Catholic high school employees were invited to participate in the survey; 111 responses were gathered, indicating a response rate of about 20%. 26 of 29 schools were represented in these results, providing a glimpse into the current state of Catholic identity and mission perception among faculty and staff at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The results demonstrate broadly positive trends in all the statements; most respondents agreed with the majority of the statements posed in the survey. Every statement received “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” as a response more often than “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” For example, the statement, “Everyone in the school community – administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians, alums, and supporters – knows and understands the school's mission,” received a response of 50.5% “Agree” and 31.5% “Strong Agree.” The statement, “Our school mission clearly expresses a commitment to Catholic identity,” received a response of 31.5% “Agree” and 64.9% “Strongly Agree.” The generally positive trends indicate that most faculty, staff, and administrators who responded to this survey know, understand, and feel a sense of responsibility for the mission of their schools. Similarly, it signifies that many schools have incorporated formation and spiritual development programming for their faculty and staff, which are evident to participants.

The data collected in this project shows a general awareness and understanding of school identity and mission on the part of faculty, staff, and administrators. Nearly every question in the Mission and Identity section of the survey produced a positive response, suggesting strong awareness of the mission statements and Catholic identity of the schools included in the survey. Faculty, staff, and administrator respondents felt that the

schools make their mission statements known through strategic planning and goal setting, the physical environment of the school building itself, and the work of the teachers in the community. The building of knowledge and ownership surrounding that mission comes into play through adult formation in the school community. The Formation section of the survey indicated that, while every school may have some elements of its adult formation program that are specific to its community, many strategies and programs are common to schools, regardless of their sponsoring orders. What is offered across schools tends to be fairly similar, to varying degrees of effectiveness. Yet, some congregation-specific strategies are utilized on the local and national levels in order to promote an awareness of the partnerships that exist between schools and their sponsors. In response to the question, “What activities are offered to your faculty and staff to build your understanding of the mission of the school?,” 64.2% of respondents indicated that “Learning sessions on the school's sponsoring religious order” were part of the formation process. This is evident in the responses to the open-ended questions, as eighteen participants specifically cited their school’s sponsoring order as having particular activities such as pilgrimages, charism-based retreats, or visits to other locations sponsored by their religious order. Programs that work at one school do not necessarily work at a different school. However, there are a few constants in the effective programs that resonate across communities. Formation that motivates stakeholders to be more active and aware members of the community can be employed to strengthen the responsibility felt by these individuals over the identity of the school.

While the knowledge of mission statements and Catholic identity is present according to the survey results, ownership and involvement in the carrying out of the

mission of the school or promoting the Catholic identity of the school are still in question. When asked questions such as, “Our school administration involves all members of the school community to ensure a school culture that embodies the mission and vision,” 38.7% of participants indicated that they “Strongly Agree” with the statement. Considerably more stated that they “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with this statement than other statements; 4.5% noted they “Strongly Disagree” and 12.6% noted they “Disagree” with the statement. Similar results were reflected in the statement, “Everyone in the school community – administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians, alums, and supporters – knows and understands the school's mission.” For this statement, 16.2% of responses were “Disagree.” These are minor differences in thought; however, they reveal the personal feelings of individuals completing the survey. “Our school’s Catholic identity is an important reason why I work here” prompted more divided results than anticipated with 18.9% of respondents offering “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” as their feeling toward the statement. The majority of responses in the “Strongly Disagree” range came from faculty and staff at the same school. This may raise questions about hiring practices at this school. It may also indicate that some of the faculty and staff at these schools demonstrate a lack of ownership of, of connection to, and of responsibility toward the mission and identity of these schools. By indicating the identity of the school is not an important reason for working at the school, those responding share that there are other factors driving their employment decision.

Those responding to the survey were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “The teachers in our school understand, promote, demonstrate, and teach Catholic values and beliefs,” to which most responded positively, however, compared to

other responses, this statement received more negative indications than most other statements – 17.3% of the responses were on the negative side. This could indicate something of a lack of trust or confidence in one’s colleagues, regardless of an individual’s feelings about one’s role in the mission and identity of a school. This response seems to contradict the statement, “Everyone connected with our school works together and respects each other's gifts, for the sake of building a strong, faith-filled learning community,” to which a vast majority of respondents indicated that they “Agree,” 47.7% of responses. This second statement does not specifically mention the mission of the school, but does incorporate community, which is a highly respected value among all the schools examined. The value of community directly connects to the mission statements of many of these schools, as well as their Catholic identity, as community is one of the essential elements of Catholic schools, according to both the NSBECS⁶⁶ and *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools*.⁶⁷ Community building as a means of adult formation became a recurring theme in survey responses and focus group discussions.

When analyzing the second set of questions aimed at assessing the Formation process at each school, one survey respondent made an important note: “We OFFER [sic] opportunities but very few teachers join us for these events.” Keeping this in mind, for the purposes of this research, the effectiveness of the formation programs at these schools is measured based on the perception of those participating. Observations regarding whether certain elements of mission formation are present and available, of course, draw

⁶⁶ See “National Standards and Benchmarks For Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools” at https://ncea.org/NSBECS/NSBECS/NSBECS_Home_Page.aspx.

⁶⁷ See *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools* at <https://catholiceducation.org/en/education/the-holy-sees-teaching-on-catholic-schools.html>.

objective answers. However, personal feelings surrounding the “effectiveness” of those programs cannot be quantified in the same way. Again, the majority of responses in this section reflected positive affirmation of the opportunities listed. Most respondents indicated that their school provided faculty and staff opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation through prayer, retreats, sacraments, service activities, social justice activities, and Mass. However, the results for this set of questions were less uniform than the data collected in the first set of questions.

In examining the second set of questions, focused on formation activities, 30.3% of respondents did not agree with the statement, “Our school offers opportunities for faculty and staff to explore and support their own faith.” This means 69.7% of respondents agreed with the statement, which is reflected in the subsequent statements. Most participants responded positively to the prompts regarding the presence of specific formation activities at their schools. The frame of the question “Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in:” received the following positive results: retreats - 69.7% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, prayer - 76.4% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, Mass - 85.4% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, sacraments - 64.2% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, service activities - 76.1% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, and social justice activities - 63.3% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”. These results, while they do align within the context of this survey, leave questions about the connections faculty and staff are making between mission and identity activities and faith formation programming. The statements offered in the survey do not indicate whether respondents see a direct relationship between formation

opportunities, spiritual programs, and the identity of the school. As such, only so much can be discerned from these results.

The final question was open-ended, asking if survey respondents had any other thoughts, information, or ideas to share with the researcher. This elicited interesting perspectives that individuals have toward their school's identity, their personal thoughts on formation activities, and questions regarding the work left to do by Catholic school employees. For example, one participant stated, "I think schools could focus more on community of teachers in regards to their faith formation."⁶⁸ Another noted, "The reality is that adult faith formation opportunities aren't offered or encouraged. The focus is very much on the students."⁶⁹ Some commented on their thoughts regarding the expectation of spiritual support at their schools and its importance, "At a Catholic school, people shouldn't be surprised with required levels of faith formation."⁷⁰ Another shared, "Adult formation in a Catholic School is really important. But there are always going to be employees there for reasons other than the faith who may or may not be resistant to 'being forced' to do formation. We definitely struggle with it!"⁷¹ These comments demonstrate personal attitudes regarding the general programs offered and add anecdotal information to this research project.

3.6 Focus Group Overview and Observations

In addition to the background survey, four focus groups were held as a way to gather more information from survey participants and discuss mission, identity, and

⁶⁸ Survey Results, Response #94.

⁶⁹ Survey Results, Response #64.

⁷⁰ Survey Results, Response #82.

⁷¹ Survey Results, Response #83.

formation in a more direct way. Through hour and a half long virtual meetings, 13 faculty, staff, and administrators discussed their feelings and observations regarding these areas in their schools. Eleven different schools were represented with a nine to four split of administrators and staff members to teachers. Specific information about the dynamics at play in adult formation and mission integration was illuminated during these sessions. Participants were given seven questions in advance of the meeting, in order to encourage them to have some thoughts ready for the discussion. These questions can be found in Appendix B. Prior preparation was not required, however most participants shared that they had read the questions ahead of the discussion. None of the participants had memorized the mission statement of the school but all participants were easily able to share general values and characteristics that were explicitly mentioned in their mission statements. All participants were able to locate their mission statements without difficulty. One participant even had a copy of the mission statement hanging in their office at the time of the meeting. The ease with which individuals were able to share about elements in their mission which speak to what their school community is like gave the sense that the Catholic identity of these schools was understood and witnessed by these participants.

Again, using Roulston's suggestions for designing focus groups proved useful for this research; her suggestions on developing questions and eliciting discussion in the group setting gave the researcher more confidence in drawing out responses that would be beneficial in this research. The questions about formation and mission integration were simply phrased; "What does your school do to ensure the adults in your community are aware of and understand the mission statement?" and "Are there any activities that

you feel have not been effective in conveying the mission of the school to participants?” made up the majority of the conversations. The researcher made an effort to allow the group to voice whatever they felt was relevant to the discussion rather than sticking to a specific script for each group. This resulted in an organic dialogue that provided great coverage to the research questions. Some of the responses in the focus groups overlapped with survey results. The overlap reinforced the findings of this project. Participants were offered space to speak about both the positives and negatives of formation, mission, and identity at their schools. They were presented with unique circumstances in which they had the occasion to collaborate with other professionals who have the same goal. By creating this uncommon experience, new ideas were explored and passed around, a community was formed, and the opening to forge partnerships for shared aim. Each group opened and closed with the same questions, but the conference in between was specific to the educators in the Zoom room.

The final question for the focus groups was “In your opinion, what makes a Catholic school Catholic?” The replies to this question inspired hope, gratitude, and joy. Working in a Catholic school setting poses unique challenges and opportunities; administrators, faculty, and staff grasp this from the beginning of their time in these schools. To hear what some stakeholders in these institutions feel sets their community apart from schools without religious affiliation reveals the dedication, confidence, and personal commitment they feel toward their schools. Those who participated in the focus groups shared a strong centering in Gospel values. They asserted the importance of caring for the whole person, meeting their students where they are, and living according to the example of Jesus Christ. If all adults in our Catholic school communities exhibited this

level of devotion to those they serve and the mission of their schools, there would be no question about what makes a Catholic school Catholic, as the people in these schools would clearly demonstrate the difference.

The focus groups were recorded via Zoom and transcribed. A word and content analysis of the meeting transcriptions provided valuable insights into perceptions of current mission integration programming, highlighting what participants deemed effective, relevant to their school's mission, and meaningful for fostering a sense of community. Consistent with the findings from the survey portion of this research, recurring themes of charism, retreat, leadership, community, and prayer emerged prominently in the discussions. References to sponsoring orders and their charism were mentioned 123 times over the course of four focus groups underscoring the central role that the identity and values of religious orders play in shaping school culture. Participants articulated the importance of grounding mission programming in the unique heritage of their sponsoring order, which they viewed as a foundational element of their Catholic identity. Prayer, discussed 29 times, was another focal point of the conversations. Participants explored its significance in various contexts, such as school-wide prayer, prayer led by ministry personnel, and its integration into classrooms or extracurricular activities. Retreats were referenced 49 times, highlighting their dual role as a tool for adult formation and as an avenue for relationship-building with students. Participants emphasized the transformative potential of retreats when attended with colleagues or students, noting their ability to deepen connections to the school's mission and foster a sense of shared purpose.

Service projects, mentioned 65 times, emerged as a particularly impactful aspect of mission integration for adults in the community. Participants viewed these initiatives as a tangible way to live out Gospel values and engage the broader community. In contrast, social justice, discussed 20 times, was recognized as an area with room for growth, reflecting both its significance and the challenges of integrating it fully into school programming. Generally, social justice advocacy or education is utilized in adult formation and mission integration programming, in conjunction with traditional community service opportunities. Finally, the theme of community appeared 80 times, reflecting its critical importance in mission integration efforts. Participants linked a strong sense of community to effective leadership, meaningful collaboration, and shared experiences like prayer, service, and retreats. This emphasis underscores the belief that fostering relationships among faculty, staff, and administrators is essential to sustaining a vibrant Catholic identity.

3.7 Effective Strategies

Schools employ a wide range of activities to support the spiritual development and mission knowledge of their faculty and staff. Any number of opportunities focused on an array of mission-related themes may be presented for adult formation. Schools tend to offer an onboarding process for new employees, professional development to ensure teachers maintain their licensing, and opportunities for further education in pedagogy, curriculum planning, and educational technology. At Catholic schools, the formation of employees extends beyond professional expectations and often incorporates spiritual formation, mission knowledge and integration, and information specific to the religious

order sponsoring the school. One of the many elements that sets Catholic schools apart from their public and private counterparts is the focus on their identity as Catholic schools which requires those working in the setting to understand what it means to say their school is Catholic. One survey respondent noted this saying, “At a Catholic school, people shouldn't be surprised with required levels of faith formation -- I would enjoy doing retreats, required service, etc. if it was built into the day.”⁷²

The programs used to convey school identity and share the school’s mission statement can take many different forms. There are a number of standard strategies – lectures or talks, Mass, newsletters, crosses or quotes on the walls of the school building – used to express the characteristics of a Catholic school that distinguish it from other schools. Based on the survey and focus groups for this project, the success of an adult formation program depends on the effectiveness of the opportunities provided to the adults in the community, the level of engagement or participation that the activities draw in, and whether or not employees feel like they are part of the community for having taken part in them. This research found that faculty and staff find formation more effective when the topics change or rotate, when there is strong leadership in the school itself and in the mission and ministry departments, when community service and social justice advocacy are involved, when there is interaction with the sponsoring order, and when they have the opportunity to attend retreat with students.

Based on this research, common effective strategies exist across many of the schools surveyed. At least half of the respondents indicated the existence of learning sessions on the Catholic identity of the school (58.7%), learning sessions on the school's

⁷² Survey Results, Response #82.

sponsoring religious order (64.2%), ongoing formation in the core values or charism of the school (78%), retreat (88.1%) and prayer opportunities (92.7%). Many indicated in their free responses that gathering as a community for mass, retreats, prayer services, and service projects were the most effective forms of building their understanding of the mission of the school. Retreats and mass were mentioned quite frequently in open-ended questions (mentioned in 65% of responses), which suggests that community is a major factor in the effectiveness of a formation strategy. The focus groups found even more evidence for the effectiveness of the same opportunities, with each of the 13 individuals reiterating the specific activities listed in the survey at various points in discussion. Having the right people in charge of the school and the mission and ministry departments was cited more than once by focus group participants as an effective strategy for conveying mission. One survey respondent noted,

I honestly wish that our school leadership were more outwardly religious. I think that our regular staff meetings should start with prayer. Even if you aren't Catholic, it provides a moment of reflection and a reset to prepare for the work that we do with children every day. I wish that we (staff) were provided with some spiritual, faith-based moments from time to time. I sometimes feel that religion is low on the list of daily priorities, yet it is at the heart of what makes our school different and special.⁷³

This response may suggest a number of things: when leaders are not bought-in to the Catholic identity of the school, faculty and staff do not see a reason to buy-in or feel encouraged to do so; leaders may hesitate to engage in outward signs of faith for fear of excluding non-Catholic employees; explicit ways to express the identity of the school can be inclusive and Catholic, but perhaps more training is needed to ensure this is done well.

⁷³ Survey Results, Response #97.

When the mission and ministry departments are short staffed or underfunded, it can be very challenging to actually introduce any of the ideas stated above. One focus group participant stated “when we have someone people like and want to listen to”⁷⁴ programs are more effective. “Having the right people”⁷⁵ in the right places leads to more involvement among the adult community because they like the person running the programs and therefore feel more comfortable and motivated to participate. Another focus group participant stated that formation is “all about relationships,”⁷⁶ meaning when employees at the school feel seen by their colleagues and administrators, they are more inclined to take something away from their formation activities. Having a strong sense of community in the school building, offering mentorship programs among faculty members, and witnessing outwardly religious school leadership share their faith with the community have all been expressed as effective strategies for increasing awareness of and faculty buy-in to the mission of the school. Through the four focus groups, leadership as integral to faith formation and mission integration was mentioned 76 times.

Leadership, specifically the importance of administrators modeling faithfulness and dedication to the mission, was discussed in the focus groups 64 times. In Focus Group #4, Participant #2 shared that their school hired a Director of Mission and Ministry for one year, but the programs set in place by this person did not go over well because this person was not serving the community in the way they were intended to do so. Unfortunately, there is no guaranteed formula for success when it comes to community building among the adults in a school. Informal opportunities for faculty and staff to

⁷⁴ Focus Group #1, Participant #1.

⁷⁵ Focus Group #1, Participant #1.

⁷⁶ Focus Group #3, Participant #2.

interact with each other socially are commonly reported as helpful to breaking down silos between departments, but no perfect order of operations exists. The benefit of building adult community in particular was mentioned 23 times in the focus groups. As with any workplace, interpersonal issues can severely damage the work of well-intentioned individuals.

In both the survey and the focus groups, retreat was frequently mentioned, in both positive and negative lights. Thirty-five separate survey responses mentioned retreats as one of the most effective strategies for building the Catholic identity of a school. Most schools surveyed incorporate some form of retreat into their school year, whether it be a mandatory staff retreat before the school year begins, after the school year ends, or at some point in the school year or encouraging faculty and staff to attend retreat with students. Faculty and staff retreats were reported to be most successful when elements of choice and interaction were included – choice of a prayer experience, choice of a small group session, choice of a service site. The focus groups discussed the benefits of giving choices and introducing optional activities; this idea appeared ten times in the course of the focus groups. The interactive element comes from this choice, but also discussion, activity that requires participants to be up and moving, or the opportunity to try something new in the form of an art or prayer experience. Having the ability to choose what activities made up the retreat experience allows employees to take on the required task and find space for what they might actually need from the retreat. Aside from these elements, another survey respondent stated that leading with charism can be a useful tool as well: “Retreats with charism-based instruction and discussions – these experiences allow faculty and staff to engage in dialogue about the most pertinent elements of the

school's values.”⁷⁷ Everyone comes to retreat with varying levels of willingness to participate, however there is always something that can be taken from the experience of retreating. Having a choice in the matter makes a positive experience more likely.

Additionally, retreats are a good reminder of the goals the community shares: “In school faculty/staff retreats [are most effective] because it gives us a chance to talk about how our mission is alive, or what needs to improve.”⁷⁸ Attending a retreat with students seems to be universally appreciated as an opportunity to learn more about the Catholic identity and faith life of the school. As one respondent stated, “I think retreat opportunities -- especially in conjunction with students -- accomplishes this best.”⁷⁹ Many Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese utilize the Kairos retreat program for their students; this retreat takes many different shapes and usually includes several witness talks given by the adults on the retreat as a supplement to the student leader witness talks. Adults who attend this retreat are considered retreatants in a similar way to the students on retreat. They too are encouraged to take the chance to step away from their everyday lives and embrace the silent reflection of the Kairos experience.

