

Seton Hall University

## eRepository @ Seton Hall

---

Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses  
(ETDs)

Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses

---

Fall 12-15-2020

# Recruitment and Retention of Catholic School Principals: The Importance of School Leadership in the Success of Catholic Schools

Elise Abbie Dite  
elise.dite@student.shu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dite, Elise Abbie, "Recruitment and Retention of Catholic School Principals: The Importance of School Leadership in the Success of Catholic Schools" (2020). *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs)*. 2814.

<https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2814>

Recruitment and Retention of Catholic School Principals: The Importance of School Leadership  
in the Success of Catholic Schools

Elise Abbie Dite  
Seton Hall University

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Maureen Gillette

Dr. David Reid

Dr. Donna Kiel

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Department of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy  
Seton Hall University  
2020

© 2020 Elise Abbie Dite



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

We certify that we read this thesis written by \_\_\_\_\_ in the Fall Semester 2020 and, in our opinion, it is sufficient in scientific scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor in Education.

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)

Maureen Gillette, Ed.D.  
Research Mentor

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)

David Reid, Ph.D.  
Reader, Member of Dissertation Committee

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)

Donna Kiel, Ed.D.  
Reader, Member of Dissertation Committee

## **Abstract**

The Catholic Church has established the importance of a high-quality Catholic school as an essential opportunity for parishes, pastors, parents, teachers, and school leaders to pass the Catholic faith on to the next generation. To ensure an excellent Catholic education for all students, each school must have a strong principal in place who is an excellent faith and instructional leader. Strong principal leadership is an essential element in school success, and schools across the country, both public and private, are experiencing a principal shortage. A shortage of qualified principals means that schools and students are challenged as they look for high-quality leaders to move their schools forward. High-quality principal leadership increases the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom and impacts the ability of the school to attract high-quality teachers. Because of the high demand for Catholic school principals, the increasing demands on principals, and the qualification that a Catholic school principal must be a practicing Catholic, Catholic schools are experiencing a significant principal shortage. This dissertation addresses this problem of the Catholic school principal shortage by providing insight on why Catholic school principals seek principal positions, why they remain principals, and why they might leave. The research design is a narrative inquiry, including interviews with six principals and six pastors from a Catholic diocese in the Midwest. The analysis of the data sheds further light on the essentials of recruiting and retaining strong principal leaders in Catholic schools. Keywords: Principal leadership, Catholic schools, principal recruitment, principal retention

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful for all the love and support I received throughout this journey toward my doctorate. I could not have achieved this accomplishment without the support of my family, friends, and coworkers.

I want to begin by thanking my husband, Brendan. His support of me throughout this process has been unwavering, from the when I came home from work with an idea to complete a doctorate in New Jersey (a state neither of us had ever set foot in), requiring significant travel over the course of two years, to my dissertation defense. I am grateful that he has always supported me and helped me achieve my goals and dreams.

I am grateful for my parents for their support. My mother and father have supported me along the way, always asking questions about my progress and findings. Both taught me the importance of focus, hard work, and goal setting, and their guidance has helped me achieve my goals and made me the person I am today.

My co-workers and friends have also been a source of endless support and kindness. They expressed interest in my work, and their support was essential in helping me stay focused throughout the ups and downs of this process.

I am grateful also to the participants in this study. Their passion for Catholic schools and teaching and learning is unparalleled. Their candor in the interviews and desire to help and contribute to the literature on Catholic leadership and education is greatly appreciated. I am thankful to them for providing their time, talent and experiences during the interviews.

I was blessed with outstanding mentors throughout this dissertation process. Dr. Maureen Gillette provided me with amazing help, support, and guidance as my mentor. I was fortunate to receive her as a mentor as her expertise in the field and knowledge of qualitative research,

especially around recruitment and retention, is unparalleled. I was blessed to have the opportunity to work with her. Dr. David Reid also provided outstanding support throughout the dissertation process. His guidance and expertise around qualitative research provided me with the necessary background to complete this study. Dr. Donna Kiel's guidance was also essential as she took time to answer my questions and guided me throughout the dissertation process.

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Conceptual Framework.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Research Design .....	10
Definition of Terms .....	11
Organization of the Study .....	11
Body of the Review .....	12
Changes in the Catholic Schools .....	14
Principal Leadership .....	25
Summary.....	34
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Introduction.....	36
Statement of the Problem.....	37
Research Questions.....	37
Research Design .....	38
Sampling and Participants .....	41
Data Sources and Data Collection .....	44
Data Analysis.....	51



Ethical Considerations/Potential Bias.....	53
Validity and Credibility .....	54
Limitations of the Study .....	56
Delimitations of the Study .....	57
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....</b>	<b>58</b>
Introduction.....	58
Findings .....	60
Summary.....	97
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>99</b>
Introduction.....	99
Implications for the Literature .....	100
Limitations .....	107
Implications for Practice.....	107
Implications for Future Research.....	113
Conclusions.....	114
<b>References .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Appendix C .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Appendix D .....</b>	<b>127</b>

**List of Tables**

Tables

Participant names and school/Parish Name .....46

School/Parish Name, Student Demographics, School Size, FRI Status .....46

## **List of Figures**

### Figures

Catholic School Principal Selection Framework .....	110
---	-----

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Conceptual Framework**

Catholic schools in the United States have a long, storied history. While the first Catholic schools were founded in Florida and Louisiana when the southern part of the United States were Spanish and French colonies (Bryk et al., 1993), St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is credited with beginning the first Catholic school in the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). She founded the first teaching order of nuns in 1809, and subsequently many more orders of nuns were established in the United States and Canada, with a specific mission to teach in Catholic schools across the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Historically, Catholic schools were built to ensure the Catholic faith was passed along to the next generation of Catholics.

Bishops in the mid-to-late 19th century instructed priests in every parish to create a Catholic school associated with that parish to ensure the next generation of Catholics was brought up in the Catholic faith (Hunt et al., 2000). As immigration to the United States increased, so did the population of Catholics. By the 1920s, Catholic schools enrolled almost two million students. The number rose to over five million by the 1960s. After the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and the movement of Catholics out of large cities and into the suburbs, the number of students in Catholic schools began to decline (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). Decreased vocations to religious life led to a shortage of nuns to teach in and lead schools, and a shortage of priests to lead local parishes. Priests, nuns, and brothers accounted for almost 60% of school staffs in the 1960s (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). Today, they make up less than 3% (NCEA website, 2018). Catholic school closures, especially in inner cities, began in 1968 and have continued to the present day (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Because of the increasing costs to hire lay employees, tuition at Catholic schools and the cost to run Catholic

schools have steadily increased over time (Caruso, 2012). Today, most Catholic children are enrolled in public schools, making the decision of pastors and parishes to invest in parish-sponsored Catholic schools a difficult one; religious education programs can provide religious instruction to Catholic students at a fraction of the cost (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

Even though the number of Catholic schools and Catholic school enrollments are declining, there is still a need for Catholic education in the United States. Church documents, past and present, articulate the need for Catholic schools as a vehicle to convey the faith to the next generation of Catholics. In 1965, Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical concerning Catholic education. In that document, Pope Paul VI declared that the Church must continue its involvement in the whole life of each parishioner. Education is established as an inalienable right for every person according to his or her ability, enabling each person to positively contribute to society. Pastors and parents are challenged to ensure each child receives a faith-based education, and the Catholic Church is charged with providing education to all its members throughout their life. Pope Paul VI established the Catholic school as an essential vehicle by which students learn about their faith and how to spread that faith to others in their community. Catholic school teachers must impart religious and academic knowledge to every child in their care, and parents must send their children to Catholic schools when possible (Gravissimum Educationis, 1965).

In *To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education* (1972) the bishops in the United States recommitted to Catholic education, stating that Catholic schools served a specific purpose: to help students grow in their faith. In this document, the United States Bishops clarified the purpose of schools: to lead students to personal salvation and to encourage social reform through a Catholic lens. The document focuses on parents as those who are primarily responsible for raising their children in the faith (*To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on*

*Catholic Education*, 1972). In 1977, the Catholic Church once again declared its support for Catholic schools in *The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: The Catholic School*. This document, published as an addition to the 1965 Encyclical, further solidifies the Catholic school as an essential asset in a child's Catholic education. Because the Catholic school is responsible for developing the academic and spiritual needs of the children under its care, the Catholic school is considered essential to the evangelization of the next generation of students. The Catholic school also educates the "whole child" by addressing each child's spiritual, academic, social, and emotional needs. Because of the Catholic school's essential place in any society, the Catholic Church

is absolutely convinced that the educational aims of the Catholic school in the world of today perform an essential and unique service for the Church herself. It is, in fact, through the school that she participates in the dialogue of culture with her own positive contribution to the cause of the total formation of man. The absence of the Catholic school would be a great loss for civilisation [sic] and for the natural and supernatural destiny of man. (*The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: The Catholic School*, 1977)

Pope John Paul II also echoed this idea in his support of Catholic schools as an essential vehicle by which parents should pass along their faith to their children (Hunt et al., 2000). In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) asserted continued support for Catholic schools in the United States, highlighting the importance of Catholic schools as high-quality, "available, accessible, and affordable" by providing financial assistance to parents who cannot afford Catholic schools, and securing high-quality administrators and teachers who are trained to educate the next generation of Catholics in the faith (United States Conference of

Catholic Bishops, 2005). The primary responsibility of Catholic schools is “with the salvation of souls and evangelization . . . [and] to form responsible and active citizens who will take their place in society and the Church” (Caruso, 2012, p. 101).

The cited Catholic Church documents describe several key players who have an essential role in the education of a child. The child’s parents are charged with ensuring that child receives a religious education within the family. They are the primary educators of their child and decide the education each child will receive. Pastors and parishes are instructed to evangelize to all their parishioners, especially those who will constitute the next generation of Catholics. Per Canon law established in 1983, the pastor of the parish school is the primary, or head administrator of the Catholic school (Caruso, 2012). As the head of the parish, he is responsible for all ministries of the parish, including the school. Canon law also requires a parish school to be at least as high performing as the local public school with the distinguishing characteristic that the school is also responsible for the faith formation of all students enrolled (Boyle et al., 2016). Because all ministries in the parish are overseen by him, and his

centrality [to] the life of the parish—his authority, liturgical leadership, administrative duties, pastoral responsibilities, educational oversight, relationships with his people, and even his physical proximity—no description of parish life would be complete without his participation. It is simply not possible to understand, assess, change, or improve parish life without reference to the pastor. (Nuzzi et al., 2008, p. 6)

In response to the call for excellent Catholic education, many pastors continue to support parish schools. Given the scope of the pastors’ work, and the smaller number of priests available today than in decades past (Brinig & Garnett, 2014), pastors rely on school principals and teachers to ensure excellent academic and faith formation for the next generation of Catholics.

During a pastor's seminary training, aside from possibly teaching a catechism class, the pastor is not formally prepared for the responsibility of managing a school. Instead, most of this preparation takes place when he assumes the responsibility as pastor for a parish with a school (Caruso, 2012). Because of the lack of formal school management training, and often little training in managing and executing a budget, the pastor is increasingly reliant on an excellent school leader to be the faith and academic leader of the Catholic school.

Catholic schools in the United States were almost entirely staffed by religious orders, mostly women, from the late 19th century until Vatican II in 1965 (Caruso, 2012). In the late 19th century, bishops required parish priests to open schools almost as soon as they founded a parish. Religious communities believed education of Catholic school children to be a noble calling, and they willingly provided an inexpensive workforce. Several religious communities were founded with the goal of providing educators to Catholic schools. These communities continued to grow, especially after World War II, when Catholic schools also grew to meet the needs of the Baby Boom population (Caruso, 2012). The number of people who joined religious orders was unusually high between 1940 and 1960. When the number of men and women seeking religious vocations declined to where that number had been previously, the drop was palpable. After Vatican II, religious orders were asked to reexamine their charisms. Many discovered that their founders had different visions, and these orders returned to other pursuits such as health care or helping the poor (Caruso, 2012). Social changes that gave women more options, along with sisters moving away from communal life and into apartments, also caused disconnects in religious communities and a decline in the number of members. As the number of sisters, priests, and brothers declined, schools needed to hire more laypeople to fill roles in the schools. This included the role of principal. Increased numbers of lay teachers and leaders in a



school not only caused costs to go up because laypeople demanded higher salaries and benefits than members of religious orders, but this also tasked laypeople, who may not be as formed in the faith as the members of religious orders, to become faith leaders of schools.

Today, high-quality, faith-filled educators are essential leaders in Catholic schools. Catholic school principals are mentioned by Church educational documents as essential to the quality of the school. While principals are not mentioned specifically in the Vatican documents, the USCCB mentioned the importance of high-quality school administrators and teachers in *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (2005). The authors of this document commended lay leaders for their excellence and sacrifice in their calling to witness the Catholic faith to students every day. They also recognized the importance of providing ongoing formation programs for lay leaders and teachers, as well as the need to “recruit, and prepare our future diocesan and local school administrators and teachers so that they are knowledgeable in matters of our faith, are professionally prepared, and are committed to the Church” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 10).

The USCCB has called for Catholic schools to have high-quality educators as leaders. A high-quality leader guides and empowers excellent teachers to execute a strong vision in the school (Doyle & Locke, 2014; Ryan & Taylor, 2005). The principal is the most important component of school leadership in garnering respect and ensuring school improvement (Ryan & Taylor, 2005). The leader sets the tone for the school, helping teachers to come together around specific academic goals. Catholic school principals are considered the faith leaders of the school, taking on the responsibility of ensuring student sacrament preparation, religious instruction, and prayer within the school (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014).

The Catholic Church has established the importance of a high-quality Catholic school as an essential opportunity for parishes, pastors, parents, teachers, and school leaders to pass the Catholic faith on to the next generation. While the Catholic school is considered essential for evangelization and faith formation, schools are also tasked with providing an excellent academic, social emotional, and faith-filled education rooted in the teachings of Christ. To ensure an excellent Catholic education for all students, each school must have a strong principal in place who is an excellent faith and instructional leader.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research has established the importance of school leaders and the difficulties in recruiting qualified candidates in both public and private schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Chapman, 2005, Durow & Brock, 2013, Frasier & Brock, 2013, School Leaders Network, 2014). Catholic schools are challenged to find leaders who are not only strong academic leaders but are also capable of serving as faith leaders. Because of the high demand for Catholic school principals, the increasing demands on principals, and the qualification that a Catholic school principal must be a practicing Catholic, Catholic schools are experiencing a significant principal shortage. A shortage of qualified principals means that schools and students are challenged as they look for high quality leaders to move their schools forward. High-quality principal leadership increases the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom and impacts the ability of the school to attract high quality teachers (Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009). Strong school leaders also positively impact student achievement (Doyle & Locke, 2014; Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014). This dissertation addresses this problem of Catholic school principal shortage by providing insight on why Catholic school principals seek principal positions, why they remain principals, and why they might leave.

Many dioceses across the country are seeing a significant drop in qualified principal candidates who apply for open principal positions (Boyle et al., 2016). The decrease in qualified candidates and frequent principal turnover affects the stability and growth of Catholic schools, and frequent turnover also affects the overall quality of education students receive (Boyle et al., 2016; School Leaders Network, 2014). Given the number of students and families served by Catholic schools around the country, a study on the recruitment and retention of quality principals will help ensure all students have an excellent leader in their schools. While the problem of principal recruitment and retention has been well documented by various researchers (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Durow & Brock, 2013; Fraser & Brock, 2013; School Leaders Network, 2014), and some studies have provided some suggestions on how to potentially address this problem (Boyle et al., 2016; Durow & Brock, 2013; Fraser & Brock, 2013), there continues to be significant principal turnover in Catholic schools.

The Central Catholic Diocese provides an example of a diocese that has experienced significant principal turnover over the last several years. Central Catholic Diocese is in the Midwest and provides a good location for this study on principal recruitment and retention. The diocese is diverse and contains urban schools, suburban schools, and schools in rural areas. Student demographics also vary throughout the diocese. Some schools have no students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL), while at other schools, more than 60% of the student body is eligible for FRL. Racial and ethnic backgrounds of students also differ in Central Catholic Diocese. Some schools in the diocese have a majority of students who are Caucasian, while other schools serve students who are a majority Hispanic, African-American, or Asian. There are also schools that have a mix of several races and ethnicities. The diversity in Central Catholic Diocese makes the diocese a good place to study leadership because schools with

different demographics and challenges will have different needs. By uncovering commonalities in the answers from principals serving in a diverse diocese, the findings can address leadership challenges in a variety of communities.

The Central Catholic Diocese continues to be challenged by significant turnover in principal leadership. The Central Catholic Diocese had a 23% leadership turnover for the 2018–2019 school year (Central Catholic Diocese, 2018), and there was an average of 1.25 qualified candidates to fill the open positions (Central Catholic Diocese, 2018). At least one of those positions was filled with an interim principal because suitable permanent candidates could not be found (Central Catholic Diocese, 2018). Based on these data, there is a need to further explore recruiting and retaining principals in the Central Catholic Diocese and across the country to create a stable school environment in a time of change, ensure student academic success, and build future faith communities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explored why principal candidates choose to become Catholic school principals, why principals choose to remain Catholic school principals, and why some principals choose to leave the system by examining the lived experiences of Catholic school leaders through in-depth interviews with current principals and pastors in Central Catholic Diocese. Learning why candidates choose to become Catholic school principals, and why principals stay in the system will help the Central Catholic Diocese and other dioceses across the country learn how to recruit and retain excellent principal leaders. Catholic schools and systems must research ways to keep principals employed in their schools to ensure continuity, faith formation, and academic excellence. In Catholic schools, every school needs a principal who serves as the faith leader to ensure the Catholic faith is passed on to the next generation. Effective school leaders

have significant influence over the academic performance of students in their schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014). Catholic school systems must continue to identify excellent school leaders to ensure high performance. This study will add to the literature on Catholic school principal recruitment and retention by exploring ways pastors and dioceses can attract and retain high-quality leaders. Other Catholic school systems in the United States are also concerned about the attrition of principals (Boyle et al., 2016); conclusions from this study can be applied to other parishes and dioceses in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

Discovering what motivates candidates to seek a principal position in Catholic schools is essential in order to understand why they remain leaders in Catholic schools. Gaining an understanding of why principals might leave their schools will also help dioceses as they seek to retain leaders. Based on the research around principal recruitment and retention, the following three questions were developed.

1. What factors influence candidates' decisions to seek a principal position at a Catholic school?
2. What factors influence a principal's decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?
3. Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?

### **Research Design**

This was a qualitative research study utilizing one-on-one interviews with current principals and pastors in Central Catholic Diocese. Questions around retention, calling, and professional development were the focus of the inquiry. Qualitative methodology allowed me to address the research questions by hearing directly from principals concerning why they choose to apply for the principalship, stay employed as principals, and might choose to leave. Reviewing data based on their experiences helped me see the specific reasons for principal retention and

turnover. I chose principals from different backgrounds to interview. Based on the wide variety of schools in Central Catholic diocese, I ensured that schools with various demographics were represented in the sample.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Catholic Schools* - Schools that are usually operated by an individual parish, groups of parishes, or a religious order. These schools profess Roman Catholic beliefs and are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

*Principal* - School leader who is ultimately the leader of an elementary or secondary school.

*Principal Attrition* - The reduction of the number of principals available to lead schools. Attrition can be the result of retirement, poor principal performance, or voluntary resignation.

*Principal Turnover* - The number of principals leaving the school system and not taking a job as principal in another school in the Central Catholic Diocese.

### **Organization of the Study**

In addition to the Chapter 1 Introduction, Chapter 2 includes the review of literature, focusing on the history of Catholic schools and principal leadership in public and Catholic schools. Chapter 2 discusses reasons why principals join the profession, why they might stay, and why they would potentially leave the principalship. Chapter 3 presents the overview of the study and the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 organizes and reports the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 presents the implications of the study for school leaders, makes recommendations, and draws conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The aim of this study was to elucidate why principals remain leaders in the Catholic school system, and to show challenges faced by principals who choose to leave the system. Uncovering specific factors that influence a principal's decision to stay or leave their position as principal in the diocese was necessary to complete this goal. Setting the context of the role of Catholic schools within the structure of the parish and the Catholic religion was essential in understanding the purpose of Catholic education.

In the review of literature, search terms such as *principal retention*, *Catholic school principal retention*, *principal professional development*, and *principal turnover* were used to search for various research articles that address the problem statement. Many sources were accessed through the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and others were discovered using the Seton Hall Library Database and accessing online books and articles through that source. Peer reviewed journal articles, especially those addressing issues in Catholic education, were included in this review, along with Church documents, international publications, pamphlets, and blogs from educational research firms. While research on public schools is included, this study focuses mainly on a discussion of Catholic school principals and leaders. The review is organized around the search terms with an emphasis on research conducted in a Catholic school setting.

