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The Nature of the Catholic High School Principalship in Alberta: Principals' Experiences and Perceptions

Annicchiarico, Bonnie

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The Nature of the Catholic High School Principalship in Alberta:
Principals' Experiences and Perceptions

by

Bonnie Annicchiarico

A THESIS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the question, “What does leadership look like in Alberta’s Catholic high schools”. Through survey, focus groups, and interviews with Catholic principals across the province, data was generated. The voices of Alberta’s Catholic high school principals emerged in significant ways. With 38% of the province’s principals responding to the initial survey, 23% of them participating in focus group discussions and 9% of them providing in depth insights through one on one interviews, a broad, varied, and comprehensive picture evolved. Through the use of grounded theory methodology, six complex themes emerged from the data: 1) Called: the vocation of the principal; 2) Entrusted: the responsibilities of the Catholic principal; 3) Gathered: the principal in community; 4) Liberated: freedom to “be” in a Catholic school culture; 5) Challenged: Leading 21st Century Catholic School; and 6) Appointed: Leadership in a Catholic school. An exploration of these themes in relation to the literature on leadership and Catholic schools resulted in a proposed framework for Catholic school leadership. Viewed through the lens of a Catholic paradigm, Catholic culture and community become the essential context for the discussion. Key leadership characteristics included a vocational call, intrinsic motivation, a compelling vision, an abiding love of others, a strong sense of hope, the leader as witness and servant, and the capacity to sacrifice. Catholic high school principals in Alberta told their stories with a language steeped in faith and a perspective that reflected their Catholic understanding of the world and their work. Catholic school leadership is spiritual leadership.

This study provides synthesis and clarity regarding Catholic leadership in Alberta's high schools. As well, a deeper understanding of the expectations for the province's Catholic principals was realized. Principals' opportunity for personal reflection enhanced their own understanding of their lived experience. By bringing the principals own voices to the table this study contributes to and enhances the literature on Catholic school leadership. Recommendations for Catholic principals, Catholic school boards, ACSTA and the provincial government conclude the study.

Acknowledgments

This five year journey has been one of significant learning about leadership and about my own capabilities. Throughout the process I have been challenged and encouraged; supported and inspired by many. My sincere thanks and appreciation is extended to each one of you who has played a part in my academic and personal growth.

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I send my deepest appreciation to my colleagues, the Catholic principals across Alberta who spoke openly, shared trustingly and reflected deeply. Thank you for taking risks and for devoting your lives to the call of Catholic leadership.

It has been my good fortune to work in a school district that has supported my studies. To the district leadership, to my fellow principals, and to my school faculty who not only cheered me on, but have taught me the true meaning of community and inspired me daily, thank you.

Most importantly, I send my love and thanks to my family who bring out the best in me. Krista, Jenni, Michael, and Julian because of you, I can be me. I am truly blessed.

Dedication

To my husband, Julian, Coach A

You have cheered me on from day one. You have given me perspective and provided the necessary pep talks. You have sacrificed on my behalf. You have believed in me—always. You have been the ultimate coach and made us a great team. Thank you.

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Chapter One

In 1996, I became the principal of a Catholic school in Alberta. Unique to my experience was the opportunity to open the first Catholic school in my city. I learned immediately that, as principal, I was expected to be an instructional leader who ensured that top quality learning was taking place in every classroom. This led to decisions regarding hiring and certification, allocation of resources, development of support and intervention programs, networking with parents, coordination of student services, discipline, management, and more. Foundational to every decision made however, and woven completely through every moment of leadership, was the directive from my Catholic community and my school board to imbue my school culture with faith. When faith is infused into all aspects of school life it also impacts administrative decisions about staff, allocation of resources, protocols for discipline, and more. In addition, it was necessary for me to ensure that traditions, events, activities, instruction, and school policies were specifically designed and carried out to create and enhance Catholic culture and the faith experiences for students and staff. All of this took place within the context of a Catholic school faith community. It was evident to me that the Catholic school principalship was both multifaceted and complex.

The impetus for this study arose from my own experiences as a principal and from the questions I had about my purpose, my work, and my effectiveness. My own search for direction and meaning led me to consider what the nature of the Catholic high school principalship is both in theory and in practice. In turn, I was led to seek information from several sources: documents generated by the Catholic Church's Congregation for Catholic Education, national and provincial directives from the Catholic Bishops, national and

provincial directives from Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association (CCSTA) and Alberta Catholic School Trustees' (ACSTA), policies developed by the Alberta's Catholic school districts, and international scholarly literature on Catholic school leadership

The Study

The title of this research, then, is *The Nature of the Catholic High School Principals in Alberta: Principals' Experiences and Perceptions*. For the purposes of this study, “nature” refers to the practices, experiences, and understandings of high school principals within the context of Catholic education as defined by the church, as directed by educational governing bodies, and as described by the literature on Catholic school leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the nature of the Catholic high school principalship in Alberta from the perspectives of Alberta's Catholic high school principals within the context of the expectations, understandings, and beliefs currently at play in the academic, institutional (both governmental and religious), and political milieu of today.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it will

- (a) offer synthesis and clarity;
- (b) aid in the development and articulation of expectations;
- (c) provide an opportunity for personal reflection by participants; and
- (d) supplement the current academic literature in the area of the Canadian Catholic school principalship.

Synthesis and Clarity

This study seeks to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Catholic high school principal in the province of Alberta today. Although the leadership expectations of public and Catholic school principals overlap, they are not identical. Not only must Catholic high school principals embody the leadership qualities determined by provincial standards, but also it is incumbent on them to be leaders faithful to the directives of their Catholic school districts, their communities, and the church.

The Catholic principal's work is fully immersed in the context of the Catholic school. The mandate of the Catholic school directs the role and responsibilities of the principal. In the review of the literature in Chapter Two it will become readily apparent how inextricably the mission of the Catholic school and the mission of the Catholic principal are intertwined. For now, three sources will provide an overview regarding the expectations for the Catholic principal. The first is a secular governmental source, Alberta Education; the second is a provincial Catholic school authority, the Alberta Catholic Schools Trustees' Association; and the third is an ecclesiastic directive from the Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops. The Ontario Catholic Bishops have been selected as there is no document comparable within the Alberta Catholic Bishops' writings.

Alberta Education, the Alberta Catholic School Trustee's Association, and the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops are three influential bodies that specifically detail expectations for the Catholic school principal. Though each stands alone they also interface to define and direct the work of the Catholic principal.

Alberta education.

In 2009, Alberta Education proposed seven leadership dimensions for principal quality practice. Those dimensions were stated as:

1. Fostering effective relationships.
2. Embodying visionary leadership.
3. Leading a learning community.
4. Providing instructional leadership.
5. Developing and facilitating leadership.
6. Managing school operations and resources.
7. Understanding and responding to the larger societal context. (Alberta Education, 2009, pp. 4-6)

These leadership dimensions are applicable to both public and Catholic principals from K-12.

Alberta Catholic school trustees' association.

In addition to responsibilities set out by Alberta Education, the ACSTA (Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association) has provided the following expectation for Catholic school principals in their 1985 Mission Statement:

Catholic school administrators exercise a responsibility, not only in relation to government policy makers and to the Bishops of Alberta, but also in relation to Catholic parents and children. As educational leaders, administrators have the task of coordinating the many diverse tasks demanded by education, and of building community by infusing those tasks with a unifying Christian and Catholic vision. (Laplante, 1985, p. 69)

Ontario council of Catholic bishops.

Further, in 1993 the Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops highlighted qualities of the Catholic principal in their document *Fulfilling the Promise*. They suggested that the leadership of Catholic school administrators be marked by:

- willingness to accept responsibility from the Catholic community and to exercise leadership within this community;
- a deep commitment to evangelization and life-long faith development;
- a collegial style that seeks to empower staff and students;
- the ability to bring people together and to foster reconciliation when needed;
- persistence in encouraging a communal discernment of the workings of the Holy Spirit;
- sensitivity to the needs and hopes of the families of students;
- commitment to ensuring understanding and cooperation between Church and school;
- openness to collaboration with clergy. (p. 4)

Not surprisingly, James Mulligan, a spokesman for Catholic education in Canada has stated: “The expectations placed upon Catholic school principals today are frighteningly challenging” (Mulligan, 2006, p. 187).

As this study seeks to synthesize the expectations and understandings of the Catholic school principalship from a variety of sources, it will also clarify the roles

and responsibilities of Alberta's Catholic school principals, from both an outside perspective and the inside perspective of the Catholic school principals themselves.

Development and Articulation of Expectations

As the nature of the Catholic high school principalship is clarified, clearly articulated expectations have emerged. This research provides a rich body of evidence to describe the work Catholic high school principals do. From this data a deeper understanding will assist Catholic school districts in Alberta - and perhaps elsewhere in Canada - in identifying, articulating, and developing the expectations of Catholic school principals.

Opportunity for Participants' Personal Reflection

The design of this study has drawn heavily on the Catholic high school principals' own observations, reflections, and conversations. This, in turn, has allowed participants the valuable opportunity to reflect on their practice. Survey and interview tools were designed to draw out the principals' perceptions and understandings. The use of focus groups took those reflections a step further, allowing a collective picture to emerge. This "group interview" provided the participants with the opportunity to engage in dialogue, share ideas, opinions, and narratives and, at times, debate each other. This sharing allowed for the "social construction of meaning" and was "essential to the process of writing history and culture together" (Madriz, 2000, p. 841). In the busy lives of school principals, opportunities to talk with colleagues about issues of mutual concern are rare.

Together, in the focus group format, Catholic high school principals were able to address their common experiences and their diverse experiences and, in doing so, generated conversation that has provided insight into the collective experiences of these participants.

Supplementing the Current Academic Literature

Literature on the Alberta Catholic high school principalship is practically non-existent. Literature on the Canadian experience offers little more. Most of the academic literature on Catholic school leadership is American with some writing emerging from the United Kingdom and Australia. There is a vital need for research in this area that is Canadian.

Alberta enjoys a special privilege (along with Saskatchewan and Ontario) of fully funded Catholic education (Flynn, 2003). This fact in itself has major implications for Catholic schools within the province. This study takes this unique circumstance into account. When principals do not have to focus on funding concerns, other issues take priority instead. The body of literature set in this unique circumstance needs to be added to.

Although the study's results will be limited to Alberta's Catholic schools, the findings may be of some significance for other Catholic school districts in Canada. The study's findings will certainly add to the literature on Catholic school leadership in Canada.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study emerged from my personal experiences and understandings and from the literature on Catholic education:

1. What does leadership look like in Alberta's Catholic schools?
2. What is the relationship between identified leadership models and the institutional expectations, both governmental and religious?
3. What, if any, leadership issues are deemed critical for Catholic education as identified by Alberta's Catholic high school principals?

Methodology

This study was a qualitative study firmly situated in the interpretive paradigm. Through the use of a survey, focus groups, and interviews the nature of the Catholic high school principalship in Alberta was closely examined and deeply explored. The study was conducted in three phases with each phase laying the groundwork for the next phase to come.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has been selected as the means of generating theory from the data acquired and has been chosen for this study due its ability to allow theory to emerge. First introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, this methodology allowed an integrated set of hypotheses to emerge from the data. Grounded theory was the basis for data analysis in this study.

Delimitations

1. This study did not deal with Catholic school principals other than the principals who participate in this study.

2. This study did not include elementary or junior high principals and, as such, all references to the principalship are limited to high school principals.
3. This study did not seek to understand the perspective of Catholic students, teachers, parents or superintendents.
4. The data was largely silent in regards to academic issues, however Catholic schools maintain rigorous academic standards and deliver the Alberta curriculum in all subject areas.
5. This study was limited in that grounded theory methodology has been selected for data analysis.

Limitations

1. The findings in this study were limited to the participant's understandings.
2. A limitation of this study was the bias of the researcher, who is Catholic, and who has worked in both the Catholic and Public school systems in Alberta.

Definitions

1. Catholic School: is a publicly funded separate school in the province of Alberta and is authorized by the local bishop to operate as a Catholic school. A Catholic school is permeated by the Catholic faith in all aspects of the explicit and implicit curriculum, extra curricular activities, social interactions, and in the mission, vision, and values of the school itself. "Formation and education in a Catholic school must be based in the principles of Catholic doctrine" (803.62 Canon Law). The distinctive nature of the Catholic school is determined by its "religious

- dimension and this is to be found in a) the educational climate; b) the personal development of each student; c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel; and d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith” (CCE, 1988, p. 3).
2. Catholic school principal: The principal is responsible for instructional leadership, supervision, and evaluation of students, teachers, and programs, direct management of the school, order, and discipline of the school (Alberta School Act, 2000, 20). The Catholic school principal is also ultimately responsible for ensuring the school is permeated with the Catholic faith. The principal “is an accomplished teacher who practices quality leadership in the provision of opportunities for optimum learning and development of all students in the school” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 4).
 3. Catholic: "Catholic [means] a member of one of the rites of the Catholic Church who recognizes the Pope as the supreme head of the Catholic Church." (Pander v. Melville (Town). 3 W.W.R. 53, 1922).
 4. Faith: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”: Hebrews 11:1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states “faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed” (CCC, 150).
 5. Faith Community: is a group gathered around “the person of Christ and sharing his Spirit” (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 120). The faith community becomes “the primary context of divine/human encounter” (Groome, 1998, p. 176). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “no one can believe alone...the believer has

received faith from others and should hand it to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbour impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers” (CCC, 166).