Not all retreat experiences are positive; four survey participants stated they felt retreats are the least effective method of building Catholic identity in their schools. Retreats that involve sitting and listening for the whole day, or even for a half day, tend to be dull and forgettable. When everyone is stuck in one room listening to a speaker who is unfamiliar or not very charismatic, it is difficult to feel a sense of fulfillment in the retreat. One survey response stated, “The mandatory new employee overnight retreat was

⁷⁷ Survey Results, Response #20.

⁷⁸ Survey Results, Response #86.

⁷⁹ Survey Results, Response #11.

not effective. The information could have been presented and shared in a one-day retreat without taking employees away from their home and family obligations for 1+ days.”⁸⁰ Another said, “The annual retreat day feels like it's a Professional Development day, but instead of PD, we are getting spiritual development. I know some of my colleagues enjoy that, but I don't.”⁸¹ Another stated faculty retreat felt ineffective because “it is scheduled before the school year and off campus; therefore, it does not feel like a retreat, but a mandatory meeting.”⁸² In short, there are many ways to create an adult retreat that can inspire the community to live out the mission of the school, however not everyone will be “on board” so to speak regardless of the time and care given to the retreat. As one survey respondent stated, “Full faculty/staff retreats can be hit or miss, but some have been wonderful for building the Catholic identity because it brings everyone together for those important conversations about mission.”⁸³ When done well, retreat naturally builds community and fosters a sense of belonging, both of which assist in strengthening mission knowledge and in fostering Catholic identity.

As with retreat, having the opportunity to participate in community service or social justice activities encourages the adults in the school to live out the mission statement of the school. No survey respondents or focus group participants cast service in a negative light; rather the common sentiment was “Service opportunities really speak to our mission.”⁸⁴ The dual facets of social justice and community service truly convey the Christian mission of living like Jesus Christ lived, so to integrate these enterprises into

⁸⁰ Survey Results, Response #40.

⁸¹ Survey Results, Response #70.

⁸² Survey Results, Response #56.

⁸³ Survey Results, Response #47.

⁸⁴ Survey Results, Response #27.

the everyday life of the Catholic school community is to explicitly carry out the mission of the school. Survey respondents articulated a desire for more of these events: “I would love more social justice and service activities at our school.”⁸⁵ Many schools have required service programs for students, but the adult community can benefit from this as much as the students can. One survey participant stated, “We used to do service projects together – students and faculty, but that was years ago. I think it's good for us to serve, too, and with the students.”⁸⁶ The direct connection to mission, on a school community and broader Christian level, makes service meaningful and effective as a means of mission integration. There is a clear link between what the school is doing in an academic sense and the overall goals of the school when community service becomes part of the lived mission of the school. As one survey respondent said, “I think the most effective is participating in mass together and doing service together. I think because then people begin to understand our core values and tenants.”⁸⁷ The identity of the school becomes evident when a strong emphasis is placed on living like the person of Christ, living out Gospel values, walking with the marginalized, and inviting students to encounter those in need.

It can be more difficult to incorporate social justice advocacy and action into a school community than it is to incorporate service activities. Schools can engage in justice activities in a number of ways, for example, inviting authors and practitioners who focus on different areas of Catholic Social Teaching to speak to students and adults, or working with local organizations that undertake justice endeavors. Catholics view social

⁸⁵ Survey Results, Response #19.

⁸⁶ Survey Results, Response #88.

⁸⁷ Survey Results, Response #6.

justice as significant as the Christian mission as charity and service. Educators in Catholic schools who are open to ensuring that their students recognize the necessity of both service and justice have found creative ways to form not only the students in their communities, but also the adults. For example, some schools have implemented school-wide values days or weeks in which activities are planned that highlight the school's commitment to social justice. Ministry teams tend to be responsible for these days which bring the whole community together to learn about the featured virtue or value and its role in the school's Catholic identity and mission. Survey participants asserted the connection they feel when these activities take place: "Ignatian Values Days (IVD) all school in-house retreat with students, teachers and staff. It is valuable because we are all learning together as a community and have shared experiences from every corner of the school."⁸⁸ These chances to put all the pieces of a school's identity together in a communal setting, especially when the topics or focus change from year to year, accentuate the bond between Catholic identity and lived mission.

Taking time to shine a spotlight on different aspects of the school's identity and values from year to year or from one formation opportunity to another prevents stagnation and boredom on the part of those participating. It establishes a program that asks stakeholders to arrive at each new experience with an open mind and heart, ready for new information and ideas to be shared. Many adults in these communities seem to expect that the same things will be presented from session to session, so incorporating a rotating array of topics and events avoids the potential resentment or struggle that follow from repetitive activities. The focus groups offered many suggestions regarding how to

⁸⁸ Survey Results, Response #40.

improve or enhance current formation programs. Because each school has a unique identity in which many different aspects of their community can be highlighted by a variety of people in their school family, participants in the focus groups advised offering specific themes for the year or following a changing program of ideas through a four- or five-year program can enhance the stakeholders' understanding of the school mission and identity.

Many survey participants noted that their sponsoring orders offer similar events to those employed by their individual schools. Various school communities emphasize their sponsoring order, and many are invited into the larger community of the congregation through retreats, conferences, seminars, and other programs. For example, "Faculty have opportunities to attend annual Augustinian Value Institutes held at different Augustinian schools all over the country."⁸⁹ Similarly, "We are fortunate to participate on district and regional levels with other Lasallian schools for mission and values development. Many on our staff have been part of programs that have ranged in time commitment from a day to a weekend to several weeks during a summer to multiple year formation programs."⁹⁰ Having a link to the sponsoring order of the school, either in the personnel on campus or through the broader society of the congregation gives explicit access to the specific identity of that organization, which is naturally part of the school's identity as well. A number of schools specifically mention their sponsoring order in their mission statements and as such it logically follows that the sponsoring order would be involved in formation for the adults in the community. Survey responses underlining this link were extensive:

⁸⁹ Survey Results, Response #63.

⁹⁰ Survey Results, Response #76.

- “We have Faculty Moreau learning sessions. (Fr. Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross).”⁹¹
- “a limited Ignatian training program that was internally run available to tenured faculty by application.”⁹²
- “I think the retreats and lessons about the school's Catholic identity/our sponsoring religious order (the Jesuits) is most important in terms of giving a baseline understanding -- particularly for those who are not Catholic.”⁹³
- “participation in programs sponsored by our Province as well as the Jesuit Schools Network”⁹⁴
- “Providing retreat opportunity by taking students to the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse for their freshman retreat.”⁹⁵
- “Pilgrimage to Spain to walk the footsteps of Saint Ignatius Loyola, Ignatian Family Teach-in”⁹⁶
- “We sometimes provide sessions for new employees about the Dominican, Catholic identity of the school.”⁹⁷
- “online formation programs, conferences, and immersion trips with other Lasallians in the country”⁹⁸
- “Huether Lasallian Conference (sometimes); Lasallian Formation Schools”⁹⁹
- “The Augustinians host an annual conference on our core values.”¹⁰⁰
- “Occasional PD's on Mercy”¹⁰¹
- “Induction/mentoring programs - these are more social events that allow faculty to explore our Jesuit identity in a no-pressure, interactive way. Our newly formed Ignatian Pilgrimage - a hands-on experience that brings the life of St. Ignatius into clearer view”¹⁰²
- “Learning sessions for new teachers to give them history and context about the sponsors (Sisters of Saint Joseph), because they are lead [sic] by sisters who are really enthusiastic and it feels very comfortable to speak with them.”¹⁰³

While including the sponsoring order in the formation and identity programs was generally considered by survey respondents to be effective formation programs, that was

⁹¹ Survey Results, Response #91.

⁹² Survey Results, Response #37.

⁹³ Survey Results, Response #45.

⁹⁴ Survey Results, Response #73.

⁹⁵ Survey Results, Response #95.

⁹⁶ Survey Results, Response #1.

⁹⁷ Survey Results, Response #48.

⁹⁸ Survey Results, Response #86.

⁹⁹ Survey Results, Response #90.

¹⁰⁰ Survey Results, Response #98.

¹⁰¹ Survey Results, Response #92.

¹⁰² Survey Results, Response #71.

¹⁰³ Survey Results, Response #77.

not always the case. The same factors that were cited as integral to other formation activities are necessary for order sponsored formation to be successful – having the right people in charge, offering some choice in the session make-up, providing space for those participating to connect with their fellow participants, and avoiding the mandatory or required label for the programs.

3.8 Ineffective Strategies

Teachers are stretched for time and resources without accounting for professional and personal formation; any meetings, talks, or activities that are “mandatory” or feel “forced” are not received well. When teachers are “forced” to participate in Mass or a presentation, it feels like a “burden”¹⁰⁴ or a “chore.”¹⁰⁵ Solo prayer opportunities, articles or books, web presentations or online certification classes, newsletters, and Mass were frequently cited as ineffective mission integration and formation activities with 31% of respondents mentioning these as the “least effective” methods of mission building. Mass and prayer services as ineffective methods of mission integration or less effective opportunities to build the Catholic identity of the school is troubling and potentially speaks to a larger misunderstanding of sacramental life and the importance of prayer. Having Mass listed as ineffective may demonstrate a lack of Eucharistic understanding, or a lack of adult faith formation in settings outside of the workplace. To say that Mass “does not build community” because everyone is “just sitting together”¹⁰⁶ does not account for the powerful theological impact of Holy Communion. However, when a

¹⁰⁴ Survey Results, Response #58.

¹⁰⁵ Survey Results, Response #86.

¹⁰⁶ Survey Results, Response #88.

community consists of a mixture of different religious identities, it is natural that rituals specific to Catholicism may feel alien to some. It is difficult to imagine a Catholic high school setting in which Mass is foreign. Therefore, feelings of boredom or disinterest when one is first introduced to the ritual of the Eucharist make sense. Formation that is strong and relevant may assist in dispelling these feelings. Taking the time to ensure liturgy is done well, with good music and preaching, inclusive rituals, a welcoming atmosphere, and strong community may also mitigate such feelings.

Newsletters or emails sharing articles for reading on one's own time were commonly named as ineffective methods of building Catholic identity in the survey. While time and effort go into these resources, the main concern is whether or not people actually read them. As two separate survey participants said, "They were so well done, but I fear no one read them"¹⁰⁷ and "Anything simply sent via email – while helpful, unless it is backed up in person, I imagine it's not getting looked at."¹⁰⁸ In-person opportunities are seen as far more effective for many reasons, mainly the active participation required in most cases. Inviting teachers into activities that require extra work on their own time – additional reading or preparation – or anything that takes place outside of normal contract hours or contract requirements does not elicit a positive response. An administrator in Focus Group #1 said that "anything outside of the school day"¹⁰⁹ is not well received. It is "hard for teachers to take anything else on"¹¹⁰ because their plates are already full with the normal expectations of being a teacher – lesson

¹⁰⁷ Survey Results, Response #6.

¹⁰⁸ Survey Results, Response #53.

¹⁰⁹ Focus Group #1, Participant #1.

¹¹⁰ Focus Group #3, Participant #2.

planning, grading, meeting with parents, collaborating with colleagues, creating resources, and previewing innovative strategies, to name a few.

For educators who are already dedicated to the well-being and success of their students, any extra time taken by “meetings,” “lectures,” or newsletters, especially when these are considered mandatory, builds resentment and feels burdensome. When these activities feel like “one off” chances for formation or when they are difficult to connect to the everyday life of a teacher, the inconsistency of the programming leads to frustration on the part of participants and does not inspire future participation. Many teachers seem to be burdened and burnt-out; because of this, they may not perceive additional responsibilities as opportunities for growth, as any more time given to their school may be more detrimental than beneficial. Additional certifications or classes in Catholic leadership or education¹¹¹ have a similar effect, as again, there is a lack of personal connection or relationship required to complete them. One survey respondent shared, “In my personal opinion, any online or remote certificate program is a waste of time and resources. To name two based on my personal experience, the 19th Annotated Spiritual

¹¹¹ In the same spirit as online certifications, the researcher for this project has served as a Teaching Assistant for the University of Notre Dame STEP program through the McGrath Institute for Church Life. Many of the students in the Foundations of Catholic Belief course, a mandatory class for a certification in Catholic Theology, are teachers at Catholic schools around the country. Many schools require their new teachers to partake in formation such as this outside of their school’s professional development programs. These students seem disengaged with the course material, disinterested in discussion, and lackluster in their homework responses. They are often required by their school to complete the program as a means of formation, rather than their school creating natural, organic programming to accomplish the same goals. They do not feel that the material they are learning directly correlates with the work they do in the classroom. These are not necessarily Theology teachers, as some schools require all faculty to complete the certificate program. The feedback given to this researcher regarding the course was that students did not feel the need to engage in class material or discussion because they could not connect it to their everyday work in the school community. This anecdotal evidence reinforces the idea that outside of the school community, formation activities do not produce the desired results. However, this is not part of the overall research done for the purposes of this project.

Exercises online from Creighton and a Boston College run course on Catholic Social Teaching were both shallow, performative, and did not enhance my faith formation.”¹¹²

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored the specifics of the research project design and highlights of the results of both the background survey and focus groups. It outlined the research methods and key findings of the study, highlighting the perceptions employees have of mission integration and adult formation strategies in Catholic high schools within the Archdiocese of Chicago. The survey design, informed by both quantitative and qualitative approaches, captured individual and communal insights into these processes. Respondents demonstrated a general awareness of their schools' Catholic identity and mission, with broad agreement on the value of community-building and formation activities. However, discrepancies in participation and perceived effectiveness of these programs, especially regarding administrative leadership and community involvement, underscore areas for growth.

The survey data and focus group discussions also revealed recurring themes, such as the importance of retreats, the integration of charisms from sponsoring religious orders, and the role of service and social justice in reinforcing Catholic identity. At the same time, the chapter identified challenges, including lack of engagement in certain formation activities and the perception that some strategies, such as mandatory or isolated programs, fail to resonate with participants. These findings emphasize the need for intentional, relationship-focused approaches to formation that foster a sense of ownership

¹¹² Survey Results, Response #37.

and connection among faculty and staff. When faculty feel that they are part of the community and have positive leadership to model active participation in bringing the mission into the everyday, they tend to indicate stronger understanding of the mission and identity of the school.

Looking ahead, the next chapter will build on these findings by offering an in-depth analysis of the most effective strategies for mission and identity formation in Catholic high schools. It will explore best practices, innovative approaches, and actionable recommendations to strengthen the Catholic identity of these institutions. It will also examine the ineffective strategies referenced here and explore why these may be less effective in supporting the growth of faculty and staff in their mission knowledge. Research on these topics explores not only high schools but also universities, elementary schools, and other mission-oriented organizations both within and outside of the Church. By reviewing how formation activities can be designed to inspire deeper engagement and commitment, the next chapter aims to consider best practices for sustaining vibrant, mission-driven school communities.

Chapter 4:

Effective and Ineffective Strategies for Adult Formation

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter explores the strategies and programs that promote deeper mission understanding in faculty and staff at Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. In examining the results of the project survey and focus groups, researching common practices of mission-driven organizations, and putting these pieces into dialogue with one another, the researcher has constructed a basic roadmap of what may assist schools in developing their faculty and staff. The optimal approach will differ from community to community, but a general overview of strong practices may provide a useful starting point for those developing an adult formation or mission integration program. A range of strategies and programs designed to foster a deeper understanding of Catholic mission and identity among faculty and staff at Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago are examined. Drawing from survey and focus group data, as well as research into best practices within mission-driven organizations, the chapter outlines a roadmap for developing effective adult formation programs. While each school community has unique needs, the chapter identifies overarching principles that can guide the development of mission integration efforts. These include rotating professional development topics, fostering strong leadership, incorporating service and social justice elements, organizing retreats, and engaging with the school's sponsoring religious order.

The chapter begins by exploring current approaches to mission integration within Catholic institutions, particularly in light of the diminishing presence of religious men and women in leadership roles. It highlights the shift toward lay leadership and the

resulting need for intentional formation efforts to preserve Catholic identity. By reviewing both “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches, the chapter examines how different frameworks can successfully support mission integration at various organizational levels. A comprehensive exploration of best practices in mission integration addresses how schools can move beyond individual programs and strategies to create holistic, community-driven approaches that embed mission into all aspects of school life. By examining successful models and innovative ideas, the chapter aims to equip educators and administrators with actionable insights for advancing mission engagement in their communities. This allows the researcher to provide ample thoughts and ideas that can be adapted for the needs of any community.

Key insights from the research emphasize the importance of community-building initiatives, interactive and reflective programming, and meaningful opportunities for faculty and staff to engage with the values and charism of their schools. These findings serve as the foundation for understanding how schools can create sustainable and impactful formation programs, setting the stage for the subsequent chapter, which will delve into broader best practices in mission integration beyond specific programs and strategies.

4.2 Effective Strategies for Adult Mission Formation

It is widely accepted that mission-oriented organizations bear the responsibility of forming their employees in light of that mission, of sharing the identity of the organization with their staff, and of supporting their community in culture-building. Research focusing on effective and ineffective strategies for adult formation in light of

Catholic identity and mission integration tends toward the university level, with little light shed on practices at the secondary and elementary school levels. Despite this, mission-driven work is applicable regardless of academic level or arena; differences in structure and discipline may allow for more targeted professional development and formation opportunities, but the goals remain the same across educational institutions, and even branch into other industries such as non-profit organizations or healthcare systems. Common practices are often similar regardless of university, secondary, or elementary school programming, and may encompass work done in other fields as well. Dioceses and parishes may be included in the design and implementation of such formation programs, depending on their involvement in the school community and partnership with administration. Common initiatives, especially at the university level, may take either a “top-down” or “bottom-up” approach. With a “top-down” approach, university presidents and administrators take the reins on mission engagement and focus on department chairs, directors, and other managerial personnel to implement mission-oriented formation with their faculty and staff.¹¹³ In a “bottom-up” approach, efforts are made to prepare faculty and staff to integrate identity and mission into their work from the time of their employment.¹¹⁴ Debates regarding the more effective approach are ongoing, but success has been found in both directions.

The prominence of mission and identity roles in Catholic organizations is a recent development. Historically, religious men and women were responsible for the advancement of Catholic culture in Catholic organizations. A common challenge,

¹¹³ Angelo Belmonte and Neil Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools: Preserving Catholic Culture in an Era of Change,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 12, no. 3 (2009).

¹¹⁴ James L. Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

regardless of community, lies in the near extinction of religious men and women in school communities. In recent years, lay leadership has increasingly taken on the vital work of mission integration and safeguarding Catholic identity and charism, complementing and building from the efforts traditionally made by members of sponsoring religious orders. In their examination of lay leadership across six different Catholic schools in Australia, Angelo Belmonte and Neil Cranston explored the elements of Catholic schools that are built from the top-down, beginning with principals and other leadership positions. They determined that “a deliberate and conscious approach to integrate the religious and academic purposes in every dimension of the school is what will be required”¹¹⁵ in order to preserve the Catholic identity of a school even after the visible support of having religious men and women on campus is no longer possible.