### **Body of the Review**

#### **History of Catholic Schools**

While St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is credited with founding the first teaching order of sisters and subsequently the first Catholic school in the United States in the early 19th century, Catholic schools existed the southern part of what is now the United States when that area was controlled

by Spain in the 18th century (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). In the early and mid-19th century, the number of Catholics in the United States grew significantly, especially due to the large number of Irish immigrants entering the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). This influx of immigrants from a predominantly Catholic country led to the expansion of dioceses, especially in the Northeast, and eventually the Midwest by the mid- to late 19th century. The influx of Catholic immigrants, combined with suspicion of Catholicism held by many protestant Americans, led to public battles over education (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993).

In the middle of the 19th century, Horace Mann began what was known as the common school movement. During this time, Mann advocated for schools that were publicly accessible for all students, and they included a protestant religious and moral curriculum to “Americanize” recent Catholic immigrants (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993; Hunt et., al, 2000). This requirement caused conflicts in various cities with large populations of Catholics, especially Boston and Philadelphia. In Boston, the mayor required that any student who did not fully participate in the curriculum, including the reading and recitation of the protestant Bible, be expelled from school. The local bishop responded by requiring Catholic students to read aloud from the Catholic Bible in school. As a result, hundreds of Catholic students were expelled from school in Boston (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Local Catholic leaders appealed to the government to no avail. In Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Bible Riots in the mid-19th century led the local bishop to appeal to the public schools to allow Catholic teaching in the public-school curriculum. Philadelphia Catholic leaders were once again unsuccessful with their petition to the government (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993).

Bishops in the United States decided as early as 1829 that the Catholic Church should be responsible for the education of its children. Every parish was encouraged to build a school



(Bryk et al., 1993). The bishops reiterated this encouragement again in 1866 due to the continued conflict with protestants as the United States continued the common school movement (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). By 1884, the bishops in the United States required every parish to establish a Catholic school within 2 years of the establishment of that parish, and likewise required all Catholic parents to send their children to a Catholic school (Bryk et al., 1993). The requirement for every parish to have an established school, along with the diverse ethnicities of Catholics in the United States, led to the establishment of parishes with a variety of ethnicities. For example, one neighborhood in Chicago had the following ethnic parishes located in “little more than one square mile—two territorial/Irish parishes, two Polish, one Lithuanian, one Italian, two German, one Slovak, one Croatian, and one Bohemian” (Brinig & Garnett, 2014, p. 8).

### **Changes in the Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools were originally founded in the early 19th century as part of the “European Academy Movement” (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 20). These schools were typically considered elite training for girls, and they served as the terminal point of education for them. These schools charged tuition and enabled the sisters who ran these schools to use the money they made to serve poor immigrants in the northeastern part of the United States (Bryk et al., 1993). By the middle of the 19th century, Catholic schools were increasingly viewed by Catholics, parishioners and clergy alike, as a necessary alternative to common schools that taught protestant religious ideals and theology as part of the curriculum. As the 19th century progressed, Catholic schools became essential in the parish by ensuring that the Catholic faith was passed on to the next generation of Catholics. Throughout the early and mid-20th century, Catholic schools served as the place where Catholic children were educated and learned about their faith, and the

parishes in which they were located served as the cornerstone for each specific ethnic community the parish served (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993).

When Catholics moved to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s, they also built schools to serve the growing population. Again, the purpose of Catholic schools remained the education of Catholics and passing the faith on to the next generation. As Catholics moved from the city to the suburbs, the demographics of the city schools changed. The neighborhoods in the cities saw an influx of non-Catholic African Americans (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). As a result, some Catholic parishes re-envisioned their mission to provide an excellent, faith-based education to all children. This position answered a call from Vatican II that refocused the purpose of the Catholic Church on social justice (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993).

The original purpose of Catholic schools was to educate poor and/or immigrant Catholic children who would have otherwise been required to learn protestant doctrine in American common schools. Catholic schools also ensured families were able to pass on the Catholic faith and participate in insular, immigrant communities and ensure their participation in the Church in the next generation. These children of poor, immigrant families were also offered an education to become more upwardly mobile, and for the most part, these efforts were successful (Bryk et al., 1993).

Catholic schools are no longer meant exclusively for specific immigrant communities. In many communities, Catholic schools are a better option than local public schools, even if the surrounding population is not Catholic (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Often, these Catholic churches maintain the local Catholic school to answer the post-Vatican II call for Catholics to increasingly fight for peace and social justice for all people (Bryk et al., 1993). Students in Catholic schools still learn about the Catholic faith and participate in religion class and prayer, and those who are

Catholic or become Catholic prepare for sacraments. By providing an excellent, faith-based alternative to the public school, Catholic schools in urban, non-Catholic areas can help students out of poverty through education, as they did in centuries past for Catholic immigrants.

The pastor and the principal of schools that serve predominantly Catholic students and schools that serve predominantly non-Catholic students must maintain a clear mission and vision of the purpose of the school. The pastor is still tasked with providing an excellent, Catholic education to all students, and the school must be at least as good as the public-school alternative, per Canon Law. The role of the principal is important because in order to meet the needs of the children and families in the parish, the pastor needs an excellent principal educator to ensure that the Catholic identity and education in the school meet the standards of excellence.

### **Church Documents Supporting Catholic Education**

In *At the Heart of the Church: Selected Documents of Catholic Education* (2012), editors Father Ronald Nuzzi and Thomas Hunt included several documents from the Vatican and the USCCB that outline the importance of Catholic Schools. In 1965, Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical *Gravissimum Educationis*, outlining the importance of Catholic education. He established Catholic education as the vehicle by which the Catholic faith is passed on to the next generation, established parents as the primary educators of their children, and encouraged them to send their children to a Catholic school to ensure they received strong faith formation.

In *To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education* (November, 1972), the bishops in the United States recommitted to Catholic education as the primary vehicle by which students were led to salvation and learned the ethics of social justice. This document reiterates the importance of the parents as the primary educators of their children and the responsibility for parents to ensure their children are raised in the Catholic faith. In 1977, the

Catholic Church further declared its support for Catholic schools in *The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: The Catholic School*, which was published as an addition to the 1965 Encyclical. In 1977, the Church described Catholic schools as essential because they addressed academic and spiritual needs of students. Catholic schools are considered an essential tool to evangelize the next generation of Catholics, and they are called to educate the whole child. Schools are called to address the academic, faith, and social emotional needs of each child, with the distinguishing characteristic that the school is also responsible for the faith formation of all students enrolled (Boyle et al., 2016).

The USCCB has continued its support of Catholic schools as a vehicle of social justice and as a method of passing along the faith to the next generation of Catholics. Students in Catholic schools are to be taught to live the Gospel message of Jesus and to serve others (Bryk et al., 1993). In 2005, the USCCB reiterated its support for Catholic schools, asking parishes to ensure that they are affordable for all parishioners and remain an essential vehicle by which parishes and parents pass the Catholic faith on to the next generation (United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2005). While the purpose of Catholic schools has evolved over the last two centuries, they remain important institutions of faith and social justice with a calling to provide an excellent education for all students.

### **History of Catholic School Leadership**

Traditionally, Catholic schools were led and staffed by religious orders of nuns and sometimes brothers; both nuns and brothers are members of religious orders who follow a life dedicated to God, taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The nuns and brothers were overseen by the parish priest (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). These orders were established in both the United States and Canada throughout the 19th century. By 1900, the order

established by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Sisters of Charity, had over 1,600 sisters who taught in Catholic schools across the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 116 orders of nuns in the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). New waves of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe brought more religious orders with them to help start new ethnic schools in the United States (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Religious orders continued to grow in numbers throughout the first half of the 20th century. The large supply of sisters still could not keep up with the demand for new schools. Between 1940 and 1960, there was a baby boom across the United States, but especially in Catholic families (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Some bishops even complained that many of the children in their parishes were attending public schools because there was not adequate room in the local Catholic schools (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

The decline in the number of vocations began around the time of Vatican II (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). Members of religious orders left vocations in large numbers, which led to schools hiring lay people and significantly increasing labor costs (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). Religious sisters, brothers, and priests accounted for almost 60% of school staff in the 1960s (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). This number decreased to less than 3% in 2018 (NCEA website, 2018). Between 1960 and 2000, leadership of Catholic schools transitioned from almost exclusively religious to almost exclusively lay. Today, 95% of school leaders are laypeople (Caruso, 2012).

When the women and men religious left the Catholic schools, schools were faced with several challenges. One of the challenges included the expectations that were placed on the religious versus what laypeople with families could handle (Caruso, 2012). Father Michael Caruso (2012) outlined a situation that occurred when the sisters left a specific school. After the

sisters left, lay teachers were expected to teach Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes on Saturdays. These classes are offered for children in the parish who do not attend Catholic school, so they are able to gain the education needed to receive their sacraments. The lay teachers had families, and this proved to be a hardship for them. Because the sisters did not have families, they could teach the CCD classes on Saturdays without a problem. The sisters were expected to work every weekend as a part of their position in the school. This is not a realistic expectation for a layperson. In the transition from religious to lay leadership, some of the expectations placed on principals and teachers failed to change, or changed slowly with the disappearance of the sisters, causing managerial challenges for new principals (p. 102).

With the transition of Catholic school leadership from religious sisters to laypeople, other challenges arose, with one of the most significant being increases in the need for funding for schools (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). The sisters were an inexpensive workforce. They received a limited salary in exchange for living quarters, typically on the same site as the parish and school, and a small stipend (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). While salaries for laypeople do not typically match the salaries made by public school teachers and administrators, these salaries still cause a drain on parish finances, as individual parishes still typically continue to support a parish school (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). This, coupled with the fact that laypeople are typically not able to work the same number of hours as the sisters because they have family and other obligations to attend to, has added to the stress on parish finances and expectations around work hours (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Caruso, 2012). The strain on parish finances led to a need for schools to increase tuition and rely on outside fundraising to continue to support Catholic schools. The parish also has other ministries that require funding, so increases in the cost to run a school often continued to put a strain on the parish (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Caruso, 2012).

Because of these challenges, any lay principal must work with the pastor to ensure he is updated on what is occurring in the school. The lay principal must also assist with fundraising and devise creative ways to offset financial and staffing concerns.

### **Pastor Leadership and Catholic Schools**

The relationship between principal and pastor is an essential one when discussing the potential impact of the Catholic school. Caruso (2012) noted that when he conducted interviews regarding Catholic schools, “each respondent brought up their relationship with the pastor, even though this question was not part of the interview” (Caruso, p. 44). Caruso also stated that “whenever there were meetings of elementary school principals, the first topic of conversation was the pastor” (Caruso, p. 44). Caruso went on to describe four different types of pastors who lead schools. “Father Hostile” is unsupportive of the school, and he sees the school as a drain on resources. He often has an adversarial relationship with the principal and the school. “Father Schizophrenia” is sometimes supportive of the school, but his support is inconsistent. He may be complimentary toward staff one day and eliminate them the next day due to a perceived flaw or what he deems are money constraints. “Father Laissez-faire” is supportive of the school and attends necessary meetings but lacks the vision or leadership to engage those in the school community. Instead, he often leaves this task to the principal, and tends to generally lack a vision for the parish. “Father Engaged” is constantly at the school, and he provides support to students and families. He empowers the principal to make decisions, but also works with her or him to ensure students are receiving the best possible faith-based education (Caruso, p. 45-46). If the pastor of the school is “Father Engaged,” his leadership, along with the leadership of an excellent principal, can lead to school stability, faith development, academic excellence, and enrollment growth. Two excellent leaders paired together in this capacity can halt declines in enrollment and

lead families to receive an excellent, faith-based education through the Catholic school as a vehicle for evangelization. If “Father Engaged” is not the school pastor, this could pose a problem for the principal and the school community, especially a community working to grow an excellent school. The principal in this situation would need to figure out how to work effectively around the pastor’s perceived role.

### **Catholic Schools in the Midwest**

In the Midwest, a wide variety of parishes were established between the late 19th and early 20th centuries that served many different ethnic groups. For example, in 1916, in one city in the Midwest, there were 93 territorial/Irish parishes, 35 German parishes, 34 Polish parishes, and 53 additional parishes serving various ethnic groups. These parishes enrolled approximately 650,000 members, or about 30% of the city’s population (Brinig & Garnett, 2014, p. 20).

Schools and parishes were insular, with members of the community often remaining in that ethnic area. Parishes, up until the middle of the 20th century, were the cornerstone of the Catholic community. Catholics were required to attend Mass once a week and send their children to the local Catholic school. Families attended various parish events and socialized almost exclusively within the parish (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

By the mid-20th century, Catholic parish life began to change. Many Catholics moved away from cities, and African Americans, many of whom were not Catholic, moved into former ethnic neighborhoods (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Vatican II also brought about many changes to parish life. Latin Mass ended, and priests began interacting more with parishioners during the Mass (Bryk et al., 1993). The number of people entering religious life and staffing Catholic schools declined drastically to a point where less than 5% of the instructors in schools are nuns, brothers, and priests (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). This led to increased personnel costs for Catholic



schools and parishes, as well as to the closing of parishes and schools because neighborhoods became unable to support the large number of parishes in their area. Closures began in 1968 and have continued to this day (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

### **Catholic School Leadership Today**

Today, over 95% of school principals are laypeople. Because current administrators are members of the laity, the USCCB stressed that principals must have appropriate theological and catechetical training to be spiritual leaders of Catholic schools (Caruso, 2012; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). The Catholic bishops stressed the importance of recruiting, onboarding, and training future Catholic school principals to ensure the Catholic faith continues to be passed on to the next generation of Catholics (Caruso, 2012; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). The bishops encourage Catholic universities to provide excellent formation programs for Catholic leaders to ensure they are trained to lead Catholic schools (Caruso, 2012; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). This calling has been researched by Catholic universities, and they continue to develop leadership programs for future Catholic school teachers and leaders (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014).

Catholic school leaders are tasked with the challenge put forth by the USCCB which includes proclaiming the Gospel, providing an atmosphere where students and families experience Christ, taking advantage of service opportunities, and worshiping God (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Catholic school leaders must also ensure their schools are academically excellent, high-quality educational options for all students. Leaders in Catholic schools must also educate teachers on up-to-date professional development practices and manage the school budget (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Catholic school leaders receive an important call to not only ensure an excellent academic education for all students in

their care but also ensure the Catholic faith is passed along to the next generation of Catholics in their schools.

### **Essential Elements of an Excellent Catholic School**

Bryk (2010) included five essential elements of excellent schools in his research. These elements are challenging academics for all students, a strong staff, community engagement from parents and students, instruction that is student centered, and a strong school leader who drives change and improvement. Ryan and Taylor (2005) also added extra-curricular activities, student discipline, and student self-control as elements that exist in a successful Catholic school.

Catholic schools must provide all these essentials and excellent faith formation to students as they learn to be productive citizens, and subsequently continue to pass on the faith as they enter adulthood (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014).

In 2012, the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools were published. These standards were created and published in a joint effort by university professors, Catholic school principals, and teachers in conjunction with the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) (Ozar & Weizel-O'Neill, 2012). The goal of the project was to create a “national articulation of defining characteristics and performance benchmarks that will enable all sponsors of Catholic elementary and secondary schools to assess, strengthen, and sustain their operations” (Ozar & Weizel-O'Neill, 2012). Leaders who adhere to these essentials meet the diverse needs of Catholic school students and families in their care. The essentials outline important characteristics of Catholic schools and provide a framework for school and leadership success in Catholic schools (Ozar & Weizel-O'Neill, 2012). The standards examine nine “Defining Characteristics” of Catholic schools and present thirteen standards that “describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in Catholic

schools” (Ozar & Weizel-O’Neill, 2012). The standards focus on ways schools can measure their Catholic identity, while ensuring excellent governance, leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality for schools (Ozar & Weizel-O’Neill, 2012). Leadership is one of the essentials of the standards and domains, and excellent principal leadership directly correlates to a school’s ability to provide excellent faith formation, academics, and operational vitality.

If each of these elements is further analyzed, it becomes clear that strong leadership is essential for a successful school. The quality of the school leader can relate directly to student achievement (Rieckhoff, 2014). When a strong principal is in place in a school, student achievement grows by 25% (School Leaders Network, 2014). Creating a positive school culture is also essential to the mission of a Catholic leader and school (Rieckhoff, 2014). The school leader sets expectations with staff and students, forms teams, develops community, hires and evaluates staff, and drives school improvement. The importance of a strong staff is clear. An inspiring, respected school leader can develop a team of excellent educators to support him or her (Ryan & Taylor, 2005).

For the past several years, recruiting and retaining high-quality principals and educators has been challenging because there is currently a shortage of principals across the United States (Fraser & Brock, 2013). In Catholic schools, principals are required to be Catholic in order to serve as the faith leader of the school (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). This further decreases the available pool of candidates. Given the essential nature of consistent leadership in schools and the high turnover in school personnel (School Leaders Network, 2014), the Catholic school system must continue to examine how to recruit and retain high-quality leaders.

## **Principal Leadership**

The need for excellent principal leadership in schools is a consistent theme throughout the literature on school excellence (Bêteille et al., 2012; Bryk, 2010; Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Ryan & Taylor, 2005; School Leaders Network, 2014). Researchers have shown that strong school leadership can translate directly into academic success (Rieckhoff, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014). The study conducted by School Leaders Network (2014) could not find a single instance of a school turning around academically without a strong leader serving as principal of the school (p. 3). Excellence in instruction throughout the school building, rather than pockets of excellence related to a few good teachers, almost never occurs without strong principal leadership (Boyle et al., 2016). Good principals can create a culture of learning by helping teachers facilitate learning communities with a specific focus on student academic growth and attainment (Chapman, 2005).

Multiple researchers have illustrated the importance of effective leaders in schools. According to Boyle et al. (2016), “Studies . . . indicate that a principal’s influence accounts for about one-quarter of school-level variation in student achievement” (p. 294). This assertion is also supported by other researchers (Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014). Doyle and Locke (2014) examined the importance of principal effectiveness and acknowledged that “highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year, while ineffective principals lower achievement by a similar amount” (p. 9). Quality principal leadership impacts student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014), and research suggests that principals with strong education backgrounds attract higher performing teachers to work in their schools (Viadero, 2009).

## **Principal Leadership in Catholic Schools**

While several researchers have discussed the importance of retaining principals in general (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network 2014; Viadero 2009), recruiting and retaining Catholic school principals is increasingly challenging (Durow & Brock, 2013). In Catholic schools, principals also face challenges of low pay, lack of autonomy, high stress, long hours, high accountability, and conflicts with school boards and pastors (Durow & Brock, 2013). While principals ascend to the principalship because they enjoy working with students and teachers, they can become discouraged by parental demands, reports, accreditation, and other bureaucratic tasks (Fraser & Brock, 2013). A Catholic school principal is also considered the faith leader of the school, taking on the responsibility of student sacrament preparation, religious instruction, and prayer within the school (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). Because the principal is considered the faith leader of the school community, frequent turnover in the principalship in Catholic schools also means that a school is seeking to constantly fill a position for someone who is not only an excellent academic leader but also a faith leader.

Limited research has been conducted on Catholic school principal recruitment and retention. One study in New Zealand discussed the importance of standardizing Catholic school principal salaries and surveyed principals about recruitment and retention practices (Fraser & Brock, 2013). Durow and Brock (2004) conducted a study in 2004 of principals who left a particular midwestern diocese in the United States in the previous 3 years. Their study was a mixed method study in which they conducted personal interviews with the participants, and they provided them with a survey (Durow & Brock, 2004). The findings of their study discussed why principals left their positions. These reasons included family needs, location in proximity to their home, the work required by the school, and the opportunity to advance their career. Conflict with

pastors, presidents, or school boards caused principals to leave their positions. Durow and Brock (2004) found that compensation was not a significant factor that caused principals to leave.

Durow and Brock's study primarily focused on why principals leave, while this dissertation adds information about why principals seek positions in Catholic schools and explores why they stay. This dissertation also specifically addresses the pastor–principal relationship by directly interviewing pastors.

### **Principal Recruitment**

Even as research illustrates the importance of principal leadership, fewer individuals are choosing to become school leaders (Fraser & Brock, 2013). According to Fraser and Brock (2013),

An Educational Research Service (1998) survey of 403 school districts revealed that 50% of districts had shortages of qualified applicants for principal positions. The typical public-school principal in the United States had a median age of 50 and plans to retire by age 57. (p. 426)

Researchers have noted a variety of reasons for this phenomenon, including high stress, low pay, and completing required tasks that are not associated with educating students (Fraser & Brock, 2013). This phenomenon is not unique to the United States and is a pattern that has been studied around the world (Chapman, 2005). Many principals are reaching retirement age, and there are not enough new leaders to take their place (Chapman, 2005; Fraser & Brock, 2013). Leaders who become trained as principals often take positions as principals, but, according to Viadero (2009), “data available from a handful of states suggest that only about half of beginning principals remain in the same job five years later, and that many leave the principalship altogether when they go” (p. 4). Research suggests that there are not enough principal candidates to fill current

vacancies, which highlights the importance of retaining strong principals (Durow & Brock, 2013).

### **Principal Turnover**

According to researchers, principal turnover is a challenge across the country, with approximately one third of principals leaving their schools after 3 years, and one half leaving their schools after 5 years (Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009). Principal turnover is costly (School Leaders Network, 2014). The cost to hire, train and onboard a principal is estimated to be \$75,000 (School Leaders Network, 2014).