6. Public Schools: The Alberta School Act (2000) states that there is “one publicly funded system of education in Alberta whose primary mandate is to provide education programs to students through its two dimensions, the public schools and the separate schools, in such a way that the rights are guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada” (p. 281). Although Catholic schools in the province of Alberta are publicly funded, in this study “public schools” will refer to those schools in Alberta that are not Catholic.
7. Survey: is used to gather data “at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 205).
8. Interview: is an “interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 349). Interview data is jointly constructed and is, therefore, inter-subjective.
9. Focus Group: a group gathered by the researcher to discuss a given topic thereby “yielding a collective rather than individual view” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 376).
10. Grounded Theory: “is the systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method. Grounded theory... is an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses” (Glaser, 1998, p. 3).

Outline of Dissertation

Chapter One of this dissertation presents the genesis of the study. As well, the study itself, the purpose and significance of the study, research questions, and methodology, delimitations, limitations, and definitions have been discussed.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature. Topics covered include an historical perspective of Catholic education in Alberta. Within that context, the unique nature of Catholic schools, Catholic school culture, the Catholic school as community, and the Catholic school principalship are presented. When exploring the Catholic school principalship, leadership theory in general and leadership theory specifically for Catholic schools will be discussed. A leadership construct for Catholic principals will be suggested.

Chapter Three will deal with the research design by introducing the interpretive paradigm and the design of the study. Data collection using methodologies of survey, focus groups, and interviews will be explored. Data analysis leads to a discussion of grounded theory, grounded theory strategies, and issues of qualitative validity and qualitative reliability. The evolution of the study will describe the three-phase process that was undertaken in this research. Reflections on the data will provide a global perspective to the study.

Chapter Four presents the data in terms of the themes that emerged from analysis. Six key themes guide the discussion: Called: the vocation of the principal; Entrusted: the responsibilities of the Catholic principals; Gathered: the principal in community; Liberated: freedom to be in a Catholic school culture; Challenged: leading 21st century schools; and Appointed: leadership in a Catholic school.

Chapter Five is a discussion and analysis of the themes within the context of literature on Catholic schools and leadership. Each of the six themes is reviewed and explored in terms of the literature. Subsequently, the data will be interpreted in terms of spiritual leadership within the context of transcendental leadership. A leadership model for the Catholic principal will be presented.

Chapter Six provides conclusions and recommendations from this study in three distinct sections. Section one summarizes the answer to the question, *What does leadership look like in Alberta's Catholic high schools* by presenting both a quantitative and qualitative response. Section two summarizes the significance of the study in terms of synthesis and clarity; expectations for Catholic high school principals in Alberta, personal reflection; and supplementation of academic literature. Section three pushes this body of work forward by making recommendations to stakeholders and suggesting areas for further research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Catholic schools are founded on the teachings of the Catholic Church and bring a wisdom and tradition steeped in theology and Christian beliefs. The principal of a Catholic school is called to leadership and, as such, assumes responsibilities and duties that extend far beyond simple administrative tasks. Catholic principals are responsible for instructional leadership and the supervision and evaluation of students, teachers, and programs. They are accountable for the direct management of the school and for the order and discipline of the school (Alberta School Act, 2000, p. 20). In addition, by the nature of their Catholic faith, they are charged with responsibilities and leadership within the Catholic community, which include a commitment to evangelization, lifelong faith development, and ensuring cooperation between Church and school (Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops, 1993, p. 4).

This chapter begins with an historical look at Catholic education in Alberta. A retrospective view allows four key concepts to emerge:

1. The evolution of the Catholic principalship from religious to lay leaders;
2. The recognition of the principal as central to the success of the Catholic school;
3. The impact of governing bodies on the Catholic principalship; and
4. The creation of a context for Alberta's modern Catholic schools.

Following the historical overview, this chapter will focus on five key elements of Catholic education pertinent to this study. They are:

1. The Unique Nature of Catholic Schools
2. Catholic School Culture
3. Catholic School Community
4. The Catholic School Principalship
5. A Leadership Model for Catholic Principals

Catholic Education in Alberta: An Historical Perspective

Catholic education in Alberta has a long and distinguished history. There is evidence that in 1859 the Grey Nuns established the first school in Alberta at Lac St. Anne under the leadership of Bishop Vital Grandin (Kulmatycki, 2008, p. 36). Catholic education began well before Alberta was a province and was carried out through the work of missionary priests and sisters. Their passion and conviction were rooted in the belief that Catholic schools were a necessity (ACSTA, 2009). Travelling far from home and working tirelessly, these religious founders laid the groundwork for what has become more than 140 years of constitutionally recognized Catholic education in Canada.

The roots of Alberta's publicly funded separate schools were established in the *Constitution Act of 1867*, the year the nation of Canada was founded. The Constitution Act introduced and protected minority religious education rights and "ensured those specified religious minorities that had, by law, right of access to denominational schools prior to joining confederation would not lose those rights and be forced into schools operated by those of the majority religious persuasion for the privilege of becoming part of a new province of Canada" (Bemount, 2007, p. 2).

In 1905, when the province of Alberta was established, section 17 of the Alberta Act "provided full rights for separate schools whether the minority faith was Catholic or

Protestant” (Flynn, 2003, p.7). From that point forward, Catholic schools became entrenched in the constitution and in the educational system of Alberta.

In the years that followed, Alberta’s Catholic school boards “faced a number of socio-political discords... [and] had to maintain a delicately balanced political acumen as they responded to various pressures from inside their jurisdictions, the rest of the province, and the country” (Kulmatycki, 2008, p. 147). While issues of vision, mission, curriculum, and exclusive attendance were discussed, enrolment in Alberta’s Catholic schools grew.

The first association of provincial school trustees included Catholic school trustees as founding members in 1907. Catholic trustees continued to be active members of the provincial body even after the creation of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association (ACSTA) in 1958. ACSTA united Catholic school trustees across Alberta and was central in developing leadership, providing professional development, and leading political lobbying for Catholic education within the province. Their mission states: “The Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association is the voice of Catholic trustees in Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and is committed to enhancing the rights of Catholics to education based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (ACSTA, 2010).

The ACSTA works to benefit Catholic education by

- involving the provincial Catholic community in Catholic education through regular dialogue and collective advocacy;
- communicating the value of a Catholic education system to the Catholic community and the community at large;

- empowering member board delegates to represent the views of their district, while collectively promoting the rights of Alberta’s Catholic school supporters to provide Catholic education; and
- facilitating and promoting faith development opportunities through the Catholic community (ACSTA , 2010).

Any historical overview of Catholic education must include the dramatic changes that occurred in the Catholic Church through Vatican II. When the Vatican II council opened in 1962, “little had changed in Church practice on Catholic education in almost a century. For the remainder of the twentieth century, change would be a basic reality” (Flynn, 2003, p.7). Following Vatican II, the newly established Alberta Catholic Schools Trustees’ Association created a task force to review the Vatican documents. Their reflection process resulted in the following observations:

- Alberta lacked a guiding statement and a common understanding of what it means to be a practising Catholic.
- On the whole the Bishops of Alberta did not speak out publicly on the importance of Catholic education.
- Due to the time of renewal and re-evaluation of the church in society, trustees and teachers were experiencing difficulty presenting a Christian vision. (Carney, 1985, p. 8)

In the 1988 *Alberta School Act*, Catholic education and its historical and constitutional roots were reaffirmed. The preamble stated:

...there is one publicly funded system of education in Alberta whose primary mandate is to provide education programs to students through its two dimensions,

the public school and the separate school, in such a way that the rights under the constitution of Canada of separate school electors are maintained... (MacDougall & Michniewski, 2003, p. 8)

In 1994, the *Alberta School Act* was again revised. Although the 1988 preamble remained intact, many other issues affecting Catholic schools were addressed and altered including changes to taxation and funding. The new School Act granted Catholic school boards the right to appoint their own district superintendents subject to approval by the Minister. As well, “new legislation emphasized the operation of parent-run school councils and...ACSTA began to work to provide faith formation and development to parents as well as to educators” (MacDougall & Michniewski, 2003, p. 9).

Big changes were underway within the province throughout the 1990s and, most significantly, a program of reducing the number of school jurisdictions within the province was initiated by the conservative government. By 1997, the 51 Catholic school districts within Alberta had been amalgamated into 16 Catholic boards.

In 1995, the government took over all costs associated with capital construction of new schools and changed the parameters for building new schools. Although this eliminated the need for local Catholic taxpayers to come up with additional tax revenue for construction of new schools, it also raised a new challenge for Catholic schools. A number of politicians and government officials began to openly advocate for shared facilities between public and separate schools. In 2002, the Alberta Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a specific statement in response to this emerging issue. In it they stated:

A separate Catholic school is not a rejection of the culture, but a designated environment of faith formation, which requires its own separate space for the sake of cohesion, unity, and growth...the shared faith life of the school permeates every part of the building and every activity that happens within and around it. Anything that detracts from this permeation, such as a “shared facility” situation, leads to the loss of something vital to Catholic education. (Alberta Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002, p.3)

The Alberta Catholic School Trustee’s Association chimed in their support. Both the bishops and the trustees were very clear that a Catholic school must be separate in order to maintain its own distinct identity and culture and to allow for full permeation of the Catholic faith throughout the school day and in all aspects of school life.

Leadership in Alberta’s Catholic Schools

Prior to Vatican II, the leadership in Catholic schools had come primarily from bishops, priests, and church documents. “Catholics continued to depend upon papal pronouncements on education in the 1960’s to explain and justify their system of schools” (Carney, 1985, p. 7). Most administrators prior to Vatican II were sisters appointed to positions of leadership by the bishop. “The role of the administrator was traditional: the principal was the religious leader of the school, appointed, anointed and extremely visible” (Garvey, 1985, p. 45).

Post Vatican II this reality had changed. In Edmonton Catholic schools, for example, the number of women religious as principals went from 85% in 1955 to less than 5% by 1975. It was not until 1981, based on the belief that Catholic school leadership was central to the future of Alberta Catholic schools, that ACSTA hosted the

first ever Blueprints conference designed to “advance a Gospel centered model of schools versus a simple administrative one” (Laplante, 1985, p. 20). The first Blueprints conference confirmed that “the linch-pin in the Blueprints process was the school principal, on whom falls the main responsibility for religious education and life in the school” (Tkach, 1983, p. 364).

At the inaugural Blueprints conference a one page Mission Statement central to the community renewal process was developed. The Mission Statement was a “1980’s Catholic school creed developed within the post-Vatican II Catholic school experience in Alberta” and was a statement of ideas of what Catholic educators wanted Alberta Catholic schools to become (Laplante, 1985, p. 21). Of the ten statements, one in particular spoke to the role of principals and is central to the tenants of this study:

Catholic school administrators exercise a responsibility, not only in relation to government policy makers and to the Bishops of Alberta, but also in relation to Catholic parents and children. As educational leaders, administrators have the task of coordinating the many diverse tasks demanded by education, and of building community by infusing those tasks with a unifying Christian and Catholic vision. (ACSTA, 1985, p. 69)

The Blueprints process was a conscious strategy on the part of ACSTA to prepare Catholic school principals and administrators for the new Catholic school reality in Alberta.

Today, as the second decade of the third millennium embarks, it would be fair to say that Catholic education in Alberta is alive and well. As of 2012-2013 school year, 144,315 students were enrolled in 380 Catholic schools. Catholic jurisdictions are

growing and by the academic standards of Alberta Education, students are learning and learning well (ACSTA, May 2009). Many challenges, however, remain. If Catholic schools are to remain true to their heritage and mission, constant vigilance is required. The distinct and authentic faith community of Catholic schools requires constant attention. It is within this context that a close study of Catholic school principals and their work within modern Catholic schools in Alberta is proposed.

The Unique Nature of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools are unique on a number of levels. Catholic schools are established and directed by the authority of the Catholic Church. Today, the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) has influence in three diverse sectors of Catholic education: seminaries, houses of formation of religious, and secular institutes; all universities, faculties, institutes, and higher schools of study; and all schools and educational institutes.

In *The Catholic School* (1977), the CCE wrote:

[The 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 civilization and for the natural and supernatural destiny of man. (15)

In a Catholic school, the mission, vision, values, and behaviours are founded in Gospel values and lived intentionally. Catholic schools have been charged with bringing

faith into every aspect of the school (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002). In Catholic schools, learning and living are permeated with Christ (CCE, 1998).

A Catholic school is, first of all, a place of learning. The word “catholic” is “the adjective qualifying the noun. Catholic schools must be good schools before they can be good Catholic schools” (Cook, 2007, p. 11). A commitment to academic excellence is central to the school’s mission and existence (ACSTA, 2009; CCE, 1998). Learning is where it begins.

In a review of the literature from 1991-2000, Nuzzi (2004) synthesized the research answering the question, “What makes a school Catholic?” He brought together responses from theologians, educators, bishops, and the international community. He summarized his findings into three distinct categories: the canonical response which maintains that Catholic schools are those which the bishop says are Catholic; the sacramental response appeals to the “sacramental life of the Church and points us to the person of Christ. Catholic schools make Christ present and are places where the example and life of Christ are incarnated daily.” Therefore, “it is Christ who makes schools Catholic” (p. 19); the ecclesial response “places the Catholic school in the larger contexts of the universal Church and civic society.” Catholic schools “embody the most effective and successful effort anywhere to educate children in the faith and to prepare responsible and faithful citizens for Christian witness and action in the world” (p. 19).