They further suggest, “Preparation and formation for those who are to assume the challenge of leadership in Catholic schools must take into consideration this dimension and seek to develop leaders with the qualities and capabilities that religious leadership demands.”¹¹⁶ Their advice includes the creation of “a deliberate and structured formation program that builds the individual’s capabilities and competencies,”¹¹⁷ as opportunities for retreat and spiritual development are cited as highly desired by lay leadership at Catholic schools. Other than the positive nature of retreats, specific ideas or research regarding what activities these formation programs might entail are not included in the case study. Belmonte and Cranston note the importance of community and relationship

¹¹⁵ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 313.

¹¹⁶ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 312.

¹¹⁷ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 312.

when attempting to integrate or engage school identity across a large scale. They do not, however, offer suggestions regarding how to build community or support relationships within a school community.

Strategies and programs are not the only way to encourage a deeper understanding of school mission and identity. It is commonly accepted in research and analysis of Catholic higher education institutions that hiring for mission and formation of faculty is particularly effective when integrating mission into all areas of the school.¹¹⁸ In light of this, Dr. Don Briel offers a strategic action plan requiring “a clear institutional commitment and administrative will”¹¹⁹ to prioritize the school mission. While the basis of this analysis and research is done at the university level, there are practical applications for high schools and elementary schools as well. Briel proposes a focus on recruitment of faculty and staff, orientation and ongoing formation for faculty, and mission-based evaluation for promotion and tenure. Using a “top-down” approach to mission integration, Briel suggests, “Once hired, faculty need to have regular opportunities and university incentives to examine and reflect upon the specific implications of the university’s mission and their own responsibility to it. Such opportunities must be serious and purposeful as well as inviting and free.”¹²⁰ Briel often references Fr. James Heft as another example of institutionalizing the Catholic identity and mission of a university. Heft’s “bottom-up” approach provides a point of contrast to Briel’s suggestions.¹²¹ For the most part, both end up in similar positions pertaining to

¹¹⁸ Recruitment and hiring for mission will be considered in the following chapter.

¹¹⁹ Don Briel, “Mission and Identity: The Role of Faculty,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 177.

¹²⁰ Briel, “Mission and Identity,” 178.

¹²¹ Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*.

effective strategies for mission integration, with Heft highlighting hiring for mission and mission-oriented curricula and faculty research. Whether beginning with the administration or beginning with faculty and staff, both named challenges to the process alongside their best practices. Their statements resonate with the messaging received in both the focus groups and survey results of this project.

Based on the results of the survey sent to Catholic high school educators in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the most effective practices for adult mission integration include: changing or rotating topics for lectures or professional development sessions focused on mission and identity; strong leadership on the school level as well as within the ministry and mission departments; incorporating community service and social justice activities into the mission integration process; attending retreat as a faculty and staff community or with students; and interacting with the sponsoring order and members of that order. These practices were mentioned most frequently in the open-ended survey questions and were discussed in focus group sessions.

4.2.1 Rotating Topics for Mission-Focused Professional Development Sessions

Good pedagogy, regardless of the age group being taught, involves keeping things fresh, avoiding redundancy, and ensuring that topics can be made applicable to the everyday lives of those learning are key strategies when it comes to adult faith formation programs in Catholic schools. Having an organized and pre-determined multi-year program of mission engagement topics allows faculty and staff to hear about a number of different topics that directly apply to mission and identity in their school community. By incorporating many different topics over the course of several sessions, what is said can

be revisited every few years in order to update and revise what may need changing depending on the present school community. Holding these events frequently across the school year, while also varying the method of knowledge dissemination and style of formation event, builds a sense of normalcy into the proceedings. Belmonte and Cranston recommend this strategy: “Staff formation experiences, therefore, should be a matter of routine and built into staff development occasions. Given that not all teachers are at the same point on their faith journey, it is most important that these occasions be presented in a nonthreatening [sic] way and structured in a manner the principal discerns suitable for the habitus of the school.”¹²² Based on the feedback presented in the survey results for this research, these methods are appreciated by faculty and staff. One survey respondent reported that regular monthly formation sessions were effective in building their awareness and understanding of the school’s mission and identity by saying, “Monthly Formation sessions, with changing yearly themes. Not embraced as a good use of time by all faculty, but they are objectively valuable and well designed!”¹²³ Providing dedicated opportunities for faculty and staff to reflect on the school as a Catholic entity seems to be a popular and low-stakes method of formation.

Many organizations use this strategy as a way to provide solid formation to their employees. Keeping topics fresh and relevant seems to be preferred and may be incorporated in a few different ways. A program may follow faculty and staff through a few years of formation, easily introducing different topics to employees with different years of experience at the organization and avoiding redundancy. In this model, cohort

¹²² Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 309.

¹²³ Survey Results, Response #83.

groups of individuals who begin in the same year would stick together as they move from topic to topic. On the other hand, topics presented to the entire faculty and staff might be presented on a rotating basis. In this scenario, some topics might be repeated, but ideally not for many sessions. Using Barry University as an example,

Faculty and staff leadership development is further enhanced by attendance at numerous mission luncheons and academic lectures. Held throughout the year, these events focus on key elements of Barry University's mission and Core Commitments. Participation in these scholarly activities serves as professional development and supervisors encourage attendance from their departments.¹²⁴

Inviting different speakers, engaging different values or topics, encouraging active participation, and regularly connecting the topics presented in the lecture, seminar, or "session" style formation opportunities back to the work of the classroom teacher, dean of students, or athletic coach send a message that what is being discussed is essential to the school community and requires adult stakeholders to directly involve themselves in the material. Offering seminars or sessions specific to the roles of the various adult stakeholders at a school and tailoring the information regarding mission and Catholic identity to the activities of those individuals may motivate those who would otherwise be disengaged.

At one high school in Chicago, a workshop on the core values of the school and their relevance to coaching sports was offered to the athletic coaches in the community. This seminar was highly regarded, hosted by one well-established coach and one newer coach, and incorporated well-defined elements of what makes that school unique as a Catholic high school with a particular religious sponsor. Similar ideas have been posed at

¹²⁴ Scott F. Smith and Roxanne S. Davies, "Institutionalizing Mission Engagement and Leadership Formation at a Dominican University," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 35 no.1 (2013): 50.

other schools; in their book, *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education*, Briel, along with Kenneth Goodpaster and Michael Naughton explore the “institutionalization” of mission and identity in the Catholic university, using the University of Notre Dame as a case study. Their work covers many different methods and strategies of mission engagement and identity awareness. However, they mention particular success with interactive seminars, like the one mentioned above. They share that “the openness of the seminar process fosters an atmosphere of freedom and inquiry that is appreciated by all.”¹²⁵ Their seminar structure, mentioned in Chapter 4 “Institutionalizing: Passing on the Fire of Mission and Identity,” makes use of the tenure system in the university setting to initiate discussions about the elements of the school’s mission that would be most appropriate to examine at various points in the career of a faculty member. This ongoing formation provides variety and openness to the needs of the faculty while instilling knowledge and understanding of what makes the university special and distinct among other schools.

While some high schools have tenure opportunities, others make use of a cohort model where employees who joined the community at the same time have required meetings or even formation sessions for the first years of their employment at a given school. Utilizing this system that is likely already in place and expanding it to include new topics at the three-, five-, and ten-year marks of service could be beneficial in providing ongoing formation to faculty and staff members. In the research for this project, it was noted by several survey respondents that hearing the same lectures or talks over and over again did not assist in their dedication to the mission of the school, rather it

¹²⁵ Briel, Goodpaster, and Naughton, *What We Hold in Trust*, 117.

made them feel as if this programming was a waste of time, redundant, or inefficient in the achieving the goal of building a community dedicated to the mission of the school.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the survey results for this project brought to the forefront a desire for ongoing learning and formation; several faculty members of the various high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago mentioned the importance of moments dedicated to the identity of their schools. For example, when asked about effective methods of formation and Catholic identity recognition offered at their schools, teachers said:

- “Retreats are helpful, but I would like to see sessions dedicated to our Catholic identity.”¹²⁶
- “Ongoing formation and learning sessions, because they are offered to us in a special moment for that only, so that we can focus and reflect about it.”¹²⁷
- “Learning sessions on school identity offered internally or by affiliated religious order”¹²⁸

There are many elements of mission integration; to expect all adult stakeholders to be aware of every aspect of a school’s identity after only one opportunity for learning would do a disservice to the stakeholders and the mission of the school. Providing a formation program that covers as many of those components as possible in a reasonable period may be effective as a mission integration strategy in most schools.

4.2.2 Strong School Leadership

Strong leaders in faith at the helm of the school community in academic and spiritual settings model for the rest of the stakeholders the critical nature of putting the mission at the heart of the school’s activities. This begins at the administrative level, with

¹²⁶ Survey Results, Response #55.

¹²⁷ Survey Results, Response #111.

¹²⁸ Survey Results, Response #25.

a principal, president or head of school, and board of trustees or directors who are committed to and have bought into the Catholic identity of the school. In their research, Belmonte and Cranston capitalized on the essential work of a school principal and the needs of a school in regards to their principal,

This research highlighted the importance of recruiting and appointing principals who have the professional and personal qualities needed to lead Catholic schools effectively. If the Catholic character of the school needs to be maintained and nurtured, lay principals, as cultural and spiritual capital, need to be not only professionally competent, but spiritually competent as well.¹²⁹

In an age where religious men and women are no longer the majority of faculty, staff, and administration at Catholic schools, entrusting the spiritual work of the community to lay leadership is integral to the continuation of Catholic education. While those who profess vows to a particular order and submit to their religious organization have become sparse in elementary and secondary education, the work of ensuring that the Catholic identity of a school prominently and proudly lives on lies with the lay leadership and other important adult stakeholders in the community.

Belmonte and Cranston express how important it is for lay principals to be involved in all aspects of the school community and give advice on how principals can integrate themselves into the work of the school beyond just the administrative tasks of leadership. He stresses the importance of professional development, not just for faculty and staff, but also for leaders within the school:

Catholic school leaders at all levels should collaborate to ensure that spiritual development opportunities are part of professional development of Catholic school principals. The continuation of Catholic schools with strong Catholic

¹²⁹ Belmonte and Cranston, "The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools," 308.

character necessitates leaders who have high levels of cultural and spiritual capital.¹³⁰

This work, while not solely the responsibility of the administrative professionals at a school, can be effective when such a top-down approach is taken. Principals and administrators support teachers and their work and, at Catholic schools, should invest in the spiritual lives of their faculty and staff. Belmonte and Cranston suggest that such leaders “must ensure that time, opportunities, and budgets are creatively allocated for teachers to be educated about and updated on the teachings of the Catholic Church.”¹³¹ They have many other suggestions for building strong leadership in Catholic schools; of interest to this researcher is the proposal that principals who also serve as classroom teachers are incredibly effective at encouraging mission integration:

Teaching principals who participated in this study observed that there was no more effective way to promote the religion program in a school than for principals to teach the subject themselves. In recognizing the significant symbolism conveyed to the school community in this action, there appears no more explicit transmission of a principal’s religious leadership than teaching a religious education class.¹³²

The opportunity for administrators to experience the daily ebb and flow of the classroom is a great way for those in charge of decision-making to see the effects of their decisions. This dedication to the school community demonstrates deep commitment to the mission of the school; however, while a significant message is sent when an administrator teaches a theology or religion class, other subjects may accomplish the same task. Principals have time demands and administrative duties that are bound to make this a difficult reality,

¹³⁰ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 311.

¹³¹ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 309.

¹³² Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 306.

perhaps even prohibitive. By spending more time in the classrooms of their teaching colleagues, they might achieve a similar goal and raise their own awareness of how mission can be supported through academics. There are a number of ways for Catholic schools to advance their school leaders as mission and culture builders, both in and out of the classroom.

Catholic university systems have done critical work in the realm of advancing and institutionalizing their missions by focusing on lay leadership development. This situation is not new; the decline of religious vocations has impacted the Church far beyond the pulpit over the past several decades. As researcher Lauren Milner and Dr. Joseph Ferrari from DePaul University stated, “Many Catholic universities are currently facing the challenge of transitioning to lay leadership and thus making changes in the stakeholders of the institution. This secularization has caused many faith-based institutions to lose their faith-based identities in order to compete with other secular universities.”¹³³ Critically important to the relative success of a Catholic institution is its ability to remain true to its mission statements and the culture of the Catholic school. In order to ensure these needs are met, various programs have been introduced across various universities, in particular, the training of faculty, staff, and administrators on the mission of the school and how that mission can be integrated into the work of all stakeholders.

Smith and Davies have led research regarding the success of particular mission institutionalization processes at Barry University in an age where fewer professed Dominicans play a role in the institution. They have made progress by introducing a

¹³³ Milner and Ferrari, “Embracing the Institutional Mission,” 260.

Mission Integration Council “to review current mission engagement efforts at both university and department levels.”¹³⁴ The purpose of the council is “to ensure that the university's mission, Catholic identity, and Dominican heritage permeate the life of the university and foster individual and communal transformation in the communities we serve.”¹³⁵ This direct approach and explicit mention of the mission provide a clear understanding of the work the council reinforces.

Other universities have incorporated new structures or administrative positions to accomplish similar tasks. Barry University’s inclusion of the Mission Integration Council contributed to their mission engagement efforts by creating “organizational structures that communicate the centrality of mission as an institutional priority.”¹³⁶ At a Franciscan university, Siena College, the establishment of a vice president for mission integration was suggested to aid in the mission activities of the school, but Maryellen Gilroy, the school’s Vice President for Student Affairs, noted that this important task cannot rest on the shoulders of one individual:

The vice president for mission or the mission-effectiveness office often holds the responsibility of upholding Catholic identity on campus. However, if Catholic identity is truly a part of the institutional culture, communication of the Catholic mission should be a task shared by all individuals involved in the interview process, and not restricted to the mission office, chaplain, or members of the sponsoring orders on our campuses.¹³⁷

While the lay leadership of a school should take the lead in the academic, spiritual, and cultural advancement of the school, it is everyone’s responsibility to live out the mission of the school in their specific and individual labor.

¹³⁴ Smith and Davies, “Institutionalizing Mission Engagement,” 50.

¹³⁵ Smith and Davies, “Institutionalizing Mission Engagement,” 50.

¹³⁶ Smith and Davies, “Institutionalizing Mission Engagement,” 53.

¹³⁷ Maryellen Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity: Lessons Learned.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28 no. 2 (2009): 103.

4.2.3 Community Service and Social Justice Elements

As part of the broader Christian mission, imitating Christ in everything done at a Catholic school establishes a connection between that institution and the Church. Members of the institution, Catholic or otherwise, are usually able to see a link between the mission of their school and works of service. Dr. Joseph Ferrari and Patrick Janulis, in their study comparing the faculty and staff perceptions of mission identity and mission activities at DePaul University, note that the university “expresses its *Catholic* mission and values by direct service to the poor and economically disenfranchised through programs such as student engagement in volunteer and community service directed at impoverished communities.”¹³⁸ Their study showed that regardless of religious affiliation, faculty and staff members perceived these activities as essential to the mission and identity of the school. In fact, participating in service events and social justice advocacy was frequently cited as an efficient method of adult faith formation and mission engagement strategy in the survey research for this project. Survey participants responded to the question of which formation activities are most effective in the following ways:

- “I think the most effective is participating [sic] in mass together and doing service together. I think because then people begin to understand our core values and tenants.”¹³⁹
- “Day of Service because they are naturally a part of our day/yearly schedule.”¹⁴⁰
- “Service opportunities really speak to our mission.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Joseph Ferrari and Patrick Janulis, “Embracing the Mission: Catholic and Non-Catholic Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Institutional Mission and School Sense of Community,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28 no. 2 (2009): 117.

¹³⁹ Survey Results, Response #6.

¹⁴⁰ Survey Results, Response #58.

¹⁴¹ Survey Results, Response #27.

Service is a tangible element of the Christian mission that translates to nearly every Catholic school's mission. This active formation allows faculty and staff to live out the mission of their school and its Catholic identity with a discernible outcome.

As stated in Chapter 2, at least one-third of the mission statements of Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago directly state that service is an integral part of their community's identity. Most of these schools have service-learning programs in which students are required to complete a certain number of hours of community service during their time as students. Similar programs are not typically required for the adults in the community, although many do participate alongside students as their coaches and mentors for the groups taking part in the service. Based on the results of this project's survey, it seems that more is desired due to the clear and comprehensive relationship between mission and service.

Having adults within the community participate in service and social justice programs underlines Catholic Social Teaching as an active piece of the overall Catholic mission of the institution. While most high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago do not require service of their faculty and staff, many offer opportunities for their faculty and staff to engage in meaningful neighborhood community organizations as part of their formation or professional development programs. An example of this type of investment in the wider community surrounding an institution is how the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) offers an extended faculty service-learning experience in conjunction with their partners, the Sisters of Charity, in which professors, local educators, and PhD students volunteer with Women's Global Connection (WGC). WGC, a nonprofit organization partnering with Peru, Tanzania, and Zambia, invites volunteers to partake in

14- to 16-day trips with two main goals: “(1) to promote understanding of different cultures aimed at building respectful collaborative relationships across the globe; and (2) to provide education for grassroots women around the world as a means of promoting women's leadership and community development.”¹⁴² Dr. Michael Guiry, a Professor of Marketing at the University, reflected on his participation in two faculty immersion experiences with WGC, focusing on where he witnessed the core values of the University's mission statement throughout his trips.

A university has more infrastructure, partnerships, and endowment to make trips such as this possible; however, the principles at play can be translated to the elementary and secondary school level. Guiry notes, “One of the barriers a Catholic university faces in institutionalizing its mission and identity is that faculty and students are too often unfamiliar with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and how they relate” to the courses of study outside of religious studies, theology, or campus ministry.¹⁴³ Through his immersion trips, Guiry could directly identify not only the principles of CST on display through service-learning, but also the key values expressed in UIW's mission statement. By participating in such an in-depth application of these values, Guiry, a professor in the MBA and business programs, could apply what he witnessed to the work he was doing in the classroom. Guiry states,

In terms of personal outcomes, the author was motivated to become an immersion trip volunteer by his desire to more fully understand UIW's mission, which paved the way to enhancing his career development as the immersion trip opened the door to learning about CST principles, bringing UIW's mission and CST principles into his MBA coursework, and exploring a new area of academic

¹⁴² Michael Guiry, “Cultivating the Understanding of a Catholic University's Mission and the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching through a Faculty Service-Learning Experience,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31 no. 2 (2012): 238.

¹⁴³ Guiry, “Cultivating the Understanding of a Catholic University's Mission,” 233.

research—namely, integrating Catholic university mission, CST principles, and business education.¹⁴⁴

He suggests that this unique approach to faculty development “invites faculty to awaken a Catholic university’s mission in a way that does not trigger strong resistance but instead builds on their identity as scholars.”¹⁴⁵ As previously stated, hands-on immersive service in this capacity demonstrates what the mission of the community means, even beyond campus. While perhaps such an investment of time and resources is not reasonable for high school faculty and staff, more local opportunities are often utilized to achieve similar impact. High school faculty and staff are not expected to dedicate this kind of research or time to long-term service; however, they may be encouraged to accompany students during longer service-learning opportunities that take place during school breaks.