When a principal leaves a school, there are several challenges (Durow & Brock 2013; Fuller 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014). Research illustrates that principal turnover has a direct, negative effect on student achievement, often immediately after the departure of a principal (Fuller, 2012). Frequent principal turnover can lead to teacher and community apathy and change aversion, since teachers and community members assume that a new principal will not be in the school long term (Fuller, 2012). Often, increased principal turnover leads to increased teacher turnover, resulting from frequent changes occurring in a school building and various leadership initiatives (Fuller, 2012). Frequent turnover in principal leadership leads to instability in the school organization, and it disrupts the organization as it attempts to move forward (Béteille et al., 2012). Researchers have illustrated that a school with high teacher turnover also often has high leader turnover (Fuller, 2012). All these factors can lead to decreased student achievement (Béteille et al., 2012). Student achievement often drops in a school the year after a principal departs, and it can take up to 3 years for student achievement to return to the level where achievement was before the first principal left (School Leaders Network, 2014). Patterns of frequent teacher and principal turnover often occur in high-poverty

schools and districts (Béteille et al., 2012; Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014).

Research has illustrated that higher-poverty schools often have less experienced leaders and teachers and greater turnover (Béteille et al., 2012). Therefore, higher-poverty schools tend to be ineffective academically and organizationally due to the higher turnover in teachers and leadership (Béteille et al., 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014).

Principal turnover affects schools in both the Catholic and public-school system. In the public-school system, studies have shown that about half of principals stay at their schools after 5 years, and many of those who leave do not take another principal role (Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009). Because about one quarter of student achievement is determined by the quality of the principal (Doyle & Locke, 2014), the principal in a school must remain consistent and of a high quality (Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014). Principal turnover is also a concern in Catholic schools. According to Durow and Brock (2014), when a principal leaves a school, the momentum of the school is disrupted, and the principal's departure sends a discouraging message to potential future principal candidates (p. 204). As a result, more work must be done around principal attrition to make the job of principal more attractive to the next generation of leaders.

While several researchers have offered suggestions of ways to restructure the principal position to attract excellent principal candidates (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014), they have not offered information illustrating how these suggestions have been put into practice and whether they have been successfully evaluated. Suggestions provided are research based, but they have not necessarily been tested in systems or school districts. Durow and Brock (2013) discussed the effectiveness of standardizing principal salaries



in Catholic schools in New Zealand, but there is limited research that discusses implementation of solutions and suggestions in Catholic schools in the United States.

### **Principal Retention**

While it is important to explore and understand reasons for principal turnover and why and how principal turnover can lead to inconsistencies in student achievement and teacher performance, it is also important to examine how a system can retain effective principals. If effective principals are retained in the school, some of the teacher turnover and student achievement difficulties can be minimized (Durow & Brock, 2013). Teacher capacity, school stability, and employee retention often directly relate to the quality of the principal (Fuller, 2012). Based on the challenges schools face when there is leadership turnover, schools must find ways to retain effective principals (Fuller, 2012).

Because of the need to retain high-performing principals, several researchers have validated the need to explore principal retention (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009). These researchers have discussed the shortage of qualified principal candidates, even though most of these discussions are anecdotal (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014). Researchers have also confirmed the need for high quality principal candidates to ensure student growth and strong school culture (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Their studies highlight challenges around low salary in comparison to the salary an educator can earn as a teacher, high levels of stress and responsibility, and a lack of work/life balance as reasons teachers either do not choose to become principals or leave the principalship after only a few years (Chapman, 2005; Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009).

To make the principalship attractive to new candidates, researchers mention the need to increase salaries of principals by appropriately compensating high-performing leaders

(Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014) and restructuring the job of the principal. According to researchers, the requirements of the job have outgrown the ability for one person to handle all the expectations (Chapman, 2005; Elmore, 2000; Viadero, 2009). Therefore, schools should think about creative ways to restructure the principal position, so one person is able to handle all the demands which include staffing, human resources, high stakes standards, student academics, instructional leadership, budget constraints, and parent demands, just to name a few (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014).

Researchers also have discussed the importance of fit when hiring principals in specific schools (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014). Doyle and Locke (2014) explored the need for active recruitment measures in school districts to ensure that the most qualified principals are placed in schools where they will be the best fit (p. 35). Principal turnover can negatively impact student learning and school continuity (School Leaders Network, 2014). Finding the right principal fit in a school remains an important part of ensuring a high-quality educational environment for all students.

Existing studies on principal retention have listed several suggestions concerning ways to help restructure the position of principal to make the principalship more appealing, including raising salaries for high performing principals and restructuring the job to ensure that the requirements of the position of principal can be completed by one person. The research lacks specific suggestions or examples of schools where these new structures are implemented, and researchers do not address the specific needs of Catholic schools. The suggestions are based on feedback from principals, but implementation or impact of the suggestions were not discussed.

### **Catholic School Principal Retention**

Catholic schools also face similar challenges to those that other private and public schools face. While there is not a study that currently has statistics specific to Catholic school principal turnover, one diocese in the Midwest, the Archdiocese of Chicago, determined in the strategic plan that the typical principal in the Archdiocese leaves the principalship after 3 years (Archdiocese of Chicago, School Strategic Plan, 2017). Catholic school systems struggle with principal retention for many of the reasons mentioned by public school researchers. Principals and schools are challenged with low pay, high stress levels, and often more responsibility than public school principals because Catholic school principals are considered the faith leaders of the school in addition to the academic leaders (Boyle, et. al, 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). Catholic school principals also face budget shortfalls, increased need to market the school, and challenges in raising money for student scholarships, all while working to ensure students in the school receive a high-quality, faith-filled education (Rieckhoff, 2014).

Principals in Catholic schools leave the principalship for reasons similar to those of their public-school counterparts. The desire for higher salaries, conflicts with pastors and/or governing bodies, increasing stress, and lack of respect for the position of principal are cited as reasons Catholic school principals leave the position (Durow & Brock, 2013). As a result, the job of Catholic school principal is not viewed as an appealing one. This has resulted in fewer candidates applying for school principal positions in recent years (Fraser & Brock, 2013).

While the Catholic Church has remained clear about the importance of Catholic schools and renewed its commitment to them in 2005, the Church also recognizes changes and the importance of the laity in continuing quality Catholic schools (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). In 2005, the laity made up 95% of the teachers and principals in Catholic schools (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). According to the NCEA,

today that number is closer to 98% (NCEA, 2018). In previous decades, many Catholic school leaders were religious sisters, brothers, and priests who were trained in Catholic theology and espoused a specific mission around education and faith associated with their orders (Schuttloffel, 2013). Because of the decreased number of religious orders and members of those orders, more and more lay leaders have taken over the leadership and teaching duties in Catholic schools (Schuttloffel, 2013). With the advent of lay leaders taking over the leadership of schools, pastors and parishes are unable to assume that lay leaders have the same level of theological training as religious leaders (Boyle et al., 2016; Schuttloffel, 2013). While faith leadership and calling are reasons that many lay leaders become Catholic school leaders (Fraser & Brock, 2013), lay leaders may not have a strong background in theology and have demands from families and personal lives that religious sisters and brothers did not (Durow & Brock, 2013).

While there are several challenges associated with the change in principal leadership in Catholic Schools, the USCCB is clear about the importance of Catholic schools and strong leadership in the new millennium (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). The organization of bishops renewed its call for pastors and parishes to hire and train the highest quality leaders and teachers possible, ensuring the laity working in schools had appropriate faith formation and training (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Catholic schools are tasked by the USCCB (2005) with continuing to provide excellent Catholic education and faith formation to students. The resulting outcome of this well-rounded education is ideally a next generation of Catholics who are fully formed in their faith.

Principals play a significant role in the faith formation of the students in their care (Rieckhoff, 2014). Principals can help increase Mass attendance by encouraging children to go to Mass as a part of their faith leadership calling (Boyle et al., 2016). They can also ensure that the

school as an essential part of the mission of the parish, as outlined by USCCB, is a stable, caring community. Ultimately, a stable, strong principal can help ensure the academic and faith development of the school's students and foster the faith of the next generation of Catholics (Rieckhoff, 2014; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

### **Summary**

Literature around principal retention illustrates the need for effective principal recruitment and retention strategies and recognizes the challenges around both topics in Catholic schools. While there was a study conducted on Catholic school principal retention by Durow and Brock in 2004, this study did not involve interviewing pastors, who are essential stakeholders in Catholic schools. I propose that through presenting interviews of pastors and principals who are leaders in the same parish, this study is positioned to provide a better sense of the state of the parish school, and the state of Catholic school principal leadership.

Principal leadership is essential in Catholic schools, with principal turnover affecting the continuity and morale in school communities. Excellent academic growth in schools is connected to strong principal leadership. Principals in Catholic schools are expected to have a strong skill set in multiple areas that they may not be prepared for when they move into an administrative position.

Given the decline in the number of Catholic schools, this study is important in ensuring the future of Catholic education. Constant turnover in the principal position has been shown to harm student achievement and discourage future potential leaders from applying for the principalship. Researchers offer several suggestions to help reduce principal attrition including higher principal pay, restructuring of the principal position, and increased professional development in areas of weakness for each leader. While the literature illustrates the challenges

faced by Catholic school principals, which includes more responsibilities around marketing and faith leadership that are not required of their public-school counterparts, few tested methods that help ensure principal retention in Catholic schools exist in the research. Only two studies, one conducted by Durow and Brock (2004) in the United States and one conducted by Fraser and Brock (2013) in New Zealand, specifically address the Catholic school principalship. Neither of these studies contains interviews with pastors, and they do not take other factors such as school finances or demographics into account. To fill this gap in the research this study examines principal recruitment and turnover in Chapters 3 and 4, with a focus on the pastor–principal relationship. Chapter 5 then discusses what can be done to recruit and retain strong leaders in Catholic schools.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Principal leadership is essential to the success of a school (Bryk, 2010; Rieckhoff, 2014; Ryan & Taylor, 2005; School Leaders Network 2014). One fourth of a school's academic impact is dependent on the quality of the school leader (Doyle & Locke, 2014). An excellent principal shapes "a vision of academic success for students, set[s] a positive tone and culture in a building, and cultivate[s] leadership in others" (Doyle & Locke, p. 9). Given the importance of the principal position, districts and dioceses seek to hire high-quality principals to lead schools. Principal retention is a significant challenge for Catholic and public-school districts due to high pressures principals face, long hours, and changing job expectations (Chapman, 2005; Fuller, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Viadero, 2009). Catholic schools face the additional challenge of finding principal candidates who are Catholic and are prepared to serve as the faith leaders of their schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Schuttlöffel, 2013).

This study used narrative inquiry to explore various reasons that Catholic school principals choose to become school leaders, why they remain employed as principals, and why they leave. Studying these phenomena will help Central Catholic Diocese, as well as other dioceses around the country, retain principals. Principal leadership is essential as Catholic schools work to stabilize enrollment by ensuring schools are staffed with high-quality teachers who provide an excellent academic and faith-based education for all students.

First, Chapter 3 will discuss the research design, the type of study that was conducted, and the study's participants. The chapter will then discuss the interview questions crafted for the participants, recruitment for the study, ethics, data analysis, and validity and credibility.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Research has established the importance of school leaders and the difficulties recruiting qualified candidates in both public and private schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Chapman, 2005; Durow & Brock, 2013; Frasier & Brock, 2013; School Leaders Network, 2014). Catholic schools are challenged to find leaders who not only are strong academic leaders but also are capable of serving as faith leaders. Because of the high demand for Catholic school principals, the variety of demands placed on principals in Catholic schools, and the special qualification that a Catholic school principal must be a practicing Catholic, Catholic schools are experiencing a significant principal shortage.

Catholic schools serve over 15,000 students in the Central Catholic diocese alone. Given the number of students and families served by Catholic schools in the Midwest and around the country, a study on the recruitment and retention of quality principals will help ensure all students have an excellent leader in their schools. While the problem of principal recruitment and retention has been well documented by various researchers (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Durow & Brock, 2013; Fraser & Brock, 2013; School Leaders Network: 2014), and some studies have provided some suggestions on how to potentially address this problem (Boyle et al., 2016; Durow & Brock, 2013; Fraser & Brock, 2013), there continues to be significant principal turnover in Catholic schools. The results of this study will provide strategies for parishes and dioceses to recruit and retain high-quality leaders and ensure students in Catholic schools receive an excellent education.

## **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following primary research questions:

1. What factors influence candidates' decisions to seek a principal position at a Catholic



school? This question addresses Catholic school principal recruitment by examining the specific factors that influence candidates.

2. What factors influence a principal's decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?

This question addresses Catholic school principal retention by discovering the reasons why principals decide to remain in the profession.

3. Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools? This question addresses both recruitment and retention. If research can discern why principals leave their position, researchers can potentially make changes to the principal position to ensure strong principals are recruited and retained long-term.

### **Research Design**

This study was conducted as a narrative inquiry study. Narrative inquiry is a method by which participants are interviewed, and their perspectives and stories are analyzed based on the participants' lived experience. The "narrative portrays or represents real life experiences in a transparent fashion" (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 6). In a narrative research study, researchers examine a subject and that subject's experience of the world around them. According to Robert and Shenhav (2014), the way each person sees and structures the world helps that person create meaning. By examining the experiences of the principal and pastor in a parish school and conducting interviews with them, I examined how they interpret the world around them. A person's story, as gleaned through interview questions, can "hold special powers as windows into the individual and social world" (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 4). By looking through these "windows," I gained a deeper understanding of how each leader experienced and interpreted the world around them and enacted their vision of their role. Subsequently, themes were developed around each person's individual experience. Narratives represent "real life experiences in a

transparent fashion” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 6). By conducting a narrative inquiry with principals and pastors, I reached a level of transparency regarding individual experiences and interpretations by exploring their stories and recording the way each interviewee interpreted the world. The narrative inquiry also helped illustrate how the principal’s personal experience shaped the way that he or she interpreted or saw his or her position, enacted his or her role as principal, and made decisions related to the position.

This narrative research study consisted primarily of interviews with six Catholic school leaders and the pastors who oversee their parish schools. By closely examining principal and pastor relationships and their perspectives of Catholic education through the method of narrative inquiry, I discovered the specific reasons why these principals in the Central Catholic diocese became principals in Catholic schools, why they remain principals, and the factors that might impact their decision to leave. By focusing on specific principals and learning the demographics of their school, their life experience, and their reasons for remaining principals, I detailed the specific experiences of individuals and what they think about their situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). By hearing directly from pastors and principals via interviews, I gained specific insights that will help other dioceses learn more about the experiences of pastors and principals, and how to help them remain engaged in their work as leaders.

I directly interviewed principals and pastors because each is a key stakeholder in the parish school. The principal directly oversees the school and serves as faith and academic leader. The pastor is responsible for the entire parish. He hires the principal, and he is responsible for ensuring all parishioners under his care, including the children and parents involved in the school, receive an excellent, faith-based education.

Principal Interviews: The interviews expanded on themes and topics that are important to each principal, highlighting the meaning behind what each principal said. Learning about the specific experiences of each principal and the context in which each principal leads his or her school allowed me to examine best practices concerning recruitment and retention. Interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams to help ensure busy principals and pastors were able to meet according to their schedule and that they were in a place where they felt comfortable.

Pastor Interviews: Pastors of parishes with schools are essential stakeholders. Per Canon Law, pastors ultimately oversee and are responsible for all parish operations, including the Catholic school. They are ultimately responsible for hiring the school principal. They are required to provide excellent faith formation as well as an academic education that is at least as good as that provided by the local public school in the area. Pastors face significant pressure to provide an education for the children in their care all while managing limited funds (Caruso, 2012). Because of these dynamics, I interviewed the school pastor and principal of the Catholic school in that parish. Learning a pastor's views on Catholic education and how he supports the principal and students in the school and parish allowed me to examine how pastoral support can influence each principal's work. Hearing from pastors about their expectations of Catholic education and its sustainability provided an essential voice around how they can continue to support Catholic school leaders.

Even though Catholic schools have experienced enrollment declines in recent years (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Hunt, Oldenski, & Wallace, 2000), there is still support for Catholic education. Catholic schools seek to stabilize and grow, ensuring that the Catholic faith is passed on to the next generation of Catholics. The goal of Catholic schools is to ensure all children receive an excellent academic, faith-based education. Community members and "researchers

continue to praise Catholic schools for achieving strong academic results at relatively modest costs” (Hunt, Oldenski, & Wallace, p. 71). Several studies in inner cities have illustrated the impact of Catholic schools in low-income communities (Brinig & Garnett, 2014), and “growing coalitions of business and community leaders see inner city Catholic schools as shining examples of the power of high expectations and personal interest to educate the children of the poor” (Hunt, Oldenski, & Wallace, p. 79). If Catholic schools can stabilize and continue to grow, more children and families can receive an excellent, faith-based education. Ensuring that each school and parish has excellent leadership in place is essential to ensuring the academic excellence and growth of Catholic schools (Rieckhoff, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014).

This study was constructed using a narrative research design consisting of semi-structured interviews of six principals and pastors in Central Catholic Diocese. Closely examining the school leader’s experiences as a Catholic school principal sheds light on his or her perceptions. A close examination of the experience of school leaders helps researchers determine the best methods by which school leaders can be recruited and retained. Conducting a narrative inquiry elucidated how Catholic school leaders can be recruited and retained.

### **Sampling and Participants**

A variety of principals and pastors in different areas of Central Catholic Diocese were chosen to represent the diversity of the diocese. Central Catholic Diocese serves students of various socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Some parishes serve parishioners who are different ethnically and socioeconomically from the students in the schools. For example, some parishes serve a predominantly Caucasian population in the parish but serve a different population (Hispanic or African American, for example) in the school. Capturing differences in the wide variety of parishes and schools by examining schools with different financial realities

and demographics in Central Catholic Diocese was important to illustrate the variety of students served by the diocese. Capturing the variety of parishes and students in the diocese also provided a context to understand the work of the pastor and principal.

There are many different schools, principals, and pastors in Central Catholic Diocese, and conducting a narrative inquiry does not allow all voices to be heard. Therefore, I used purposeful sampling to carefully choose schools for the narrative research study to ensure the diversity of Central Catholic Diocese was reflected. Through the selection of a diverse group of principals, pastors, and schools, several types of communities are represented in the study. These cases revealed conclusions about the “real life experiences” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 6) of each individual principal, and perhaps others like them in similar community situations. This study helped me “understand the way people think about their world and how those definitions are formed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 35) by teaching me what is important based on their lived experience.

I also analyzed the consistencies or inconsistencies of those experiences when compared to the available literature. Understanding the experience of each principal yielded richer data and more detail around exactly why principals become leaders, why they stay, and why they might potentially leave. These specific examples can help schools and dioceses take actionable steps to prevent turnover.

To select a representative sample of schools and parishes given the wide variety of types of schools in the diocese, school demographic data were examined, and principals and pastors were chosen based on the following characteristics: percentage of students eligible for FRL, school size, and student race and ethnicity. When the numbers in Central Catholic Diocese were analyzed, the schools fell into the following percentages: 52% of schools were 0–10% FRL, and

over 50% Caucasian. Of those schools, 60% had more than 300 students, and 40% had fewer than 300 students. Two schools with more than 300 students and one school with fewer than 300 students were chosen in this category. Only 8% of schools had FRL rates between 10% and 30%, so no schools in this category were solicited or chosen for the study. Of the schools in the diocese, 14% had FRL rates between 30% and 60%, were over 50% Hispanic, and had fewer than 300 students. One school was chosen in this category. Of schools in the diocese, 25% had FRL rates of over 60%, were over 50% Hispanic, and had fewer than 300 students. Two schools were chosen in this category. I solicited principals by sending an email to them directly asking them to participate in the study. Over 20 emails were sent.

Once principals and pastors responded positively to the participation solicitation, I checked the school's demographics to ensure they fit into the representative sample. If they did, I asked them to participate in the study. Subjects for this study were asked via email via the letter in Appendix A to participate in the study. Subjects learned of their time commitment for the study in the letter they received and were made aware of any potential risks and/or rewards based on their participation. The identity of participants in addition to the names of schools and parishes were protected through pseudonyms.

During the interviews, I considered that answers from pastors and principals may vary based on time of year, or what had taken place in the school most recently. Outside influences, stressors, and other factors may have influenced the interviews and collection of the data. Being aware of these considerations during the interview and discussing them during the research helped me discover if some information is a potential outlier, or if certain answers or lived experiences were affected by other outside factors. One outside factor that was mentioned frequently during the interviews was the fact that the interviews took place about one month into

the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. During this time, school buildings were closed, and teachers taught students online. Pastors and principals alluded to the pandemic in their interviews when they discussed missing their students, working with parents through difficult situations, and concerns about finances and enrollment.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection**

Central Catholic Diocese spans over 40 elementary schools, and the situations in the schools, leader experience, pastor experience, school size, and demographics vary widely. Purposeful sampling was used to determine the participants of the study. To select a representative sample of schools and parishes given the wide variety of levels of principal experience and types of schools in the diocese, school demographic data were examined, and principals and pastors were solicited based on the following characteristics: school ethnic demographics, percentage of students eligible for FRL, number of years of principal experience, and location of the school in the diocese. Because of the large population of schools in Central Diocese, it was not possible to talk to every principal. The representative sample ensured that several different principals, pastors, and communities were explored (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011).