Simply stated, “the Church is what makes a school Catholic, for when any school community embraces the faith, celebrates the sacraments, struggles to be like Jesus, and lives and works in the world for peace and justice, it truly becomes a Catholic school” (Nuzzi, 2004, p. 19).

Bryk, Lee & Holland (1993), identified three major common characteristics of Catholic secondary schools:

1. An unwavering commitment to an academic program for all students, regardless of background or life expectations and an academic organization designed to promote this aim.
2. A pervasive sense, shared by both teachers and students, of the school as a caring environment and a social organization deliberately structured to advance this.
3. An inspirational ideology that directs institutional action toward social justice in an ecumenical and multicultural world.

In *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998) the Congregation for Catholic Education recognized certain fundamental characteristics of the Catholic school “which are of great importance if its educational activity is to be effectual in the church and society” (p. 5). They are:

- The Catholic school as a place of integral education of the human person ...of which Christ is the foundation;
- its ecclesial and cultural identity;
- its mission of education as a work of love;
- its service to society... (p. 5).

Thomas Groome (1998), in his definitive exploration of Catholic education, identified eight characteristics of Catholic Christianity. They are:

1. Its positive anthropology;
2. Its conviction about the sacramentality of life;

3. Its emphasis on relationship and community;
4. Its commitment to history and tradition;
5. Catholicism's appreciation of a wisdom rationality;
6. Spirituality;
7. Working for justice and the social values of God's reign;
8. Catholicity itself; hospitality for all. (pp. 59-60).

Taken in more practical terms, Catholic Christianity provides a benevolent view of the human condition, seeks to see the presence of God in the ordinariness of daily life, is convinced that God will be found first in each other, honors the legacy and traditions of faith, appreciates a "reflective way of knowing," seeks holiness in life, works for justice in the world, and provides a welcoming hospitality for all. These eight characteristics permeate the life and teaching in a Catholic school.

Cook (2007) identified key themes that emerge from church documents regarding religious identity, aims, and distinctive culture of Catholic schools. He suggested that Catholic schools are characterized by:

- an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel;
- a synthesis of faith and culture and faith and life;
- knowledge illumined by faith;
- the formation of a faith community;
- a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture and of history;
- the integration of faith and reason; and
- the formation of mature personalities (p. 12).

Emerging from the work of these scholars are consistent themes that describe Catholic schools. In each, a complex picture of Catholic school life is painted. In each, the foundational component of community is identified. In each, Catholic school culture is central.

Catholic School Culture

Catholic school culture is distinct. From the mission of the school, to its physical décor; from the conscious, articulated activities and teachings, to the more ethereal but highly identifiable “feel” in the school, a Catholic school is “different.” Much of what makes a school Catholic is rooted in church teachings, tradition, Gospel values and 2000 years of Christian community. Much of what makes a school Catholic are the day-to-day interactions and the deep-rooted relationships.

Culture refers to the way things are done. School culture is a conglomeration of rituals, symbols, traditions, stories, values, beliefs, relationships, ceremonies, ideologies, and patterns of behaviour (Cook, 2007; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Flynn, 1993; Palestini, 2009; Sergiovanni, 1994). Culture is both obvious and subtle. It is conscious and unconscious. It is seen and unseen. Visitors to a Catholic school often recognize the obvious aspects of this unique culture, but just as often are heard to say, “There’s something going on in that school. It feels different.” Bryk et al. (1993) described the “distinctive atmosphere” in many of the Catholic high schools they spent time in (p. 63).

In any and all discussions of Catholic schools, the focus on culture is central. Catholic school culture provides the context for an exploration of community and leadership. It is the backdrop for all that takes place and continues to shape school life

day by day. As Bryk et al. (1993) pointed out, “If we fail to consider the distinctive culture and traditions of Catholic schools, we may misread their policy lesson” (p. 17).

Cook (2007) described culture as the “hidden or informal curriculum. It is what graduates remember long after formal schooling ends” (p. 9). Culture is of primary importance when determining a school’s effectiveness (Cook, 2007; Palestini, 2009; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994, 2000, 2007). It could be argued that Catholic school culture is a culture of relationships as well as an organizational dynamic that Catholic leaders must attend to. A culture of relationships refers to how members of the school community treat each other. Expectations that interactions will be respectful, kind, compassionate, loving, and reflect Catholic teachings on how to treat others are central to most Catholic schools’ rhetoric.

Unity is central to the formation of a strong school culture. “Core values are the keystone – a culture is strong to the degree it is cohesive in terms of ideals” (Cook, 2007, p. 17). Palestini (2009) posited that “one of the reasons that Catholic schools exhibit a clearly defined culture and identity is because the Catholic school community tends to be unified in its perception of the ultimate goal of the Catholic school” (p. 11). Sergiovanni (1994) reinforced this concept when he stated, “when we depend on norms, customs and mores that are embedded in the social structure itself the ‘we’ looms large. People are bonded to each other as a result of their mutual binding to shared values, traditions, ideas and ideals” (p. 61).

Sergiovanni (2000) referred to this essence, this culture, this vibrancy as “lifeworld.” Lifeworld includes traditions, rituals, and norms as well as the leaders and their purposes. In contrast, systemsworld is consumed with “management designs and

protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures and efficiency, and accountability assurances” (Sergiovanni, 2000, ix). It is critical that the lifeworld generate the systemsworld and not the other way around. Sergiovanni recognized that Catholic schools persevere and thrive because of their ability to grow their unique culture.

Catholic School Community

The concept of community is strongly embedded in Catholic theology and Catholic teaching. The centrality of community is found in Vatican documents and within the writing of modern Catholic thinkers. Catholic Christianity emphasizes the person as person-in-community rather than as an individual. Catholic theology is rooted in the “conviction that we live most humanly as a ‘community of persons.’ We are our own and each other’s keeper, bonded together for the common good—both spiritual and temporal; as humankind we are ‘made for each other’” (Groome, 1998, p. 174). Rolheiser (1999) reinforced Groome’s thesis in his description of church community:

Before all else, the church is the people...a community of hearts and souls, previously separated by many things, coming together. Jesus formed a community around himself, animated it and then left it his word, his spirit and the Eucharist (p. 113).

Church documents repeatedly emphasize community in their directives for Catholic schools. In 1972, the conciliar *To Teach as Jesus Did* called on educational leaders to form “persons-in-community” environments in which “one person’s problem is everyone’s problem and one person’s victory is everyone’s victory” (National

Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972, 13). “Building and living community must be prime, explicit goals of the contemporary Catholic school” (NCCB, 1972, 108).

In *Sharing the Light of Faith* teachers were encouraged to understand their students by listening to them with respect and sensitivity and to build each learner’s integrity in order to create community in the classroom and to learn “the meaning of community by experiencing it” (NCCB, 1979, 209).

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School expanded the role of the Catholic school teacher to one of climate setter and described the distinctive climate within the school as one “permeated by the gospel spirit of freedom and love” (CCE, 1988, 1).

The Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops wrote in *This Moment of Promise* (1989) the following plea to Catholic educators:

We all need to be members of a community which encourages each person in the difficult task of living according to faith values which are often at odds with the prevailing values of our society. Within a society which is increasingly secular, there is more need than ever before for an educational community which stakes its existence on the infinite promise which Jesus Christ has offered through his death and resurrection. He came that we may have life and have it more abundantly.

(Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops, 1989, p. 4)

In *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* (2002), the Canadian Council of Catholic School Trustees (CCSTA) stated that “a culture that admonishes everyone to go his or her own

way leaves no one to go together...we are fiercely resentful of those who want to cramp our style and yet we hunger powerfully for solidarity” (p. 29).

Within the province of Alberta, the recognition of community as integral to Catholic education was aptly described by Richard Laplante (1994) in his discussion of the sacramentality of community:

One of the significant changes in the post Vatican II Catholic vision is the passage from the school as institution to the school as community...If the school is seen primarily as a community of learners, faithful or faith seeking persons, then a profound philosophy of person centered activity should be a direct result.

(Laplante, 1994, p. 31)

In their 1993 study of Catholic high schools titled, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, Bryk, Lee, and Holland conducted a set of investigations that spanned almost ten years. Their research included an in-depth study of a small number of Catholic high schools, statistical analyses of large national databases, and an exploration of the philosophical and historical roots of Catholic schools. Their goal was to “examine the distinctive features of Catholic high schools and the ways in which these features combine to form supportive social environments that promote academic achievement for a broad cross section of students” (Bryk et al., 1993, ix). This study is arguably one of the most comprehensive in the history of Catholic school research. Given all the data and the extensive exploration, one central and critical finding rose above the others: the “pervasive talk among teachers, principals and students about their school being a community. As field researchers who had recently spent a considerable amount of time

in public high schools, this language and accompanying practices of community appeared quite distinctive” (Bryk et al., 1996, p. 28).

In 2007, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) published a monograph titled: *Architects of Catholic Culture*. In it Cook explored the many facets of Catholic school culture and within this broad context came to the conclusion that “it is the communal dimension that characterizes Catholic schooling” (Cook, 2007, p. xix). Cook suggested that Catholic culture is a balance between the individual and the community.

The personal component of Gospel culture, points to the integral formation and growth of the entire human being---heart, mind and soul...Gospel culture also implies a communitarian dimension. Believing that Christian faith, in fact, is born and grows inside a community, the communal aspect of Catholic school education is essential to its religious mission. (Cook, 2007, p. 13)

Specific to Catholic schools, is the dual role of community. The Catholic school is unique because it provides a religious community within a learning community. Although secular schools may seek to embrace learning communities, Catholic schools expand the learning community to include faith community as well.

Communities are based on relationships and the quality of those relationships determines the quality of the community. In a school, teachers and administrators are the key adults who set the tone and model caring and commitment. In their review of the research on Catholic school effectiveness, Manno, Bruno, and Graham (2004) explored the question “Why do Catholic high schools succeed so well?” They concluded that

...it is apparent that schools that communicate high levels of care and concern create a genuine basis for engaging parents, teachers and students....Inner drive springs from the self-confidence of knowing that there are people---especially authority figures---who care for you and demand the best from you. (p. 293)

Covenantal Community

Laplante's (1994) phrase "the passage from the school as institution to the school as community" (p. 31) created an essential paradigm shift. This image of school as community rather than institution is a powerful one and is crucial to the work of this study. In exploring this concept and its implications for Catholic school principals, the work of Sergiovanni becomes central to the discussion and to the framework for Catholic school leadership. Sergiovanni has written widely and in depth on the topics of community in schools, moral leadership, and the lifeworld of leadership. The premise for Sergiovanni's theories rests on the conviction that community is and must be the guiding metaphor for schools.

Authentic community requires us to think community, believe in community and practice community---to change the basic metaphor for the school itself to community. We are into authentic community when community becomes embodied in the school's policy structure itself, when community values are at the center of our thinking. (Sergiovanni, 1994, xiii)

Although Sergiovanni does not write specifically about Catholic schools, his language and his worldview have much in common with Catholic educational philosophies and practice. He suggested: "We cannot achieve community unless we

commit ourselves to the principle, 'love thy neighbour as thyself'. Yes, these are sacred words but then again community is a sacred idea" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 29).

Sergiovanni laid the groundwork for a new way of thinking about communities and yet, a way of thinking that particularly suits the Catholic way of life. He proposed a shift in thinking from individual to group and focused on the binding power of relationships.

Communities are organized around relationships and ideas. They create social structures that bind people to a set of shared values and ideas. Communities are defined by centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of 'we' from the 'I' of each individual.

(Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 65)

This sentiment is echoed by Catholic scholars such as Rolheiser (1999) who have related the teachings of Jesus to community. Rolheiser stressed that "God calls us, not just as individuals, but as a community and...how we relate to each other is part of how we relate to God. For Jesus, the two great commandments, to love God and love one's neighbour, can never be separated" (p. 68).

Catholic school community at its best is aptly described by the phrase "covenantal community." In the Bible, the word "covenant" refers to God's solemn promise to his people. In a school, the word covenant refers to the solemn agreement between members of the community to do or not do certain things. Agreements between teachers and their students, teachers and each other, students and each other, or administrators and teachers are all covenantal commitments.

Rolheiser (1999) reminded Catholics that “Church involvement, when understood properly, does not leave us the option to walk away whenever something happens that we do not like. It is a covenant commitment, like a marriage, and binds us for better and for worse” (p. 61).

Similarly, a Catholic school community, “when understood properly” is a “for better or worse” covenantal community. In such covenantal communities, “shared ideas, principles and purposes provide a powerful source of authority for leadership practice” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 2).

Covenantal relationships are based on a “shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals, and to management processes.” Members of the covenantal community build strong relationships based on trust. These relationships “fill deep needs and they enable work to have meaning and to be fulfilling. Covenantal relationships reflect unity and grace and poise. They are the sacred nature of relationships” (Dupree, 1989, p. 60).

As the view of school shifts from one of institution to one of community, certain elements must be evident. A school becomes a community when community values are central to the school. A “we” point of view overtakes an “I” point of view. Relationships are characterized by genuine commitment and care for each other. Solemn agreements bind community members to each other through both trying times and times of celebration. Ideas, principles, and processes share common understandings and are built on relationships of trust. This vision of school community is particularly suited to Catholic notions of community; firmly anchoring Catholic leadership theory in the context of Catholic community.

Caring and an Ethos of Love.

The Catholic school is a community of children and adults gathered around the Gospel. Fundamental to the teachings of Jesus is the scripture from Matthew, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"(Matthew 22: 37-40). It is this essential command of Jesus that all other beliefs and actions of Catholic schools are based upon. Without love, Catholic schools are just "noisy gongs" or "clanging cymbals" (1 Corinthians: 13:1).