Such dedicated service experiences, while incredibly impactful, are not necessary to achieve similar recognition of how an institution’s mission can be applied to areas of study, research, socialization, athletics, and beyond. Opportunities to take part in meaningful service events, to learn about and advocate for human rights, and to support marginalized people in a tangible way fall under the elements of mission that at least one-third of the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago name as part of their identity. Integrating service and Catholic Social Teaching into various disciplines creates possibilities for students and adults to grasp real models of mission in action. For example, beyond theology classes, science classes might incorporate units on care for creation, economics classes might talk about the option for the poor and vulnerable,

¹⁴⁴ Guiry, “Cultivating the Understanding of a Catholic University’s Mission,” 250.

¹⁴⁵ Guiry, “Cultivating the Understanding of a Catholic University’s Mission,” 251.

history classes can explore rights and responsibilities on display in communities. The chances to bring these integral principles to life in the classroom are truly limited only by the creativity of those designing the curriculum.

Service and social justice are intrinsically linked – both are vital to understanding the Christian mission. Quoting Cardinal Peter Turkson, Fitz and Naughton note, ““a school must practice what it preaches; it must operate in a manner that is consistent with Catholic social teachings’ especially in the areas of mission statements, selection of faculty, operational policies and practices, curriculum priorities, course content, and engagement with the wider community.”¹⁴⁶ This implies the necessity for direct action and dedication in service and justice initiatives, rather than stating that service and justice are valued by the community but not providing opportunity or time for all stakeholders to engage in such activities. As Fr. Heft states,

Social justice, then, draws upon several key concepts of Catholic social teaching, such as the common good and the dignity of the person. More than this, as part of the biblical tradition, Catholicism's commitment to social justice has to do with bringing about the kingdom of God, and doing so humbly, that is, never assuming that our vision of the just society is exactly what God wants.¹⁴⁷

Social justice advocacy is perhaps more difficult to incorporate in a natural way, however, introducing faculty and staff to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching during professional development or adult formation sessions has been successful at some schools. Mary Ann Brenden, a faculty member at the School of Social Work at College of St. Catherine and University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, analyzes the process one school of social work went through to implement a curriculum of CST into their faculty

¹⁴⁶ Ray Fitz and Michael Naughton, “The Challenge of Institutionalizing Mission and Identity,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31 no. 2 (2012): 144.

¹⁴⁷ James L. Heft, “Catholic Education and Social Justice,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 10 no. 1 (2006): 15-16.

development program. By requiring faculty to learn about CST and actively brainstorm ways to link the principles to their course material, they acknowledged their own responsibility regarding justice education for their students and the helpful framework presented by CST. Part of this development process was individual inquiry in the form of reading an overview on CST and discussion with colleagues regarding the inclusion of CST in their own work:

...The faculty read a primer on CST and participated in retreats and seminars. These experiences provided an overview of the sources, methods, and themes of CST, and an opportunity to discuss its application to contemporary social problems. Experts, including noted academics, theologians, and a local pastor, inspired the faculty by sharing wisdom and real-world examples. The faculty brainstormed and discussed the potential benefits of, perceived barriers to, and possible strategies for integrating CST into the curriculum.¹⁴⁸

Brenden shares the method by which this information was presented to the faculty first at a weekend retreat, and later through development opportunities that involved readings and discussion, seminars and retreats throughout the year, and a series of presentations by colleagues of all religious backgrounds.

While the discipline addressed by this method – social work – is naturally inclined to absorb elements of social justice, similar strategies can be used across disciplines and topics. The faculty development program had several positive outcomes:

- The School's faculty and students have a renewed commitment to social justice. A commitment that predated this initiative has been strengthened and made more explicit in the School's literature, procedural materials, and course syllabi.
- The School has reviewed the social justice content within the curriculum, inventoried strengths, and identified opportunities as well as strategies to integrate social justice content throughout. Phased and systematic integration has begun. Assessment methods have been put into place to measure outcomes.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Ann Brenden, "Teaching to Catholic Mission in Professional Education: A Comprehensive Model for the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 27 no. 1 (2008): 17.

- Faculty and students are developing a keener understanding of Catholic mission and identity and its relationship to the social justice mission of their profession.
- The faculty has a deeper appreciation for CST and the rich resource that it presents to social work education and practice and to higher education.¹⁴⁹

Knowing that the achieved outcomes of this program have accomplished many of the goals set for integrating the Catholic identity of the school into their everyday work may be encouraging to other schools hoping for a similar connection to their mission.

4.2.4 Retreat: Attending and Accompanying

Many Catholic schools offer a retreat program to their students, with faculty and staff members serving as chaperones or even small group leaders, with the opportunity to give witness talks. Attending a retreat with students is an opportunity many adults in the community look forward to as a way to grow their own understanding of the school community and its Catholic identity. Additionally, schools may offer a faculty retreat program in which adults attend retreat together as a way to invest in the community more deeply. Faculty and staff retreats can take many different forms and may or may not be required as part of an extended formation program or even back-to-school professional development. The survey and focus groups for this project found an appreciation for the opportunity to attend retreats, both with and without students, depending on the respondent. What was consistent was the recognition that retreat is an important opportunity to step away from the hustle and bustle of the school community and reinvest in the values that make the community special. Programs that mirror a retreat setting – off campus, low stakes, time for reflection and discussion – may also serve the same purpose

¹⁴⁹ Brenden, “Teaching to Catholic Mission in Professional Education,” 24.

but remove some of the pressure that non-spiritual or non-religious folks might feel when presented with a religious retreat. Some schools have made retreat mandatory for their faculty and staff, often at the beginning or end of the school year as a way to prime their community for the next season.

Catholic universities have adopted similar practices on a much larger scale, with various chances for faculty and administrators to engage in meaningful mission work at set times throughout the school year as well as throughout their careers at the university. While serving as the provost of the University of Dayton, Fr. James Heft, S.M. redesigned the faculty formation program as part of a hiring for mission initiative and mission institutionalization process that involved the entire school. He put into place a program that spanned the course of a professor's or instructor's time at the University. Beginning from the moment of interview, the mission of the school was openly, honestly, and proudly communicated to the candidate without any apprehension on the part of the University. Throughout the course of their time at Dayton, faculty members joined their peers at various checkpoints during which they were given time and space to see their work as part of the greater mission of the University, the goal of the mission institutionalization process. A major part of this program was a retreat that second-year tenure track faculty took part in during the spring semester. Heft describes the retreat:

The university also began to conduct a second-year tenure track faculty retreat in the spring, and a little later a special program for newly tenured faculty who by that time had settled sufficiently into their identities as faculty to understand more clearly the challenges and possibilities of embracing a distinctive mission at the university.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, 141.

By utilizing a time in one's career when they might feel more settled and confident, this program serves as a way for dedicated members of the community to become more familiar with the University's mission, how they already fit into it, and how they might grow in that mission.

Programs similar to the University of Dayton's have been adopted in other places. The Midwest Jesuit Province asks faculty and staff members to make a weekend retreat away to a Jesuit retreat house at the conclusion of their first year at a Jesuit high school in the province. While the retreat is mandatory, it is offered over a variety of weekends in the summer between the first and second year of employment, and at a number of different retreat houses so as to be convenient for as many retreatants as possible. The goal of the retreat is for new members of the Jesuit family to fully embrace the principles of Jesuit education, Ignatian spirituality, and the heritage of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It creates a community among newer faculty and staff members across schools who share in the experience of entering into a new school, not just a Catholic school but a school run by the Society of Jesus. This retreat lasts two nights, and while it may create a burden for some, the weekend retreat format consolidates the formation experience.

Most of the high schools in the Midwest Province have ongoing formation programs for their adult stakeholders, so the retreat is a supplement to what is already done in-house at these schools. Having attended this retreat, the researcher of this project observed the beneficial nature of standardizing formation activities and providing a curriculum of sorts focused on Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit education so that all employees of such schools receive a baseline of the same information to bring back to their community. Ministers, coaches, teachers, administrative assistants, and everyone in

between are asked how they might embody the Jesuit mission in their service to their school. This retreat is not meant to replace formation work done at the school or to be the only exposure one might have to the principles introduced, but a piece of a larger puzzle where the end picture shows a school in which all members of the community actively work to bring about the mission of the school in their individual tasks.

In this research, survey respondents had much to say about the effectiveness of faculty-staff retreats and attending retreats with students. When asked about the most effective methods of mission integration and formation in their community, responses were as follows:

- “Retreats with charism-based instruction and discussions. These experiences allow faculty and staff to engage in dialogue about the most pertinent elements of the school's values.”¹⁵¹
- “The retreats the grown-ups attend and sometimes participate in with the students. They are not required and the teachers give freely of their time to attend.”¹⁵²
- “In school faculty/staff retreats - because it gives us a chance to talk about how our mission is alive, or what needs to improve.”¹⁵³
- “Retreats. Retreats celebrate community and prayer - two things that our school community highly values.”¹⁵⁴
- “I think retreat opportunities -- especially in conjunction with students -- accomplishes [sic] this best.”¹⁵⁵
- “The retreat day because it allows time for direct reflection on this topic.”¹⁵⁶
- “Annual retreats and reflections at the beginning of the school year.”¹⁵⁷
- “Retreats - dedicated time to focus on Catholic mission of the school”¹⁵⁸
- “I find our all-school Masses and retreat programs to be the most effective in building the Catholic identity of the school primarily because these are moments when all faculty, staff and students come together to give witness to our Catholic faith.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵¹ Survey Results, Response #20.

¹⁵² Survey Results, Response #80.

¹⁵³ Survey Results, Response #86.

¹⁵⁴ Survey Results, Response #48.

¹⁵⁵ Survey Results, Response #11.

¹⁵⁶ Survey Results, Response #103.

¹⁵⁷ Survey Results, Response #108.

¹⁵⁸ Survey Results, Response #19.

¹⁵⁹ Survey Results, Response #84.

- “all school in-house retreat with students, teachers and staff. It is valuable because we are all learning together as a community and have shared experiences from every corner of the school.”¹⁶⁰

Whether alongside students or with peers, many adults in the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic high school community tend to appreciate what retreat might offer them in terms of their own knowledge and understanding of their school's mission statement.

When faculty and staff are asked to attend a retreat with students, an approachable way for them to embody the mission of the school becomes easily available. Adults from all areas, across disciplines, extracurricular activities, and administrative work are all valued as chaperones, leaders, and witnesses on student retreats. From a logistical standpoint, diversifying the adults who attend retreat with students ensures that campus ministry and theology teams are not overburdened with the responsibility of guiding students while on retreat. Campus ministers, responsible for planning and directing retreats, rely on assistance outside of their own department for additional supervision on student retreats.

As another low-stakes chance to engage in spirituality and faith, accompanying students on retreat also demonstrates to students that even the football coach, the biology teacher, and the history club moderator are invested in their spiritual lives. If schools are attempting to encourage young people to continue to live the values instilled in them during their time as students beyond graduation, providing role models for what that might look like in the form of faculty and staff members gives a tangible image of adult faith. When campus ministry and theology departments are left to staff retreats on their own, they may become fatigued with the process, or others might view the opportunity as

¹⁶⁰ Survey Results, Response #40.

outside of their capacity as an educator. Inviting adult employees to participate in such activities and encouraging retreat participation can be beneficial to the overall mission integration of the school.

4.2.5 Sponsoring Order Involvement

As religious men and women leave their roles in Catholic schools and universities and are replaced by lay people, it is critical that the identity of the school be maintained and advanced by those taking over administrative and teaching roles from the sponsoring order. In light of this development, it is appropriate to emphasize not only the Catholic identity of the school but also its sponsorship – for example, the Jesuit, Franciscan, or Dominican nature of the school. The mission statement of an order-run school most likely contains references to the charism¹⁶¹ of the school’s sponsoring order. Using the Archdiocese of Chicago as a sample data group, 24 of the 29 Catholic high schools mention their specific religious order. As such, continued incorporation of that charism into the work of the school community and in particular adult formation appropriately supports the mission of the school.

Catholic universities have been faced with this reality for decades and have made adaptations to their mission activity which shine a light on their sponsoring orders. Barry University and Siena College provide many opportunities for faculty, staff, students, and

¹⁶¹ “Charism refers to a Catholic school's unique identity, special focus, and particular spirit that enable the school to evangelize and glorify God.” In this case, charism is associated with the unique identity of a particular religious order. Timothy J. Cook, *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools* (National Catholic Educational Association, 2015), 57.

administrators to interact with the founding orders of their schools. Smith and Davies cite a number of activities that highlight Barry University's Dominican heritage:

Creating educational opportunities that honored the institution's Dominican heritage and Adrian Dominican foundation served to convey the importance of these experiences at this juncture in Barry University's history. Initial actions range from establishing large university-wide traditions, such as Founders' Week, to regular email reminders linking Barry University's mission with important issues in Catholic higher education.¹⁶²

Creating school culture around the founding order of the school allows for interaction with the values and charism of the order through a community-based method. The University of Dayton offered similar activities aimed at faculty and staff mission awareness; they organized off-campus overnight workshops for those involved in the hiring process during their hiring for mission initiative. The workshop offered a seminar session that

focused on a candid description of the strengths and weaknesses of the University of Dayton, especially in terms of what a distinctive intellectual culture at a Catholic and Marianist university would look like, whether it would be desirable, and what difference it might make.¹⁶³

With an exerted effort made toward an understanding of and familiarity with the nuances of the religious order involved in the school, Dayton's strategy has opened the minds of its faculty and staff regarding what makes their university unique, Catholic, and Marianist. Maryellen Gilroy shares similar sentiments regarding the Franciscan school, Siena College, and its journey toward mission-oriented hiring. The college developed a strategic structure for introducing its distinctive Catholic and Franciscan heritage to its potential hires. It was determined through an internal investigative process that staff

¹⁶² Smith and Davies, "Institutionalizing Mission Engagement," 50.

¹⁶³ Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, 140.

members on campus were not comfortable speaking about the Franciscan charism upon which the school was founded.

After conversations with members of the residential life staff, “it was apparent that if members of the student affairs staff became conversant in Franciscan values and the distinctiveness of a student life program informed by the elements of Catholic Social Teaching, the culture of the division would change.”¹⁶⁴ They introduced St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan values they hoped to embody as a community through a series of documents that staff members read in preparation for hiring new employees, who would be required to read the same documents. When the time came to re-evaluate the recruitment process, conversations with and feedback from Franciscan friars allowed a new perspective to take shape. The involvement of their sponsoring order became a critical step in the process:

The Franciscans were a valuable resource in helping the staff to express concepts, feelings, and experiences of the mission. Their guidance (and support) in this process was essential in reassuring student affairs staff that articulating mission should be everyone’s role on the campus; these conversations helped the staff to articulate the mission thoughtfully and confidently.¹⁶⁵

By working with their sponsoring order, the staff at Siena became more comfortable and more skilled at articulating the mission of the school and seeing their individual roles as part of a larger picture.

Catholic high schools are faced with the same challenges regarding the passing on of the treasures of the faith from sponsoring organizations to lay leaders. Despite this reality, connection to the founding order remains a powerful feature of mission integration. While those who have professed vows to the organization are well equipped

¹⁶⁴ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 106.

¹⁶⁵ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 111-112.

to explain their mission means, the current state of religious orders requires the passing on of this heritage to lay men and women. In fact, “Many religious order school networks have their own processes as another layer of accountability to ensure that sponsored schools are living out the Network's Mission and charism.”¹⁶⁶ By involving the sponsoring order in the mission integration process, there is a possibility that the tone is set for the care and attention paid toward the school’s mission and the importance of those who know that mission as part of their own vocation. The survey responses from this research share the viewpoint that effective mission integration takes place when the sponsoring order takes center stage. One survey response stated,

I think the retreats and lessons about the school's Catholic identity/our sponsoring religious order (the Jesuits) is most important in terms of giving a baseline understanding - particularly for those who are not Catholic. In my case, I attended Catholic schools for 12 years, but I didn't have a strong knowledge of the Jesuits and what makes them unique. I have really enjoyed learning more about this topic.¹⁶⁷

Another shared, “We have members of our sponsoring religious order come into our building and work with us on our formation and shows [sic] us pathways to better build our Catholic identity. We commit time and effort to continuing our education and development into a brother/sisterhood of schools in the US.”¹⁶⁸ As for new employee training, exposure to the sponsoring order can motivate and inspire individuals who are just getting acquainted with the larger community. Another survey respondent reflected on this as an effective practice, “Learning sessions for new teachers to give them history and context about the sponsors (Sisters of Saint Joseph), because they are lead [sic] by

¹⁶⁶ Cook, *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools*, 65.

¹⁶⁷ Survey Results, Response #45.

¹⁶⁸ Survey Results, Response #85.

sisters who are really enthusiastic and it feels very comfortable to speak with them.”¹⁶⁹

While order and charism may vary, a positive effect follows from involving the religious order that sponsors a school.

Schools will approach their mission integration processes differently, and success for a school looks different depending on the criteria used to evaluate the school.

Effective mission integration strategies and ideas take many forms. Recurring themes that were mentioned throughout the research process included: community and relationship building, hiring for mission, retreat options for faculty and staff, consistency in formation, opportunities specific to the community, and space for impromptu or casual gatherings. With the changing landscape of Catholic education, especially in light of diminished vocations to religious life, school mission, identity, and culture remain the primary ways by which Catholic schools may be distinguished from their private and public school counterparts. The words of Belmonte and Cranston, though their research focuses on Australian schools, can be applied to American Catholic schools as well: “At present, Catholic schools are especially challenged to maintain their overall character and ethos and at the same time integrate into a new context that which is more appropriate to the multicultural and pluralistic dimensions of modern [Australian] society.”¹⁷⁰ The practices and strategies recounted here offer effective methods for supporting faculty and staff knowledge of mission and engagement with the Catholic identity of the school.

¹⁶⁹ Survey Results, Response #77.

¹⁷⁰ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 295.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher examined the key strategies and programs that effectively promote mission integration and Catholic identity within Catholic organizations, particularly universities, and how they might be applied to the high school level. The research underscored the importance of rotating professional development topics, cultivating strong leadership, and incorporating elements of service and social justice into the fabric of the school community. Additionally, retreats and active engagement with sponsoring religious orders emerged as powerful tools for fostering a deeper connection to the school's mission and identity.

Survey responses and focus group discussions revealed that faculty and staff value opportunities to reflect on their roles within the school's mission. However, challenges such as redundancy in programming and limited participation underscore the need for creative and relationship-focused approaches. The chapter also highlighted the evolving role of lay leadership in Catholic education, emphasizing that strong, mission-oriented leaders are essential for sustaining a school's Catholic identity in the absence of religious men and women.