Three of the six principals and pastors serve a high-poverty population (over 50% FRL), and three serve a low-poverty population. Three schools serve a mostly white population and three schools serve a mostly Hispanic population. Four of the six schools have under 300 students, and two schools have over 300 students. In the sample, principal level of experience in their current school varies from 1 year to 12 years. Over 65% of principals in Central Catholic Diocese have 6 years of principal experience in Central Catholic Diocese or fewer. In this sample, five principals have 6 years of experience or fewer, and one principal has 12 years of experience.

Aside from the demographic data, additional data were collected in each school from each principal to draw a clearer picture of the school. These data were collected during the interview process and cross checked with the demographic data compiled by the diocese about each school.



**Table 1***Participant Names and School/Parish Name\**

Principal	Pastor	School/Parish Name	Current School**	Overall***
Jennifer Williams	Fr. Andrew	St. Martha	2 years	19 years
Mary Davis	Fr. Phillip	St. Polycarp	12 years	20 years
Maria Jackson	Fr. Simon	St. Steven	1 year	20 years
Linda Wilson	Fr. James and Fr. Thomas	St. Augustine	1 year	12 years
Chris Miller	Fr. John	St. Erasmus	1 year	21 years
Sandra Smith	N/A	St. Claudia	3 years	4 years

\* All participant names and school/parish names are pseudonyms

\*\*Years of Experience as Principal in current school

\*\*\*Years of experience as an administrator overall

Each school's demographics are described in Table 2.

**Table 2***School/Parish Name, Student Demographics, School Size, FRL Status*

School/Parish Name	Student Demographics	School Size	%FRL
St. Martha	> 50% Caucasian	> 300 students	< 10%
St. Polycarp	> 50% Caucasian	> 300 students	< 10%
St. Augustine	> 50% Caucasian	< 300 students	< 10%
St. Steven	> 50% Hispanic	< 300 students	30%-60%
St. Erasmus	> 50% Hispanic	< 300 students	> 60%
St. Claudia	> 50% Hispanic	< 300 students	> 60%

Initial questions containing general demographic questions were asked of each participant before the formal interview. The answers provided by the principals and pastors were cross-checked with the information available in the central office to create a more detailed picture of each principal, parish, and school.

Sample questions for principals include the following:

1. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator (principal or assistant principal) in this school?
2. How many years did you teach?
3. How would you describe your school's demographics by race/ethnicity? By number of students receiving FRL?
4. Is there anything unique about the demographics of your school that may not be recorded on a typical demographic report? (ex: large number of immigrant families?)

Sample questions for pastors include the following:

1. How long have you been the pastor in this parish?
2. How many pastors have served this parish in the last 10 years?
3. How many years of experience do you have as pastor?
4. Is there anything unique about your professional background or experience that you would like to add?

The Microsoft Teams interviews for both the pastors and principals were conducted as semi-structured interviews. All interviewees were given the same “grand tour” questions. However, some of the probing, follow-up, and clarifying questions differed based on participant answers. Grand tour questions for principals included the following themes: hiring information,

general leadership, faith leadership, professional development, and support. Sample questions included:

1. Tell me about why you decided to become a principal in Central Catholic Diocese.
2. Discuss what you enjoy most about being a principal in this school.
3. Is there anything that might cause you to consider another career opportunity? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
4. To what extent do you feel prepared to be the faith leader of a Catholic school?
5. What, if anything, would help you most as you continue to serve as a principal in your school?
6. To what extent do you feel supported as principal by your pastor?

These questions allowed for the interviewee to discuss how he or she interprets the topic being discussed. If answers were unclear or needed additional explanation, I employed probing questions or prompts like “What do you mean?,” “Give me an example,” or “Take me through that experience” to elicit more specific answers or feedback from the interviewee.

Questions for the pastors were broader, but similar tactics, including the grand tour and probing questions, were employed. Sample grand tour questions and prompts for pastors included the following: “Were you responsible for hiring your current principal? If so, what made you think this person was a good fit to lead the school? If not, how did you introduce yourself to him/her and begin your working relationship?,” “To what extent do you feel your current parish school is a successful ministry of the parish?,” “How are you involved in the school?,” “Discuss what you think the biggest challenges are with Catholic education today. What are the biggest rewards?,” and “What are your hopes for the future of Catholic education and your parish?”

The following information was collected from principals to help draw a clearer picture of the school.

- a. General financial data concerning whether the parish and/or school are receiving a subsidy from the Central Catholic Diocese.
- b. Confirmation of FRL rates.
- c. Confirmation of racial and ethnic demographics.
- d. Principal performance reviews.
- e. School improvement plans/school strategic plans.

Interviews took approximately an hour to an hour and a half each to complete, and they were audio recorded. Principals and pastors were interviewed in a location of their choice using Microsoft Teams. Creating a natural environment where each principal and pastor could be interviewed was an important consideration (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). Taking the subjects out of an area where they are comfortable may skew the data or cause the subjects to not answer the questions in as in-depth a manner as they might otherwise. Being aware of the time of year of the interview is also important. Principals and pastors may answer questions differently depending on the time of year, especially if that time of year is particularly busy for them. For example, Christmas tends to be a busy time for both pastors and principals, Easter tends to be a busy time of year for pastors, and the end of the school year in May and June tends to be busy for principals. The interviews took place in the month of April, after Easter for the pastors, and before May and June for the principals.

One factor that is important to note regarding the interviews is that these interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Interviews could not take place in-person due to state and local limitations, which is why Microsoft Teams was utilized. Principals and pastors

mentioned the pandemic during their interviews and alluded to challenges the pandemic posed with finances and enrollment. Principals mentioned that they missed seeing their students every day, and they were tasked with managing school in a different way than they had previously. While the interviews were triangulated with data that were collected before and after the start of the pandemic, the unique situation for the pastors and principals is a factor that must be considered with the collected data.

Data from the interviews with pastors and principals were triangulated with demographic data from the school and parish, principal performance evaluations, school and parish finance information, and school improvement goals. Once interviews were conducted and the interview data were analyzed, I cross checked the themes that emerged from the initial interview with the interviewees to confirm the findings. I conducted a document analysis of artifacts pertaining to each principal and school, including principal performance evaluations for each principal, an analysis of the school website and social media information, and financials to illustrate a more holistic picture of each individual school.

I also conducted an interview with one of the regional directors with the Office of Catholic Schools and with one of the council deans. Regional directors oversee schools and assist the pastor in conducting the principal performance evaluation. Deans are priests who oversee parishes and pastors and assist the bishop in the management of the local area. These additional data informed the results by drawing a clearer picture of each principal's job and the situation at their current school. Learning more about their current school and parish, the demographics in their school, and the pressures they face helped me gain a clearer picture of the tasks of the principal and helped me put the principals' and pastors' interview questions into context.

The data helped answer the research questions by providing me with information about each school and the concerns that each individual principal and pastor has about Catholic education. The variety of data helped me determine if there are common themes in answers from the principals and pastors, or if their answers and concerns differ, perhaps based on the situation in that specific parish and school, or a concern based on parish and school demographics.

### **Data Analysis**

All interview questions connect with the research questions, eliciting answers from principals and pastors about recruitment and retention of Catholic school principals. Interviews were recorded using the Otter application on my cell phone. Otter records and transcribes the interviews and provides them to the researcher in a written format. When the interviews were completed, I checked the interview transcriptions for accuracy by listening to the interview and editing the transcription provided by the Otter application where necessary. Once interviews were audio recorded and I edited the transcriptions for accuracy, the interview scripts were uploaded into Dedoose for analysis. Based on the format from Bogdan and Biklen (2011), coding took place in several steps. First, I examined the data for any patterns that were present and determined topics or headings for these patterns. These topics were sorted in Dedoose using parent codes and child codes. Parent codes were overarching codes that emerged from the interview data, and they included topics that were frequently mentioned by principals and pastors during the interviews. The parent codes that emerged upon data analysis included “relationships,” “support,” “faith,” and “challenges of the principalship.” Once the data were sorted using the parent codes, the data were further analyzed and sorted into child codes. These child codes were more specific codes that emerged from the parent codes upon further analysis. Under the parent code “relationships” the following child codes emerged: “Pastor–Principal

Relationship,” “Relationship with Parish,” “Relationships with other Principals,” “Relationships with Staff,” “Relationships with Students,” and “Relationships with Parents.” Under the parent code “support,” the following child codes emerged: “Support from Students,” “Support from Central Office,” “Support from Parents,” “Support from Parish,” and “Support from Pastor.” Under the parent code “Faith,” the following child codes emerged: “Faith Formation,” “Faith Leadership,” “Faith Nourishment,” and “Influence of Faith.” Under the parent code “Challenges of the Principalship,” the following child codes emerged: “Hours Worked,” “Leaving the Principalship,” “Multiple Facets of the Job,” and “Self-Care.”

Once the interviews were coded, codes were analyzed using Dedoose’s Qualitative Charts Code Application function. This analysis provides the frequency by which each code is mentioned throughout the interviews and provides the number of times that code was addressed by each interviewee. Child codes that were discussed more than 12 times during the interviews with both principals and pastors created the overarching themes for the findings. The following child codes were discussed more than 12 times by the principals and pastors: “Multiple Facets of the Job,” “Faith Leadership,” “Faith Nourishment,” “Fit for the Position,” “School Culture,” “Support from the Pastor,” “Support from the Parents,” “Support from the Parish,” “Relationships with Parents,” “Hours Worked,” and “Support from Central Office.” The child codes with more than 20 mentions included “Support from the Parents” (32) and “Fit for the Position” (24). After analyzing the frequency of each code, I further analyzed the quotes by using the “matching excerpts” function in Dedoose. This function allowed me to review the exact quotes from each interviewee so the quotes can easily be compared with one another. Once the quotes under each code were analyzed, I tabulated the findings and determined the

overarching themes that were used to answer the research questions. The overarching themes are discussed in Chapter 4.

After the data were analyzed, they were triangulated using various school documents. These documents included principal performance reviews and supporting documents, documents and communication available on the school's website and Facebook page, and parish annual reports when available. Pastor responses also provided triangulation, especially in the discussion of the pastor–principal relationship.

### **Ethical Considerations/Potential Bias**

In my position in the central office of a diocese, I recognize that I have potential biases. I conducted the research on principal recruitment and retention and am responsible for both as part of my position. I served as a principal in Central Catholic Diocese for 3 years and as a teacher for 8. As someone who has familiarity with Central Catholic Diocese in several capacities, I must be aware of my potential biases based on my experience. In my position, I often encounter principals and pastors who discuss their experiences with Catholic education, and how they are trying to support Catholic education within their parishes. I need to be aware of how the perspectives I heard previously might skew my interpretation of the data.

I also realize any conclusions reached must be based on the interview data collected and based on the interviews of the pastors and principals. Because “the data must bear the weight of any interpretation . . . the researcher must continually confront his or her own opinions and prejudices with the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 37). The goal of this study is to add knowledge to the research literature in the hopes that other schools and dioceses can more effectively address principal recruitment and retention concerns. Ultimately, the goal of any system is to provide an excellent education for the children in its care. That assurance starts with



providing excellent principal leadership for schools and students (Doyle & Locke, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014).

One additional ethical consideration that had to be addressed was ensuring participants knew they could participate in this study based on their own free will, and they could end participation at any time. The letter in Appendix A addresses this. Subjects were informed on multiple occasions that they were volunteers and would not receive compensation in return for their participation in the study, and that they could halt participation in the study at any time.

I also was aware that my position in a diocese might make some principals and pastors nervous and perhaps more guarded during the interview. Sometimes, employees of a central office are treated with trepidation and distrust. Because of this, I worked with any concerned pastors and principals to ensure they understood the purpose of the study, and helped them understand that their names, schools, and parishes would be kept confidential. I clarified their option to quit the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable or felt as if the potential risks in participating in the study outweighed the benefits.

### **Validity and Credibility**

Leadership is essential to the success of every school. By exploring the experience of each leader in these schools and parishes, I gleaned a clearer picture of the position of principal and pastor as each participant experienced it. The “truth” behind each participant’s experience, and the themes developed from those experiences helped me explore what leadership in these capacities, and how each person’s experience as principal contributes to his or her leadership. Because narratives are based on the “truth” as that truth is viewed by each participant, data triangulation is essential. What each person said was examined through other documentation, such as performance reviews, an examination of the school’s website and social media posts, and

financial documentation. All data contributed to the whole picture of the Catholic school principalship, while still ensuring the voice and experience of each principal was heard and analyzed (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 8). The narrative inquiry allowed me to ask in-depth questions of each individual principal and pastor, analyze specific relationships, and develop conclusions based on situational analysis.

To test the validity and reliability of the questions, sample interviews of a principal and pastor who are not in the study were conducted to test the interview questions to ensure they elicited responses that are relevant to the study. I also checked the questions for understanding to ensure they were clear to the interviewees. Once interview questions were tested and finalized, interview questions and answers were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to ensure that I painted a clear picture of the experiences of each interviewee. Data were collected from sources other than interviews to draw a picture of each principal's experience based on his or her story and perspective along with other data that illustrate his or her experience and performance as principal. By conducting a follow-up with each participant to confirm findings from the interviews, I ensured that each interviewee's lived experiences were accurately stated and recorded to see if my findings were valid. Ultimately, each interviewee should see that his or her story is told in a way that represents his or her experience as a principal or pastor.

After all data were collected and recorded, the interview data along with the other data collected were stated in an unbiased way. In other words, the data were left to speak with words from the principals and pastors, along with performance review data as is. Data were interpreted, but objective observation data were recorded along with exact statements from interviewees. This ensured that I remained unbiased when interviewing and reporting the data.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the challenges of conducting a qualitative analysis for this study instead of a quantitative analysis is that the breadth of schools in Central Catholic Diocese may not be represented within the study, and generalizability may be questioned. When researchers discuss generalizability, “they are usually referring to whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects and the setting involved” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 36). Because of the diversity of Central Catholic Diocese, the lived experience of the principals and pastors in one school may be different than the lived experience of individuals holding the same positions in another school. In this study, I analyzed the data and determine if similar themes, joys, and challenges were experienced by pastors and principals represented in the study. Other limitations include the following:

1. Even though answers to questions have been kept anonymous, some principals may have been reluctant to share their experience, or may not have been entirely honest about their feelings.
2. Due to time constraints concerning this study, only a small group of principals and pastors were studied. There may be an anomaly in the data based on the timing or the year in which the study was conducted.
3. Principals may not have been completely candid in the interview out of fear of how they might be perceived in the study.
4. There are many different Regional Directors who conduct performance reviews and interviews. There may be scorer bias or inconsistencies in the performance review data.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Specific choices were made around participants and literature to address the problem and research questions for this study. Certain types of research were more relevant to the study than others. The following delimitations outline these specific choices:

1. Some research on the public school principalship was reviewed, but the focus of the literature review addressed Catholic school leadership. Articles on Catholic school leadership, while somewhat scarce, are more relevant to the topic being discussed.
2. Principals in the Central Catholic Diocese were interviewed and surveyed due to their proximity to me.

Chapter 4 will provide an analysis of the data collected through the interviews. Data in addition to the interviews were analyzed to ensure triangulation. The chapter will discuss the findings, including the themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

Leadership is essential to the success of a school (Bryk, 2010; Rieckhoff, 2014; Ryan & Taylor, 2005; School Leaders Network, 2014). This narrative research study examined the experiences of six Catholic school principals and six Catholic school pastors, utilizing narrative inquiry. The research questions for this study were determined after an examination of research that focused on schools in general and especially on the importance of principal leadership in Catholic schools. Catholic schools are called by the USCCB and other Church organizations and documents to provide an excellent academic and faith-based education to all students. A strong principal is the most important component in ensuring an excellent student learning environment, school culture, and continuous school improvement (Ryan & Taylor, 2005), and a Catholic school principal must also serve as the faith leader in a Catholic school by modeling the faith and ensuring student faith formation and preparation (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014).

Strong leadership is essential to the success of Catholic schools (Boyle et al., 2016). However, principal turnover has become an increasing challenge in Catholic schools across the country (Boyle et al., 2016; Durow & Brock, 2013; Frasier & Brock, 2013). In order to discover why principals choose to interview with and accept positions at Catholic schools, why they remain principals, and why they might leave, the following research questions were developed, and principals were asked a series of interview questions using narrative inquiry to explore the answer to the research questions. The research questions included: “What factors influence candidates’ decisions to seek a principal position at a Catholic school?,” “What factors influence a principal’s decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?,” and “Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?”

These questions were explored with semi-structured interviews with six principals and six pastors from Central Catholic Diocese. Interviews were audio recorded, analyzed, and coded using Dedoose. Each interview script was input into Dedoose, and the scripts were analyzed for overarching themes. The parent codes, which served as the overarching codes that emerged from the data, include “relationships,” “support,” “faith” and “challenges of the principalship.” Child codes were more specific codes that emerged from each parent code upon further analysis. For example, under the parent code “relationships” the following child codes emerged: “Pastor–Principal Relationship,” “Relationship with Parish” “Relationships with other Principals,” “Relationships with Staff” “Relationships with Students” and “Relationships with Parents.”

Once all interviews were coded, the codes were analyzed using Dedoose’s Qualitative Charts Code Application function. This analysis deciphers the frequency of each code throughout the interviews. Child codes that were discussed more than 12 times during the interviews created the overarching themes for this dissertation. The following child codes were discussed more than 12 times by the principals and pastors: “Multiple Facets of the Job,” “Faith Leadership,” “Faith Nourishment,” “Fit for the Position,” “School Culture,” “Support from the Pastor,” “Support from the Parents,” “Support from the Parish,” “Relationships with Parents,” “Hours Worked,” and “Support from Central Office.” The child codes with more than 20 mentions were “Support from the Parents” (32) and “Fit for the Position” (24). After determining the most frequently discussed themes in the codes, I further analyzed all quotes within each code using the “matching excerpts” function in Dedoose. This analysis led to the development of the overarching themes used to answer the research questions. These themes are discussed in the findings section.

Once the findings section was completed, principals and pastors who participated in the study were provided with a copy of Chapter 4 to review in order to review the findings to see if they accurately represented their statements and if there were additional insights or clarifications. None of the principals or pastors provided any additional clarification, and this feedback did not change the results.

The principal and parish demographic data in Table 1 and Table 2 in Chapter 3 outline the background of the principals and pastors who were interviewed for the research study. The demographics illustrate the years of experience for each principal along with the demographics of each school and parish. The tables provide the names of the pastors and principals, years of experience for each principal, and basic enrollment information for each school.

### **Findings**

After conducting an analysis of the codes and specific responses to the interview questions, the following themes emerged as answers to the three research questions. To answer the first research question, “What factors influence candidates’ decisions to seek a principal position in the Catholic schools?,” the following themes emerged: Desire to Work in Catholic Schools and Fit for the Position. The theme Desire to Work in Catholic Schools emerged from the parent code “Faith” and the child codes “Faith Leadership” and “Faith Nourishment.” When principals described faith leadership, they discussed their desire to work in a community where they could openly practice their faith, and they felt as if teaching children about their Catholic faith afforded them the opportunity to educate the whole child. Principals also discussed how they felt they were a unique fit for the principal position for which they were hired.

To answer question number two, “What factors influence a principal’s decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?” the following themes emerged: Relationship Building in a

Catholic Context, Relationships with Pastors, Relationships with Parents, and Relationships with Staff. Relationship Building in a Catholic Context emerged from the parent code “relationships” and child codes “Pastor–Principal Relationship,” “Relationship with Parish,” and “Relationships with other Principals.” When principals spoke about their interactions with stakeholders, they spoke about the significance of building relationships with everyone in the community. They especially discussed the importance of relationship building with the pastor and parents. Having strong relationships with stakeholders led the principals to express interest in remaining in their community.

Only one theme emerged for question number three, “Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?” The principals discussed challenges they faced with finances, especially salary and enrollment. Principals and pastors expressed concerns with finances and enrollment and how these factors can affect the parish’s ability to provide an excellent Catholic education to students. This theme emerged from the parent code “challenges of the principalship” and the child code “Support from the Parish.”

In the following sections, the research questions are outlined along with the themes that emerged from the research questions. Data were based on the frequency of the themes that emerged from the interviews with pastors and principals. The data were triangulated using additional documentation from the parishes and principals, such as website and social media content, the principals’ performance reviews, and the school and parish annual reports.

### **What factors influence candidates’ decisions to seek a principal position at a Catholic school?**

Principals expressed two overarching reasons they sought a principal position in Catholic schools. These reasons included a desire to work for the Catholic school system and a feeling of



a specific skill fit for the school where they were hired. Principals stated that they were inspired to work in Catholic schools because of their personal desire to practice their Catholic faith in the workplace. All six principals expressed a love for Catholic schools, and they felt that their ability to practice their faith and teach children not only about academics but also about faith and relationships allowed them to educate the whole child in a way they would not be able to in a public school setting. They also felt that their specific skills were a fit for their community. For example, they described feeling supported by the pastor, a personal match with the community demographics, a specific skill fit (the ability to speak Spanish, for example), and knowledge of the community and surrounding area as reasons they accepted a specific position.