In *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* (BBE) (2002), the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association made a statement to the nation's Catholic community. In it they addressed what makes Catholic schools different, what makes a school Catholic, and finally, what the desirable characteristics of a Catholic school graduate are. This document is a powerful reminder of the mission of Catholic schools. BBE called Catholic educators to build Bethlehem in every school and to create communities that welcome human weakness so that "none are separated from the love of Christ" (III).

Within this ethos of unconditional and forgiving love, Catholic educators have a "fundamental option for the lost." No matter the situation, no matter the cost, "no matter how lost our youth may have become, as long as we have breath to draw, we will never stop looking for them" (CCSTA, 2002, p. 45).

What does this have to do with Catholic school leadership? Everything. The principal as servant leader with moral authority is called to build a caring community within the school. This covenantal community has "no option" but to care for each other.

Based on binding, sacred commitments all members of the community must give and, in turn, receive the care and love that permeate the Catholic school community. “If we want a person to enter into our heart’s domain, we open wide the doors through kindness, consideration and compassion, attentive care and tender love” (CCSTA, 2002, p. 32).

Within this community ethos of love and care, all are welcome and all are recognized as special and gifted. Catholic schools seek to recognize the giftedness in each person and to provide opportunities for each member to discover their own talents and then, in turn, give them back to the community. “The Catholic school strives to draw out these gifts and to help students achieve their individual and collective potential. Experiencing success and enjoying affirmation build confidence, self esteem, self worth and self respect” (Cook, 2007. p. 12). In covenantal communities “everyone is expected to be a leader and everyone is expected to have a voice...we recognize and rejoice in their gifts” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 42).

The Catholic School Principalship

Leadership Theory

Debates on leadership have been raging since the beginning of time. Plato suggested that only philosophers could be rulers and hence from this premise emerged the understanding of philosopher kings. The great man theory predominated thinking from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. This premise was based on the belief that leaders were born, not made, and was often the underlying principle of monarchical kingships. Trait theory also supported the idea of inherent leadership and suggested that people are born with traits that are particularly suited to leadership. Good leaders have the right combination of these traits. Trait theory was the dominant theory in practice in the first

half of the 20th century. In contrast, behavioral theory emerged in the early 1950s and proposed that leaders are made, not born and that leadership can be learned through teaching, training, and observation.

In the past quarter century, books, seminars and models of leadership have flourished. Theorists such as Covey with his highly influential work *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) have generated discussion and enthusiasm amongst leaders in all segments of society. Collins' (2001) research was an exploration of the nature of businesses that had gone from "good to great" and had an impact on leadership discussions within the field of education as well. Leadership theory in general provides the broad strokes for a more specific focus on leadership in education, and a thorough understanding of educational leadership theory provides the context for a deep understanding of Catholic school leadership. Research on educational leadership reveals a number of prominent theories that have been influential in guiding school leaders. A brief overview of each theory will provide both a historical and current context for viewing leadership in schools.

Transformational leadership.

Any discussion of educational leadership rightly begins with transformational leadership. Hallinger (2003) described transformational leadership as one of the "foremost models in educational leadership in the past 25 years" (p. 329). The work of Burns (1978) was fundamental in the generation of transformational leadership theory. Burns described transformational leadership as one in which the leader forms "a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). Building on the early work of Burns and

later Bass (1985) Leithwood (1994) proposed the transformational model of school leadership. This model consisted of three broad categories of leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

In Hallinger's reflections on transformational leadership, he pointed out that transformational leadership stimulates change through bottom up participation and seeks to increase the capacity of others in the school. This form of leadership requires the principal to invite teachers to share leadership functions, often resulting in the need to have a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

Transformative leadership focuses on higher order, intrinsic, and moral needs. It "is first concerned with high order psychological needs for esteem, autonomy and self-actualization and then, with moral questions of goodness, righteousness, duty and obligation" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 66). A transformative leader works to move the group "towards a common good that is beneficial for both the leaders and the followers. This makes this theory unique as it has to be grounded in the leader-follower relationship" (Northouse, 2004, p. 316).

Based on their analysis of 69 studies over the course of 35 years, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that "transformational leadership is the favoured style of leadership given that it is assumed to produce results beyond expectations" (p. 14). Transformational leadership is focused on change.

Transactional and instructional leadership.

Transactional leadership focuses on the "management of existing relationships and maintenance of the status quo" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338). It is defined as "trading one

thing for another (quid pro quo)” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 14) or leadership by “bartering” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 69).

Instructional leadership models emerged in the early 1980s from research on effective schools and have characteristics of a more directive and top down approach to school leadership. “Instructional leadership emphasises the principal’s coordination and control of instruction” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 337). Instructional leadership would, therefore, be characterized as transactional leadership due to the fact that it seeks to “manage and control organizational members to move towards a predetermined set of goals” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338).

Servant leadership.

Servant Leadership is a leadership framework first suggested by Robert Greenleaf (1977). Greenleaf proposed that “the great leader is seen as servant first” and that these great leaders will be freely and knowingly granted allegiance by those who follow, because they “are proven and trusted as servants” (p. 10).

Servant leaders make other people’s needs their highest priority. They respond to any problem by listening first and this “true listening builds strength in other people” (p. 17). Servant leaders are accepting and empathetic, but may refuse to accept a person’s effort or performance if it is not good enough.

Building on Greenleaf’s original premise, Blanchard, Hybels, and Hodges (1999) developed the concept of servant leadership in their treatise *Leadership by the Book*. In it they suggested that servant leaders will assume leadership “only if they see it as the best way they can serve” (p. 42). Their focus is “to serve the cause, not to enhance their own positions” (p. 43). Servant leaders operate in three domains: the intellectual, the

emotional, and the behavioral. “In other words, the head, the heart and the hands must all be working in harmony” (p. 53). The servant heart refers to leadership character, the servant head refers to leadership methods and the servant hands are leadership behaviours.

Marzano et al. (2005) proposed that the servant leadership perspective “stands in sharp contrast to those theories (such as transactional leadership) that emphasize control or ‘overseeing’ those within the organization” (p. 16). These authors pointed out that servant leadership suggests a unique concept regarding where the leader is positioned within the organization. “Instead of occupying a position at the top of a hierarchy, the servant leader is positioned at the center of the organization” implying that the servant leader “is in contact with all aspects of the organization and the individuals within it as opposed to interacting with a few high level managers who also occupy positions in the upper strata of the hierarchy” (p. 17).

Situational leadership.

Situational leadership proposes that the best action of a leader depends on a range of situational factors such as the motivation and capability of followers, the relationship between leader and followers and situation specific factors. The leader is required to adapt his leadership behaviour based on the maturity and willingness of the followers. Effective leaders know the ability and willingness levels of their followers and are able to “accurately discern which styles are appropriate for which followers in which situations” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 18). As Hallinger (2003) suggested, “it is virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to the school context. The context of the

school is a source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand and address in order to lead” (p. 346).

Stages of Leadership

Sergiovanni was a scholar, a writer, and an educator whose thinking in the area of leadership has not been “mainstream.” His writings “turn conventional management and organizational thinking topsy-turvy...he substitutes moral community for leadership, he dismantles system theory, and he shows how hierarchical control is the antithesis of what is needed in school for today and tomorrow” (Glickman, 2007, vii). Sergiovanni’s work in leadership is ahead of the curve. His thinking, however, is foundational in the argument of this thesis. As a significant contribution to school leadership theory, Sergiovanni’s stages of leadership are presented.

In the stages of leadership, Sergiovanni expanded transactional and transformative leadership definitions into four levels of leadership: bartering, building, binding, and bonding.

Leadership by bartering is transactional. The leader and the led exchange needs and services in order to accomplish independent objectives. Leadership concepts at work in this stage are management skills, contingency theory, and exchange theory. Physical, security, social, and ego needs are satisfied.

Leadership by building is transformational. The leader provides an environment that enhances the follower’s opportunities for fulfillment. Leadership concepts of symbolic leadership, empowerment, and charisma come into play. Esteem, competence, autonomy, and self-actualization needs are satisfied.

Leadership by binding and bonding are transformational as well. In leadership by binding, the leader and the led are bound by a set of shared values and commitments towards a common cause. Leadership by bonding requires a commitment from the leader and the led to a set of shared ideas that ties them together morally. Leadership concepts of moral leadership, covenantal community, and building followership are realized. Purpose, meaning, and significance needs are satisfied.

Sergiovanni believed that each stage of leadership is one of school improvement and yet, may be used simultaneously for different purposes within the stages as well. “Leadership by bartering is an especially valuable strategy when the issue is one of competence. But once competence has been achieved, one must look to the strategies of building, binding and bonding, which will add value and help people transcend competence to reach the level of inspired commitment and extraordinary performance” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 68).

Transcendental Leadership.

Transcendental leadership is a mere decade old. Its roots can be traced back to ideas generated by Greenleaf (1979) regarding servant leadership and such powerful spiritual examples as Mahandas K. Gandhi. This model of spiritual leadership emerged from the recognition that traditional approaches to understanding leadership lacked depth and were limited in scope (Sanders et al., 2003). Sanders, Hopkins, and Geroy (2003) developed a theory that “purports to provide a more comprehensive view of leadership by connecting traditional theories to a meaningful domain, spirituality” (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 22). This additional aspect of spirituality expands, enhances, and enriches popularized

understandings of leadership (Cardona, 2000; Fry, 2003; Gardiner, 2006; Lavery, 2012; Liu, 2007; Sanders et al., 2003).

Sanders et al. have created a model that presented transactional, transformational, and transcendental theories of leadership as linked along a common continua. Additionally the authors suggest that spirituality is the connection between transcendental leadership and the more traditional constructs of transactional and transformational leadership. They contended that:

1. The nature of the relationship between transactional, transformational, and transcendental theories of leadership is defined along a hierarchical continuum.
2. As leaders develop along the hierarchical continuum there will be a commensurate development in their spirituality. Three dimensions of spiritual development of leaders have been identified: consciousness, moral character, and faith.

Three continua are presented: locus of control, effectiveness, and spirituality.

Locus of control continuum.

Locus of control concerns the extent to which leaders are internally or externally oriented. The authors suggested a stronger internal locus of control is a result of leaders' spiritual focus, which "compels them to consciously place greater importance on the dynamics of the immaterial (inner spirit) as opposed to the material (the body)" (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 25).

Effectiveness continuum.

Transcendental leaders possess the same effectiveness-producing traits as transformational leaders. Due to their "stronger internal locus of control and a more

focused spiritual orientation...the effectiveness of transcendental leaders may be greater than the effectiveness of transformational leaders” (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 25).

Spirituality continuum.

“Traits such as high self-confidence, self-determination, inner direction, and a strong conviction in the moral righteousness of his or her beliefs characterize the charismatic leader” (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 25). Charisma is a significant player in the theory of transformational leadership behaviour. These traits continue to play a major role in motivating the spiritual and behaviour of transcendental leaders as well.

Leadership at this level is likely to be associated with a highly developed sense of divine awareness, a post-conventional level of moral development, and faith in a higher, spiritual authority. Indeed, we view transcendental leadership as operating at the highest level of spirituality. (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 26)

Proponents of transcendental leadership see this theory as one “nested” within transformational and transactional models, yet also on a hierarchical continuum with these theories of leadership. Sanders and his associates suggested three propositions that would explain the relationship between the three frameworks of leadership:

Proposition 1: As leaders develop along the transactional-transformational-transcendental hierarchy continuum, the consciousness dimension of spirituality and thus leader effectiveness will become more developed.

Proposition 2: As leaders develop along the transactional-transformational-transcendental hierarchy continuum, the moral character dimension of spirituality and thus leader effectiveness will become more developed.

Proposition 3: As leaders develop along the transactional-transformational-transcendental hierarchy continuum, the faith dimension of spirituality and thus leader effectiveness will become more developed (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 28-29).

Within the context of this study, spiritual leadership provides a robust picture of Catholic school leadership. This theory of leadership will be explored in detail in Chapter Five as part of the analysis of the data.

Transcendental leadership is a new and more comprehensive way of viewing effective leadership....Spirituality is a complex phenomenon that can no longer be ignored by society and its organizations. (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 29)

Catholic School Leadership Theory

It is the premise of this study that the Catholic school principalship is different in many ways from its secular school counterpart and that the unique nature of the Catholic school community demands a unique model of Catholic school leadership (Nuzzi, 2000; Traviss, 2004). “Within the context of a culture of Catholic identity, it is important that the Catholic school administrator develop an appropriate leadership model” (Palestini, 2009, p. xiv).

As stated by Hallinger (2003) in the section previous, it is critical that the principal’s leadership be studied with the context of the school and all its “constraints, resources and opportunities” (p. 346). Public and Catholic school principals share much in common. Expectations of the Alberta government are identical for both principalships. This top layer of school accountability sets policy and determines what governs a school, what curriculum is to be studied and the legal expectations of the school district, trustees, principal and teachers. This direction from Alberta Education is non-negotiable and is

applicable to all public and Catholic schools in the province. Once the educational process moves into the domain of school districts, communities, and schools, however, the differences become apparent. Public and Catholic schools, their districts, and their communities have dissimilar mandates, missions, expectations, and cultures.

Although recognizing the responsibility each school and its principal have to provincial standards, it is clear that Catholic school authorities expect adherence to directives set by the Bishops of Alberta and loyalty to the Catholic parents and community of which the school is a part (ACSTA, 1985). This context for Catholic principals is unique, distinct, and complex.