Looking forward, the next chapter will build upon these findings by offering best practices in mission integration beyond the programs and strategies in this chapter. The suggestions explored in the following chapter are not necessarily programming proposals for mission leaders specifically; rather, they are overarching ideas for improving current structures at an administrative level and among faculty and staff communities. These ideas may lead to further research in the arena of mission integration. They have been

introduced through outside research, advice found in the survey and focus groups for this project, and experts in the field.

Chapter 5:

Recommendations for Improving Mission Integration Beyond Adult Formation

5.1 Chapter Introduction

While best practices are explored in the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on recommendations, beyond formation strategies and existing programs, to increase mission awareness and more fully integrate school identity into school culture. Explored in this chapter are recommendations that may not be the responsibility of a mission or ministry team but individual administrators, the entire administration, or the entire adult community. Based on scholarly research of Catholic higher education and the information gathered in the survey and focus groups, the researcher has compiled recommendations for schools in the area of mission and identity. The principles compiled by Dr. Timothy J. Cook in his workbook, “Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools,” were helpful as this research came together. The “Eleven characteristics of good enculturation and formation” can be found in Appendix C. For the purposes of this research, hiring for mission, budgeting for mission, community building, and highlighting successful programs, individuals, or departments can be used to bolster active and passive adult formation and mission awareness. These are not necessarily programs; rather, broader strategic designs that assist in sustaining the mission integration work achieved through specific adult formation initiatives. By incorporating these goals into strategic plans or annual goals, schools can further support their mission efforts and the adult community.

Often mentioned when mission integration is discussed, recruiting and hiring for mission provides a foundation for mission awareness among all new employees. In the 1990 Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II gives specifications for how Catholic universities should protect and promote their identity in light of the loss of religious men and women in their institutions. He specifically states:

The responsibility for maintaining and strengthening the Catholic identity of the University rests primarily with the University itself. While this responsibility is entrusted principally to university authorities (including, when the positions exist, the Chancellor and/or a Board of Trustees or equivalent body), it is shared in varying degrees by all members of the university community, and therefore calls for the recruitment of adequate university personnel, especially teachers and administrators, who are both willing and able to promote that identity. The identity of a Catholic University is essentially linked to the quality of its teachers and to respect for Catholic doctrine.¹⁷¹

While this papal document discusses the importance of identity in Catholic universities, once again similar ideas can be applied to Catholic high schools as well. Beyond having dedicated individuals across the school community, budgeting for mission similarly ensures that what needs to be done to support the identity and culture of the school can come to fruition. Without proper funding, mission activities would be severely lacking, especially when set up against commonly valued aspects of the high school experience such as athletics, advanced placement programs, and extracurricular activities.

Developing a budget that reflects the core values of an institution may ensure a unified vision of the mission across departments. Backing the words of a mission statement with line items in the school budget validates the concrete work of the mission. Schools that already account for their mission activities in their financial and strategic planning set and verify that their budgeted items are aligned with the school mission.

¹⁷¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Apostolic Constitution, Vatican Website, August 15, 1990, Article 4 §1.

Community building and highlighting successes are the final two recommendations suggested by this researcher. Encouraging members of the adult community to find specific avenues for their participation in the mission of the school and celebrating when they do so effectively gives concrete examples of how the mission is applicable to all individuals in the community and may raise the morale of the employees. When the community is engaged socially and professionally, it may be more likely for them to feel part of the mission as well.

5.2 Suggestions

5.2.1 Suggestion #1: Recruiting and Hiring for Mission

“All teachers and all administrators, at the time of their appointment, are to be informed about the Catholic identity of the Institution and its implications, and about their responsibility to promote, or at least to respect, that identity.”¹⁷²

Widely recognized as the most effective means of ensuring that employees are on board with the mission of an institution, hiring for mission has been part of the conversation in Catholic education for over two decades. Hiring for mission ensures that employees are aware of, agree with, and will support the mission of a school from the time they are interviewed and then going forward. Staudt similarly shares, “A clearly articulated mission must guide all hiring, beginning with the principal and all teachers. The more the community understands and accepts the mission of the school – rooted in faith and embracing curriculum and community – the more the school can achieve its true

¹⁷² Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Article 4 §2.

purpose and goal.”¹⁷³ Many different universities have well-established programs to support the process of recruiting new faculty and staff members who are dedicated to the institution's mission values. High schools and elementary schools have recently joined the same methods of recruitment, and Catholic institutions beyond just schools have produced strategies to assist in today's job market. Incorporating the mission of a school into the hiring process can assist in building a school culture where the Catholic identity of the school is at the forefront of every employee's mind. Hiring for mission is an effective way to ensure that faculty, staff, and administrators are aligned in their goals for their individual work as well as the larger community.

Several practitioners in higher education have created hiring and recruitment procedures that rely heavily on their candidates and hiring professionals to embrace the school's mission. Heft, Smith and Davies, Gilroy, and Briel have all shared about their experiences as university administrators responsible for evaluating the recruitment and hiring practices for their schools. In his book, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, Heft expertly examines the underlying factors for why faculty and staff at Catholic universities might not be entirely supportive of a Catholic mission. He states, “Unfortunately, many academics assume that the mission of a religious university belongs only to campus ministry and the theology department. Faculty may reduce the mission to being fair and kind to students and being good colleagues—certainly desirable qualities, but not sufficient for an adequate embodiment of the mission.”¹⁷⁴ This primary objection or misunderstanding proves difficult to overcome once an individual is well-established in their new community. To combat this very concern, Barry University

¹⁷³ Staudt, “To Change a School,” 128.

¹⁷⁴ Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, 136.

implemented a hiring for mission process that included sharing the main defining characteristics of the school with any potential faculty members; “From the moment of hire, new faculty and staff are introduced to the inclusive and collaborative organizational culture that defines Barry University. Strategic university priorities are presented in terms of how they further the institution's mission and core commitments.”¹⁷⁵ As a prospective employee, this allowed for joining the community to understand what they have agreed to as a new member of the university staff. These efforts, organized by a specific Office of Mission Engagement, also assist department chairs and those in charge of hiring in their search and recruitment strategies.

Similarly, Siena College, under the leadership of Maryellen Gilroy as Vice President for Student Affairs, framed their hiring for mission process as a two-step initiative, with part one being education and professional development for current faculty and staff to become familiar and comfortable with the unique characteristics of a Catholic university as a place of higher education and intellectual curiosity.¹⁷⁶ The process of recruiting for mission also entails a continuous commitment to offering training and professional development for current staff. These opportunities equip staff to express the unique Catholic identity of the institution and to share mission-focused examples of actions, values, or decisions when engaging with applicants.¹⁷⁷ At Siena College, investing in the current faculty and staff and providing them with opportunities to grow as leaders in their institution increased their ability to comfortably speak about the mission of the school and how they personally fit into that mission. Gilroy sees the

¹⁷⁵ Smith and Davies, “Institutionalizing Mission Engagement and Leadership Formation at a Dominican University,” 54.

¹⁷⁶ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 101.

¹⁷⁷ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 102.

recruitment for mission process as a version of “educational branding,”¹⁷⁸ making very clear to potential community members what the goals and expectations of the institution are. A key factor in this process consists of open dialogue with existing and possible staff about their view of themselves within the mission of the school.

Recruitment for mission is also a way to gauge how clearly applicants understand and appreciate the defining features of the environment they may be joining. A process allowing for dialogue about how an institution's Catholic identity or charism is expressed can help applicants to assess whether this environment is a place where the tribute to the mission.¹⁷⁹

Knowing if a particular institution is the right fit for the faculty member is as important as knowing the faculty member is the right fit for the school; Gilroy points out how making the mission a significant part of the interview process can assist in both parties judging the nature of the possible partnership.

For Siena College, the best way to convey the mission of the school to future employees was by asking candidates to read a paper written by the university chaplain, *A Persistent Memory: The Spiritual Legacy of Francis of Assisi and Siena College*. This piece introduced the values of the school community, the identity of the school, and the history of the school's association with the Franciscans. According to Gilroy, “the document had an immediate and dramatic effect on the hiring process. It was clear to interviewing committees that the applicants invited to campus that year were prepared differently.”¹⁸⁰ The school experienced beneficial results from this new mission-oriented hiring process in a few different ways:

First, the preparation, reading, and discussion of these documents allowed the entire staff to develop a baseline understanding of our institution's identity, and to be conversant about the mission. Second, these materials allowed candidates to

¹⁷⁸ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 103.

¹⁷⁹ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 103-104.

¹⁸⁰ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 107.

have a sense of how the mission informs what we do at the College, and in student life. Third, it provided candidates with a sense of the institutional culture, and helped them to frame their responses to the questions of how they would contribute to and enhance Siena College's mission.¹⁸¹

By asking their staff to truly consider what it means to be part of a mission-driven organization, Siena College found itself to be a more integrated university, with connections made across departments and disciplines despite personal faith traditions or prior understandings of a Catholic university. Members of the faculty and staff became more able to express how their specific practices exemplified the mission of the school. While many members of the community were not Catholic, they were better able to identify where their personal beliefs overlap with the Franciscan mission of Siena College.

Catholic colleges and universities, as with any organization, cannot discriminate in hiring based on religion or creed. This leads to creative ways in which the mission of the organization can be passed on. At Siena College, “it was apparent that if members of the student affairs staff at Siena became conversant in Franciscan values and the distinctiveness of a student life program informed by the elements of Catholic Social Teaching, the culture of the division would change.”¹⁸² Their process of ensuring a level of familiarity with the Franciscan tradition of the school began with the hiring process. This method of hiring for mission was beneficial, not just for new faculty recruits, but for the entire faculty community. Gilroy’s recommendations for establishing a recruiting for mission process can be applied far beyond a university community – any Catholic organization can find useful guidelines in her principles to consider.

¹⁸¹ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 108.

¹⁸² Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 106.

At the University of Dayton, Fr. James Heft and his exploration of institutionalizing Catholic identity began with the faculty and staff who were responsible for hiring new employees. This “bottom-up” approach was designed “to work directly with faculty and especially with department chairs—that is, with those at our institution who play key roles in the hiring process.”¹⁸³ The idea began when Heft realized the number of misunderstandings that surrounded the idea of hiring for mission. While starting with department chairs and those responsible for hiring, Heft and those involved in the initiative designed a series of off-campus overnight workshops for current employees. The process started with the business school, but “over time, this retreat about hiring proved effective enough that the Provost was willing to require attendance from departments given approval to initiate searches.”¹⁸⁴ With “top-down” support of the “bottom-up” process, the programs became more sustainable and saw continued success. They considered the work done in these workshops to be research into how the various disciplines can best adopt mission-driven hiring practices. According to Heft, “A good number of the faculty now take for granted that doing this sort of research is not only legitimate but adds to their understanding of their own discipline. A vibrant intellectual community conducting such research makes it easier to understand what hiring for mission means.”¹⁸⁵ Of course, this scenario is the ideal and went into play slowly through the business school at Dayton, not necessarily the entire university. It is not hard to imagine how similar structures could be put into place in other Catholic institutions as

¹⁸³ Heft, “Institutionalizing Catholic Identity,” 186.

¹⁸⁴ Heft, “Institutionalizing Catholic Identity,” 187.

¹⁸⁵ Heft, “Institutionalizing Catholic Identity,” 190.

well, including high schools and elementary schools, Catholic hospital systems, religious orders, and beyond.

Recruitment and hiring for mission are commonly held best practices in the Catholic academic community. Briel states, “In order to renew the Catholic identity of our institutions, it will be necessary not only to develop a new approach to the recruitment of faculty, but also to create strategic plans to secure the cooperation of departments in new approaches to hiring.”¹⁸⁶ Briel, Heft, and Gilroy all have the perspective of higher education institutions. The reality of Catholic high schools and elementary schools is quite different than that of colleges and universities with endowments that allow for higher salaries, more personnel in charge of mission activity, and most likely deeper pools of talent for open positions. High schools often do not have an abundance of applicants for open roles, the time to actively recruit the person who best fits the school’s identity, nor the ability to offer salaries competitive with local public schools. This can draw talented individuals away from a career in Catholic education. Because of these realities, recruitment and hiring for mission can take a back seat to filling open teaching, student support, and staff positions.

5.2.2 Suggestion #2: Budgeting for Mission

While hiring the right people is essential for a mission-based institution, it is also critical that they have what is necessary to do their jobs in light of the strategic goals of the school. One interesting statement said in the focus groups for this research project was, “Budgets reflect priorities.”¹⁸⁷ The focus group member expressed that when a

¹⁸⁶ Briel, “Mission and Identity: The Role of Faculty,” 175.

¹⁸⁷ Focus Group #4, Participant #1.

school dedicates itself to achieving a particular goal, they “put their money where their mouth is” and ensure that the project is funded to achieve its ends. When a school pours the majority of its resources into programs or processes that do not cooperate with their mission, they do not allow space for retreats, formation programs, and other ministry programming. A school may demonstrate its lack of support within the budget. Other focus group members agreed with this assessment and shared that they have seen similar things happen at their schools.¹⁸⁸ It is easy to tell when a program is well supported by a school administration when it receives appropriate funding. However, budgets are complex and the stewards of school budgets must juggle a multitude of priorities when safeguarding the future of their institution. It may seem that ministry and mission programs are not always at the top of mind when budgets are constructed, so perhaps the responsibility of ensuring mission-related programs have space within the budget should rest with individual departments and people when compiling their annual finances. Additionally, entrusting oversight of the mission to at least one person in the final budget discussion may be helpful to provide essential funding for staff formation programs

Mission statements can give concrete shape to the general values established as essential to the identity of a school. Strategic planning flows from the way that a mission statement informs the overall goals of the organization. This encompasses the operations of the entire school community and can offer specifications down to the financial planning of each department. Richard J. Burke, a former financial consultant for the National Catholic Educational Association, cites many challenges to the budgeting

¹⁸⁸ Focus Group #4.

process, in particular the lack of interconnection between strategic planning budgets and departmental budgets:

As the first finance consultant for NCEA and one who has devoted the last 25 years to providing consultation to Catholic schools, I contend that financial planning as a stand-alone process is inappropriate for Catholic secondary schools. When financial planning is taken to an extreme or used in isolation, the financial goals often impede more legitimate and desirable outcomes with regard to the teaching/learning process. Occasionally financial planning has been blatantly counterproductive to the mission of Catholic education.¹⁸⁹

Because the financial planning process is undertaken by individuals or departments without connection to those outside of the department, it may be beneficial for those preparing their budgets to gather feedback from others, including administrators, members of other departments, and mission or ministry employees. By including individuals who are primarily responsible for mission activities into the budgeting process, as well as others who are impacted by budget decisions, it becomes more likely that the budget will reflect the mission and goals of the institution.¹⁹⁰ Research regarding budgeting for mission is perhaps an area of focus that needs more attention in the coming years as lay leadership continues to be the norm in Catholic settings. Because of this, hiring for mission, especially at the administrative level, may lead to a more inclusive, thoughtful budget demonstrating an awareness of mission importance. As hiring for mission underwent a revolutionary exploration in the early 2000s, those examining the process of budgeting for mission could do with the same kind of analysis, as the majority of literature discussing Catholic school budgets surrounds the viability of the school. Of

¹⁸⁹ Richard J. Burke, "Financial Planning for Catholic Secondary Schools: Essential but Not Determinative," *Journal of Catholic Education* 2 no 4 (1999): 480.

¹⁹⁰ Ozar, Weitzel-O'Neill, Barton, Calteaux, Hunter, and Yi, "Making a Difference," 159.

course, it is essential to budget for a school's future success, however, when the continued existence of the school is not a question, focus could shift to the mission.

Strategic planning is the key to successful financial planning in a school setting. Burke recommends, "The five-year financial plan should be based on and reflective of the school's strategic plan—its goals and objectives."¹⁹¹ As such, his recommendations for a basic strategic plan includes: "Ownership/governance, Administration, Catholic identity, Enrollment, Staffing, Curriculum, Plant and facilities, Finances, Institutional advancement, School-community relationship."¹⁹² When it comes to long-term planning, viability is of primary concern for any Catholic community – school, parish, or otherwise. Burke, as a consultant for finances in Catholic schools, observed that the budgeting process tends to happen in silos, which leads to a lack of transparency regarding what the priorities of the school truly are. Part of the viability concern stems from enrollment, or lack thereof; families are asked to make sacrifices in order to invest in a Catholic education for their children which is not possible for many who would otherwise choose a Catholic school. This project did not explore the connection between strong Catholic identity and sustained enrollment or financial success, but perhaps further research could be done to uncover whether or not there is a link between the two. If there is, which this researcher suspects there might be, then the financial feasibility of investing Catholic identity, culture, and mission in these environments.

5.2.3 Suggestion #3: Community Building

¹⁹¹ Burke, "Financial Planning for Catholic Secondary Schools," 483.

¹⁹² Burke, "Financial Planning for Catholic Secondary Schools," 482.

When people feel included in the school community and vital to the operations of the institution, they may be more likely to cooperate with spiritual and mission-oriented formation, opportunities to socialize in a mission or ministry setting, or volunteer to participate in optional activities. Investing time, resources, and personnel in community building benefits the faculty and staff, as well as the students and the rest of the stakeholders in that school. Staudt expressed the connection between mission and community by saying, “Strong mission and curriculum lead to a vibrant school community.”¹⁹³ Building relationships between community members has been proven to enhance the community; “Whether these relationships involve students, colleagues, or administrators, the quality of them profoundly impacts the growth and positivity of school environments.”¹⁹⁴ Creating an environment that supports community building can be challenging as it requires dedicated time, effort, and funding.

Heft expresses the positive impact of a faculty community and culture in the work of mission integration: “Over the years, this multi-faceted approach to orienting faculty research to mission-related topics has created a faculty culture at the university.”¹⁹⁵ While building community and culture is a labor of time, the work is worthwhile when it promotes communication, compassion, and respect among colleagues. Uniting under a shared mission statement and aligned under a shared goal provides “the focus and the energy for learning together in ways that enable people to learn generatively, to accomplish the vision for which they hope.”¹⁹⁶ A community that lives into this shared

¹⁹³ Staudt, “To Change a School,” 132.

¹⁹⁴ Cathleen Beachboard and Rashard Wright “Nurturing Positive School Relationships,” *Edutopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, September 20, 2023, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/nurturing-positive-school-relationships>.

¹⁹⁵ Heft, “Institutionalizing Catholic Identity,” 190.

¹⁹⁶ Amata Miller, “Infusing Catholic Identity throughout the Campus Community,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 30 no. (2011): 9.

vision is one that communicates with, supports, and encourages each member to embrace what unifies.