### **Desire to Work in Catholic Schools**

All six principals discussed the importance of the Catholic faith to them personally. They discussed the importance of prayer, how they were prepared to be the faith leader of their schools, and how they continue to grow in their faith. They discussed their desire to work in a Catholic school, and all six worked in a capacity outside the Catholic school system at some point in their career. All but one served as either a teacher or administrator in the public-school system. Four of the five principals who had previous public-school experience mentioned that they did not enjoy their time in the public schools as a teacher or administrator, and they did not want to return to the public schools.

The principals' desire to work in a Catholic school comes from a variety of experiences. Three of the six principals stated that they were products of Catholic education, and this gave them the desire to work in the Catholic school system. Two principals stated that they enjoyed their time working in Catholic schools, and this led them to seek a principalship there. One principal mentioned she sent her children to Catholic school and was introduced to Catholic

education through her children's school. Even though the principals described different paths to Catholic education, they all discussed a belief that working in a Catholic school affords them the opportunity to express their faith in their work. Their desire to practice their faith and use their faith to communicate with teachers, parents, and students led them to seek a position as a Catholic school leader.

All principals discussed their faith practice during their interviews. They highlighted how important infusing faith into everything they do is for them. The data illustrate that the ability to celebrate their faith and pray with their communities is important to them in their work, and this factor led them to seek a principal position in a Catholic school. In a Catholic school, principals can display their faith in a way that has meaning to them, and they can publicly lead their community in faith.

Faith is mentioned as a guiding factor for each principal as they face difficult decisions or have opportunities to witness their faith to students or parents. The opportunity to share faith by praying together enables the principal, parents, teachers, and students in the Catholic community to share in a common faith practice and build a supportive community of faith. This opportunity to publicly share faith is not available in the public school, so the principal's ability to share his or her faith was a factor in encouraging principals to seek a position in a Catholic school. Maria Jackson and Linda Wilson illustrated this finding when they discussed the importance of a prayerful faith community in a Catholic school.

I prayed at my public school and I wasn't supposed to. I hung out with parents and when parents were having a true difficult, difficult hardship, if I knew this family were strong Catholics, we would do some prayers, obviously behind closed doors, but that was something that I needed, and we couldn't preach it. So, when I was able to do that freely

and be authentic in who I was and I have the space to pray without having to close a door or say God without having to whisper it because you're in a public space and you're not supposed to do that, I felt safe. I was able to marry these two passions that I had, one was schooling and instructional leadership, but bringing in that other level that deals with humanity and being authentic and doing the right thing for people and leading with the heart and the mind but heart first mind second. (Maria Jackson)

[Faith is] everything. It's everything because I didn't have it in my other job [in the public school]. And that's the thing I've learned in renewing my faith, and then becoming a Catholic, is that prayer has a huge role in my work. I love praying with the kids . . . . And I also feel that I like to be able to pray. So, if we have someone on our faculty who is hurting, I love that when I come to a meeting that's the first thing we do. Every time we sit down, as a community, in this work, we start with a prayer. And I find that to be so comforting, because if you're talking about something that's hard, you've already alerted the group that you're hoping that God is going to guide you through murky waters. (Linda Wilson)

Maria Jackson and Linda Wilson made clear comparisons between their public-school experience and their experience in Catholic school. Those who made the comparison felt that not having an opportunity to practice faith was a deterrent to working in a public school. They specifically sought a position in a Catholic school so they would be able to openly practice their faith. The ability to practice their faith openly and having faith as a sustaining factor gave the principals a greater sense of personal faith practice. Sharing their faith in God afforded them an opportunity to practice their faith publicly that would not occur in a public school. Mary Davis

and Chris Miller outlined the importance of faith practice in comparison with faith practice in the public school in their comments.

I'm a product of Catholic education, my grammar school background high school background [and] college background have all been in Catholic education. I had a slight taste of what it was like to be in a public-school situation. And I really didn't care for it because I missed the fact that our faith was not part of everything that we did as it has always been in a Catholic situation. (Mary Davis)

I like the Catholic component of the job very much. And I was excited about that going into this job. Certainly, there was no religious component to my work in the public system, obviously. So, this was, again, a refreshing change for me. I told Father John right off the bat that I would like to be a Eucharistic minister, and he enthusiastically agreed to that. I love the weekly Masses. (Chris Miller)

While the principals discussed the importance of prayer and open faith practice as a reason they sought a position in a Catholic school, they also discussed the importance of educating the whole child and using their ability to speak about and teach the faith as an essential element in their students' education. They felt they could address situations with students through a lens of faith by emphasizing the importance of the sacraments, service, and social justice. This is a unique function of Catholic schools, as principals can discuss Catholic religious doctrine and faith as they teach subject areas and social emotional skills. The principals felt student needs were better met at the Catholic schools because they were able to address more than just academics in a meaningful way, and their needs as leaders were also met because they could lean into their Catholic faith to educate students in all facets of development. Jennifer

Williams and Sandra Smith highlighted student faith formation and development in their comments.

We really do tackle the importance of faith in accordance with their social emotional learning that I don't believe you could do at a public school. I think now with the faith lessons they're doing and the reflections they're doing there's always a faith aspect to it. It's not just an existential philosophical piece for them. Just being able to go to Mass with them and be with them in a faith community makes a big difference. We go to Mass once a week on each grade level. And then we have special Masses as well as special prayer services that the kids will put together, so I think that would be really lacking if I was in another environment. (Jennifer Williams)

Now having had the experience of working in Catholic schools, I don't think I could ever go public again. There's something about being able to place God at the center and share that with students and share that with families and have the kids really come into a relationship with Jesus that is such a special thing that I don't think I could ever work in a public school again. (Sandra Smith)

The data from the principals illustrate that their focus on faith and faith practice is a motivating factor as they seek principal positions in Catholic schools. Openly practicing one's faith through prayer, liturgical celebrations, and sacramental preparation and celebrations with families and students were mentioned as factors that encouraged principals to seek a position in a Catholic school. There were other documents that supported the principals' faith practice in their schools, illustrating its importance to them, and clarifying faith practice as a factor that encouraged principals to seek principal positions in a Catholic school. These data were triangulated with data from performance reviews, faculty meetings, pastor interviews, and other

communications with stakeholders. The performance evaluations and other communications illustrate the principals' commitment to faith in their work.

Mary Davis, Jennifer Williams, and Sandra Smith explained that service and liturgical practices are an essential part of their school community. These practices are an important part of Catholic faith celebration. The following evidence describes how the principals strive to create a foundation of faith for their students and faculty. By highlighting reflection, prayer, and other spiritual nourishment, the principals illustrate their focus on providing a faith-based education for their students and faculty. Faculty and staff serve as models of the faith, and there are various ways faith can be shared. The principals emphasized training faculty and staff in how to evangelize and share the faith with the school community.

We embrace the various liturgical experiences and service projects and encourage our students to continue the foundation of Catholic education as they enter high school, which parents have supported all these years at St. Polycarp. Our faculty meetings reinforce the important message that we are the evangelizers of our faith. Often, I include links from Bishop Barron for faculty to view beyond our meetings and the classroom instruction. We model our faith to our children and community. (Mary Davis's Performance Review)

All teachers have completed the required Catechetical training, and veteran teachers have completed their next level. Pre-K families are invited to Mass once a month to include in community. Worked with Central Catholic Diocese on reviewing/revamping religion standards. Weekly attendance at school Mass. (Jennifer Williams)

St. Claudia school has come a long way in reforming and recommitting to being a school that brings students and families to Jesus. This school year, I started a daily morning

assembly that has grown and evolved, but has always centered on starting each day as a school community in prayer. The morning assemblies include instruction on virtue, reflections on Saints, personal encounters with Christ, and the ways we can live our mission as a school community. (Sandra Smith's Performance Review)

Other principals focused on Catholic identity as central to everything that occurs in the school and provided evidence of leading their communities with the importance of the Catholic faith. They again emphasized the importance of prayer by beginning meetings in prayer, leading with prayer or scripture in their communications, and reinforcing the mission and vision of the school as that mission and vision pertain to the Catholic faith. The principals also provided communications to the parishioners in the local parish, again emphasizing the importance of faith as they led their school communities. Maria Jackson and Linda Wilson provided examples as follows:

Our Catholic Identity is at the core and drives every movement, goal, and decision made for our students, families, and community. During monthly meetings with parents, we start our meetings centering what we do based on the mission and vision of the school. All school meetings begin with prayers and included in Jackson's weekly bulletin; our Catholic mission is proclaimed. (Maria Jackson)

Maria Jackson's supervisor commented on her faith leadership as follows:

Maria's strong Catholic faith was the backbone of her steadfast pastoral communication with families that helped stabilize the school community. Maria has engaged the faculty, students, and families in promoting the vision and mission of the school. There are written communications that go out to teachers, weekly newsletters that go out to families

and monthly conversations with parents that are held bi-lingually to discuss the activities going on in the school and the progress that has been made. (Maria Jackson's Supervisor)

Linda Wilson provides reflections for the families in the local parishes. In one of her reflections, she discussed the "Season of Creation" and the importance of life. She also reflected on "respect for life" as "love for all living things she holds dear." In another memo, she wrote about the importance of prayer, community, and kindness. The school's Facebook page features daily prayers with Linda Wilson and some of her students. In her performance review, she stated that

The most important part of instructional leadership in a Catholic school is our Catholic identity. Our pastors are invited, included and consistently present at school events, especially when requested for the purpose of prayer.

Pastors discussed how their local principal infused Catholic identity into their communications and ensured the Catholic faith was passed along to the next generation via the students in the local Catholic school. They commented on the principal's ability to ensure the celebration of the sacraments, along with the ability of the Catholic school and its leader to pass the faith along to the next generation. They discussed the importance of how principals have devoted themselves to educating students in the Catholic faith. Father John and Father Andrew explained how their principals and schools have encouraged the development of the Catholic faith in their schools and parishes.

Religion is part of the curriculum in the school and attending Mass every Friday with the entire school. He's been responsible for organizing a base of reflection with teachers, and also giving some Catechesis with parents who will be doing sacraments this year, like



Confirmation and First Communion. And one of the beautiful things is that he is willing to be involved with the entire parish. He has been present at some meetings and so people know him and that's a very good thing. (Father John)

Sacraments are all about all of the kids making them as a community of faith . . .

[Jennifer] has devoted herself to Catholic education and wants to be there, so that makes a difference. (Father Andrew)

[St. Polycarp] offers the best both in terms of our teachings in terms of social justice and fairness, and the way we are faithful in terms of sacraments that we help people to both understand and live their faith. (Father Philip)

All principals discussed that they specifically sought a position in a Catholic school because they were motivated by the ability to practice the faith. They felt Catholic schools focus on a more holistic education that includes faith and sacraments, academics, and extra-curricular activities. They felt as if they could authentically pray with their communities and keep faith at the center of every activity. The principals described being motivated to seek positions in Catholic schools because of their desire to practice their faith. While this desire was mentioned by all six principals who were interviewed for the study, additional evidence supports their motivation to practice their faith. Principals were cited positively in their performance reviews for their ability to practice their faith. There was evidence of faith practice in their communications with school parents and parish stakeholders. Principals supported their teachers as they were formed in faith throughout the school year. Pastors commented that their Catholic school was able to successfully educate students in the faith with the principal as faith leader of the school.

### **Specific Skill Fit for the Community**

Each of the six principals felt he or she was a unique fit for the principalship at his or her school because of his or her personal abilities and how those skills fit the needs of the community. Skill fit is important when hiring a principal. Catholic schools in Central Catholic Diocese span many communities and demographics. Each of these unique communities has different needs. For example, one school might need a principal who can bring a fractured community together. Another school might need a principal who can implement academic turnaround strategies, while a third might need someone who can implement a strategic plan for technology. If principals' skills and experience fit the principal positions for which they apply, they are much more likely to be successful in the positions for which they are hired, they are more likely to express satisfaction in their positions, and consequently, they are more likely to remain principals in their schools.

Researchers also have discussed the importance of principal fit in specific schools (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014). Doyle and Locke (2014) specifically addressed how districts can ensure the best candidates for specific schools are placed in locations where they can be successful (p. 35). Specific skill and community fit are essential during the principal recruitment process in encouraging principal candidates who are a fit for specific communities to apply for specific openings.

This finding of the importance of specific skill fit finding is supported by how principals Chris Miller, Maria Jackson, and Sandra Smith described why they were a unique fit for their schools.

I speak Spanish. I know the community. I even knew the school. I've been in the school once before, with the Rotary Club; about 7 years ago I was at St. Erasmus. I've been to the church for a funeral Mass once, so I was familiar with it. (Chris Miller)

The fact that, again, is a population that I am familiar with. It's a population where the demographics are need based. I saw that, yes, while almost half of the families have these medium incomes, there are others that didn't, and there are still support systems that that need to be in place. I also saw it poking around through their website, I learned that they did not, or they were just starting to put the systems in place to bring in language support for ELs. And that's what I did. All my life as a school administrator, bilingual liaison whatever. So that's something that I could do. And it was like this mutual need give and take. I thought that it was a good match for me. (Maria Jackson)

I saw [the school] really where people felt like it was at its prime. When I was there in the beginning, it was really strong. The leadership is great, kids were happy to be there, families loved being there, the teachers were a really collaborative group. And then I saw the flip side of that, where a leader came in and really had a negative impact on the culture of the school. And I wanted to be the person having seen both sides of that coin to bring us back in the right direction. And I felt like my knowledge of what it was like when we were at our peak and my knowledge of what it was like when we were really, really low would help me know what to do and what not to be doing in order to bring us back into the right the right direction. (Sandra Smith)

Each principal discussed how they felt his or her unique skills and abilities fit the needs of his or her school. Chris Miller discussed his knowledge of the surrounding community and ability to speak Spanish as a unique skill that made him a good fit for his school. Maria Jackson previously worked with communities with a large English Language Learner population, and she realized that her school needed her expertise as they examined ways to provide more support for

students who did not speak English at home. Sandra Smith described her unique knowledge of her school as a factor that made her a good fit for her school because she knew the history of the school, and she had seen the school go from successful to unsuccessful when leadership changed. She described her desire to be the leader who brings her school back to displaying success.

The principals mentioned interactions with various stakeholders in the community influenced their decision to become principal at their school. They focused on their impressions of the pastor and the search committee as being integral in deciding to accept a position at their school. The ability to build relationships with stakeholders was cited as a source of satisfaction for principals. Having initial positive interactions with stakeholders led principals to decipher if they would be a good fit for the school because of their perceived ability to build relationships with the pastor, parents, and staff. If principal candidates have a sense of belonging with the community when they initially interview, that connection can lead them to understand if their personality and skills will be a good fit for the school. If they do not have a good interaction, they may decide that a school would not be a fit for them. Because relationships with the community and pastor are a source of principal satisfaction, the initial feeling of belonging for a principal interview candidate will help them decide if they will be a strong fit for the school and able to build relationships with the community.

This finding is supported by comments from Jennifer Williams, Mary Davis, and Linda Wilson who discussed their interactions with the community before they were hired.

I made the decision and really met with more of the people there because they had a bad transition [with the previous principal]. I really liked [that] I knew of the pastor, and I talked to a couple priests that I know and I was like, “What do you think? Do you think

we'd work well together?" As it turns out, we work really well together so everything just kind of fell into place. (Jennifer Williams)

I found myself really enjoying my conversation with [the search committee] truly on a very, very authentic level. And there was room for very honest and serious discussions about practice and about what's best for kids. There was laughter. We just had a really good vibe at the table . . . . It was just happy and joyful and everyone at the table liked children. (Linda Wilson)

And when I went to St. Polycarp to interview, Father Paul, who was the pastor at the time, I immediately liked him, and the values that he brought to the table. And then I interviewed with the principal search committee and then again with the school advisory board. I always look at those types of interviews to be advantageous to me because you're looking in the faces of the people that you'll be serving so it was very good thing, because I thought, well, if I don't like it, and I don't feel that comfort level here, then this is not the place for me. So, you know that that's the beauty of the interview process.

(Mary Davis)

Each of these principals highlighted the importance of community interactions as she interviewed for a position. Jennifer Williams and Mary Davis highlighted the importance of a fit with both the community and the pastor as they made their decision to become principal at their schools. Linda Wilson highlighted the importance of feeling a fit with the community, and the understanding that the committee who interviewed her shared her value of positivity and ensuring the education provided in the school is what is best for students. Each of the principals expressed that a feeling of fit with the parents in the community and a feeling of comfort with the

community being served was an important part of their decision to accept a position at their school.

The pastors also supported the finding on principal fit, and they discussed the importance of a principal being a fit for the specific community. The pastors who hired their principal added that they used a search committee to help them select the next principal for the school to ensure the principal would be able to meet the needs of the parents and teachers. The pastors spoke of specific skill fits that their principal possessed as they sought a new principal for the school. This specific skill fit led the pastors to hire their principal for the position. For example, Father John believed that Chris Miller's years of experience, ability to speak Spanish, and knowledge of the community made him a strong fit for the school. Father Andrew highlighted his use of a search committee to ensure the principal was a strong fit for his community. He mentioned he was looking for a strong, experienced leader for his school, and believed he found that candidate in Jennifer Williams. Father James mentioned that he felt Linda Wilson's energy, joy, and years of administrative experience in both public and Catholic schools made her a strong fit for the principal position. While Father Simon was not responsible for hiring Maria Jackson, he stated that he still felt as if she was a good fit for the school because she was able to meet the needs of the Hispanic community, and she was able to move the mission and vision of the school and parish forward.

The fact that he is bilingual. He had more than 10 years of experience in that and was a principal close to us. So, he knows the community and the population. So, those are the things were the strongest things to hire him. (Father John)

I was not solely responsible. There was a committee. And we agreed on Jennifer. Then, as you know, the pastor makes the final decision. One of the things that sold me on

Jennifer was the experience that she came with. And the fact that she, she was a strong woman, a strong leader. (Father Andrew)

It was just that vibrancy and the energy and the joy, the joy that you can see in everything she touches, how infectious that is, and so that was very important. From the business side knowing that she had experience as a principal in public schools and had been at [another Catholic school] all that fit in. She'd gotten all different aspects. (Father James)

She's an excellent fit for the school. She really is outstanding. And, especially where I think the school may need to go. So we've done some futuring together in terms of looking at different possibilities for the school. And one of the studies that she did that I found to be very helpful as I was stepping in to understand this community better is a fuller understanding of the family backgrounds of our students. (Father Simon)

All principals stated that they felt their specific skill set and fit with the stakeholders they met, especially the pastor and the search committee, made them a fit for the specific school where they were hired. The principals spoke of different needs of the schools where they were hired. Mary Davis discussed her strong academic background as fitting a need for her school. Jennifer Williams felt that her previous knowledge of the community and experience working in a similar community aided her in her work. Linda Wilson felt as if her philosophy of education was a fit for her community. Maria Jackson and Chris Miller had previous experience with Hispanic communities, and both speak Spanish, which made them feel as if they were good fits for their predominantly Hispanic schools. Sandra Smith knew the history of her school and felt that her knowledge of that history would aid her as she worked to move the school forward in a positive direction.

Overall, the principals answered this research question in two ways. First, they discussed that they had a desire to work in Catholic schools because of the opportunity to authentically share their faith with the community and meet the spiritual needs of the students and families in the schools. They expressed their comfort with prayer and desire to pray with the families in the school and pass the faith on to the next generation. Second, they discussed how their feeling of specific skill fit for their school was important as they chose to seek a position at a specific school. They explained fit as their specific skills and experiences being a fit for the principalship at their school at a given time, and as their ability to build relationships with the families at the school and the pastor.

### **What factors influence a principal's decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?**

The six principals interviewed for this research study expressed several reasons why they remain leaders in Catholic schools. All six discussed the importance of fostering a variety of relationships with stakeholders, especially with the pastor, parents, and teachers. All principals focused on the importance of the pastor–principal relationship as essential to their success. The principals also discussed the importance of maintaining relationships with parents and teachers, and four of the six discussed how they enjoy coaching their teachers and helping them improve. While fit was a significant factor in encouraging principals to seek a specific position, continued fit in the community was a significant factor in why they chose to stay in their position.

### **Relationship Building in a Catholic Context**

Each principal discussed relationships and relationship building as essential to his or her success. Strong relationships with various stakeholders help principals as they lead their communities through new initiatives and necessary changes, and as they advance the school's current mission and vision. A principal's ability to build relationships with a community directly



relates to fit. If the principal's skills are a good fit for the community, the principal can build strong relationships with the members of that community. If a principal has strong relationships with those in the community, that principal can learn more about any changes or ideas that will be acceptable to the community, allowing the principal to successfully advance the school.