Community

This treatise proposes that Catholic school leadership will be different because of the situation and context of the Catholic school. Because of the very nature of Catholicism, certain elements of a Catholic school set it apart from its public school neighbours. As written previously in this chapter, Catholic schools are unique and Catholic school community is central to who Catholics are and to how they do things. It is from the centrality of community that the case for this model of Catholic school leadership is made.

Bryk et al. (1993) in their work with Catholic high schools spoke to principals who identified their top goal as “building community among faculty, students, and parents” and they understood innately their own responsibility in shaping school life and forming school ideals. No task was too big or too small to receive the attention of the principal and it often seemed that the job entailed more work than one person could deal with.

We conclude that the nature of school leadership has a distinctive character...for principals in Catholic schools...there is an important spiritual dimension to leadership that is apt to be absent from the concerns of public school administrators. This spirituality is manifest in the language of community that principals use to describe their schools and in their actions, as they work to achieve the goal of community. (Bryk et al., 1993, p.156)

Vocation

The call to leadership is not an easy one. Father James Mulligan, one of the few Canadian writers on Catholic education identified a real concern among Catholic systems regarding the scarcity of interested, committed Catholic school leaders. He advised that principals need a “heightened awareness of the vocation of leadership, which will often involve sacrifice” (Mulligan, 2006, p. 199). The idea of the principalship as vocation rather than job is critical to the understanding of Catholic school leadership.

Catholic educators have long known that their calling was a special one...They also knew that a special and unique leadership model was required to accomplish this mission; one that would not only require the knowledge of management principles but also requires an added dimension. This additional dimension would speak to the ability of Catholic school leaders to model and operationalize Gospel values. To be effective, Catholic school leaders would have to lead with both mind and heart. (O’Brien, 2009, p. xi)

Catholic principal as servant leader.

Catholic school leadership theory points repeatedly to a servant leadership model. Many theorists have identified the strong relationship between servant leadership and the

Catholic principalship. Wallace (2000) stated that “the Catholic school principal uses the servant model—the principal must re-present Christ” (p. 192). Palestini (2009) suggested that the “challenge for Catholic school leaders is to lead effectively in a non-coercive way, that is, lead with heart” (p. 22) and then added that “the leader must...become the servant of the servants (p. 38). Garvey (1985) wrote that “it is incumbent on the principal to be the “washer of the feet” in the school. It is up to the principal to serve the staff, students, and community (p. 47). The Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops (1993) directed school leaders to “serve in such a way that [people] are encouraged and inspired to be all that God calls them to be (p. 3).

Why does servant leadership seem uniquely suited to Catholic school leadership?

Three key points must be made at this time:

1. Jesus Christ is the model for servant leadership.
2. Servant leadership is vocational.
3. Servant leaders form and serve community.

Jesus as the model.

Servant leadership is modelled after one of the greatest teachers ever to live; namely Jesus Christ. Jesus was a servant leader who led by example. “Jesus showed us that true leadership starts on the inside with a servant heart, then moves outward to serve others...everything we do will be to serve others and the highest good” (Blanchard et al., 1999, p. 44). “To teach and lead as Jesus did requires the Catholic school administrator to make spirituality an integral part of his or her being and leadership style” (Palestini, 2009, p. xiii).

In following the example of Jesus, Catholic educators have a special responsibility to lead as Jesus led...Leading as Jesus led not only entails leaders using their power as he did, it also means establishing communities that clearly reflect this common life in and under Christ. (Nuzzi, 2000, p. 269)

Servant leadership as vocational.

A servant leadership perspective is essential to the vocation of the principal. Servant leaders are called to leadership and answer that call in order to serve the cause, not themselves. In their study of Catholic Schools and the Common Good, Bryk et al. discovered that “the individual who takes on the role of principal is likely to see it as a way to help the school, not self” (1993, p. 300). Mulligan (2006) added that “leadership in Catholic education is not a career; it is a vocation... Leadership is intended to serve the Catholic education community” (p. 188). He encouraged a “heightened awareness of the vocation of leadership, which will often involve sacrifice” (p. 199).

When teachers view their job as vocations, their work becomes morally inseparable from other aspects of their lives. They are not teachers only sometimes and principals are not principals only sometimes. Whatever they are, they are everything together. (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 147)

The Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops stated: “There is no such thing as “just a job” in a Catholic school. There are only various forms of Christian service, each calling for extraordinary dedication” (OCCB, 1989, p. 7).

Servant leaders form and serve community.

The servant leader is specially positioned to form and serve community. Greenleaf (1977) made the bold statement that “all that is needed to rebuild community

as a viable life form...is for enough servant leaders to show the way” (p. 20).

Communities are networks of relationships immersed in an ethos of love and care.

Servant leaders have “a loving care for those they lead” (Blanchard et al., 1999, p. 67).

Through this form of leadership, authority no longer belongs solely to the leader; it belongs to the community. “Real authority is diffused throughout the Catholic school community. The contemporary challenge for authority in the Catholic school, then, is to release the potential of the core community...it is to facilitate the liberation of others who will be leaders in their spheres of influence” (Mulligan, 2006, p. 190).

Servant leaders serve the vision and ideals of the community. In this case “the principal is at the same time a leader of leaders, follower of ideas, minister of values and servant to the followership” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 34).

The Principal’s Leadership in a Catholic Covenantal Community

Covenants are morally based contracts. They bond people to one another and they “acknowledge the aspect of human nature that places other interests before self interests” (p. 102). As such, covenants are solemn and binding agreements that provide “reciprocal rights, duties and obligations on the one hand, and guidelines for action, on the other. They define how one should live as an individual and one’s collective life as a member of the community” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 103).

When a school is transformed from an organization to a covenantal community, the basis of authority also shifts. In a covenantal community, principals’ authority becomes moral rather than authority based on bureaucracy or position. It is at that point that “the school changes from a secular organization to a sacred organization” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 102).

Palestini (2009) suggested that covenantal relationships induce freedom and produce excellence.

[The] goal as Catholic school leaders is to encourage a covenantal relationship of love, warmth and personal chemistry among our employee volunteers. Shared ideals, shared goals, shared respect, a sense of integrity, a sense of quality, a sense of advocacy, a sense of caring; these are the basis of an organization's covenant with its employees. (p. 43)

Under the broad heading of leadership in a Catholic covenantal community emerge more specific leadership concepts. They are: moral authority, stewardship, and an ethos of love.

Moral authority of the principalship.

Moral authority determines what is right, good, and just. It determines behaviour and guides the work of the adults in the community. Moral authority is freely given to those who are trusted and who have earned the respect of the community they serve. In Catholic school communities “led” by a servant leader, authority is freely given by those who follow. The moral authority rests not only with the principal (in this case) but also with the community whose values and mission become the determining factors in decision-making. “Moral connections are strong...because they come from commitments to shared values and beliefs that teachers, parents and students accept and the obligations they feel toward each other and their work. Moral connections are grounded in cultural norms” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 86).

Principals are responsible for creating a moral order that binds their followers to themselves in order to move forward together. In addition, leadership must connect

“people morally to each other and to their work. The work of leadership involves developing shared purposes, beliefs, values and conceptions themed to teaching and learning, community building, collegiality, character development and other school issues and concerns” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 83).

“Moral leadership is the means that principals and others can use to build connections”(Sergiovanni, 2007, p.3). A school, united as a community, is about relationships. Relationships, because they connect human lives, are fundamentally moral. The principal brings together the head, heart, and hand of leadership “to make administering a moral craft” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 23).

If Catholic school leadership is best characterized by the servant leader model, moral authority and moral responsibility become givens as well. Sergiovanni and Greenleaf both proposed that a new kind of hierarchy emerges with the servant leader model. The leader’s purpose now is to serve the ideals, commitments, and values of the community and to be, ultimately, “positioned at the center of the organization” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 17).

The strength for this leadership is not based on power, but on moral authority. Followers follow by choice and with trust. The needs of the community are placed above the needs of the leader. The principal, teachers, and students work in service to these purposes. In the Catholic school, principals are called to moral leadership as they serve their school community.

The principal as steward.

Within the metaphor of community emerges the concept of stewardship. Stewardship is a concept deeply embraced by Catholic teaching. Merriam-Webster

defined stewardship as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.” The Catholic view on stewardship is aptly described by Archbishop Martino, Head of the Delegation of the Holy See, when he stated:

... we cannot lose sight of the need for responsible stewardship which demands attention to the common good; no one person, no one group of people is allowed to determine their relationship with the universe. The universal common good transcends the interests of the individual, national and political agendas and the limits of time.

Stewardship implies trust. Principals, as servant leaders of the school community, accept the responsibility and obligation that comes in partnership with the trust given. Stewardship requires principals to place themselves “in service to ideas and ideals and to others who are committed to their fulfillment” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 59). Stewardship requires principals to place the common good over their own interests and to bring a collective vision to their relationships.

Though stewardship for the common good must be widely shared among members of a community, principals have special stewardship obligations. They must plant the seeds of community, nurture fledgling community and protect the community once it emerges. To do this they lead by following. They lead by serving. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership. They lead by knowing. And, like Plato's Guardians, the lead by being. (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 203)

Conclusion

This chapter provides a thorough review of the literature on Catholic education and on the relevant leadership research regarding the Catholic school principalship. This study is placed within the historical context of Catholic education in Alberta. The literature allowed for a description of the unique nature of Catholic schools; specifically what makes a school Catholic. Catholic school culture and Catholic school community emerge as critical components to this study with a specific focus on the covenantal community of the school and the ethos of love which permeates Catholic school culture. Within these pages, leadership theory in general and Catholic school leadership specifically are explored and a model for the Catholic school principal begins to emerge. Centered on servant leadership theory and rooted in the covenantal Catholic school community, the principal leads as a moral authority and steward.

Chapter Three

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the nature of the Catholic high school principalship in Alberta from the perspectives of Alberta's Catholic high school principals within the context of the expectations, understandings, and beliefs currently at play in the academic, institutional (both governmental and religious), and political milieu of today. This chapter will present the research design of this study. Working clearly in the interpretive paradigm and using qualitative methodology, the data was gathered in three phases. Each phase focused the data more specifically. Methodologies employed included survey, focus groups, and interviews. Throughout the data collection process grounded theory analysis was applied.

This chapter is organized in eight sections: the interpretive paradigm, design of the study, data collection, data analysis, evolution of the study, reflecting on the data, emerging themes, and summary.

The Interpretive Paradigm

The focus of this study was the nature of the Catholic high school principalship in Alberta as perceived and experienced by the principals in the study. Understanding the complexity and the nuances of the Catholic principalship is a human endeavour. It requires a multi-faceted approach that takes into account a wide array of factors. It requires interpretation on the part of the researcher who attempts to "make meaning" as the research evolves and after it is complete. This study was firmly grounded in the interpretive paradigm, where the goal is to "understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). The interpretive paradigm is founded in the

ontological view that meaning is “socially constructed by individual interpretations of it.” At the heart of this belief is the understanding that “social phenomena exist in the interpretations we give to our experiences of the world” (Heyman, 2009, pp. 28-29).

In this study, the principals themselves interpreted their experiences. Subsequently, it became the researcher’s task to use the data to generate theory and a deeper understanding of that experience. As Cohen et al. have clearly stated:

[Interpretive researchers] begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. Theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations; it should be ‘grounded’ in data generated by the research act. Theory should not precede research but follow it. Investigators work directly with experience and understanding to build their theory on them. The data thus yielded will include the meanings and purposes of those people who are their source. Further, the theory so generated must make sense to those to whom it applies. (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 22)

Role of the Researcher

This study has its roots in qualitative methodologies. Stake (1995) reminded us that “good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking” (p. 19). By its very nature, qualitative research is subjective and this subjectivity on the part of the researcher is “not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (p. 45). As a Catholic high school principal, my own understandings and experiences impacted my work within the study and with the data. This “subjectivity” is an essential element of my own understanding and most undoubtedly, played a role in the interpretations I share.

Having been a Catholic high school principal myself for the past 17 years, I bring an undeniable perspective to the research. In recruiting principals for the study, my own vocation as fellow principal may have encouraged them to trust and engage with me. I believe that this credibility allowed me to build rapport with participants in the study. I also believe that my own position as principal allowed me to build an “intimate reciprocity” (Rapley, 2007, p. 26) with participants. Despite my obvious subjectivity, I made every attempt to speak little and influence minimally. I chose to take a more passive role and to be facilitative in nature. In coding the data it would be reasonable to presume that again, my perspective has influenced my understanding and my interpretation of the data. It is my desire to present as authentic a picture of the Catholic principalship as possible, taking into account the fact that I am operating as an embedded principal throughout this process.

Design of the Study

This study evolved over the course of three phases, with each phase establishing the groundwork for the next phase. Appropriate consents were sought and approved through the Conjoint Research Ethics Board and local school district ethics boards. Prior to phase one, a survey was designed to explore the wide range of characteristics endemic to the Catholic high school principalship. Once the survey was generated it was pilot tested with two Catholic school principals, one male and one female. These two principals were approached and asked to take the survey and then provide feedback to the researcher. Both agreed and both made suggestions that tightened the process and clarified the questions being asked. Following revisions, the survey was finalized and was ready to be shared across the province.

Phase I: Survey

With a “pre-tested” survey in hand, the next step was to receive approval to administer the survey and do research with principals in each of the 16 Catholic school districts. Permission from each superintendent was therefore required. The researcher contacted each superintendent by email and outlined the purpose and process of the research. Thirteen of the 16 superintendents provided permission for research to proceed in their school district. Once this permission was received, invitations and a link to the online survey were sent to each high school principal in the approved district.