A study conducted in 2009 by Dr. Joseph Ferrari and Patrick Janulis at DePaul University examined the perceptions of the university's mission by Catholic and non-Catholic faculty and staff members. Their findings offer an interesting perspective on the importance of faith formation opportunities and mission-driven activities, in particular for staff members who view the Catholic identity of the school as essential to the work of the university. Their study focused on "gaining a more complete understanding of institutional perceptions and a sense of community among faculty and staff of different religious affiliations."¹⁹⁷ Their hypothesis, based on the work of Paul Sullins in a hiring for mission analysis, was that Catholic faculty and staff would be more in tune with the mission and identity of the school than non-Catholic faculty and staff and therefore will feel more comfortable in the community. Extrapolating from this, some elements of the mission which may seem less connected to Catholic identity might be more attractive to non-Catholic stakeholders, when in fact those elements are just as essential to the overt spiritual and religious elements of the mission statement. This might impact the way in which non-Catholic employees engage with their Catholic colleagues. Ferrari and Janulis examined how faculty and staff members responded to various elements included in the university's mission statement and how this impacts community:

Sense of community among administrators and coworkers predicted many diverse aspects of institutional interaction, such as administrator responsiveness to staff concerns, coworker willingness to help, and school service response to employee needs. This outcome provides further evidence that a strong community can be developed among individuals of all faiths working within Catholic institutions.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Ferrari and Janulis, "Embracing the Mission," 117.

¹⁹⁸ Ferrari and Janulis, "Embracing the Mission," 123.

Perhaps a misunderstanding of the mission or identity of the school, the values that were appreciated by both Catholic and non-Catholic community members were inherently essential to the mission of the university, regardless of appearing to be “Catholic” as one who is not familiar with the tradition might assume. While their research sheds light on the importance of mission knowledge among faculty and staff, it also presents the possibility that building relationships between faculty and staff members, regardless of faith, supports the overall Catholic identity of the school.

When individuals feel that they are vital to the overall goals of an institution, they may be more likely to participate in activities that support those goals. It may take time to build a community and to grow a following for optional events; however, it is worthwhile to invest the time as doing so makes it more likely that those individuals will support other activities in the name of the mission. In a church that focuses on Jesus Christ and his love of all people, it is never a detriment for a Catholic school or Catholic institution to invest time, talent, and treasures into their employees, to make them feel valued and appreciated, to support their needs as human persons – including their spiritual needs. Miller suggests, “Personal relationships marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, and continuing dialogue are required for a genuine spirit of communion.”¹⁹⁹ There are many suggestions for promoting positive relationships among school employees. Edutopia, an online network for K-12 educators, offers the three keys of active listening, an asset-based focus, and effective communication and encouragement as critical to nurturing strong relationships between administrators, faculty, and staff:

Cultivating active listening and trust forms a collaborative, respectful learning environment. Embracing strengths propels us to value every voice and unlock leadership. Building a culture of support binds these elements. Through

¹⁹⁹ Miller, *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*, 32.

heartwork, we embark on a transformative journey, fostering hope, growth, and positivity to build a relationship that supports every person to thrive.²⁰⁰

Any school has the goal of educating its students; when educators recognize their shared purpose, their collaboration and unity can build a community in which all are valued – students and adults.

As Van Hecke shares, “Forming a community can be a difficult thing.”²⁰¹ It makes the most sense, logistically, to incorporate community time into days or hours where employees are already asked to be at work. However, mandatory or forced community time often feels just as obligatory as faculty-staff meetings, parent-teacher conferences, or other required activities in which faculty and staff are expected to be their most professional selves. Impromptu, casual, or grassroots efforts for faculty and staff to socialize provide space for community building that does not feel forced or mandatory. Of course, this is a difficult process to organize, as part of what makes these events appealing is the disconnect from the administration and the spontaneous nature of such opportunities. When those outside of leadership positions take on the role of unofficial community builders, participation in those activities may increase the sense of belonging felt by employees. Edutopia, along with other education-based websites and organizations, offers some suggestions for building community in those obligatory settings, in spite of the connotations or feelings surrounding them, and discusses the benefits of having individuals dedicated to this task:

Community builders encourage participants to engage in more creative and meaningful discussions along with purposeful but voluntary collaboration (which is key). ... Collaboration is generally better when it is voluntary. The interactions

²⁰⁰ Beachboard and Wright, “Nurturing Positive School Relationships.”

²⁰¹ Michael Van Hecke, “Forming a School Community,” In *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, ed. R. Jared Staudt (The Catholic Education Press, 2020), 96.

are set to allow for varying degrees of sharing personal experiences, thoughts, ideas, and goals of the activity.²⁰²

Any employee could take on the role of “community builder” and successfully facilitate this kind of collaboration. School leaders may have a role in identifying these individuals, or they may self-select.

Belmonte and Cranston highlighted the importance of supportive leadership on the administrative level when working toward a Catholic community in the school setting. In their analysis of principals and school leaders, they noted the significant difference made in schools that valued relationships between faculty, staff, and students.

These principals recognized the importance of the promotion of interpersonal relationships in the school as central to creating an ethos and culture that supported the Catholic view of life. They were able to articulate that a family-like character was sought for their school habitus. All principals viewed an ideal as one where the school operated as an extension of the family where, through the network of relationships, they were able to forage the generation of social capital so advocated by Church authorities.²⁰³

While there is no exact formula for creating a family-like community within a school, extensive scholarship exists regarding the importance of healthy boundaries, community building, and respect within education. Heft offers two areas of faculty development that may assist in the process of community development – “providing models of scholarship in Catholic intellectual tradition that reflect excellence in a wide variety of disciplines, and inviting faculty to conversations that build and sustain intellectual community.”²⁰⁴

Connections among faculty provide a foundation for the broader school community; when those connections are based on a shared mission and identity, it is more likely that

²⁰² Ken Shelton, “Building Authentic Community during Meetings,” *Edutopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, July 8, 2024, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-start-meetings-right-school/>.

²⁰³ Belmonte and Cranston, “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools,” 300.

²⁰⁴ Heft, “Institutionalizing Catholic Identity,” 188.

individuals may feel the importance of living the school's mission in everything they do. In the budgeting process, departments are often invited to include funds for community building; they may host department lunches and casual events to encourage relationships outside of the professional environment. Cross-department community building could be supported in the same way. Examining community among faculty and staff in this way is another area of scholarship that could produce another research project.

5.2.4 Suggestion #4: Highlighting Successes

If academics, athletics, or college prep are main focuses of the school, how does the school make sure that Catholic identity is part of its overarching focus? Highlighting what is already successful by way of mission integration can set a positive example and serve as a model for those who may feel that their jobs do not align with the Catholic mission or culture of their school. For example, one focus group participant lauded the efforts of their school's athletic director. They stated that the athletic director was one of the few administrative professionals who began every meeting – small or large – with prayer. He mandated that a prayer be read before all athletic tournaments, matches, or games hosted by their school. He partnered with the service director of the school to support athletic teams in completing service projects together, expecting that coaches and athletics staff would participate alongside the students. The service director worked directly with the coaches and athletic staff to ensure all teams had the chance to volunteer together at a local organization.

The athletic director was also one of the few school employees who was regularly seen attending weekly morning mass in the chapel. He was a true example of the values

the school held dear, and a great role model for anyone who may feel that their job does not require an awareness for the mission of the school.²⁰⁵ Because athletics are so popular across the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, it benefits mission programs to adapt similar practices. The same focus group participant noted that coaches within the athletic department offered a mini-seminar on coaching with the core values of the school. The wrestling and field hockey coaches teamed up to lead a brief workshop for other coaches, expressing elements of the core values directly impacting the work they do with their athletes. By bringing the mission of the school to the forefront of popular activities within the community, it becomes second nature for participants to involve themselves in the school's mission. Sports are a great way to teach young people important values such as teamwork, empathy, and patience. It is advantageous to go where the people already are and highlight the fact that everyone there is part of the school's mission by uplifting the things already done by that part of the community that are in line with the mission.

In “Charism and Culture,” Dr. Timothy J. Cook shares examples of Catholic schools around the United States and what they do to prioritize mission in all facets of the school community. He uses Xavier High School in Connecticut as a model for collaboration between athletics and mission; the school implemented several policies to assist in integrating the mission of the school into the athletic department. Policies like those shared above take precedence over athletic competition and practice. For example, no sports practices are held on Sundays, mandatory retreats are prioritized over practices and games, optional retreats are offered for team captains, the charism and values of the

²⁰⁵ Focus Group #1, Participant #3.

sponsoring Xaverian order are presented to coaches, parents, and athletes before and during the season, and students are ineligible to participate in athletics if their school service requirement is not met.²⁰⁶ Beyond the direct policies and practices that impact the school community on a daily basis, some schools have made an effort to go beyond and ensure that their teams live out their mission in even bigger ways. Creighton Preparatory School in Omaha, Nebraska went as far as to implement a “Sweatshop Free Purchasing Policy” for its athletics programs. The policy states that the Athletic Department “requires all suppliers involved in the production and distribution of athletic apparel to ensure that the garments are manufactured under safe working conditions and in accordance with the stands of the International Labour organization.”²⁰⁷ This policy demonstrates a real commitment to the social justice concerns embedded in the Catholic mission of the school and provides a concrete example of how to incorporate mission values into an area of the school that may seem less aligned with the mission.

In addition to the success found in other departments or areas, many mission and ministry departments have hosted effective and relevant programming that allows other individuals to gain a deeper understanding of the mission, identity, or culture of the school. For example, less formal activities such as “learning lunch sessions ‘Soup and Substance’ on various topics,”²⁰⁸ “spiritual book (and wine!) clubs,”²⁰⁹ “Theology on Tap,”²¹⁰ “Non-religious community building,”²¹¹ or “Induction/mentoring programs – these are more social events that allow faculty to explore our Jesuit identity in a no-

²⁰⁶ Cook, *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools*, 38.

²⁰⁷ Cook, *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools*, 39.

²⁰⁸ Survey Results, Response #40.

²⁰⁹ Survey Results, Response #37.

²¹⁰ Survey Results, Response #37.

²¹¹ Survey Results, Response #19.

pressure, interactive way.”²¹² These types of activities provide low-intensity opportunities for exploration of the school’s identity and culture. Many schools already invite their faculty and staff to participate in such programs. The value of the less formal mission integration activities lies in the willingness of faculty and staff to partake in them. Additionally, they contribute to the community building discussed in the previous section.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the additional strategies that support mission integration programs in Catholic schools. Beyond suggested programming, strategic initiatives and intentional procedures can be used to support Catholic mission and identity. Through a combination of survey data, focus group discussions, and scholarly research, the key themes of charism, community, leadership, service, and prayer are seen as central to sustaining Catholic identity within schools. These themes not only shape institutional culture but also ensure that mission integration remains an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a static concept.

One of the most critical aspects of mission integration is the role of leadership in shaping and sustaining a school's identity. As Heft notes, mission-focused programming is most effective when it is championed by respected faculty and administrators who model the values they seek to instill: “One of the most important reasons these workshops went well was that they were led by respected lay faculty, opinion leaders whose teaching

²¹² Survey Results, Response #71.

and research were highly regarded and who grasped well the University's mission.”²¹³

When respected voices within the school take ownership of mission integration, others may be more likely to see its relevance and engage meaningfully with it.

Additionally, the way institutions articulate their mission to incoming faculty and staff plays a crucial role in sustaining Catholic identity. Gilroy’s research highlights a shift in how Catholic schools present their mission to prospective employees, noting that qualifiers such as “We are Catholic, but…” have diminished over time in favor of a more confident and unapologetic embrace of Catholic identity through intentional recruiting and hiring practices, continuing formation, and strong leadership.²¹⁴ This transition underscores the importance of institutional clarity and commitment when recruiting and forming educators who will carry forward the mission of the school.

The following chapter explores further implications for and broader best practices in mission integration beyond formation programs. While faculty and staff development are essential, mission-driven institutions must also consider structural and cultural elements such as hiring for mission, budgetary priorities, and community engagement. By embedding mission into all facets of school life, Catholic institutions can create an environment where faith, service, and intellectual formation are seamlessly integrated into daily practice, ensuring a thriving and vibrant Catholic identity for generations to come.

²¹³ Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, 140.

²¹⁴ Gilroy, “Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity,” 109.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

6.1 Chapter Introduction

This project has examined various programs and strategies utilized by Catholic High schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Catholic schools are constantly changing as are the students they serve. It is critical to the success of Catholic schools at every level that the students are known and ministered to in a way that makes sense for the present demographics, desires, and needs of the community. By meeting students where they are, schools can better serve the students in their care. The work of adult community members is at the service of the students. Teachers, administrators, counselors, staff members, and ministry professionals work together to ensure the holistic education of the young people placed in their care day in and day out. The preparation these adults undergo to provide a safe, nurturing educational environment is critical to the success of their schools.

The results of this project provide a glimpse into the realities of adult formation at the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The main strategies for effective adult formation identified through the survey and focus groups are changing or varying topics in formation sessions, strong leadership of the school and within mission-based programs, incorporating service and social justice, creating opportunities for retreat, and involvement from the school's sponsoring order. Beyond these strategies which directly impact professional and spiritual development, other suggestions to bolster mission understanding include recruiting and hiring for mission, budgeting for mission, celebrating successful individuals and programs, and building community amongst stakeholders. These findings align with research done at a number of universities and

Catholic education organizations, including the NCEA. Religious education forms students for a life of faith, community, and service; mission integration work strengthens and supports the adult communities of Catholic schools in their pursuit of these values. NCEA states its mission on its website, “In service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, NCEA strengthens Catholic school communities by convening all stakeholders and providing professional development, data, public policy and resources to support faith and intellectual formation.”²¹⁵ This is essentially the work of this project as well: to gather information and best practices in order to ensure that schools fully incorporate their mission into the work they do every day.

6.2 Key Findings

The results of this research indicate a broadly positive perception of Catholic identity among faculty, staff, and administrators. Most survey respondents expressed familiarity with their school’s mission statements and an awareness of their role in upholding Catholic identity. Many faculty and staff members recognized their participation in formation programs as integral to understanding and embracing their school’s mission. While challenges persist in ensuring active participation and deep engagement with mission-related initiatives, the shared recognition of mission importance demonstrates that many faculty and staff members are already “on board” with the values their school professes.

²¹⁵ NCEA, “Mission Statement,” NCEA, 2022, https://ncea.org/NCEA/NCEA/Who_We_Are/About_NCEA/Mission_Statement.aspx.

One significant finding is the correlation between institutional leaders and mission integration. In focus group sessions, participants expressed that having strong leadership committed to mission-driven professional development could lead to a higher level of mission awareness and engagement. One participant shared that the example set by school leaders during formation sessions laid the groundwork for others participating in formation.²¹⁶ Principals, administrators, and mission officers play a vital role in reinforcing the school's Catholic identity through both formal programs and daily interactions. Furthermore, survey results indicated that incorporating a sponsoring order into faculty formation activities was an effective strategy for supporting mission knowledge.

Another key insight pertaining to the effectiveness of adult formation strategies divulged the significance of content as well as strategy in active formation. The most impactful programs involved interactive and reflective engagement, particularly in the form of retreats, service and social justice initiatives, and ongoing professional development sessions centered on Catholic identity. Programs that relied solely on passive formation methods, such as newsletters or one-time lectures, were less effective in fostering a commitment to mission and community. Faculty and staff reported that consistent, varied, and relevant mission-related discussions contributed to their sense of belonging and personal investment in their school's identity.

Despite the presence of these formation opportunities, some survey participants did not view Catholic identity as a central reason for their employment at a Catholic school. The data revealed this small percentage, which might suggest a lack of personal

²¹⁶ Focus Group #1, Participant #1.

connection to the school mission. However, there are many factors that go into choosing an employer; this research does not directly link lack of mission support to this profession. Regardless, a need for more intentional recruitment and hiring processes that emphasize mission alignment from the outset might mitigate any questions that arise concerning an individual's role in the larger mission of a school. Schools that incorporate hiring for mission as a deliberate strategy may see a more cohesive community with faculty and staff who are intrinsically motivated to uphold the institution's Catholic character.

Recommendations made for strengthening mission integration across a school community include enhancing leadership commitment, implementing interactive formation strategies, bolstering hiring for mission practices, allocating financial resources for mission initiatives, blending the principles of Catholic Social Teaching with formation activities, and creating a culture of mission ownership among stakeholders. School leaders can actively participate in mission formation and model Catholic values through decision-making, professional development, and community engagement. Schools can prioritize dynamic and reflection formation programs that encourage faculty and staff participation in retreats, service activities, and school-wide discussions of Catholic values and charism. By emphasizing the mission during recruitment and onboarding, schools can cultivate a faculty and staff deeply committed to identity. Schools can ensure that mission-driven programs receive adequate funding and personnel to support long-term sustainability and effectiveness. Encouraging all stakeholders – faculty, staff, administration, and families – to take an active role in upholding Catholic identity can lead to a more cohesive and engaged school community.

The findings of this study reinforce the critical role of adult formation programs in strengthening Catholic identity in secondary education. By implementing best practices and fostering a culture of mission ownership, Catholic high schools can continue to serve as vibrant faith communities dedicated to holistic student development. The research underscores the importance of strategic leadership, intentional formation, and sustained institutional support in ensuring that Catholic identity remains at the heart of Catholic education for generations to come.

6.3 Limitations of This Research

As laid out in the first chapter of this project, there are limitations to this research that must be addressed and taken into consideration when evaluating the outcomes achieved. Previously stated, the major limiting factors of this research include the number and location of schools involved in the project, the instructional level of the institutions examined, lack of diversity in the demographics of those surveyed, the Likert-style scale used for survey questions, and the reality that focus group can sometimes hinder open and honest sharing in discussion.

Of the 29 Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, at least one member of the faculty or staff at 26 schools responded to the project survey. While this 89.65% rate of response on the school level is impressive, some schools were represented disproportionately to others. This naturally privileges voices from the schools that had more individual contributions. Seven schools had only one survey participant, six schools had two survey participants, and eight schools had three or four survey participants. Five schools had six or more survey participants. Because of these response rates,

representation from each school is limited to only a few perspectives, and thus conclusions are drawn on a limited amount of information, as is the case with any survey. Therefore, this project does not encompass the totality of Catholic identity in high schools in Chicago.

In addition to this lack of total representation within the Archdiocese of Chicago, the geographic boundaries of this project may impact its results. Many of the schools in the Chicagoland area mention their affiliation with or connection to their local community. Schools in different geographic regions may develop similarly distinct mission statements that reflect their local communities, historical contexts, and the specific needs of their student populations based on the area in which they are located. As these schools do not serve the same student and family populations, it makes sense that their mission statements reflect this. While the results of this research, including common features of mission statements, styles of formation, and effective strategies for mission integration may be transferable to schools in different places, the specific experiences and perceptions of mission statements at Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago will not be found in other dioceses.

Geography aside, only high schools were analyzed in this research. There was simply not enough time or resources to open the survey and focus groups to elementary and university-level employees. Programs developed for universities are often cited throughout this project. Research from the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools was examined in preparation for the survey and focus group phase of this project. The Archdiocese offers similar climate and culture style surveys to gather data for their kindergarten through eighth grade schools. Their surveys are aimed at student

and family experience, rather than faculty and staff experience. The survey used for this project could be adapted for elementary and university faculty and staff members, while the surveys from the Archdiocese could also be adapted for the high school level.