Relationships and community are a foundation of Catholic parishes and schools. The strong community in Catholic schools is often what draws families to the school. The principal's ability to facilitate strong community enables the principal to grow school enrollment and advance the school's mission and vision. The ability to successfully build a strong community among stakeholders was described as a source of satisfaction for principals and is what often encourages principals to remain in their position.

The essential relationships that emerged from this study were the pastor–principal relationship, relationships with parents, and relationships with staff. The principals and pastors discussed the pastor–principal relationship as one that was essential to the success of a parish school. The principals and pastors in the interviews expressed mutual support for one another, and they discussed the importance of maintaining a strong working relationship as they advanced the parish and school. Maintaining strong relationships with parents was considered essential to the success of the principal as well. They discussed the importance of involving parents in decision making processes and ensuring excellent communication with parents in the community. The principals also discussed their ability to maintain relationships with staff as a source of satisfaction. They enjoy coaching teachers and helping them improve. Their ability to foster leadership among their teachers was a factor that led to their satisfaction.

### **Pastor–Principal Relationship**

All six principals discussed the importance of maintaining the pastor–principal relationship. The six principals and pastors described having a strong relationship with one another in an environment of mutual respect. This relationship includes the willingness of the pastor to support the principal and for each party to trust the other. The pastor–principal relationship is an important one in Catholic schools. The pastor is responsible for managing the entire parish community and the school, which is equipped to provide ministry to children in the parish, children from surrounding parishes, or children and families who believe the parish school best fits their child’s educational needs. Because of the pastor’s role in the parish and school, the principal and pastor must establish a strong working relationship. All principals interviewed described a positive working relationship with the school’s pastor. In their interviews, they recognized the importance of teamwork, communication, and support. They also emphasized the importance of ensuring the pastor has the information he needs without overwhelming him with minutia regarding day-to-day operations that should be in the purview of the principal. They mentioned the importance of building a trusting relationship where the principal is able to run the school, and the pastor is there to offer support and check in to ensure the school is advancing in a way that is positive for both the church and school.

The importance of the pastor–principal relationship is supported by how Sandra Smith, Mary Davis, and Maria Jackson discussed the importance of trust and building a relationship with their pastors.

[He’s] very supportive and I consider myself extremely lucky because I know that that’s not always the case. He has made it explicit that he’s got my back. And he will. He just always appreciates having a heads up if there is an issue going on. So, he and I have a really strong relationship, and we typically meet once a week just for quick check ins. He

comes to the school often. He's there every Friday. I just walk around and see kids and say hello to everybody. And he always asks me, "What do I need? How are you doing? How did that thing pan out that you talked to me about a week ago?" He's very supportive. (Sandra Smith)

We're a team and we're doing the right things for not just the school and church. We're shaping the landscape of humanity and what people believe in, and faith, being a faith-based community. Those meetings still happen weekly. I think that's one way formally or informally we support each other. (Maria Jackson)

He fully supports me I mean, I think when he came on board, this is his second full year here, I had already had 10 years' experience and I think when you're coming into a situation, you may either (a) want to do things the way you want, or (b) you can turn over some of that control and just say hey you're doing a great job, you just go ahead and keep doing it. And, of course, he went in that direction. He knew that I had a good handle on it, and therefore he allowed me to do this and that. I do feel there are times when I want to sit down and talk about things, and I'm able to talk to [him] about things that are occurring and get [his] input as well and know that I have [his] support. (Mary Davis)

The principals stated that they have clear boundaries, and they understand running the school is their job, but they look to their pastors for support in situations that may escalate above them or for advice on how to handle a specific situation. They recognize their pastors have strenuous jobs as they are addressing various parish needs. They want to ensure that they are not asking their pastor too many questions, while also making sure he has the information he needs. They recognized the importance of striking a balance: they want to be able to ask for advice and form a partnership, while they work to avoid asking too many questions and overburdening their

pastor. Jennifer Williams, Chris Miller, and Linda Wilson described their relationships with their pastors as follows:

We meet regularly we talk about different things. He doesn't want to be the principal. He said, "I don't want to do your job, you don't want to do my job, we both agree. Let's not make each other's job harder." He's aware of everything that's going on when it's happening. And I feel very supported by him. (Jennifer Williams)

I wanted to have that support system, and I wanted to be the kind of principal that kept nonsense off their desk, so that they could [do their jobs]. Their jobs are huge. You go to a pastor only if you exhausted everything you know how to do because they don't need to be clogged up with [an issue like] parents are not listening. They don't care about that. I go to them more for advice, not because I need them to take care of something for me. I do honor and crave their advice on things. And I think we've struck a really good balance. (Linda Wilson)

Anytime I've asked him for anything, he's gone along with it. And I mean that truly, but again, I'm not gonna go calling him up every week. But when I ask him for something, he's followed through enthusiastically. I feel very supported by him. I'm glad he's there. (Chris Miller)

The pastors also expressed the importance of a positive pastor–principal relationship in their interviews and each expressed a strong relationship with his principal. The pastors discussed how they wanted to ensure that the principal was a strong leader and was able to run the school on his or her own. They expressed a desire to be a thought partner with the principal and provide help and advice where necessary. They also discussed the added work on their plates because they are responsible for all the ministries of the parish, not just the school. Therefore,

they reiterated their expectations that the principal provide students with an excellent, faith-based education, run the school efficiently, and use the pastor as a thought partner, striking a balance between telling the pastor what he needs to know and maintaining the independence to run the school.

Father Andrew, Father James, Father John, and Father Philip supported the finding about pastors supporting the principal in specific situations while still expecting the principal to run the school.

Our job is to work well together and to keep each other informed about things that are happening. [Her] job is to run the school, so I expect there to be excellence in education and growing in those programs, but also in Catholic formation. We should work together with that. But those implementations for education formation and community discipline that has to start with the principal and be supported, I think, by the pastor. (Father Andrew)

I want her to do keep as much away from me as possible, but at the same time know when it's appropriate to feel that I'm involved, so I'm not finding out about things at the end or when things blow up. I think she's done an excellent job with that, so she's very capable in so many ways. She comes to us with ideas fully formed . . . . I love being part of the school, but I only hear about certain things when she thinks it's important. But it's always very collaborative. I never feel blindsided. (Father James)

You're responsible the entire school, meaning children and then also teachers, and so far, he has been doing a great job. Teachers love him and children and families are happy with him. Regarding the Catholic identity, he's open. And there is a very good communication among us. So that's a very good thing. (Father John)

[The school principal is responsible for] the relationship with the diocese and the superintendent and fulfilling the requirements of the state. The school has those other organizational pieces that the principal is responsible for. The principal is responsible for hiring and maintaining staff including the teachers, is the instructional director, with a relationship to the parish. (Father Philip)

In the interview with Maria Jackson's pastor, Father Simon, he discussed the importance of building a trusting relationship between the pastor and principal. He enjoys working with someone who is constantly learning and improving. He felt that the principal having a disposition that emphasized learning and growth ensured that he and his principal had a strong working relationship.

She has an ability to discern where her limitations are or where there's a need for acquiring experience or knowledge, or both. And she sets about the task of doing that, so she's constantly in the frame of mind of improving who she is in that role. That's the kind of a person I want to work with. (Father Simon)

Father Philip also discussed positive work environment. He highlighted the importance of creating a strong working environment for the principal and ensuring that person needs to buy into to live the mission of the parish or the school. So, the . . . pay may be a little bit, or significantly less than in the public-school system. So, where do you make up for that? Is this a healthy, vibrant workplace? The principal [must believe] in the mission of the school [and] that of the parish. So, if I'm going to get paid less, I want to go to a job that I like. So, having a healthy work environment. Having supportive people around [helps with principal retention]. (Father Philip)

In these interviews, all six principals said they felt supported by their pastor, and they discussed the necessity of open lines of communication with their pastor. A positive relationship between the pastor and principal was cited as a source of satisfaction for the principals who were interviewed. The working relationship looked different for each pastor and principal pair, but each of them described mutual respect and a desire to continue working together for the good of the school and parish.

### **Relationships with Parents**

All six principals discussed the importance of community and building relationships in their schools. Each principal mentioned the importance of engaging various stakeholders in the school in the decision-making process. All six principals discussed the importance of building effective relationships with parents. Several principals mentioned that parents in their schools were active and able and willing to help the school when needed. Principals mentioned parents might check in with them individually to see if they needed anything or if they were aware of something that was occurring in the community that the principal needed to address. They mentioned that parent input in the school was important and can help the school move forward. These findings are evident by how Jennifer Williams, Linda Wilson, and Mary Davis described how they work to build a collaborative relationship with school parents.

We do have really active parents, our PTO is really active, our [school board] is active . . . I think one of the things I like to do is preemptively get things out there. I mean I have parents who will come to me and say, “Look, this is the chatter. This is stuff people are worried about. Here’s what I think you need to address.” I’m like, “Great, just keep that information coming.” And then, just get it out, try to get out ahead of it and say, “I

understand these are your concerns. Here are the things that we're doing." (Jennifer Williams)

It's been made it very clear to me that what I've always kind of known. It's relationships with people. And it's all of the people . . . I feel very supported by the parents, and in my school, I'll start with that group. My board president . . . has texted or emailed me daily just to say, "I'm checking up." (Linda Wilson)

I enjoy working with parents and parent groups that even though sometimes they can make their demands and push for what they want. If you listen to them, they have a lot of good to offer. And if you're able to take the good with each of the groups, you can really strengthen your community to make the best situation. (Mary Davis)

Sandra Smith, Maria Jackson, and Chris Miller also discussed building relationships with parents. Sandra Smith discussed the need for transparency with families as she built relationships with them. Maria Jackson mentioned feeling supported by most of her parents. She recognized that she would not receive support from everyone, but she felt as if she had support of enough parents in her first year as principal in her school. Chris Miller's comments focused on his ability to communicate with and connect with parents because he speaks Spanish.

It's okay to be transparent with people as long as you're doing it in the right way, and people really appreciate that, and it's helped build some really strong relationships with families. (Sandra Smith)

So, in terms of where parents are, we have those that are completely gung ho support anything I say and I asked, and I gotta say, that's a big chunk. The other biggest chunk is those parents that are supportive behind the scenes. If I reach out, they're there, if they can. And then there's that 10% that there's no matter what we say or do, I'm always



going to be wrong. No matter what, and they're always gonna be right. And it's just who they are, and I've been doing this long enough to know I can't satisfy 100%, and I'm going to be okay with that. (Maria Jackson)

I feel very supported by the parents . . . . If I didn't speak Spanish, it would be a tremendous barrier to connecting with the parent community . . . I don't always know to what extent people understand that. (Chris Miller)

The principals discussed different facets of relationship building in their answers. Mary Davis and Jennifer Williams highlighted the collaborative information that comes from parents and their ability to act on the good ideas they hear or to clarify any information that may have been misconstrued by the members of the community. Linda Wilson stated that she has built relationships well enough that she receives check-ins from prominent stakeholders in the community, and Sandra Smith discussed the importance of transparency, while Chris Miller focused on building relationships culturally, relating to families by speaking their language. While Maria Jackson mentioned that she did not receive support from all families all the time, she still felt support from many of the parents in her school.

This finding regarding parent support of the school is further supported by other documents and information. An examination of St. Martha's website and Facebook Page revealed that at the end of the school year, the school posted a message thanking all parents and caregivers for everything they did for the school during the pandemic. Jennifer Williams communicated with her community weekly over the summer regarding school reopening plans. She posted all communications from the diocese, and the website contains weekly newsletters from her addressing the look of the classroom environment that includes pictures of a sample classroom. She assured parents that the school was "on target" for reopening on the regularly

scheduled date in August. Mary Davis, Linda Wilson, and Sandra Smith also focused on building relationships with parents in their performance reviews. Mary Davis created a strategic plan for her school, and she used input from the parents to create the plan and develop the areas for improvement. Linda Wilson sent out a survey to parents to determine the school's current climate, and she formed a parent committee to ensure parents had a voice in school matters. Sandra Smith stressed appropriate communications with parents in her performance review, and she was positively commended for her transparency and creating an environment of respect with parents in her performance review.

This finding is supported with the following performance review data.

School wide survey sent out to establish current culture and climate, response to survey initiated changes to communication and formation of parent committee. (Linda Wilson's Supervisor)

"We listen to our constituents as indicated by our strategic plan," and she provides evidence of the strategic plan outlining the following: "Financial Plan, Academics, New Academic Programming, Catholic Identity, Governance, Facilities, Extracurriculars, and Other." The plan was based on survey data from constituents in the school. (Mary Davis's Performance Review)

Principal Smith builds a culture of high expectations by clearly and consistently communicating her vision for the school. She upholds the foundations of mutual respect for all stakeholders. (Sandra Smith's Supervisor)

Maria Jackson and Chris Miller also emphasized appropriate parent communications. Communications on St. Erasmus's website are included in both English and Spanish, highlighting Chris Miller's statements on the importance of speaking Spanish and

communicating in Spanish in his community. While Maria Jackson mentioned she did not necessarily have the support of all members of her community, her supervisor commended her for her various methods of positive communication with all parents. She is bilingual, so she is able to communicate with parents in both English and Spanish. She regularly updates parents on activities and progress via newsletters and coffee with the principal to give parents an opportunity to read about what is occurring in the school and ask questions in person.

There are written communications that go out to teachers, weekly newsletters that go out to families and monthly coffees with the principal that are held bi-lingually with parents to discuss activities going on in the school and the progress being made. (Maria Jackson's Supervisor)

All six principals mentioned positive personal connections with families which included providing transparency and clear communications, general parent involvement in the school, or check-ins from parents during the quarantine. The principals mentioned that the positive relationships they have developed with families are a source of satisfaction for them. These positive communications and interactions contribute to their feeling of "fit" in their community and contribute to their desire to remain principals of their school.

### **Relationships with Staff**

Four of the six principals discussed the importance of cultivating relationships with their staff and sharing responsibility. By keeping the importance of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students in mind, principals focused on developing relationships with their teachers and coaching teachers as they work to provide students with an excellent education. The principals discussed how they enjoyed mentoring teachers and watching them improve. The principals mentioned that building a strong relationship with faculty and staff helped them as

they worked with teachers to train them and implement change. They discussed how they enjoyed the work of building relationships with teachers and they appreciated that the teachers have a willingness to learn, step into leadership roles, form relationships with one another and the principal, and support students.

In her comments, Jennifer Williams discussed the importance of distributed leadership and giving teachers an opportunity to step into leadership roles in the school. This helps the teachers by encouraging them to step up and take on more responsibility, but distributing leadership also helps take some of the leadership stress off the principal's shoulders. She explained that she enjoys mentoring teachers and helping them grow and develop their skills. Mary Davis and Maria Jackson spoke about the rapport they have formed with their staff, and they discussed the importance of hiring teachers who fit into the vision for the school and are able to execute the vision moving forward. Both were complimentary of their staff and expressed joy in continuing to work with them to move the school forward. They recognized that if their teachers are successful in the classroom, their excellent teaching translates to student learning and growth. Linda Wilson also discussed building relationships with teachers and ensuring they had the freedom and support to educate all the children in their care. She focused on students as the top priority, but in ensuring students were the top priority, she mentioned that her job is to ensure teachers have everything they need to support the students in their classrooms. This finding is supported by comments by four of the principals.

I really like mentoring. Our teachers, we've got a lot of teachers who have great leadership potential. They don't necessarily want to go into leadership, but they have great leadership potential, so we build that up within the school. We have unit coordinators and curriculum coordinators. So, trying to get them the training that they

need, and give them the outlet so that they can have more responsibility and feel that they want to stay. So, luckily, we have not had a lot of turnover. (Jennifer Williams)

I have built what we presently have within our four walls, and I have an excellent rapport with my staff. You know, one of the beauties of being at a place for a while is that, as some people retire. Generally, that's what it is because as [some teachers] retire, or leave for one reason or another, you hire someone who's going to fit within your plan. And I've been very lucky over the years to have made some very good hires. (Mary Davis)

I love leading St. Steven because I work with an amazing staff who enjoy learning, too. We've built some really good relationships, and I took on the vision that was already there and I just tweaked it a little bit . . . . I enjoy teaching and learning in all its facets. Teaching teachers, coaching teachers, setting up systems for them to succeed with their students. (Maria Jackson)

It's been made it very clear to me that what I've always kind of known but it's relationships with people. And it's all of the people. So, clearly your students are your top priority. And then your teachers because when you're a classroom teacher, the students are your classroom and when you're the principal, the teachers are your classroom because you have to do everything you can to support them so they can do their job. (Linda Wilson)

This finding is also supported by evidence in each principal's performance review. In her performance review, Jennifer Williams provided evidence of frequent meetings with staff members through the observation schedule she provided. She also provided data illustrating school academic improvement in math, which, as stated in her performance review, was a target for school improvement. The performance review included a teacher professional development

calendar illustrating that she prioritizes learning for her staff. In Mary Davis's performance review, she outlined the actions she took around teacher evaluation, helping teachers internalize the Danielson process over the course of the school year. She also instructed teachers on peer observations to aid in improving instruction and collaboration. Faculty meeting artifacts included an outline of how Mary Davis led teachers in using data and continuous improvement to inform instructional practices. Maria Jackson provided evidence of teacher feedback for goal setting, helping teachers reflect on teaching and learning, and a peer observation schedule. Her supervisor stated that "instructional leadership is Maria's strength." Linda Wilson's supervisor mentioned in her performance review that "faculty/staff are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities" and "teachers work in teams" on school improvement priorities.

When discussing their teachers and staff, the principals discussed their belief in staff leadership. They reviewed how they enjoy leading their staff and helping them learn, and they highlighted the dedication the teachers and staff have for their schools, especially in their desire to ensure students receive an excellent education. Principals mentioned the ability to lead the staff and help them grow as a positive part of their job, and they identified staff leadership as a factor that contributes to principal retention.

Each of the six principals discussed the importance of relationships in encouraging them to remain principals in their schools. They expressed the importance of the pastor-principal relationship and developing and fostering community relationships. While one can build relationships in a public school, the ability to build relationships with all stakeholders while ensuring they are building a community of faith and educating the next generation of Catholics is why the principals stay in Catholic schools. The ability to practice and share their faith and be

the faith leaders of their schools enables Catholic school principals to meet their personal faith needs along with their career goals of leading successful Catholic schools. While they could do some of this work in a public context, the ability to share their faith was important to each of the principals, and sharing their faith is what sustains them as principals in their schools.

### **Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?**

In their interviews, the principals recognized some of the challenges of being a Catholic school principal, which may be factors that might cause a principal to leave his or her position. The principals mentioned struggles with finances, marketing and enrollment, and salary when they discussed some of the challenges they faced. They discussed feeling overwhelmed by the multiple demands on their time and the lack of staff members to help in the many facets of their jobs. Many principals work long hours and attend events outside school hours. Others stated they struggled with the multiple facets of the principal position as they served their schools. Some also mentioned they struggle to achieve work/life balance. One key theme emerged in response to this research question: finances, enrollment, and salary. Five of the six principals expressed concerns around these topics. While none of the principals interviewed expressed the intention to leave his or her school soon, the principals did address several challenges they face as a Catholic school leader.

### **Finances, Enrollment, and Salary**

Five of the six principals and most pastors discussed finances and salary as a challenge for Catholic schools. In Catholic schools, enrollment and finances are tied together. Tuition dollars make up the largest percentage of income in most Catholic schools. Typically, a higher school enrollment where families pay full tuition or receive tuition scholarships that provide the full tuition amount to the school means higher income for the school. As a result, pastors and

principals focus on increasing enrollment in the school to increase the school's income. If enrollment is a challenge for a school, finances are often a challenge for the school as well because decreasing enrollment means decreasing income. Often, parishes are tasked with covering any school deficit. If the deficit is higher than what the parish can pay, this can lead to challenges with reductions in staff at the school, and ultimately school closure if enrollment continues to decline and costs continue to rise.

Finances and enrollment can be influenced by several factors. Pastors and principals mentioned that some challenges with enrollment are based on changing local demographics and the decisions parents face when paying tuition for both elementary school and high school. Many pastors and principals alluded to the COVID-19 pandemic in their answers, as many were concerned that the pandemic would further affect their enrollment as they completed their budgets for the following year.

Chris Miller and Linda Wilson discussed their financial constraints and the importance of managing a school budget with fidelity.

There are financial constraints. And the financial constraints are something that's new to me. I mean you really have to watch the budget very closely. Every penny. (Chris Miller)

To me it's money because of the Catholic school and being sensible and smart and making good choices and responsible choices, and learning about making those. (Linda Wilson)

Even though parents pay tuition for Catholic schools, salaries continue to be a challenge for schools. Often, the cost to educate a child in a school is more than the tuition that parents pay. Sometimes, parishes provide the difference. Other times, schools absorb the cost to educate by cutting staff. Salaries often remain low in Catholic schools, which makes hiring and retaining



teachers a challenge. Comments from Jennifer Williams, Father Andrew, and Father Simon highlighted this challenge.