Phase II: Focus Groups

As contact was made with Catholic high school principals through email and surveys, individual principals were approached and asked to consider hosting a focus group in their district. In total, nine districts were asked to host focus groups. Six principals said yes to the request; resulting in six district focus groups throughout the province. In all cases, the focus group was organized by a hosting principal in cooperation with the researcher. Superintendents were not involved.

Focus group questions were generated from the emerging issues identified in analysis of the surveys. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from two principals to seven. The length of each focus group ranged from one and a half to two hours. In all cases the focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The focus group data was synthesized, analysed, and coded. Emerging topics were articulated and used in the third phase of the research, which were interviews.

Phase III: Interviews

Phase III of the research involved individual interviews with two Catholic school principals, one male and one female, from each of the six focus groups. Only four of the districts included female principals at the high school level. Of the four potential female candidates, three were able to conduct an interview. As a result, three female and six male interviews were held. Interviewees were selected by the researcher based on their availability, openness, and interest in the topic. Each interview was held at the convenience of the interviewee and all, but one, took place at the principal's school. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a paid professional transcriber bound by a confidentiality agreement.

Data Collection

Data collection refers to the methods used to gather evidence. Qualitative methodology was employed throughout this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). They have gone on to explain that:

...qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Whether asking Catholic principals to describe the nature of their roles and responsibilities through survey, interview, or focus group, the researcher attempted to

“make sense of” the “phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” In this study, qualitative methods of survey, focus groups, and interviews were employed.

Survey

A survey is a “form of interviewing” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 648) and is a quick, relatively inexpensive, and accurate way to get required information (Alreck & Settle, 1995). This study used a survey to begin the exploration of the many aspects of Catholic school leadership. Data generated by the survey was used to refine and define further research questions for the purposes of this study. The survey set the stage for the focus groups and interviews to follow.

Surveys can be designed to capture information in a broad spectrum of topics. Alreck and Settle (1995) identified eight basic categories: attitudes, images, decision, needs, behaviour, lifestyle, affiliations, and demographics. Questions on the survey are, of course, “the most essential component” if the surveys are to be reliable and valid (p. 87). As explained in the study design, the survey was pilot tested with two principals prior to its release to the larger population of principals. This “field testing” informed the survey design and allowed for refinements and revisions to take place. The questions for the survey were initially generated from a close examination of the literature on the Catholic school principal.

Focus Groups

Focus groups or group interviews are “essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 651). Focus groups generate data from the

interaction of the group....Their contrived nature is both their strength and their weakness: they are unnatural settings yet they are very focused on particular issues and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview. (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 376)

Focus groups provide “extraordinarily rich” data (Macnaghten & Myers, 2007, p. 77). Donlevy (2003), in his study of non-Catholic students and their inclusion in Catholic schools, recognized the communal nature of Catholic schools and, therefore, chose focus groups as the primary means for collecting data. Bringing students and teachers together “within a group” seemed a reasonable way to replicate the communal experiences of the school. “Isolated interviews might have produced individual experiences and meanings. However, those same experiences and meanings when expressed in a group setting could reasonably have been expected to spark...the memories of others in recalling their experiences and how they viewed them” (p. 59).

Madriz (2000) used focus groups in her feminist research work. She found that focus groups not only provided the researcher with individual opinions, viewpoints, attitudes, and experiences, but also with the added value of “collective life stories” (p. 840). This sharing created socially constructed, interactional experiences that facilitated the social construction of meaning.

Focus groups bring both vertical interaction and horizontal interaction into play. The communication among group participants often decreases the amount of interaction between the facilitator and the individual members of the group. This gives more weight to the participants’ opinions, decreasing the influence the researcher has in the interview process.

Focus groups open possibilities of listening to the plural voices of others and the creation of new meanings. Interactions between participants is a vital component.

....Precedence is given to participants' hierarchies of importance, their own words and language and the frameworks they use to describe their own experiences...the interaction among participants leads to the gathering of high quality data.

(Madriz, 2000, pp. 840-841)

Fern (2001) identified three types of focus groups: exploratory, experiential, and clinical. This study falls into the category of experiential focus groups. Experiential focus groups share thoughts, feelings, and behaviours as members of a particular culture, race or ethnic group, community, or familial group. Experiential tasks differ from the clinical by their focus on "the consciousness and commonness of the experience" and can be distinguished from the exploratory by the fact that their power "lies in knowing that each focus group respondent not only speaks for himself or herself but also for the primary groups with which he or she shares everyday knowledge" (p. 173).

Within the broader category of the experiential focus group, four applied tasks are identified. They are: sharing, eliciting, understanding, and evaluating. Focus groups within the context of this study allowed participants the opportunity to share their life experiences and their attitudes, feelings, behaviours, and intentions as Catholic high school principals.

Interviews

Interviewing is "one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). Interviews create data generated "between humans" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 349) and allow knowledge to be

constructed. In this research study, interviews with Catholic high school principals played a significant role. In an attempt to understand the principalship in its complexity and in its nuances, it was critical to explore the character, thoughts, and behaviours of the principal. A combination of structured and unstructured interview formats was used. Initial queries that explored the research questions began the interview. The interviewing process then evolved into more specific questions and a more intimate conversation.

Rapley (2007) suggested that interviews are collaboratively produced but “reflexively situated in the wider cultural arena” (p. 16). Therefore, it is essential for the interviewer to have a thorough understanding of the context for the Catholic high school principal. Initial questions were developed to stimulate the interview process. As salient points were raised the interviewer followed with impromptu questions that delved further into the topic at hand.

Two key concepts regarding interview protocol are rapport and neutrality. Rapport refers to the interviewer’s ability to establish a relationship with the interviewees. Positive rapport helps the interviewee feel comfortable and be more willing to talk (Rapley, 2007). Neutrality is a more controversial topic in the field of interview practice. Some would contend that it is an essential practice if the interviewer is to prevent “contamination” of the data. Others would argue that a neutral interviewer treats the interviewee as an “object’ and thus discourages honest, human disclosure.

For the purpose of this study, the interviewer must be considered non-neutral, operating on the belief that a “cooperative, engaged relationship—centered on mutual self-disclosure—can encourage ‘deep disclosure’” (Rapley, 2007, p. 19). Co-construction is both unavoidable and necessary. Current literature on interviewing

suggests that the interviewer and interviewee tell a story together and are involved in cooperative self-disclosure or an “intimate reciprocity.” “An interviewer may choose to produce themselves through their talk and other actions as more ‘passive’ (facilitative and neutral) or more ‘active’ (facilitative and self-disclosing, collaborative, active, reflexive, or adversarial)” (Rapley, 2007, p. 26). The interviewer in this study chose a more passive, therefore more neutral and facilitative means of leading the interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to what is done with the data generated through survey, focus groups, and interviews. In this study, data analysis was conducted according to grounded theory principles.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory uses data to generate theory. This methodology was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Thirty years later, Glaser, in his 1998 treatise, *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions* reminded us that “all is data” (p. 8). The rigor of grounded theory is stringent when “interpretations of hypotheses are constantly checked by the constant comparative method” (p. 11). Although Glaser stated that “well done grounded theory justifies itself” (p. 19), he also identified four criteria for judging and doing grounded theory: fit, workability, relevance, and modifiability.

Since its original inception, grounded theory methodology has evolved and separated into different interpretations. Dey (2007) identified four basic elements of grounded theory. First, the researcher needs to have disposition to discover ideas in data without imposing preconceptions. “Grounded theory was conceived as a way of

generating theory through research data rather than testing ideas formulated in advance of data collection and analysis” (p. 80). Secondly, the process of generating ideas requires an innovative approach to data selection. Thirdly, grounded theory relies on qualitative data gathered through a variety of methods. And lastly, the process of analyzing the data centers on “coding data into categories for the purpose of comparison” (p. 80).

Grounded theory and qualitative research.

This study made use of qualitative methodology such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Grounded theory provided an excellent framework for the analysis of the data generated by these methods. Grounded theory fits well into the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research. Based on generally qualitative methods, grounded theory seeks to “portray moments in time....Hence a grounded theorist – or, more broadly, a qualitative researcher – constructs a picture that draws from, reassembles, and renders subjects’ lives. The product is more like a painting than a photograph” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522).

Constructivist grounded theory.

This study approached the data analysis from a constructivist grounded theory stance. Introduced primarily by Charmaz (2000), constructivist grounded theory uses methods derived from interpretive approaches. Constructivist grounded theory believes in studying a situation and the people within it in a natural setting and moves the grounded theory method into the realm of social science with an “emphasis on meaning.” A constructivist point of view recognizes the “interactive nature of both data collection and analysis” and “fosters the development of qualitative traditions through the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (p. 522).

[Constructivist grounded theory] recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. Researcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it. The viewer then is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it. What the viewer sees shapes what he or she will define, measure, and analyze. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524)

The constructivist approach to grounded theory made sense in this research setting. In exploring the nature of the Catholic high school principalship, it was critical to make meaning on the part of the participants and on the part of the researcher. This required going beneath surface meanings or “presumed meanings” to look for “views and values as well as for acts and facts”. Charmaz suggested that a constructivist approach “necessitates a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their terms” (p. 525).

Grounded theory strategies.

Grounded theory offered clear guidelines and solid frameworks for data analysis. Grounded theorists code emerging data as it is collected. Coding allows the researcher to begin to define and categorize. Data is interpreted and questions posed while coding. Coding allows a new perspective to emerge which in turn focuses further data collection and may lead in unforeseen directions. The researcher’s interpretations shape these emerging codes.

Grounded theory strategies “include (a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) two step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed

at the construction of conceptual analysis, (e) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework" (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 510-511).

Coding data.

Coding is an important component of grounded theory. Data is coded early and as it emerges. Coding proceeds as the researcher "develops concepts and makes connections between them" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 492). Dey (2007) suggested that:

When we categorize, we compare like with like, like with unlike. Comparison is at the core of grounded theory, whether comparing bits of data to generate categories, or comparing categories in order to generate connections between them...comparison is a vital tool in identifying, classifying and ordering data. (p. 88)

The procedures for grounded theory set out a framework for conducting systematic data analysis and coding. Initial or open coding explores the data and identifies units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions and events. Open coding "offers a method of generating ideas by close and detailed inspection of the data" (Dey, 2007, p. 84). Line by line coding examines each line of data and defines actions or events within it. This form of coding keeps the researcher attuned to the subjects' views of their realities and sharpens "those background ideas that inform the overall research problem" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515).

Axial coding makes links between the codes and categories and looks for interconnectedness. This type of coding is aimed at making connections between a category and its subcategories that include "conditions that give rise to the category, its

context, the social interactions through which it is handled, and its consequences” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 516).

Selective coding deepens and enriches “the analysis, while also forming a framework around which to weave a ‘story-line’ that conveys its central import” (Dey, 2007, p. 85). The process of coding allows the researcher to develop concepts and make connections between them. “Data cannot be apprehended as data except through some sort of conceptualization; and concepts themselves – no matter how abstract – have to have some sort of grounding, however derivative, in data to which they refer” (Dey, 2007, p. 87).

Memo writing.

Memo writing was described by Charmaz (2006) as a “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p. 72). Memo writing is a critical technique that challenges the researcher to analyze data and codes early in the research process. A memo records the researcher’s “stages of analytic development” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). The practice of memo writing allows the researcher to grapple with ideas and set an analytic course while defining relationships between categories.

Glaser (1998) cautioned against forcing the memo’s content, which can, in turn, “stifle emergence” (p. 179). A memo is, simply, “whatever the writing happens to be at the moment to capture an idea so it is not lost...memos are simply an ideational and conceptual production that comes to mind during coding, collecting, analyzing, and theoretically sampling data: period” (p. 180).

Theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling requires that data be collected “on an ongoing, iterative basis and the researcher keeps on adding to the sample until there is enough data to describe what is going on in the context or situation under study and until ‘theoretical saturation’ is reached” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 492). Charmaz (2000) made the important distinction, however, that theoretical sampling “is aimed at refining ideas” not at increasing the “size of the original sample” (p. 519).

Theoretical sampling is a pivotal part of the development of formal theory....The necessity of engaging in theoretical sampling means that we researchers cannot produce a solid grounded theory through one-shot interviewing in a single data collection phase. Instead, theoretical sampling demands that we have completed the work of comparing data with data and have developed a provisional set of relevant categories for explaining our data. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 519)

Qualitative Validity

Although “validity is the touchstone of all types of educational research” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 134), the construct of validity originates in the positivist paradigm and needs to be redefined, indeed re-thought in the context of the interpretive paradigm. “Qualitative researchers need to be cautious not to be working within the agenda of the positivists in arguing for the need for research to demonstrate concurrent, predictive, convergent, criterion related, internal, and external validity” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 134).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that we look at “validity as authenticity” (p. 180). Glaser (1998) referred to the term “fit” as one of “validity” (p. 140). In this qualitative study every attempt to seek validity in a qualitative sense was made

throughout this research. Authenticity, in the case of this research, was enhanced by the researcher constantly reflecting on the process, the data, and the words shared by participants. By transcribing each focus group myself, hours were spent immersed in the conversations of the principals. By repeating the focus group process over and over for a total of six times, it became clear when certain insights “rang true.” The authentic nature of the principals, and their sincere commitment to the process enhanced the validity of this study as well.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the fact that researchers, themselves, are research tools and are “inescapably part of the social world that they are researching” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 170). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as research, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 183).