The demographics of those who responded to the project survey and focus group invitations are reminiscent of the wider demographics of faculty and staff at Catholic high schools in the United States. These demographics do not align with those of the population of Chicago, nor Catholics in the U.S. This leads to blind spots in the research regarding Catholic practices that reflect specific ethnic, cultural, or regional groups, the treatment of employees with distinct backgrounds, and the potential input of more voices in the development of mission-related programs. There are larger concerns at play with these statistics, including the hiring practices of Catholic schools and the importance of diversity initiatives in professional development.

As expressed earlier in this project, the intentional design for this project was a four-point Likert style survey scale. With responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree,” space was not given in the initial statements to respond in a neutral way. If a participant did not know whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement, they were given the opportunity to skip that statement. This is particularly important in studies of Catholic school identity, where personal beliefs, theological literacy, and levels of engagement with school mission can vary widely among faculty and staff. As an offset to the Likert-style scale, open-ended questions allowed for greater nuance to be communicated and provided participants with an opportunity to further explain their responses. Open-ended questions present their own challenges, as they rely on

participants to take the time to articulate their thoughts in detail. Information on similar limitations found in the focus group setting can be found in previous chapters.

Like any research method, surveys and focus groups have inherent challenges. The data collected is contingent upon the honesty, opinions, and feelings of the faculty, staff, and administrators who participated in the surveys and interviews. Responses may have been influenced by how participants interpreted survey questions, their personal experiences with Catholic education or the Church, and their state of mind at the time of completion. The accuracy of the data also depends on the extent to which respondents provide truthful and candid answers. Informed consent was obtained at the outset of both the survey and focus groups, with participants acknowledging their willingness to contribute. Anonymity and confidentiality were prioritized; all identifying information was removed during data analysis, and participants were assured that their identities and affiliations would remain protected. While the obstacles shared here do not diminish the significance of the project's findings, they expose areas where further study could be beneficial. The following section will explore some of the broader ministerial impacts of this project.

6.4 Broader Ministerial Impact

The work done here has implications beyond high schools, Catholic schools, and the Archdiocese of Chicago itself. The findings might be applied to a number of other mission-driven organizations: healthcare systems, universities, elementary schools, parishes and diocese, non-profits, and many other organizations. There are many opportunities to expand upon the identity and formation survey offered to the participants

of this project by including questions aimed at different programs, elements of Catholic identity, or audiences. As shared in Chapter 5, an analysis of budgeting for mission at Catholic schools would be a beneficial contribution to the overall area of mission integration. Considering what might be done with the results of this project opens many possibilities.

Beyond the stated goals, there are many opportunities for further development from this research. Expanding the scope of research to include Catholic elementary schools, universities, and a more diverse participant pool would enhance the generalizability of the results. The same kind of research could be done in any diocese or archdiocese, expanding beyond the Catholic community in Chicago. Conversations of the same nature with religious men and women who work in academic settings, with parents, with board members and donors, and with students would allow for a broader understanding of the perception of Catholic identity at Catholic schools from the viewpoint of additional stakeholders. To grasp whether all stakeholders have the same understanding of the school's mission and identity would allow administrators to take stock of their programs and strategies for mission integration, improving where there are holes and adapting to new community needs. The same could be done at the grade school or higher education level as well. There are many different iterations of this research that could be helpful in evaluating the Catholic identity of educational institutions and other Catholic organizations.

Having survey data and suggestions for best practices could assist in hiring procedures at Catholic high schools, help design new professional development and formation programming, provide guidance from sponsoring institutions, and advise

strategic planning for said organizations. Additionally, comparative studies of Catholic school identity across different geographic regions could provide valuable insights into how local contexts shape mission, governance, and institutional culture. By acknowledging these limitations, this research contributes to an ongoing conversation about Catholic school identity while recognizing the need for further exploration of this complex topic. By using the information shared in this project, schools can adapt surveys and focus groups to the needs of their specific community and hone in on the areas in greatest need of improvement. The feedback from a broader audience of voices would help meet the needs of those who already contribute to school community and culture. Regional and demographic factors, as well as charism specific suggestions, could illuminate more personalized, effective strategies for a variety of schools.

A lofty future implication for this project would be to work toward a Catholic school accreditation process that analyzes and advises on the “Catholicity” of a particular school. This would include the components which determine Catholic identity – demographics of student body, faculty, and staff, curriculum of theology courses, celebration of sacraments and holy days, retreat programming, community service requirements – and compare evidence collected to the school’s mission statement and values. This would assist in determining if a school is living out its Catholic identity in an evident, tangible way. By producing solid research on Catholic identity, this could lead to the development of an accreditation process. The NCEA and the Institute for the Transformation of Catholic Education both have programs aimed at the same kind of evaluation, so perhaps another program is not necessary. Partnering with either of these organizations would be a natural progression as well. However, existing programs do not

examine adult formation as a critical area of mission integration. This project will hopefully invite others to think more critically about their organization's mission statement and the way it translates to their programs and services.

This researcher believes there is more to this question than simply how the adults in a community address the unique identity of that community; there are much larger questions at play when asking "What makes a Catholic school 'Catholic'?" One factor hinted at in this research but not fully explored is adult catechesis, not only for Catholic school employees, but for all adult Catholics. Many can speak to the lack of development in the faith that so many adults experience once they have aged out of Catholic school or religious education programs; ministers and pastors encounter stunted development of mature faith in those to whom they minister. After Confirmation, the next time many Catholics consider going to Church or participating in parish life is in preparation for Matrimony or the Baptism of a child. There are many reasons one might cease to participate in the religious life of the Church; however, one critical reason may be a lack of mature faith and sincere relationship with God that many seem to experience as they grow into adulthood.

As a minister of ten years, primarily working with young people, this researcher has strong feelings about what is offered outside of Catholic schools regarding adult faith formation. Many sides of this issue exist – what is provided by parishes and dioceses, the marketing of such activities, the interest and desire from Catholic adults for a more developed faith life – and yet, the concern remains. Participating in a faith community as a young adult challenges the social norms of this day and age. Seeking answers to profound and existential questions within a hierarchical church or formalized religion is

not popular. Even when looking for a place to explore faith and spirituality can be stigmatized. While the scope of this project limited adult faith formation to employees of Catholic schools, this barely scrapes the surface of a much larger problem in the Church – stunted faith development and misunderstanding of who God is.

There are many implications to this project and its findings; the researcher considered how the many elements of adult formation and mission integration in Catholic high schools might have a greater significance on the Church. It opens new possibilities for Catholic educational institutions to more intentionally “read the signs of the times” and to adapt their practices in ways that align more authentically with the Gospel imperatives at the heart of all education. By closely examining the dynamics of adult formation and mission integration within Catholic high schools, this project brings to light the formative power of educators’ spiritual development. The insights gained invite educators, administrators, and Church leaders to consider how structures of formation might become more intentional, relational, and integrated across Catholic educational settings. This work affirms that when adult faith formation is prioritized, schools may become sites not only of academic excellence but of deep spiritual and communal transformation. As such, Catholic education can be seen not merely as a ministry of the Church, but as a prophetic witness to the Church’s mission itself. Ultimately, the goals of this project were met and many doors are now open to explore these broader ministerial impacts.

Bibliography

- Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools. *Catholic Identity Survey*. Chicago, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago, 2022.
- Archdiocese of Washington. “Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 9, no. 3 (March 1, 2006): 266–277. <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0903022013>.
- Beachboard, Cathleen, and Rashard Wright. “Nurturing Positive School Relationships.” Edutopia. George Lucas Educational Foundation, September 20, 2023. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/nurturing-positive-school-relationships>.
- Belmonte, Angelo, and Neil Cranston. “The Religious Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools: Preserving Catholic Culture in an Era of Change.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 12, no. 3 (March 1, 2009): 294–319.
- Bolling, Rick. “The Importance of a School Mission Statement.” Graduate Programs for Educators, June 16, 2022. <https://www.graduateprogram.org/blog/the-importance-of-a-school-mission-statement/>.
- Brenden, Mary Ann. “Teaching to Catholic Mission in Professional Education: A Comprehensive Model for the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 27, no. 1 (January 2008): 13–32.
- Briel, Don. “Mission and Identity: The Role of Faculty.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 169–179.
- Briel, Don, Kenneth E. Goodpaster, Michael Naughton, and Dennis H. Holtschneider. *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021.

- Burke, Richard J. "Financial Planning for Catholic Secondary Schools: Essential but Not Determinative." *Journal of Catholic Education* 2, no. 4 (June 1, 1999): 479–490.
- Cahalan, Kathleen A., and Gordon S. Mikoski. *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Cardinal Newman Society. "Catholic Curriculum Standards - Cardinal Newman Society." Cardinal Newman Society, August 12, 2021.
<https://newmansociety.org/educator-resources/resources/academics/catholic-curriculum-standards>.
- Chang, Mei-Lin. "An Appraisal Perspective of Teacher Burnout: Examining the Emotional Work of Teachers." *Educational Psychology Review* 21, no. 3 (June 30, 2009): 193–218. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-009-9106-y>.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. "Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love." Vatican, 2013.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20131028_dialogo-interculturale_en.html.
- . "Lay Catholics in School: Witnesses to Faith." Vatican, 1982.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19821015_lay-catholics_en.html.
- . "The Catholic School." Vatican, 1977.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html.
- . "The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium." Vatican, 1997.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_

ccatheduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html.

———. “The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue.” Vatican, January 25, 2022.

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/29/220329c.html>.

———. “The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.” Vatican, 1988.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19880407_catholic-school_en.html.

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes. Rome, 1990.

Convey, John J. “Perceptions of Catholic Identity: Views of Catholic School Administrators and Teachers.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 16, no. 1 (September 17, 2012).

Cook, Timothy J. *Charism and Culture: Cultivating Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools*. Arlington, Va: National Catholic Educational Association, 2015.

Cook, Timothy J., and Thomas A. Simonds. “The Charism of 21st-Century Catholic Schools: Building a Culture of Relationships.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 14, no. 3 (March 1, 2011).

Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2016.

davis, timone a. *Intergenerational Catechesis: Revitalizing Faith through African-American Storytelling*. Lexington Books, 2021.

- Davis, Dána-Ain, and Christa Craven. *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.
- Dempsey, Mary. DePaul Prep Mission Statement. Interview by Sara Conneely, January 24, 2025.
- Durr, Tony, Nicole Graves, and Patrick D. Hales. “Family Matters: Teachers’ Perceptions of Community and School Culture after Seven Years of Personalized Learning Reform.” *Middle Grades Review* 10, no. 1 (June 2024).
- eleducation.org. “Fostering a Cohesive School Vision.” EL Education.
<https://eleducation.org/core-practices/leadership/fostering-a-cohesive-school-vision/>.
- Engel, Max T., Barbara L. Brock, Timothy J. Cook, Ronald D. Fussell, Jean Louise Hearn, and Tom Simonds. *Your School’s Catholic Identity: Name It, Claim It, and Build on It*. Arlington, Va.: National Catholic Educational Association, 2020.
- Ferrari, Joseph, and Patrick Janulis. “Embracing the Mission: Catholic and Non-Catholic Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Institutional Mission and School Sense of Community.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28, no. 2 (January 2009): 115–124.
- Fitz, Ray, and Michael Naughton. “The Challenge of Institutionalizing Mission and Identity.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 139–149.
- Franchi, Leonardo. “Catholic Education and Intercultural Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation.” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 19, no. 4 (2016): 117–139. <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2016.0036>.

- Gilroy, Maryellen. "Reflections on Recruitment for Mission and Catholic Identity: Lessons Learned." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28, no. 2 (2009): 101–114.
- Gray, Howard, and Crystal Sullivan. "Campus Ministry's Mission to Serve Catholic Higher Education." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 27, no. 2 (2008): 193–205.
- Grimes, Donna Toliver. *All God's People: Effective Catechesis in a Diverse Church*. Loyola Press, 2017.
- Groome, Thomas H. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998.
- . *What Makes Education Catholic: Spiritual Foundations*. Orbis Books, 2021.
- Guiry, Michael. "Cultivating the Understanding of a Catholic University's Mission and the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching through a Faculty Service-Learning Experience." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 233–251.
- Heft, James L. "Catholic Education and Social Justice." *Journal of Catholic Education* 10, no. 1 (September 1, 2006): 6–23.
- . "Institutionalizing Catholic Identity." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 181–192.
- . *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Henao, Luis Andres. "Enrollment in US Catholic Schools Rebounds after Sharp Drop." AP News, February 14, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-religion-education-united-states-8bea1bef885e2d4180a2f5dca5110c9a>.
- Hobbie, Marian, John Convey, and Merylan Schuttloffel. "The Impact of Catholic

- School Identity and Organizational Leadership on the Vitality of Catholic Elementary Schools.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 14, no. 1 (August 31, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1401022013>.
- Hodge, Brendan. “Special Report: Why Catholics Leave; Why Catholics Stay.” www.pillaratholic.com, November 9, 2021. <https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/special-report-why-catholics-leave>.
- Iancu, Alina Eugenia, Andrei Rusu, Cristina Măroiu, Roxana Păcurar, and Laurențiu P. Maricuțoiu. “The Effectiveness of Interventions Aimed at Reducing Teacher Burnout: A Meta-Analysis.” *Educational Psychology Review* 30, no. 2 (June 2018): 373–396. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9420-8>.
- James Jr., Ronald. “Assessing Your School’s Mission and Vision.” Edutopia, January 31, 2024. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/examining-your-schools-mission-vision-statements/>.
- Jez, Rebekka J., Lauren Ramers, Melissa M. Burgess, and Julie C. Cantillon. “Preparing New Catholic School Educators for Inclusive Schools: An Analysis of University and Diocesan Teacher Training Research.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 24, no. 2 (December 2021): 84–103. <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2402052021>.
- Jiménez, Carlos, Amanda Montez, and Deena A. Sellers. “The Jesuit Case for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in Catholic Schools.” *America Magazine*, August 15, 2024. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/08/15/jesuit-schools-diversity-equity-inclusion-belonging-248474>.
- Kealey, Catherine M. *On Their Shoulders: A Short Biographical History of American Catholic Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association,

2003.

- Kreitchmann, Rodrigo Schames, Francisco J. Abad, Vicente Ponsoda, Maria Dolores Nieto, and Daniel Morillo. “Controlling for Response Biases in Self-Report Scales: Forced-Choice vs. Psychometric Modeling of Likert Items.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (October 15, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02309>.
- Lescher, Bruce H. “Forming a People of the Spirit: What Are They Saying about Spiritual Formation?” *New Theology Review* 11, no. 4 (January 1998). <https://doi.org/10.17688/ntr.v11i4.615>.
- Lu, Jane I. “Educational Models of Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: Introspection-Based Spiritual Formation.” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 24, no. 1 (January 21, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12560>.
- “Lumen Accreditation – Institute for the Transformation of Catholic Education,” 2024. <https://itce.catholic.edu/programs-services/lumen-accreditation/>.
- Maguire, Abigail, and Helen Miller. “The Professional Christian or the Christian Professional? Assessing Spiritual Formation in Theological Education.” *Religion & Education* 51, no. 1-2 (March 22, 2024): 156–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2024.2325910>.
- McDonough, Graham P. “Pluralizing Catholic Identity.” *Religious Education* 114, no. 2 (March 1, 2019): 168–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1560744>.
- Miller, Amata. “Infusing Catholic Identity throughout the Campus Community.” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (September 21, 2011): 3–20.
- Miller, J. Michael. *The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools*. Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 2006.

- Milner, Lauren A., and Joseph R. Ferrari. "Embracing the Institutional Mission: Influences of Identity Processing Styles." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (2010): 255–268.
- Morris, Andrew B. *Catholic Education: Universal Principles, Locally Applied*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.
- National Catholic Educational Association. "United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2023-2024: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing." Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association, 2024.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education." United States Catholic Conference. United States Catholic Conference, 1972.
- NCEA. "Mission Statement." NCEA, 2022.
https://ncea.org/NCEA/NCEA/Who_We_Are/About_NCEA/Mission_Statement.aspx.
- NCEA. "Surveys." National Catholic Educational Association, 2023.
https://www.ncea.org/NSBECS/NSBECS/Assessment_Tools/Surveys.aspx?hkey=751cfa3d-3879-4a74-8795-7af64e925362.
- NCEA NSBECS Advisory Council, ed. "National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, 2nd Edition." Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association, 2023.
- Ospino, Hosffman. "Catechesis, Diversity, and Culture: The Importance of (Re)Definitions." *New Theology Review* 24, no. 1 (April 30, 2013).

<https://doi.org/10.17688/ntr.v24i1.878>.

———. *Hispanic Catholics in Catholic Schools*. Our Sunday Visitor, 2017.

Ozar, Lorraine A., Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, Teresa Barton, Elizabeth Calteaux, Cristina

J. Hunter, and Shiya Yi. “Making a Difference: The Promise of Catholic School

Standards.” *Journal of Catholic Education* 22, no. 1 (May 28, 2019): 154–185.

Paul VI. *Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965.

Paul VI. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1965.

Pew Research Center. “Catholics - Religious Landscape Study,” February 26, 2025.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/catholic/>.

Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project. “Leaving Catholicism,” April 27,

2009. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/04/27/faith-in-flux3/>.

Phillips, Maggie. “Catholic Schools Attracted Students during the Pandemic: Can They Keep Them?” *America Magazine*, August 17, 2023.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/08/17/catholic-schools-enrollment-covid-pandemic-245875>.

Pope John Paul II. “Ex Corde Ecclesiae.” Vatican Website, August 15, 1990.

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

Porter-Magee, Kathleen, Annie Smith, and Matt Klausmeier. “Catholic School

Enrollment Boomed during Covid. Let’s Make It More than a One-Time Bump.”

The Manhattan Institute, June 2022. <https://manhattan.institute/article/catholic->

school-enrollment-boomed-during-covid-lets-make-it-more-than-a-one-time-bump.

Roldan, Roman D. "St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church." St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, November 1, 2023. <https://saintdunstans.org/fr-romans-blog/a-budget-for-mission/>.

Roulston, Kathryn. *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2010.

Sammons, Eric. "Catholics Are Rapidly Losing Ground." Crisis Magazine, March 4, 2025. <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/catholics-are-rapidly-losing-ground>.

Sarroub, Loukia K., and Claire Nicholas. *Doing Fieldwork at Home the Ethnography of Education in Familiar Contexts*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021.

Shafer, Leah. "What Makes a Good School Culture?" www.gse.harvard.edu. Harvard Graduate School of Education, July 23, 2018. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/07/what-makes-good-school-culture>.

Shelton, Ken. "Building Authentic Community during Meetings." Edutopia. George Lucas Educational Foundation, July 8, 2024. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-start-meetings-right-school/>.

Slate, John, Craig Jones, Karen Wiesman, Jeanie Alexander, and Tracy Saenz. "School Mission Statements and School Performance: A Mixed Research Investigation." *New Horizons in Education* 56, no. 2 (October 2008). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ832903.pdf>.