The salaries . . . it's hard to ask somebody to come to teach and put [in] the amount of work that it takes to offer someone \$30,000 a year. (Jennifer Williams)

When I see some of our young teachers working, their salaries are \$35,000, I mean, how do they survive? So, I think it's also a matter of justice until we can provide a salary that is really significantly higher, that's a just wage for them. (Father Andrew)

We need to start paying people more money. (Father Simon)

Schools are also concerned about enrollment. This finding is supported by statements from Linda Wilson, Maria Jackson and Sandra Smith.

I worry a lot about enrollment, just because you know of all the things [happening now]. I worry about the future of Catholic schools. (Linda Wilson)

I am fearful that I will let my students, parents, teachers down because I did not do enough, or I wasn't good enough at marketing and enrollment . . . I have to be my school's biggest cheerleader. And if I'm not the biggest cheerleader, who else is with me because it can't just be me. (Maria Jackson)

Sandra Smith's school receives significant financial support. She mentioned that many of her students receive scholarships from a local entity, and budgeting and financial supports from a local entity and Central Catholic Diocese. Sandra Smith mentioned that her school saw enrollment go from "100 something kids, all the way up to 335" and back down again due to poor leadership. She said that because of the enrollment drop, she wanted to be the person to "bring us back up into the right direction."

While Mary Davis and Jennifer Williams did not mention enrollment as a significant challenge for them, their pastors expressed concerns about enrollment in Catholic schools. Father Thomas, Father Andrew, and Father Philip all commented on school enrollment during their interviews.

One of the great challenges is enrollment right now and going forward. Finances are going to be huge. (Father Thomas)

When I first started, we had 400 students, and we're down to 360 and we anticipate that we're probably going to lose 25 or so kids with [the COVID-19 outbreak]. The numbers coming in are smaller groups. (Father Andrew)

Schools not far from us have recently closed. So, some of it is enrollment, but is that a factor of the cost of tuition? In some cases, yes, but I don't think always. I think in terms of quality of education, I would say that we would be competitive with the local school district. But if you're competitive with the local school district, why pay tuition when you would get a comparable product [at the local public school]. I think that's the math. We have more parishioners who choose public school . . . I don't want out-price. I don't want to turn [Catholic schools] into something that's just exclusive and private. (Father Philip)

The pastors also mentioned that financially supporting Catholic schools is difficult. An analysis of the finances of each parish and school illustrates the importance of enrollment in the finances of the parishes. Catholic schools are costly and are often a large percentage of the parish budget. The annual reports for St. Martha and St. Polycarp were posted on the parish website. At St. Martha, the cost of the school accounts for 65% of the parish budget. At St. Polycarp, the cost of the school accounts for 55% of the parish budget. When the school finances are broken out at St. Polycarp, 71% of the income for the school comes from tuition, with fundraising and

the parish making up the remainder. Of the school's income, 81% goes to salaries and benefits. While the other parishes did not have their annual reports available on their website, the school was a large percentage of each budget, and two schools (St. Claudia and St. Steven) relied on tuition dollars and subsidies from the diocese and other charitable sources to fund the school.

While salary is discussed as a challenge for retaining teachers, Linda Wilson, Jennifer Williams, and Maria Jackson all mentioned they took a pay cut to work as principal at their schools. Each of them expressed that the pay cut was worth it.

It's the best decision I've ever made, and it's probably the lowest salary at this level that I could be making, and I've never been happier in my entire life. (Linda Wilson)

I took a really steep pay cut when I came here. I mean, it's worth it to me but, you know, you'd like to get back to where you were. (Jennifer Williams)

It's not a lot of pay . . . what keeps me here is the fact that I've done the big money thing, but [now] I come to a school that people care, and I come to a school that the teachers are easy to work with . . . [because] they're willing and ready to do what they need to do. (Maria Jackson)

While the principals mentioned took a pay cut to become principals in Central Catholic Diocese, this does illustrate a potential barrier to principal recruitment and retention. Even though the principals stated that the pay cut was worth it to them to work for the Catholic schools, there may be other candidates and principals who are unable or unwilling to make the financial sacrifice to work in Catholic schools. Jennifer Williams stated that she has seen teachers leave her school because of salary. Losing good teachers and finding replacements can be a source of stress for principals and finding good teachers can be especially difficult due to the low salary.

The starting teacher salary in Central Catholic Diocese is less than \$35,000. The starting salary for teachers in the local public-school district is \$56,000. The starting principal salary for principals in Central Catholic Diocese is less than \$55,000. The starting principal salary for the local public-school district is approximately \$120,000. These data support the statements from principals who stated they took a pay cut from their public-school salaries to work in Central Catholic Diocese. While the pastors and principals mentioned the challenges with teacher pay, which is corroborated by the data, the analysis of the finances presented in the two parishes' annual reports illustrate the challenges with paying teachers and principals more. With the Catholic schools making up such a high percentage of the parish expenses and a high percentage of those expenses going toward teacher salaries and benefits, it is difficult to see how parishes could increase teacher salaries without raising tuition and potentially pricing families out of Catholic schools.

While none of the principals stated that they wanted to leave the Catholic school principalship, their answers point toward answers to the research question "Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?" While challenges exist around finances and enrollment, and there is often a pay cut involved in working in a Catholic school, these are not reasons stated by the principals as to why they would leave the job; however, they are stated as challenges that may lead a principal to consider other career opportunities.

### **Summary**

Principals and pastors in the research study answered the research questions in several ways. Principals stated they became principals in Catholic schools because spreading the Catholic faith was important to them, and they felt as if by becoming principals in a Catholic school they could share their faith and more fully educate children spiritually and academically.

Having a specific skill fit for the community they served was also an important factor to them as they searched for a position.

Principals and pastors also discussed the importance of relationships in leading principals to stay in their current position. Principals and pastors all commented on the importance of the pastor–principal relationship and working together to create a vision for the future. Maintaining relationships with parents, students, and staff were also cited as areas of high satisfaction for principals. Maintaining relationships with pastors, parents, staff, and students were also where recruitment meets retention. If a principal is a good skill fit for the community, building and maintaining relationships with the community will be easier for the principal, and building those relationships will encourage the principal to remain at the school.

While none of the principals in the study stated an intention to leave their schools, they did discuss reasons principals might leave. Finances, enrollment, and salary were all listed as potential barriers for Catholic school principals. While the principals stated that these were not necessarily deterrents to them, they were concerned about all these factors as they continued work in their schools.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 expands upon and discusses the findings of Chapter 4 and will discuss the implications of the study for the community of Catholic education. The purpose of the study was to explore the various reasons principals choose to become Catholic school principals, why they remain Catholic school principals, and why they might leave the Catholic school principalship. Research has established the importance of school leadership, and the difficulty districts, both public and private, have recruiting and retaining principals (Boyle et al., 2016; Chapman, 2005, Durow & Brock, 2013, Frasier & Brock, 2013, School Leaders Network, 2014). Catholic schools face an additional challenge in finding leaders who can serve as the faith leaders of Catholic schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). A Narrative inquiry study was conducted to hear directly from principals about their motivations to seek and retain a principal position in a Catholic school, and this technique was used to elucidate the lived experiences of six principals and pastors who work in the Central Catholic Diocese. This narrative inquiry used interviews and life experiences from the principals and pastors to construct an understanding of how each principal creates meaning in his or her environment. The pastor, as the juridic person responsible for the parish, is an essential stakeholder in Catholic schools. Therefore, capturing their perspectives of the Catholic school principalship based on principals' and pastors' lived experience was critical.

All six principals and pastors worked in schools in the Central Catholic Diocese. Three principals and four pastors worked in communities with a poverty level below 10%, one principal and pastor worked in a community with a poverty level between 30% and 60%, and two principals and one pastor worked in a community with a poverty level above 60%. Data

were collected via interviews in the Microsoft Teams platform, and interviews were audio recorded. Transcripts were inputted into Dedoose, and they were analyzed and coded for overarching themes. The following research questions were explored during the data collection phase of the study:

1. What factors influence candidates' decisions to seek a principal position at a Catholic school?
2. What factors influence a principal's decision to remain a leader in a Catholic school?
3. Why do Catholic school principals leave their schools?

Upon analysis, the following themes emerged from the data. To answer question number one, the themes of Desire to Work in Catholic Schools and Specific Skill Fit for the Community were explored. Relationship Building in a Catholic Context, Pastor–Principal Relationship, Relationships with Parents, and Relationships with Staff emerged as themes upon exploration of question number two. Finances, Enrollment, and Salary emerged as themes in question number three.

### **Implications for the Literature**

Patterns emerged from the research study that expanded on the literature on principal recruitment and retention. Results of the study revealed the following three key themes.

1. Faith Commitment: Principals expressed a desire to work in Catholic school due to their faith practice and their desire to pass the Catholic faith on to the next generation. They felt being able to express their faith in the workplace was essential to their educational philosophy. In doing so, they felt empowered to educate the whole child spiritually, academically, and through extracurricular activities.

2. **Fit for the Position:** All principals expressed that they believed the specific skills they possessed made them a fit for the community in which they were hired. The needs of each community varied, but each principal expressed that he or she felt uniquely gifted to lead the specific community.
3. **Relationship Building:** All principals discussed the importance of relationships and community building. Their comments focused on fostering a positive pastor–principal relationship, as well as positive relationships with parents, faculty and staff, students, and community members. Positive initial interactions with the community encouraged principals to accept a specific position, and continued positive interactions with stakeholders encouraged them to remain principals in their schools.

These findings have implications for the literature regarding Catholic school principal recruitment and retention. While the literature on Catholic school principals recognizes the transition from religious leadership to lay leadership (Brinig & Garret, 2014), and the literature also recognizes the need for principals to have appropriate training to serve as both academic and faith leader of the Catholic school (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014), the findings in this research study conclude that serving as a Catholic school principal, sharing one’s faith, and providing an education for the whole child was an attractive incentive for principal candidates as they interviewed for positions. Catholic school leaders are tasked with providing a holistic education for students, including ensuring students receive an excellent academic education, while also taking advantage of service opportunities, learning about social justice, and receiving sacramental preparation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Understanding that Catholic school principals who seek a principal position in a Catholic school are motivated by the ability to address the academic and spiritual needs of students will enable pastors and



dioceses to better understand what motivates principal applicants and recruit applicants who will be strong fits with the system.

Ensuring students receive a faith-based education is the foundation of Catholic schools (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). The faith base not only ensures Catholic school students are formed in the faith and receive outstanding sacramental preparation, but a basis in faith also helps students learn to be productive citizens and continue to pass the faith on to the next generation of Catholics (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). In this research study, principals emphasized that the opportunity to build a faith-based education for students, and the ability to practice their faith was something that attracted them to the position. While researchers have touched on this in their publications, this study adds to the literature by clarifying the level of significance principal leaders place on the ability to share their faith. A principal's ability to share faith in a school setting is a significant recruitment and retention factor for Catholic school principals.

Principals in the research study discussed the sense of skill fit for the school as a factor that attracted them to the principal position and encouraged them to remain principals in their schools. This finding adds to the literature by providing a specific focus on skill fit for the Catholic school principalship. According to Doyle and Locke (2014), hiring committees and districts must take the "unique needs and the strengths of individual candidates for the principalship" into account when hiring principals for a school or district (p. 36). Doyle and Locke (2104) provided an example of two principals. One principal who would be strong in a turnaround environment may possess different skills than a principal who would be a good fit in a school with high academic performance (p. 36). They outlined steps schools and districts can take to determine fit, such as developing a school needs assessment and the criteria by which

they assess a candidate's skill fit for the school (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Doyle and Locke's research focused on public schools and districts. Other researchers also have focused on public school fit and have discussed that poor fit can lead to turnover and negatively impact student learning (School Leaders Network, 2014). Previous research on Catholic school principal recruitment and retention did not emphasize Catholic school principals possessing a specific skill fit for the school where they were hired. However, this study shows that fit for a specific position was important. This study illustrates that the principal should be a fit for a specific community so he or she can use his or her skills to meet the needs of the community. As a faith leader, the principal must be able to lead the community through a lens of faith and be able to address the needs of students and families from a Catholic perspective. The USCCB and various Catholic university principal preparation programs recognize the calling of lay people to lead Catholic schools and seek to help principals prepare by developing faith leadership programs at the university level (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

The finding of specific skill fit enhances the literature by highlighting the importance of principal fit to pastors, communities, and dioceses when hiring a principal for a school. When hiring a principal, Catholic schools must consider the specific needs of their school community and the skills that the ideal principal candidate must possess. These skills must also include an ability to lead a faith community. Creating a list of ideal principal traits can help schools and communities decipher the necessary skills in the school's next principal. This research study concluded that the principals' sense of fit for a specific school led them to describe a high level of satisfaction with their position. Principals also described feeling a sense of belonging in the community due to their ability to build successful relationships with their constituents.

Principals stated that their ability to build successful relationships with essential stakeholders like the pastor, parents, and faculty and staff was a prominent factor in principal recruitment and retention. The pastor–principal relationship was cited as a significant factor for both pastors and principals in ensuring both parties remained committed to the vision of school and parish. When Catholic schools were established, they were meant to educate poor, immigrant families who were members of the parish (Bryk et al.,1993). Today, the mission of Catholic schools can vary by community. Some Catholic schools have a similar goal to the Catholic schools of the past: ensure all children in the community are formed in the Catholic faith. Other schools in non-Catholic areas may have a goal to ensure children in the neighborhood receive a better education than they could in the local public school, regardless of their religious background (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). As a result, the pastor and principal of every Catholic school must have a clear mission and purpose for the school and maintain a strong relationship. Caruso’s (2012) research highlighted the importance of the pastor–principal relationship by examining how strong principal and pastor leadership can ensure a Catholic school provides an excellent, faith-based education for all students and increase enrollment (Caruso, 2012). In his discussion of the different types of pastors, Caruso described “Father Engaged” (Caruso, 2012). “Father Engaged” works with the principal; is involved in the school; and provides collaborative support for the principal, students, and families. According to Caruso (2012), leadership from “Father Engaged” when paired with the efforts of a strong principal can lead to school success, especially in the areas of faith development and academic excellence (p. 46). The principals and pastors in this study described strong relationships. Leadership from the pastors was described as “engaged” in the school. According to Caruso’s work, these relationships can lead to stability in the school and vision moving forward.

This research study expands on literature by providing specifics around expectations pastors have for communication with the principal. Pastors in this research study discussed their need for open communication with their principal, but also described not needing to know every detail about the school. The pastors trusted the principal to provide them with the information they needed to know about the school, and they described that they appreciated being a thought partner with the principal in solving problems and enhancing the mission of the school and parish. Principals recognized and emphasized the importance of a strong working relationship with the pastor as one of the essentials in their decision to become principals in a specific school as well as in their decision to stay. The interviews specified the need for principals and pastors to keep lines of communication open and work together to determine the best methods of communication.

The principals in the research study added that the strong relationships they built with all stakeholders in their school (teachers, students, and parents) led them to stay in their positions. Several principals mentioned they enjoyed working with teachers and providing them with feedback on performance, and they discussed how they enjoyed working with school families by gaining their input and ensuring their involvement in the school community. The sense of community is a driving factor throughout the history of Catholic schools and parishes. In the late 19th century, bishops required every parish in the United States to establish a Catholic school within 2 years, and required every parent to send their child to Catholic school (Bryk et al., 1993). Catholic schools and parishes became the cornerstone of their communities and educated all parish children in the Catholic faith (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). While the purpose of Catholic schools has changed over time, there is still a sense of community and belonging in Catholic schools (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Bryk et al., 1993). Creating and

maintaining strong relationships is an essential component of building community, and building and maintaining relationships was an important factor for principals in this study. While Bryk (2008) mentioned that strong relationships are important in creating change and moving a school forward, this research study adds to his findings by highlighting that the principal's ability to build relationships in a Catholic community leads to principal satisfaction and retention. This finding highlights Bryk's comments about community in Catholic schools. According to Bryk (2008), a strength of Catholic schools is "the fact that everybody chooses to associate with one another, this creates important social resources for school improvement" (p. 137-138). While Bryk was mainly discussing teachers in this passage, this research study includes principals as essential stakeholders who also make a choice to be a member of a specific Catholic school community. This study adds to the current research by illustrating that successful principal/community relationships lead to principal satisfaction and retention.

While none of the principals in the research study mentioned a desire to leave soon, they did recognize some of the challenges facing Catholic school principals. These challenges included demands on time, lack of support staff, finances and enrollment, and salary. Concerns around finances and enrollment were cited by researchers as significant challenges for Catholic school principals (Rieckhoff, 2014). High stress that includes demands on time and lack of support staff were also cited in the research as challenges for Catholic school principals (Boyle, et. al, 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). While several principals mentioned the low salary for Catholic school principals, concurring with other researchers (Boyle, et. al, 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014), this research study expands on the literature by providing specific examples of three principals who mentioned they took a significant pay cut to become principals in the Central Catholic Diocese. These three principals stated that they felt as if that pay cut was worth it to them personally. This

study illustrates that salary alone may not be a significant reason a principal does not seek principal positions in Catholic schools or why a principal chooses to leave his or her position.

### **Limitations**

This study contained a small sample size of six principals and six pastors. While they provided in-depth interviews, different principals in the Central Catholic Diocese may have different motivations for becoming principals, different reasons why they stay, and different reasons for leaving the diocese than those outlined by the interviewees. While this study examined a representative sample of schools in the Central Catholic Diocese, there are schools that are not represented in the study. Central Catholic Diocese has schools that are multi-racial, schools that educate a large number of children of immigrants, schools that are more than 50% African American, schools that are more than 50% Asian, and schools that are in rural areas. Principals and pastors of other schools with different demographics may have different experiences than those interviewed. Therefore, there may be a lack of transferability of the data to other schools and principals.

### **Implications for Practice**

Research illustrates that fewer candidates are choosing to become principals (Fraser & Brock, 2013), and there are not enough principal candidates to fill current vacancies (Durow & Brock, 2013). While many researchers have discussed the challenges of principal recruitment and retention and offered suggestions around restructuring the principal position or standardizing salary as a way to attract candidates (Chapman, 2005; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Durow & Brock, 2013; School Leaders Network, 2014), none of them has provided suggestions on how to attract candidates who are faith-filled and who have a desire to be of service to the Catholic Church. Doyle and Locke (2014) discussed the need for recruitment measures in districts to ensure that

qualified principals are placed in positions where they will be the best fit (p. 35), but they did not specifically address what can be done in Catholic schools or dioceses. This research study provides specific suggestions to assist dioceses and schools in hiring a principal that will be a fit for each individual school.

### **Creating a Value Proposition**

Principals from this study articulated the importance of sharing their faith with their school community as an element that attracted them to the Catholic school principalship. They stated that the ability to educate the whole child by emphasizing faith practice, social emotional learning, and academics was attractive to them as they sought a position as a principal in a Catholic school. Feeling that their specific skills were a fit for the community they served was also a driving factor as they sought a principal position. A diocese can use the answers to the research questions to develop a value proposition and recruitment strategy to advertise the intrinsic benefits of the Catholic school principalship. They can use the value proposition as a framework to work with principals of schools in the diocesan system to examine who on the school staff possesses the necessary skills to become a Catholic school principal. The diocese can encourage principals to foster leadership from within by providing a value proposition that centers on faith practice while ensuring each principal candidate has the skills to provide students with an excellent academic education and can successfully serve as a community leader. While the teachers within the school may not choose to serve as a principal in the diocese or in the school, those teacher leaders can help the principal in his or her leadership, and can also contribute to principal retention by illustrating to the principal that he or she has been successful in coaching, developing, and building relationships with teachers.

Creating a diocesan value proposition for the principalship delineates the skills and abilities the diocese is looking for in the next school leaders. Future leaders may self-identify, or they may be encouraged by their principal to consider leadership positions. A clear value proposition that discusses the importance of faith leadership, leadership in a Catholic school as a calling, unique skills and abilities possessed by individuals, and the opportunity to educate the whole child in a Catholic school can encourage others to consider the principalship in a Catholic school.

A Catholic diocese could use the following steps from the results of this study to create a value proposition that meets the needs of the diocese:

1. Focus on faith leadership and calling.
2. Describe the intrinsic benefits of working in a Catholic school (educating the whole child, passing along the faith to the next generation, autonomy over instructional decisions, ability to direct the vision for the school).
3. Focus on community: Catholic school community and positive relationships were cited as reasons principals remained in their positions.
4. Focus on fit: if there are a variety of schools in the diocese, add the skills necessary for the ideal candidate. Change these based on school location, if necessary.

This value proposition can encourage future leaders to self-identify, apply for leadership programs, speak to their principal about leadership opportunities in the school, and apply for principal openings when they earn the appropriate qualifications.

Dioceses can also use the findings around pastor–principal relationship as a marketing tool. The principals and pastors in this study described satisfaction around their working relationship. A diocese could articulate information in their recruitment materials about the



pastor–principal relationship. The ability of a principal to be involved in helping a strong pastor execute a vision for the school and parish can help recruit strong, faith-filled principals.

### **Creating a Framework for Principal Recruitment and Hiring**

The findings of this study offer a framework for hiring the principal candidates whose values and skills align with Catholic school mission. The framework emerging from this study involves key areas of principal effectiveness in the unique climate of a Catholic school. Within each category of the framework are the essential questions that can guide pastors and diocesan leaders in principal selection.