Researchers are in the world and of the world. They bring their own biographies to the research situation and participants behave in particular ways in their presence. Reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research, seeking to understand their part in or influence on, the research. (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 171)

Reflexivity was a significant component of this study. As a current Catholic high school principal, the researcher was very much situated in the same context and experiencing a similar daily work situation as the participants in this study.

This study has been a journey, both in a personal and professional manner. As a principal, the conversations shared in this data were very close to my heart, my life. As I journeyed with colleagues across the province certain values and truths that I held were

reinforced. Conversely, certain perspectives that I had previously embraced were challenged. This was the most exciting aspect of the research; to hear stories that resonated and yet, to hear stories that took me well beyond my own limited understandings and experiences as a Catholic high school principal.

Qualitative Reliability

The appropriateness of using the term “reliability” in qualitative research has been soundly contested. A number of more suitable terms have been suggested. The most appreciated among them being “dependability” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 148).

Dependability involves “member checks, debriefing peers, triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, reflexive journals, negative case analysis, and independent audits” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 149).

Reliability was sought throughout the study. In the focus groups all members were emailed a transcript of the conversation held. They were encouraged to read, reflect, and provide feedback regarding any concerns or further insights. No principals responded. Triangulation occurred due to the multi-faceted approach to this research. By using survey, focus group, and interview methods, opportunities to measure emerging themes from one methodology against emerging themes from another was available. Inconsistencies did appear. Strong threads of meaning, as well, were present.

Evolution of the Study: Phases

Within this province, 99 Catholic high schools serve a total of 32,467 students in grades 10-12. Catholic high schools educate 20% of all high school students in Alberta. Governing these schools are sixteen Separate School Authorities tasked with serving the needs of students across the province, north to south and urban to rural.

The data emerging from this study moved from a broad survey, to narrower discussions, to individual conversations. Thirty-eight principals across the province responded to the survey; 23 principals participated in the focus groups; and nine principals committed to one on one interviews. As a result, the data that emerged has both breadth and depth. The design of the study allowed the researcher to “drill down” on themes that emerged from each phase of the data gathering. This allowed a thorough exploration of a wealth of Catholic leadership topics and issues. This section of the chapter will detail all aspects of Phase 1, 2, and 3 of this study by presenting the process of data gathering for each phase, the context (including a description of the participants in this phase), and the questions guiding the particular phase of the research.

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of Catholic high school principals through three data gathering phases: survey, focus groups, and interviews.

Phase One: Survey

Process.

The survey was developed following a pilot phase with two high school principals: male and female and administered on-line through Survey Monkey. After contacting all 16 superintendents in the province to seek permission to conduct research in their school district, 13 approvals were received, creating a potential of 89 principals who could choose to respond to the survey. Within each approved school district, the researcher, through email, then made contact to the principal of each high school requesting their participation in the on-line survey. The survey was available on-line over the course of three months. A 43% response rate was achieved with 38 of the 89 principals responding.

Context.

Of the 38 principal respondents on the survey, the following demographic information was presented: 79% were male and 50% were more than 50 years old. 61% of the respondents had only ever worked in the Catholic system. 84% were born and raised Catholic. All respondents had at least 10 years experience as educators and 21% had more than 30 years experience. 68% of respondents' highest earned degree was a master's degree. The majority, 71% had only worked in the Alberta education system. 45% of the principals had been a principal in a school of over 500 students, with the majority (47%) as principals of schools between of 200-500.

Questions.

The research questions for this study were designed to fully investigate the nature of the principalship in Alberta's Catholic high schools through the experiences and perceptions of the principals. Survey questions began the exploration of this topic. Twelve open-ended questions were posed to principals through the on-line survey and were designed to elicit divergent responses:

1. How would you describe your work? Vocation, career, or other? Please elaborate.
2. What are the most significant challenges or tensions you face as a Catholic high school principal?
3. How would you describe your leadership?
4. What are your strengths as a leader?
5. What is your perception of your leadership role within the faith life of your school?

6. What is your understanding of “community” within the context of your school?
7. Are there some central values that unite your school community? If so, how are these values present in your school?
8. Identify key elements of your school’s culture.
9. What do you believe about relationships in a Catholic school?
10. As a Catholic high school principal, what commonalities do you have with school principals in non-Catholic schools?
11. As a Catholic high school principal, what makes your work different than that of a non-Catholic high school principal?
12. What are some of the biggest challenges facing Alberta’s Catholic school principals?

Data from the surveys was compiled and coded. Analysis of the survey responses led to the generation of another set of questions for the focus group.

Phase Two: The Focus Groups

Process.

Once the survey phase was underway, the researcher began to make contact with various principals to seek hosts for the next phase of data gathering; focus groups. Nine separate school district principals were contacted and of those nine, six agreed to facilitate a focus group in their district. Hosting principals were asked to contact their colleagues and invite them to the focus group. Principals were also asked to choose a convenient date and location. The researcher travelled in all cases to the site selected by the principals. Five of the districts made decisions to host the focus groups in conjunction with a district meeting or professional development event to limit the amount

of travelling principals would need to do. One focus group convened on a Friday afternoon at a local high school. Each focus group met for 90-120 minutes. All conversations were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

Context.

The focus groups were a critical mix of rural and urban; male and female; experienced and novice. Twenty three principal participants took part. The majority of the principals represented traditional schools. Five principals were principals in a virtual and/or outreach setting. The principals’ high school enrolments ranged from sixty students to fifteen hundred students. Three of the principals led schools of over 1,000 students.

The participants’ experience as principals ranged from 1 to 28 years. In terms of their faith background, 19 of the principals were born Catholic and 4 were converts to the Catholic faith as adults.

Table 3.1. Focus Groups by School District

		# of High Schools	Male Principals	Female Principals	Smallest High School	Largest High School
Focus Group A	Urban/Rural	8	6	2	60	860
Focus Group B	Large Urban	14	6	8	80	1500
Focus Group C	Urban/Rural	5	4	1	60	660
Focus Group D	Urban/Rural	4	4	0	60	700

Focus Group E	Urban/Rural	4	1	3	120	1400
Focus Group F	Rural	4	4	0	80	110

Focus group A.

Described as an urban/ rural Catholic board, this school district had 8 high schools. One large urban high school and seven smaller rural high schools made up this district. Included as well were an Outreach school; virtual schooling and a mixture of 7-12 and K-12 arrangements. All eight principals were present for the focus group. Principals' experience ranged from 2 years to 16 years as principals. Of the 8 principals, 3 were Catholic converts.

Focus group B.

Described as a large urban board, this school district had 14 high schools ranging in size from 80 to 1,500 students. Five principals attended this focus group. Principals' experience ranged from 11-28 years as principals. All principals in the focus group were Catholic from birth.

Focus group C.

Described as a medium urban/rural Catholic board, this school district had five high schools. Three principal participants were in the focus group. Schools ranged in size from 60-600 students. Outreach and traditional school principals were present.

Principals' experience in the principalship ranged from 4 to 15 years. All principals in the focus group were Catholic from birth.

Focus group D.

This district was an urban/rural board. Three principals were in the focus group. Schools ranged in size from 60-700 students. A mixture of 10-12, 7-12, and K-12 arrangements were present. Two of the principals were in their first year as a principal. The third principal had 11 years experience. All principals were born Catholic. There were no female high school principals in this district.

Focus group E.

This district was an urban/rural board with three high schools ranging in population from 120-1,400. Both outreach and virtual school principals were present. Two principals were available for the focus group, one male with 14 years experience and one female with 3 years experience. One principal was born and raised Catholic. The other was a Catholic convert.

Focus group F.

This district was primarily rural with three high schools, ranging in size from 80-110. Two principals were available for the focus group. They had been principals for four and three years respectively. Both were born and raised Catholic. No female high school principals existed in this district.

Questions.

Analysis of the survey responses led to the generation of a new set of questions for the focus group. Emerging themes had been identified and were then refined into more probing questions. The focus question for each group was:

1. Given that Catholic schools are unique and distinct from their public school counterparts; in what ways are the roles and responsibilities of the Catholic principals who lead those schools unique and distinct?

The following subsequent questions were then used to initiate the focus group discussions:

1. How is your Catholic school unique and distinct?
2. How is your role as a Catholic school principal unique and distinct?
3. Do you agree that the principal has “prime accountability for the school to be demonstrably Catholic” (Wallace, 2000)? If yes, how? If no, why not?
4. George Weigel speaks of a Catholic “way of seeing the world”. This could be called the Catholic paradigm. Do you believe there is a “Catholic way of knowing”? Why or why not?
5. Is there a style of leadership particularly suited to the Catholic principalship? Please describe it.
6. Describe Catholic school community.
7. What are your biggest challenges as a Catholic school principal in Alberta?
8. What might we have missed in this conversation which you believe is important to understanding the nature of the Catholic school principalship?

Phase Three: Interviews

Process.

This phase of the study was constructed to interview one male and one female principal from each of the six focus groups. The potential number of interviewees was

twelve. All six male principals agreed to be interviewed. Only four possible female principals were eligible, due to the fact that two districts had no high school female principals. Of the four, only three were able to meet with the researcher. The total number of interviews held was nine.

Principals were selected for the interview process by the researcher based on their enthusiasm for the study, their insights during the focus groups, their openness to further research, and their availability. In all but one case the researcher travelled to the principal’s home school to conduct the interview. In one instance the interviewer and interviewee met at a provincial conference to conduct the interview. The interviews lasted, on average, about an hour.

The Context.

Of the nine principals, only one was a convert to the Catholic faith. Of the nine principals, only one was new to the job during the year of this study. The principals’ years of experience ranged from 1 to 28 years. Two of the principals were principals in the same school they began their teaching careers in. The principals led schools that ranged in size from 90-1,500 students and were located across the province from small rural communities to large, urban centers. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity for participants.

Table 3.2. Description of Interview Participants

	Faith	Years as Principal	Size of High School
David	Catholic	2	160
Olivia	Catholic	3	800
John	Catholic	28	1500

Nancy	Catholic	18	550
Daniel	Catholic	10	630
Rhonda	Catholic	15	630
Neil	Catholic	1	90
Karl	Converted	14	1400
Benjamin	Catholic	3	90

David was in his second year as principal of a 7-12 school in a rural community. With more than 16 years experience as an educator, he was born and raised Catholic. After taking his master’s degree and getting involved “in big picture” thinking he began to consider administration. After a few years of the vice-principalship he was ready to bring his own vision to fruition. A pivotal vocational moment came for him when he became heavily involved in creating a service club for students at his school. He found the experience to be transformational for his students and, subsequently, for himself.

Olivia was a third year principal in a large urban high school of 800 students. Olivia was a cradle Catholic who never missed mass and felt that she was particularly suited to the administrative role because of her skill set. She was active in her own parish but believed that her faith was shown in the “nitty gritty” of everyday. She has completed her master’s degree and has more than 16 years of educational experience.

John was the “senior” administrator interviewed with more than 28 years of experience as principal with a large urban board. He was currently principal of a school of 1,500 students. Born and raised Catholic, John felt a calling to the principalship when he began to see God in the faces of the kids and families he was working with; especially those who were struggling. He had been a principal of elementary and K-9 schools as well.

Nancy has been teaching for 32 years and been a principal for 18. She has recently been in the high school and was currently in her fourth year at her present school of 550 students. Born and raised Catholic, Nancy felt her call to leadership came when she felt she needed to make a difference.

Daniel was born and raised Catholic and has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. His teaching experience included eight years overseas and he had been a principal for ten years. He had been at his current high school of 630 students for four years. His roots go deep into this community, having grown up from elementary school with his colleagues.

Rhonda had been an administrator for 15 years and held a master's degree in educational leadership and administration. She had been at her current school of 630 students for four years. She wanted to make a difference and felt called to administration. As a cradle Catholic she recognized that her Catholicity was part of who she was and that she needed to share her faith with others.

Neil was in his first year as principal of a 6-12 school in rural Alberta. The population of his high school was 90 students. Working in a rural community provided additional challenges regarding parish involvement as he continued to live in a nearby city. Born as a Catholic he returned to the practice of his faith as an adult. Neil held a master's degree.

Karl was the only converted Catholic principal that was interviewed, and was active and passionate about his faith as an adult. Having just taken on the principalship of a large high school of 1500 students, Karl brought 14 years of principal experience to

the new task. He had taught every grade from K-12 and had been a principal in a virtual school as well. He held a master's degree.

Benjamin was the principal of small new rural high school of 90 students. This was his third year as principal after being a teacher in the same school for more than 20 years. Benjamin was raised Catholic, attended a Benedictine seminary for junior high and was a religious brother for about five years.

Questions.

Questions for the interviews emerged from the data of the focus groups. They were a combination of structured and unstructured questions. They were designed to be flexible and to allow for the interviewer to respond to the conversation as needed. The questions posed were:

1. When did you know that you wanted to be a principal? How did that come about? Was there a vocational aspect?
2. What leadership qualities do you possess that have had the biggest impact on your work as a Catholic principal?
3. The following themes have emerged from the focus groups. Please respond, from your own experiences, to the following:
 - Sense of freedom in a Catholic school
 - Aspects of care; of love; of hope and forgiveness
 - Covenantal communities
 - Having faith means having faith in others
 - The scars of leadership; wounds of caring too much

- Intentional routines or strategies that support you as a principal
- Intentional modelling
- Threats to Catholic education

Reflecting on the Data

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the nature of the Catholic high school principalship in Alberta from the perspectives of Alberta's Catholic high school principals within the context of the expectations, understandings, and beliefs currently at play in the academic, institutional (both governmental and religious), and political milieu of today.