Smith, Christian, and Carolina Melina. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives*

- of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Smith, Scott F., and Roxanne S. Davies. "Institutionalizing Mission Engagement and Leadership Formation at a Dominican University." *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 35, no. 1 (2013): 47–64.
- St. Agnes Academy. "3 Keys to Embracing a Catholic Identity in High School." St. Agnes Academy, February 2, 2023. <https://www.st-agnes.org/news-detail?pk=1423892>.
- Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. "Catholic Religious Vocations: Decline and Revival." *Review of Religious Research* 42, no. 2 (2000): 125–145.
https://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/stark_vocations.pdf.
- Staudt, R. Jared, ed. *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Education Press, 2020.
- Staudt, R. Jared. "Teaching the Catholic Tradition." In *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, edited by R. Jared Staudt, 64–74. Washington D.C.: The Catholic Education Press, 2020.
- . "To Change a School: A Vision for Renewal." In *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, edited by R. Jared Staudt, 127–136. Washington D.C.: The Catholic Education Press, 2020.
- Stemler, Steven E., Damian Bebell, and Lauren Ann Sonnabend. "Using School Mission Statements for Reflection and Research." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (November 12, 2010): 383–420.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x10387590>.
- Sullins, D. Paul. "The Difference Catholic Makes: Catholic Faculty and Catholic

Identity.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 1 (March 2004): 83–101.

Swinton, John, and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press, 2016.

Topping, Ryan N. S. *The Case for Catholic Education: Why Parents, Teachers, and Politicians Should Reclaim the Principles of Catholic Pedagogy*. Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015.

United States Census Bureau. “QuickFacts: Chicago City, Illinois.” Census Bureau QuickFacts. United States Census Bureau, 2024.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chicagocityillinois/PST045224>.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

USCCB. “Catholic Education.” 2017. <https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/catholic-education>.

Van Hecke, Michael. “Forming a School Community.” In *Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age*, edited by R. Jared Staudt, 95–106. Washington D. C.: The Catholic Education Press, 2020.

Wang, David C., Angela H. Reed, Stephen P. Greggo, Lauren Bowersox, Amy Drennan, Brad D. Strawn, Pamela E. King, Steven L. Porter, and Peter C. Hill. “Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: A Multi-Case Exploration on Seminaries and Student Development.” *Christian Education Journal Research on Educational Ministry* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 2023): 65–86.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07398913231177722>.

- Warmbrod, J. Robert. "Reporting and Interpreting Scores Derived from Likert-Type Scales." *Journal of Agricultural Education* 55, no. 5 (December 31, 2014): 30–47.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2014.05030>.
- Weddell, Sherry A. *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path of Knowing and Following Jesus*. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2012.
- "What Do They Mean When They Use the Word 'Charism'?" University of Portland, n.d. <https://www.up.edu/garaventa/did-you-know/meaning-charism.html>.
- Willard, Dallas. "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It Is and How It Might Be Done." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2000): 254–258.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710002800402>.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty, Nathaniel D. West, and Annie Lockhart-Gilroy. *From Lament to Advocacy: Black Religious Education and Public Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books, 2020.
- Winters, Michael Sean. "Growth and Decline in the US Catholic Church."
www.ncronline.org. National Catholic Reporter, April 19, 2024.
<https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/ncr-voices/growth-and-decline-us-catholic-church>.
- Young, Paul. "Finding Your School's Mission and Vision." Edutopia, November 8, 2023.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/forming-schools-vision-mission-statements/>.
- Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. "Eucharistic Adoration and Missio." *Liturgical Ministry* 13 (December 31, 2004): 88–95.
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=9057335f-9983-379d-aae4-e8f4bc6bc093>.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Our school offers regular prayer and sacramental experiences including Mass, Reconciliation, Daily Prayer, etc.
2. Our school's Catholic identity is an important reason why I work here.
3. Everyone in the school community - administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians, alums, and supporters - knows and understands the school's mission.
4. Everything we do in our school is guided and directed by our mission.
5. Our school mission clearly expresses a commitment to Catholic identity.
6. A person or group (such as a mission integration director or a board), in collaboration with the school administration, takes responsibility for monitoring that the school is faithful to its mission, academically excellent and sound in its business decisions.
7. Our school administration has authority to realize and implement the school's mission and vision.
8. Our school administration involves all members of the school community to ensure a school culture that embodies the mission and vision.
9. Administrators in our school understand, accept, and model the teachings of the Catholic Church.
10. The teachers in our school understand, promote, demonstrate, and teach Catholic values and beliefs.
11. Our school has an institutional advancement plan, based on our mission, which uses current and effective strategies for communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.
12. Symbols of the Catholic faith are displayed throughout our school.
13. Everyone connected with our school works together and respects each other's gifts, for the sake of building a strong, faith-filled learning community.
14. What activities are offered to your faculty and staff to build your understanding of the mission of the school? Options:
 - a. Learning sessions on the Catholic identity of the school
 - b. Learning sessions on the school's sponsoring religious order
 - c. Retreat
 - d. Prayer opportunities
 - e. Spiritual direction
 - f. Ongoing formation in the core values or charism of the school
15. Beyond what is listed above, what other activities are offered to your faculty and staff to build your understanding of the mission of the school? (Open response)
16. Which opportunities do you find most effective in building the Catholic identity of the school? Why? (Open response)

17. Which opportunities do you find least effective in building the Catholic identity of the school? Why? (Open response)
18. Our school offers opportunities for faculty and staff to explore and support their own faith.
19. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: retreats.
20. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: prayer.
21. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: Mass.
22. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: sacraments.
23. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: service activities.
24. Our school provides opportunities outside the classroom for adult faith formation and participation in: social justice activities.
25. Do you have any final thoughts or information you would like to share with the researcher? (Open response)

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

1. What is your school's mission statement?
 - a. Do you feel you understand your school's mission statement and what it means for you as an employee of the school?
2. What do you feel are the main areas of focus at your school? (E.g. does the school highlight academic achievement, athletic prowess, religious identity, etc.?)
 - a. Do you feel this aligns with the mission of your school?
 - b. Why or why not?
3. What does your school do to ensure the adults in your community are aware of and understand the mission statement?
 - a. What activities, opportunities, or requirements does your school offer to inform employees of the school mission/identity/charism/core values/vision/etc.?
 - b. When are these programs offered? Are these opportunities offered once during initial onboarding of a new employee? Are they on-going? Are they repetitive?
4. Are there any activities that you feel have not been effective in conveying the mission of the school to participants?
 - a. Why do you feel they were not effective?
 - b. What could have been done differently to make these programs more effective?
5. What have you particularly appreciated about your school's approach to adult formation?
 - a. What have you found useful?
 - b. What has been redundant or irrelevant?
6. What do you think could be done to better ensure that all adult stakeholders in your school community live out the mission of the school in their everyday work?
 - a. What support, training, or programming would encourage buy-in from faculty and staff?
7. In your opinion, what makes a Catholic school Catholic?

Appendix C: Mission Statement Analysis

29 Catholic High Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago

16 Co-Ed

13 Single Gender, 6 men, 7 women

All ordered schools: Carmelite, Jesuit, Dominican, Lasallian, Vincentian, Holy Cross, Christian Brothers, Salesian, Viatorians, Congregation of St. Joseph, Sacred Heart, Augustinian, Mercy

Mission statements:

Centered in Jesus Christ, Carmel **Catholic** is a college preparatory high school, empowering *students* to be servant leaders filled with zeal for faith and scholarship. Rooted in the charisms of the Order of Carmelites and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our **Catholic** community embraces a tradition of dignity, diversity, and justice.

Christ the King Jesuit College Prep, a **Catholic** school on Chicago's West Side and a member of the Cristo Rey Network, challenges and inspires its *young women and men* through the integration of academics, work experience, and extracurricular activities to lead lives of integrity, faith, and servant leadership for the greater glory of God.

Cristo Rey Jesuit High School provides a **Catholic**, college preparatory education and professional work experience to *students* from Spanish-speaking families with limited financial means.

Cristo Rey St. Martin is a **Catholic** learning community that empowers *young people* of limited means to become men and women of faith, purpose and service. Through a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, integrated with relevant work-study experience, CRSM *students* graduate ready to succeed in college and life. We exclusively serve families with limited economic means in Waukegan and North Chicago.

De La Salle Institute is an independent **Catholic** secondary school rooted in the tradition of Christian Education begun by St. John Baptist de La Salle. Founded in 1889, its mission has been, and is, to foster a desire for excellence in education. *Young people* from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds are given the opportunity to fully develop their abilities so they may be active, contributing members of our complex changing society.

DePaul College Prep, in partnership with DePaul University, is a Vincentian, **Catholic** community that provides a rigorous college prep education. Guided by our core values of

Faith, Respect, Excellence, Service and Health, we educate *young adults* of Chicago to think independently, pursue intellectual excellence, practice compassion, and value all individuals as children of God.

Fenwick High School, guided by Dominican **Catholic** values, inspires excellence and educates each *student* to lead, achieve and serve.

Located in Chicago East Side neighborhood, the mission of St. Francis de Sales is to build a **Catholic** educational community that allows for the uniqueness of each *student*, while fostering charity, tolerance and understanding through academic, social and spiritual development. We believe that every St. Francis de Sales student deserves an education that is centered around academic excellence in an environment that embraces social, economic, cultural and religious diversity.

Holy Trinity High School, a **Catholic** school in the Holy Cross tradition, challenges and nurtures *students* academically, spiritually, and personally, as they prepare to lead lives of leadership and service.

Saint Ignatius College Prep, a Jesuit **Catholic** school in the heart of Chicago, is a diverse community dedicated to educating *young men and women* for lives of faith, love, service and leadership.

St. Laurence is a **Catholic** college preparatory high school rooted in the Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education. We develop courageous leaders through problem solving and discovery in a diverse community centered on God and the pursuit of excellence in academics and athletics.

To form *women and men* for meaningful lives of leadership and service in imitation of Jesus Christ through a college preparatory education in the Jesuit, **Catholic** tradition. (Loyola)

Marian **Catholic** High School is a **Catholic**, coeducational, college preparatory high school within the Dominican tradition of study, prayer, community, and preaching. Marian **Catholic** *students* seek truth, exhibit personal responsibility, cultivate their individual talents, and demonstrate ethical leadership and Christian service.

The Mission of Marist High School as a Roman **Catholic**, coed high school, is to make Jesus Christ known and loved in the Marist Brothers' tradition, while preparing *students* for higher education and life.

Nazareth Academy is a **Catholic**, Coed, College Prep High School inspired by the mission and spirituality of the Congregation of Saint Joseph. We are committed to academic excellence, educating the whole person and fostering a community of inclusivity rooted in Gospel values. Above all we value Scholarship, Service, Spirit and Unity.

Saint Viator High School is a **Catholic**, college-preparatory community of learning called to provide religious formation and an academic program of excellence to *young men and women*.

We, the family of Brother Rice High School, are a diverse, **Catholic** Christian community, committed to preparing *young men* for college and for the process of life-long learning. We educate young men to act manfully in Christ Jesus and to deal wisely with their world in the tradition of the Christian Brothers and the charism of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice

Josephinum Academy of the Sacred Heart is a diverse college preparatory learning community, dedicated to empowering *young women* to use their creativity, unique perspectives and voice to bring about change in the ever-evolving world.

MOTHER McAULEY LIBERAL ARTS HIGH SCHOOL is a **Catholic** educational community committed to providing a quality college-preparatory education for *young women*. In the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy and their foundress, Catherine McAuley, we prepare students to live in a complex, dynamic society by teaching them to think critically, communicate effectively, respond compassionately to the needs of their community and assume roles of Christian leadership. In partnership with parents, we empower young women to acknowledge their giftedness and to make decisions with a well-developed moral conscience. We foster an appreciation of the diversity of the global community and a quest for knowledge and excellence as lifelong goals.

The mission of Mount Carmel High School is to Live with Zeal for God, for Life, and for Learning. Our mission, and our desire to fulfill this mission is inspired by the inscription on the Carmelite shield found in the 1st Book of Kings, Ch 19: “Zelo Zelatus Sum Pro Domino Deo Exercituum,” which has been translated literally as “I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts,” or more liberally as “I am filled with zeal for the Lord My God.” It is with zeal that we as a community seek to instill a love for God, a passion for all that life offers, and a commitment to learning in all of our *young men*. We accomplish our mission by committing to our Caravan Values.

Under the patronage of Mary, Notre Dame College Prep is a secondary school committed to educating *young men* to be gentlemen of faith, scholarship, and service in an inclusive, family-oriented community. Faithful to the Roman **Catholic** tradition and inspired by Gospel values, we prepare students to be lifelong learners and to lead lives of integrity.

Our Lady of Tepeyac High School is a Roman **Catholic** girls' secondary school deeply rooted in the Little Village neighborhood that provides a multicultural educational experience, developing each *young woman* to her full intellectual and spiritual potential in an environment that values learning, linked to faith, family and community.

Leo Catholic High School's mission is straightforward. To continue to expand its ability to provide high school and college preparatory education to urban minority students and to prepare them for the 21st Century. Leo Catholic High School's educational program is directed toward the growth of the whole person – a synthesis of faith, life, and culture – through a **Catholic** faith community in which each human being is seen as created in God's image and therefore uniquely good and worthwhile.

Serving students from diverse backgrounds since 1861, Saint Patrick, the oldest all-male **Catholic** high school in Chicago, transforms boys into *young men*. Guided by innovative Lasallian principles, we prepare leaders inspired by faith, tradition and brotherhood.

Rooted in the Dominican tradition, we challenge *young women* to be independent thinkers, relentless truth-seekers, and confident, compassionate leaders.

Resurrection College Prep High School is a **Catholic** community in the Lasallian tradition, dedicated to the education of *young women* and to the development of their God-given talents. Convinced of God's unconditional love and nourished by the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, we are committed to the spiritual, ethical, intellectual, physical and social growth of our students.

St. Rita of Cascia High School is a **Catholic** college preparatory school for *young men*, rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the tradition of St. Augustine, following the Augustinian philosophy of education. St. Rita aims to form each student as a whole person: spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially, and to provide its young men with the necessary skills to succeed in college and in life, leading to life-long learning and personal awareness. Through the Augustinian core values of Veritas (Truth), Unitas (Unity), and Caritas (Love), St. Rita strives to develop a bond between the members of the entire family: Augustinians, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni. In the spirit of our Father, St. Augustine, we will be of one mind and one heart on our way to God.

Trinity High School, in the Sinsinawa Dominican tradition, challenges young women to seek faith, knowledge and truth. The school community guides *young women* in developing skills for lifelong learning, an ethic of care and the desire for excellence. Each student is recognized as unique. In a nurturing, **Catholic**, college preparatory environment, she is encouraged to become self-directed toward responsible participation in the global community in order to impact society, Church and family in the twenty-first century.

Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart, founded in 1858, is an independent, **Catholic**, day and boarding college preparatory school for *young women*, grades 9-12, who wish to pursue a course of study committed to academic excellence within the context of a faith-based community. As a member of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools in the United States, Woodlands Academy commits itself to educate to our five goals: a personal and active faith in God, a deep respect for intellectual values, a social awareness which impels to action, the building of community as a Christian value, and personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.

Most Frequently Used Words:

Catholic - 34 occurrences
Faith - 20 occurrences
Education/Educational - 19 occurrences
College - 19 occurrences
Prep/Preparatory - 17 occurrences
Community - 17 occurrences
Service/Servant leadership - 15 occurrences
Young/Young men/women - 15 occurrences
Leadership - 12 occurrences
Tradition - 12 occurrences
Excellence - 10 occurrences
God - 10 occurrences
Diversity - 8 occurrences

General Analysis:

The mission statements of these schools emphasize their identity as Catholic institutions, underlining a commitment to faith, community, and service. The frequent use of terms like "faith," "Catholic," and "God" underscores the spiritual foundation upon which these schools are built. Education and college preparation are also central themes, reflecting the academic rigor and the goal of preparing students for higher education. The recurring

mention of community and tradition highlights a strong sense of belonging and continuity with the past, which are seen as essential in nurturing well-rounded individuals.

Leadership and service are key outcomes these institutions strive to instill, preparing students to contribute positively to society. The emphasis on diversity and inclusion suggests that these schools are dedicated to creating an environment that respects and embraces differences, which is seen as integral to their educational mission.

Overall, these mission statements collectively aim to develop students who are not only academically prepared but also spiritually grounded, morally responsible, and socially conscious. The frequent references to "excellence" suggest a high standard of both personal and academic achievement as a core value. The mission statements reflect a consistent focus on Catholic values, educational excellence, leadership, service, and community, aiming to mold students into well-rounded individuals ready to face the challenges of the modern world.

Observations:

Strong Catholic Identity: The dominance of "Catholic" and "school" highlights the prominent role of religion in these institutions.

Focus on College Preparation: The frequent occurrence of "college" and "prep" emphasizes the schools' commitment to preparing students for higher education.

Servant Leadership: "Lead," "service," and "leadership" appear frequently, indicating a focus on developing students who contribute to their communities.

Faith and Values: "Faith," "values," and "God" are significant, suggesting that the schools aim to nurture spiritual development alongside academic excellence.

Diversity: "Diverse" and "community" are present, demonstrating the schools' commitment to inclusivity and fostering a sense of belonging.

Further Analysis:

It's interesting to note that while "Catholic" is the most frequent word, the specific Catholic traditions are also emphasized. This suggests a diversity of approaches within the overarching Catholic framework.

Additionally, the word "excellence" appears frequently, suggesting that these schools strive for high standards in both academics and personal development.

This analysis provides a starting point for understanding the common themes and values that underpin these Catholic college preparatory schools. Further analysis could delve deeper into specific words and phrases to uncover unique aspects of each school's mission and identity.

Appendix D: Eleven characteristics of good enculturation and formation²¹⁷

1. Includes part-time personnel and extends beyond a one day retreat or a large diocesan gathering with a guest speaker.
2. Accentuates both the school's charism and overarching Catholic identity, and their relationship one to the other.
3. Accommodates diverse learning styles and needs such as generational differences (Walters & Walters, 2009), school role, faith journey, early-mid-late career, and level of commitment to mission.
4. Takes into account principles of adult faith formation (USCCB, 1999), especially as they relate to lay ecclesial ministry (USCCB, 2005a).
5. Employs principles of adult learning such as variety of learning activities, reflection and sharing, flexibility of choice, and opportunities for input in planning and design.
6. Takes a multi-dimensional, holistic approach that integrates the personal, social, spiritual, intellectual, and mission/charism agency dimensions (adapted from USCCB, 2005a)
7. Includes a community building, fun aspect that often involves good food.
8. Stresses relevance and practical application and is directly tied to school goals and student outcomes. It supplies concrete effective practices pertaining to personal witness and room curriculum and instruction.
9. Requires follow up and accountability by connecting formation with performance indicators tied to annual evaluation.
10. Offers incentives such as release time, resources, and financial support.
11. Explores technology and new media for instruction and social networking.

²¹⁷ Cook, "Charism and Culture," 49.

Author: Sara Ann Spittler Conneely

Birthday: March 29, 1993

Universities and Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts (Theology, Peace Studies, Italian), University of Notre Dame 2015

Master of Arts (Theology), University of Notre Dame 2017

Doctor of Ministry (Educating for Witness), Catholic Theological Union 2025