**Figure 1**

*Catholic School Principal Selection Framework*

<b>Disposition of Faith</b>	<b>Call to Serve</b>	<b>Relational Leadership</b>	<b>Skill Fit</b>
Does the candidate express personal dispositions of faith that reveal faith as central to lifestyle?	Does the candidate express a calling to Catholic school leadership?	Does the candidate demonstrate a disposition for relational leadership with all stakeholders (especially the pastor)?	Does the candidate possess the skills necessary to advance the school’s mission?

*Note:* This figure outlines the principal selection framework, and delineates the essential questions associated with the framework. This framework is meant to guide pastors and leaders as they select the school’s next principal.

To supplement the framework, a pastor can use the essential questions in the Catholic School Principal Selection Framework to create interview questions that discuss personal faith, faith practice, and faith leadership in the Catholic school.

When interviewing principal candidates for an opening, pastors can keep the following points in mind:

1. Create interview questions focusing on personal faith practice and faith leadership in a Catholic school.
  - a. Determine the focus and vision for advancing the faith in the parish. Use the mission/vision statement for the parish as a guide.
2. Determine the principal traits, skills, and strengths that are essential to successfully move the vision of the school forward.
  - a. Examine the vision and create interview questions around the vision.
  - b. Work with community members to determine the desired traits and strengths.
3. After an initial interview with the pastor and search committee, engage finalists in a one-on-one interview with the pastor.
  - a. Discuss traits, strengths, and communication styles that are important to the pastor to determine fit for the pastor–principal relationship.
  - b. Explain the pastor’s vision for the school and ensure vision congruity between the pastor and principal.

A positive pastor–principal relationship was cited by all principals and pastors in the study as an essential element in principal retention. When a pastor hires a principal, he will want to be aware of this dynamic. When hiring a principal, the pastor can focus on what traits are essential for the next principal of the school to possess in order to advance his vision for the

parish and the school. He will also want to be aware of intentionally building a relationship with the principal and clearly define his expectations for the principal and his expectations for the pastor–principal relationship. Discussing the best way to communicate to ensure the pastor and principal both have the information they need to make the best decisions for the community are beginning steps in establishing a strong relationship.

The pastor will also want to consider how the principal will manage the school community at large. Developing successful relationships with all members of the school community was cited as another element that provided high levels of satisfaction to principals. To get a sense of fit with the constituents of the school, the pastor can engage a search committee and/or several members of the school community to discuss the specific skill set the community is looking for the next principal of the school to possess. These skills should incorporate input from the pastor, parents, faculty and staff, and students.

The results from the research illustrate that a source of satisfaction for Catholic school principals is developing relationships with all members of the community. If a principal candidate's skills meet the needs of the faculty, staff, students, and parents, the principal is more likely to succeed in the position. Ensuring a skill fit for the community will enable the new principal to use his or her skills to ensure every child receives an excellent, faith-based education. The skill fit should also match the vision for the school moving forward. For example, if a school is looking to grow enrollment, or if the school has a specific vision for the education of students such as creating a dual language environment or welcoming more students from a variety of backgrounds, the principal candidate should have experience in a similar community. He or she should also express a passion for the vision for the school and a desire to advance the school's mission and vision.

Pastors can also work with their current principal to help foster leadership in the school. Encouraging the principal to elevate teacher leaders can provide the principal with job satisfaction because the principal has an opportunity to provide teachers with the tools to help them grow. As a teacher shows growth, the principal or pastor can encourage that teacher to obtain more training and seek a leadership position. If a principal is close to moving on to another position or retiring, the pastor and principal can work with that teacher to help him or her transition into a new leadership position, or that teacher leader can help another incoming principal adjust to the school and community.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While this narrative inquiry consisted of interviews with six principals and pastors in the Central Catholic Diocese, future quantitative studies could provide further information on principal motivations around Catholic school recruitment and retention by obtaining information from a larger sample size of principals. This may illustrate differences in answers and provide more information on why principals seek a position in Catholic schools, why they stay, and why they might leave. Conducting research on candidates who are seeking principal positions would also provide more insights on the motivations of Catholic school principals as they discern their calling to Catholic school leadership. Qualitative and quantitative studies of potential Catholic school principal candidates would provide more data on why they chose to seek Catholic school principal positions and why they might not choose to become Catholic school principals. Researchers could use this information to further refine the diocesan value proposition around principal recruitment.

A researcher may also want to conduct a more in-depth study with principals new to a diocese or school by asking questions of them year over year to see if there are times when their

perspectives change about their position. By conducting interviews with principals year over year in a longitudinal study, a researcher may determine if there is a specific time during principals' tenure when they struggle with the decision to remain a principal. This would allow the researcher to determine if anything can be done to retain those leaders, either through training, making changes to their positions and schools, or helping them find a school that is a better fit for their skills or abilities.

### **Conclusions**

The research conducted has significant implications for positive impact in the field of Catholic school leadership. Creating an intentional method of recruitment for Catholic school principals can result in the long-term viability and vitality of Catholic schools. The call for effective leadership in Catholic schools is central to advancing the mission. This study offers a framework from which to secure this leadership now and into the future. The framework includes examining candidate's disposition of faith, call to serve, relational leadership, and skill fit. Analyzing these values and skills will assist pastors and dioceses as they seek an excellent, faith-filled principal candidate whose skills are the right fit for the local Catholic school.

## References

- Baker, B., Punswick, E., & Belt, C. (2010). School leadership stability, principal moves, and departures: Evidence from Missouri. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 523-557. <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.shu.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0013161X10383832>
- Bauch, P. A., O.P. (2013). *Catholic schools in the public interest: Past, present, and future directions* [PDF e-book].  
[http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzYzMTY3NV9fQU41?si\\_d=c06bef05-a42b-401a-a569-dbb4d6991580@sdv-sessmgr02&vid=3&format=EB&rid=5](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzYzMTY3NV9fQU41?si_d=c06bef05-a42b-401a-a569-dbb4d6991580@sdv-sessmgr02&vid=3&format=EB&rid=5)
- Beam, A. P., Claxton, R. L., & Smith, S. J. (2016). Challenges for novice school leaders: Facing today's issues in school administration. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 27, 145-161.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1094357.pdf>
- Béteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2012). Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes. *Social Science Research*, 41(4), 904-919.
- Bohn, J. (2013). First year hurdles. *Educational Leadership*, 70(7).  
[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/apr13/vol70/num07/First-Year\\_Hurdles.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/apr13/vol70/num07/First-Year_Hurdles.aspx)
- Boyle, M. J. (2016). Introduction to the focus section: Preparing leaders in light of the standards. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19(3), 290-292.  
<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903142016>

- Boyle, M. J., Haller, A., & Hunt, E. (2016). The leadership challenge: Preparing and developing catholic school principals. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 9(3), 293-316.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903152016>
- Brinig, M. F., & Garnett, N. S. (2014). *Lost classroom, lost community: Catholic schools' importance in urban America* [Kindle Version].  
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226122144.001.0001>
- Bryk, A. (2008). Catholic schools, catholic education, and catholic educational research: A conversation with Anthony Bryk. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 12(2), 135-147. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1005825.pdf>
- Bryk, A. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 23-30.
- Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Holland, P. B. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good* [PDF e-book].  
<http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMGJuYV9fMjgyNjExX19BTg2?sid=ff73967a-360a-4890-9e20-6c076afb8fb1@pdv-sessmgr01&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>
- Caruso, M. J., SJ. (2012). *When the sisters said farewell: The transition of leadership in Catholic elementary schools*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chapman, J. D. (2005). *Recruitment, retention, and development of school principals*.  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001409/140987e.pdf>
- Churn: The high cost of principal turnover*. (2014). School Leaders Network. Retrieved August 29, 2018, <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/20544/20544.pdf>

*Declaration on Christian education: Gravissimum educationis*. (1965).

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html)

Doyle, D., & Locke, G. (2014, June). *Lacking leaders: The challenges of principal recruitment, selection, and placement*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED545231.pdf>

Durow, W. P., & Brock, B. L. (2004). The retention and attrition of catholic school principals. *The Journal of Catholic Education*, 8(2), 194-207.  
<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0802052013>

Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*.

Fraser, J., & Brock, B. L. (2013). Catholic school principal job satisfaction: Keys to retention and recruitment. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 9(4), 425-440.  
<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0904032013>

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*.  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

Fuller, E. (2012, July 16). Examining principal turnover. *Albert Shanker Institute - Shanker Blog*.  
<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/examining-principal-turnover>

Holter, A. C., & Farbutt, J. M. (2012). Mission driven and data informed leadership. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 15(2), 253-269.

Hunt, T. C., Oldenski, T. E., S.M., & Wallace, T. J. (2000). *Catholic school leadership: An invitation to lead* [PDF e-book].  
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEzNjYwNF9fQU41?sid=c30791ec-97af-4c59-8533-0b69aaa81262@sdv-sessmgr04&vid=6&format=EB&rid=30>



- Morten, S. D., & Lawler, G. (2016). A standards-based approach to Catholic principal preparation: A case study. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19(3), 332-349.  
<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903172016>
- Mulford, B. (2013). Successful school leadership for improved student outcomes: Capacity building and synergy. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 1(1), 7-32. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1111679>
- National Catholic Education Association. (n.d.). *Catholic school data*. NCEA. Retrieved November 17, 2018.  
[https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic\\_School\\_Data/Catholic\\_School\\_Data.aspx](https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Catholic_School_Data.aspx)
- Nsiah, J., & Walker, K. (2013). *The servant: Leadership role of Catholic high school principals* [PDF e-book].  
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzU3NjQ0OF9fQU41?sid=c30791ec-97af-4c59-8533-0b69aaa81262@sdv-sessionmgr04&vid=3&format=EB&rid=15>
- Nuzzi, R. J., Frabutt, J. M., & Holter, A. C. (n.d.). *Faith, finances, and the future: The Notre Dame study of U.S. pastors*. Alliance for Catholic Education Press.
- Nuzzi, R. J., & Hunt, T. C. (Eds.). (2012). *At the heart of the Church: Selected documents of Catholic education*. Alliance for Catholic Education Press.
- Ozar, L. A., & Weitzel-O'Neill, P. (Eds.). (2012). National standards and benchmarks for effective Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Chicago, IL: Loyola University Chicago, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness.  
<https://www.catholicschoolstandards.org/>

- Rieckhoff, B. S. (2014). The development of faith leadership in novice principals. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 17(2), 25-56. <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1702032014>
- Robert, D., & Shenhav, S. (2014). Fundamental assumptions in narrative analysis: Mapping the field. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(38), 1-17. <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss38/3>
- Ryan, C., & Taylor, C. J.H. (2005). *Excellence in education: The making of great schools*.
- The sacred congregation for Catholic education: The Catholic school*. (1977).  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_19770319\\_catholic-school\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html)
- Schuttlöffel, M. J. (2013). Contemplative leadership practice: The influences of character on Catholic school leadership. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 17(1), 81-103. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1016075.pdf>
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2005). *Renewing our commitment to Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the third millennium*. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/upload/renewing-our-commitment-2005.pdf>
- U.S Department of Education. (2018, July). *Principal Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2016-17 Principal Follow-Up Survey. First Look* (R. Goldring & S. Taie, Authors). Government Publishing Office. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585933.pdf>
- Viadero, D. (2009). Turnover in principalship focus of research. *Education Week*, 29(9), 1-14. [https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/28/09principal\\_ep.h29.html](https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/28/09principal_ep.h29.html)
- Weller, S. (2017). Using internet video calls in qualitative (longitudinal) interviews: Some implications for rapport. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), 613-625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1269505>

## Appendix A

### Letter and Email of Solicitation

My name is Elise Dite, and I am a doctoral student in Seton Hall University's K-12 School Administration Program. I would like to ask you to participate in a study entitled "Recruitment and Retention of Catholic School Principals: The Importance of School Leadership in the Success of Catholic Schools." The purpose of this study is to examine recruitment and retention of Catholic school principals within the diocese. This study will add to the literature to help explain why Catholic school principals become principals, why they remain principals in their schools, and why they might leave the principalship. Because the Catholic school provides a service to the parish by ensuring the excellent education of each child in the school, pastors will be asked to discuss their vision of Catholic education and their view of the principal position. Participants will be asked questions about school and parish demographics, general leadership, faith leadership, professional development, and support.

Each participant will be asked to participate in one 60- to 90-minute interview to discuss the topics mentioned above. Participants will also be asked to participate in a 30- to 45-minute follow-up interview to ensure the accuracy of the original interview. Responses will be recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and can be ended at any time without penalty or bias. There are no risks or benefits greater than one would typically experience. This research will be used to help better understand principal leadership in Catholic schools and potentially help other schools and diocese recruit and retain quality leaders.

The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at a conference. Participant data will be kept confidential, and the identity of the participants will not be revealed

in any way. Participant names and schools will be identified by a pseudonym with no identifying characteristics used in the research report. Participant data including all transcripts and recordings will be stored on a secured flash drive and kept in a locked desk in the researcher's (Elise Dite's) home. Only Elise Dite will have access to the data.

Upon request, you can receive copies of findings from the research if you contact Elise Dite via email at [REDACTED]. If you have any additional questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Elise Dite, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Your participation will consist of speaking to Elise Dite in a 60- to 90-minute video call. You will also be asked to participate in a 30- to 45-minute follow-up interview to ensure the accuracy of the original interview. If you are willing to participate in the study, please email me. If you are able to sign the letter below and send it back to me (scan/picture and email are fine) please feel free to do so.

Thank you for your consideration,

---

Participant Signature

---

Researcher Signature

---

Date

---

Date

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

**Demographic Questions:** These were asked of principals first before the interview. The answers provided by the principals in the questions below were cross-checked with the information available in the central office to create a more detailed picture of each principal, parish, and school.

1. How many principals have led your school in the last 10 years? What was their tenure?
  2. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator (principal or assistant principal) in this school?
  3. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator (principal or assistant principal) total in your career?
  4. How many years did you teach?
  5. What degrees do you have?
  6. Is there anything unique about your professional background or experience that you would like to add?
  7. Describe your school's demographics by race/ethnicity. By number of students receiving FRL.
- Is there anything unique about the demographics of your school that may not be recorded on a typical demographic report? (ex: large number of immigrant families?)

### Interview Questions

The in-person interviews for both the pastors and principals were conducted as semi-structured interviews. The interviews were guided by the questions listed below, but each interviewee had an opportunity to share his or her story and answer the questions in the way that best fits his or her interpretation of the question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). The grand tour

questions are listed below. These questions allowed for the interviewee to discuss how he or she interpreted the topic being discussed. If answers were unclear or need additional explanation, the researcher employed probing questions or statements like “what do you mean?,” “give me an example,” or “take me through that experience” to elicit more specific answers or feedback from the interviewee.

### **Hiring Information:**

1. Tell me about why you decided to become a principal in Central Catholic Diocese.
2. Tell me about why you chose to interview at this school and accept a position here.
3. Tell me about what made you feel like you would be a good fit for this school.

### **General Leadership**

1. Discuss what you enjoy most about being a principal in this school.
2. Discuss the biggest challenges of being a principal in this school.
3. Discuss the amount of time you spend at your school in a typical day or week.
4. Tell me about what sustains you and makes you want to remain a principal in Central Catholic Diocese.
5. Is there anything that might cause you to consider another career opportunity? If so, what is it?  
If not, why not?

### **Faith Leadership**

1. To what extent does your faith influence your decision to remain a principal in a Catholic school?
2. Do you continue to receive faith nourishment as a principal? If so, how?
3. Do you feel as if faith formation and nourishment is a priority for you and/or the Archdiocese?  
Why or why not?

3. To what extent do you feel prepared to be the faith leader of a Catholic school?

### **Professional Development**

1. To what extent do you feel supported through professional development in your position as principal?

2. What, if anything, would help you most as you continue to serve as a principal in your school?

### **Support**

1. To what extent do you feel supported as principal by your pastor?

2. To what extent do you feel supported by the parish community at large?

3. To what extent do you feel supported by parents and students in your school?

4. To what extent do you feel supported by other entities like the central office or other donors and supports?

### **Pastor Questions**

**Demographic Questions:** These questions were asked of pastors before the in-person interview. Answers were compiled and checked against the data available in the central office.

1. How long have you been the pastor in this parish? How many pastors have served this parish in the last 10 years?

2. How many years of experience do you have as a pastor?

3. How many years did you serve as an associate pastor? In how many parishes?

4. Do you have any additional degrees or training you would like to share?

5. Is there anything unique about your professional background or experience that you would like to add?

### **Interview Questions**

1. Were you responsible for hiring your current principal? If so, what made you think this person was a good fit to lead the school? If not, how did you introduce yourself to him/her and begin your working relationship together?
2. Tell me about your expectations for the principal of the school. What do you expect them to do or help with?
3. To what extent do you feel your current parish school is a successful ministry of the parish?
4. Describe what you believe to be the purpose of Catholic education.
5. How are you involved in the school?
6. Discuss what you think the biggest challenges are with Catholic education today. What are the biggest rewards? What are your hopes for the future of Catholic education and your parish?



## Appendix C



April 3, 2020

Elise Dite  
Seton Hall University

Re: Study ID# 2020-041

Dear Ms. Dite,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the amendment to your research proposal entitled "Recruitment and Retention of Catholic School Principals: The Importance of School Leadership in the Success of Catholic Schools" as submitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval.

Approval of this amendment does not change the previous expiration date from your one-year approval period. You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to the original expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research to close the study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mara Podvey". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR  
Associate Professor  
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

## Appendix D



Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

APR 03 2020

Approval Date

Expiration Date

APR 03 2021

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **Researcher's Affiliation**

Elise Dite is a doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. program in Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of her research is to explore the recruitment and retention of Catholic school principals within Central Catholic Diocese. This study will add to the literature to help explain why Catholic school principals become principals, why they remain principals in their schools, and why they might leave the principalship.

#### **Procedures**

The participant can expect to complete a survey before the interview for approximately fifteen minutes, participate in an initial interview of approximately an hour and a half, and after the data is coded, a follow up interview of approximately forty-five minutes will take place. Each participant will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire outlining general demographic data about the interviewee such as number of years at the parish/school, number of years of experience in the profession, and general data about the school and parish. After completing the questionnaire, each participant will be asked to participate in one, one-and-a-half hour interview to discuss the topics mentioned above.

#### **Instruments**

The researcher will conduct interviews using Microsoft Teams. Responses will be recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher using the Otter transcription application. After

College of Education and Human Services  
Executive Ed.D. Program  
400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079  
t 973.275.2306 / 973.275.2484

**What great minds can do.**

the interview questions are recorded and coded, a follow up interview will take place with principals and pastors to verify themes. An initial survey containing general demographic questions will be sent to each participant, pastor and principal, before the in-person interview. Sample questions for principals include the following: How many years of experience do you have as an administrator (principal or assistant principal) in this school? How would you describe your school's demographics by race/ethnicity? Is there anything unique about the demographics of your school that may not be recorded on a typical demographic report? (ex: large number of immigrant families?) Sample questions for pastors include the following: How long have you been the pastor in this parish? How many pastors have served this parish in the last 10 years? Is there anything unique about your professional background or experience that you would like to add?

#### **Voluntary Nature**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and can be ended at any time without penalty or bias. There are no risks or benefits greater than one would typically experience. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at a conference.

#### **Anonymity**

Participant data will be kept confidential, and the identity of the participants will not be revealed in any way, and no one will ever be able to link the data to an individual. Participant names and schools will be identified by a pseudonym with no identifying characteristics used in the research report.

#### **Confidentiality**

Participant data and records, including all transcripts and recordings, will be stored on a secured flash drive and kept in a locked desk in the researcher's home.

#### **Records**

Only Elise Dite will have access to the data. Data will not be used or disclosed without the participant's express consent.

#### **Risks or Discomforts**

The only foreseeable risks or discomforts might involve discussing potential future employment or support from stakeholders. Participants are assured that their information will remain confidential, and their answers will not be identifiable. Confidentiality of the data will eliminate risks and any potential discomfort.

#### **Statement of Benefits**

No direct benefits to the participants are expected. An indirect benefit consists of helping provide information that advances the literature on principal recruitment and retention.

#### **Contact Information**

Answers to questions can be provided by contacting the principal investigator, Elise Dite at [elise.dite@student.shu.edu](mailto:elise.dite@student.shu.edu) or calling the College of Education and Human Services Office at 973-761-9668. The researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Maureen Gillette, can be reached at 973-761-9668. The Seton Hall University IRB office can be reached at 973-761-9334 or [IRB@shu.edu](mailto:IRB@shu.edu).

#### **Audio Tape Permission**

By signing the form below, the participants provides written permission to be audio recorded. Participants will be identified on the recording by a code number. Elise Dite will store, listen to, and have access to the recordings. Recordings and transcripts will be stored on a flash drive locked in a secure cabinet in the home of the primary researcher (Elise Dite). Recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation.

**Statement of the Copy of Consent Form**

Participants in the study will be provided with a signed, dated copy of the Informed Consent Form.

---

(Participant Name)

---

(Date)