This study was able to hear the voices of Alberta's Catholic high school principals in significant ways. With 38% of the province's principals responding to the initial survey, 23% of them participating in focus group discussions and 9% of them providing in-depth insights through one on-one-one interviews, a broad, varied, and comprehensive picture began to take shape. The nature of the study, as well, was structured to elicit open-ended responses that allowed principals to speak from their own understanding and their own experiences. Other than the prompting questions of the researcher, principals' voices were given free range and encouragement.

The data emerging from this study moved from a broad survey, to narrower discussions, to individual conversations. The design of the study allowed the researcher to investigate themes that emerged from each phase of the data gathering. This supported a thorough exploration of a wealth of Catholic leadership topics and issues.

The design of this study was effective in that it reached a large sampling of Catholic high school principals. The qualitative aspect of this research was effective as well, as it allowed the principals' latitude to engage and respond without restrictions that would harness their ideas and responses.

Additionally, by using surveys, focus groups, and interviews as research methodologies this research was enriched. The mixed techniques provided many advantages and were an excellent means to "flesh out" the research questions.

Positives

By using the survey in the first phase of the research, a broad sampling of most of the province's Catholic principals was allowed. Of the province's 99 principals 89 were approved to participate in the study by their superintendents. Of the 89 potential responses, 38 responded, providing a response rate of 43%. This high number of responses was not only encouraging, but also showed that Catholic principals welcomed the opportunity to have their voices heard. Despite the overwhelming nature of their work, they made time to respond to the survey and share their perspectives. The open-ended nature of the survey could very well have been a deterrent to some, as it took time, energy, and thoughtfulness on their part. Answering questions that required more than a simple true or false or multiple choice answer required the principals to set time apart to think and write. Despite this structure, 43% decided it was worth the effort and that, in itself, speaks to dedication of these principals and the value they placed in this research.

The questions posed were specifically designed to elicit broad responses. Subsequently not all principals answered the questions in the same way. Different interpretations of some of the questions occurred. This was not problematic. In fact, it

enriched the process of the survey as it served to show the divergent elements involved in the question and highlighted the spectrum of responses that principals made.

The Themes Emerge

A significant amount of data was generated throughout this study. Recorded focus groups and interviews were transcribed. More than 500 pages of data was read and reread in search of emerging themes. Using a grounded theory methodology, data were coded and themes identified.

Understanding the complexity and the nuances of the Catholic principalship is a human endeavour and this study has been conducted using qualitative techniques within the interpretive paradigm. A thorough examination of the data has allowed a number of critical themes to emerge. The following chapter will present the study's findings and brings together interview, focus group, and survey as its source of information. Six broad themes have been identified from this study's data: Called, Entrusted, Gathered, Liberated, Challenged, and Appointed. Within each of the six themes sub themes arise that bear closer examination as well.

Summary

This study is titled: *The Nature of the Catholic High School Principalship in Alberta: Principals' Experiences and Perceptions* and is a qualitative study situated in the interpretive paradigm. Through the use of a survey, focus groups, and interviews, the reality of being a Catholic high school principal in Alberta has been closely examined and deeply explored.

Chapter Four

This study was conducted over a period of nine months with a total number of 49 Catholic high school principals in Alberta. Four of those principals participated in all three levels of the data gathering: interview, focus group, and survey. Nine participated in both interviews and focus groups. Thirteen were involved in focus group and survey. Twenty-six completed the survey alone. This chapter will present the data that emerged from these surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Due to the nature of the study, both breadth (survey) and depth (interviews) were accounted for. The design of this study allowed the researcher to “drill down” on themes that emerged from each phase of the data gathering. This allowed a thorough exploration of a wealth of Catholic leadership topics and issues.

The data generated totals more than 41 hours of reflection and/or conversation. Through a close reading of the data and use of grounded theory methodology, a number of relevant themes emerged. The picture that was revealed through this process allowed for an enhanced understanding of the high school Catholic principalship in Alberta.

Six large themes and a number of sub-themes organize the data in this chapter. The six encompassing themes are: called, entrusted, gathered, liberated, challenged, and appointed.

Called: the vocation of the principal

I certainly view my role as an educator and as an educational leader as a vocation... When the expectation is for faith to permeate a Catholic school, it is

true of all aspects of teaching and leadership... While tasks that fall into the inspirational leadership are an easy fit with the vocational, even budgetary decisions become infused with and influenced by our calling. (Respondent #22)

Without doubt and without hesitation, Catholic principals believed that they have been called to their work as educators and as leaders. Their discussion of the word “vocation” highlighted a sense that this was a path intended for them by God. Early on that path their own principals or friends “planted the seed” of leadership. Choices were placed before them that opened doors. Educational opportunities broadened their outlook. They met colleagues along the way that were mentors, guides, and supporters. Many described feeling God’s hand at work throughout the process. Others became aware of their calling as they looked back over the years and reflected on their careers and lives. God’s presence was evident to them in that reflection. Vocation was “God’s plan for my life” (Respondent #19).

Although Neil attended Catholic schools growing up, his mom was a single mom and her work schedule on Sundays kept the family from attending church. Neil began his teaching career in the public system and had every intention of remaining there until, suddenly, there “was a shuffle,” a new principal and he was “out of a job.” He had already put down roots in his new community with his young family and had started attending church. As he was looking for another job in the public system, by chance, the principal of the Catholic high school ended up interviewing him. At the same time, Neil also had an opportunity to take a job at a public junior high school. As he considered his options, the Catholic school came through with a full time assignment that was just what

Neil was looking for. He accepted the job. He still remembers his first time back in a Catholic school.

I'd almost sort of forgotten about that...the first day when prayer came on I stopped...did the sign of the cross, went through the prayer, and I said to another teacher, it's been a long time since I've prayed in a school...I think those seeds were always there, but definitely I felt like I got called back, and there's no question...I had already come back to the church, then there was this other element of being in a Catholic school. (Neil, pp. 1-2)

As a Catholic, Neil felt he was more aware of his vocation and as he looked back on it he realized that he was being called and guided (Group D, p. 11). Neil was the most novice of the interviewed principals. John, on the other hand, was the most senior administrator. His story had a curious similarity to Neil's. John's words explored the yearning he felt to make a difference.

I wanted to become a principal, probably in my late 20s, um, you work in a few schools, and you just start to think to yourself, I'd kind of started to chomp at wanting to organize for myself...wanting to do things better or get down to the heart of the matter...Where did my calling come from? There's a relationship with God there. A relationship with Christ...I could start to see God in so many different places. In the faces of each one of the kids in the school. In the families that would come in to see me. At that point in time, there's some kind of a calling to purpose in life...I wanted to do something meaningful and worthwhile...[I felt God's hand] more and more each year. That's grown stronger over the years. (John, p. 4)

Nancy's calling became evident to her about eight years into her career. With a desire to contribute and set direction, she became an administrator. Now, with more than 18 years of administration experience she admits, "I feel extremely comfortable...I'm at home now" (Nancy, p. 1).

Although Benjamin had been a teacher at his current school for 20 years, he had only been its principal for the past three. When he was eventually hired to be principal he told his interviewing panel: "I'm not really here because I have a choice. I don't feel I have a choice. I'm here because I'm meant to be here" (Group F, p. 12). Benjamin believed that if Catholic administrators spent time reflecting on their lives, "they probably could easily see how they got to where they are...God was forming them along the way" (Group F, p. 12).

Throughout Focus Group E the conversation regarding vocation was passionate.

Karl It is a calling; a calling from God. It is. It's a deep-rooted aspect that you are fulfilling, your mission, your purpose of what you're doing. I truly believe it's a calling. It's a vocation. It's a religious vocation, because, I mean, we pray deeply...

Lynne Definitely not a job

Karl No (laughter)

Lynne Definitely not a job. You know, it's looking in the faces of teachers and the students and seeing the face of Christ in them. That takes a vocation. 'Cause some days I know you're in there,

God, (laughter). I know you're in there. I know you're in there.
Definitely a vocation. (Group E, p. 5)

Within the theme of "Called" are four sub-themes: sustained, inspired, anointed, and wounded.

Sustained: a sense of dedication

Throughout all aspects of the study, principals identified their work as vocational. The calling was unquestionable. Their sense of purpose was strong. As well, principals shared their belief that they were sustained in this work through an understanding that it was God's work. This understanding was a support during difficult times and sustenance through times of trial.

John There's a natural calling to this position that you either step up to or you don't...But if you don't feel some kind of a natural calling to Catholic leadership, it's too heavy, too heavy to do each day without it...

Arlene I think it is vocational. I think it is too hard of a job if you don't live it and believe it. It has to be who you are. Otherwise you're just going through the paperwork and the motions, policies; sure you need to know the paperwork; sure you need to know all that and you have to be able to do it instinctively and know the right answer, but it's your faith journey that directs you to the right answer...And you have to remember that the child's the center. I don't care if the child is 6 or 16, they're the center of why we're

here. And it's really our calling as a principal to make sure that happens and that the best education happens for everybody in the building. It's the teachers, the custodians, the students; we have a lot of responsibility. So if you truly don't believe in it and it truly is not who you are, it will be very tough. (Group B, p. 7)

Along with this calling came peace in knowing that all was as it should be. Daniel told the story of sneaking into the church to pray before accepting his current job. He described a sense of "spirituality," "peace," and "confidence." He relied a lot on his priest/mentor for guidance. He relied, as well, on the Holy Spirit. Daniel confirmed an absolute conviction that he was called to his current vocation (Daniel, p. 6-7).

Many principals suggested that with a sense of calling came the desire to dedicate oneself to the vocation of principal. Vocation was described as "energy giving as opposed to energy taking" (Group F, p. 17). Because of this powerful purpose, other more basic aspects of the job no longer mattered. Olivia believed that without the understanding of vocation, she would "never work this hard. Like, I never count my minutes. I don't count my time (to a detriment), but if it wasn't a calling, if it wasn't what I'm meant to do, I'd be punching a clock and going home every day at the same time" (Olivia, p. 3). Benjamin concurred with this perspective:

I think the main thing that it does is that it takes away the hands of the clock. I guess it's a way of justifying how we can, sort of neglect our own families...I'm being facetious a little bit, but basically it's a part of who we are. It's not something you can turn on or off a certain time. (Group F, p. 12)

For Karl, a sense of calling meant that his work was not based on financial income. His purpose was bigger than salary; making money less relevant.

If somebody said to me, Karl, we're going to reduce your wage by 5%, would you still do what you're doing? I'd go, yeah. We're going to reduce it by 10%?

Yeah. I don't know if you do it for the money. Money's great. I mean, you can't survive without it. But it's not the driver. It's not the driver for what you've got to do. (Karl, p. 13)

Consistently principals equated vocation with all aspects of their life. Career, school, home, and community became intermingled and inseparable.

I believe our work is a vocation because our role as administrators is an encompassing part of our lives and does not end when the day is over. We are called to grow in our faith and share our faith and faith is not something that can be compacted into the 8-5 work day. Building relationships with our parish is not done during the work day. It is done through our participation in the parish which is mostly outside the work day. (Respondent #31)

Inspired: a sense of mission

Principals identified mission as a primary component of their calling. Their personal mission was part and parcel of the mission of the Church, which was the shared mission of the school and school division as well. This understanding of mission inspired principals to go beyond what a job might require. As identified above, salary and personal time became secondary to the principals' call to mission and vocation.

I think there's a lack of God in the world, well, I know there's a lack of God in the world, so I...constantly say to the kids, you need to acknowledge that there's

something greater than yourselves, no matter where you are on the spectrum of Church. Once you come here...you're also going to know that there's something greater than you in the world...It is God, but to bring kids to a knowing and an understanding of that is absolutely vocational. (Olivia, p. 2-3)

Neil referred many times in discussions to the impact his Catholic school district's vision statement had for him personally. This scriptural message inspired him to care for God's children. He believed that when "you look at our vision statement...there's just that little extra something that makes it powerful. So that's another thing that I think makes it more of a vocation" (Neil, p. 3).

Anointed: a sense of excellence

For many principals, accountability was linked to vocation. These individuals believed that their lives had a purpose they had been destined to fulfill and, with that, they also had an obligation to do it well. With a higher sense of calling came a strong sense of anointment, ownership, and responsibility. Principals called to this work have been charged with a hefty responsibility. Rhonda believed that "we have lots of expectations...If the expectations aren't high, it's pretty easy to just give what is expected...You rise to the challenge...you know, we're teaching kids. There should be a lot of expectations" (Rhonda, p. 14). Karl added that because of "what we hold true inside", the principal needs to "make sure that everything we do here is done well" (Karl, p. 10). Daniel suggested that principals hold themselves "to a pretty high standard." He believed this is due to the understanding of a "higher calling because we're responsible for more than just their academic and social life." He identified a responsibility for students' spiritual life as well (p. 16).

High standards are part of calling and can be intimidating. One of the respondents who saw his principalship as a vocation reflected on it this way:

At times I wonder if I can meet the standard which I believe is required. Then I fall back on the idea that God does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called.

(Respondent #15)

Wounded: a sense of investment

In one of the focus groups, an interesting insight came to light and was later explored with the principals in their individual interviews. The discussion revolved around the woundedness of leadership and the eventual scars a Catholic principal must live with.

Most of the principals believed that Catholic administrators have a heavier responsibility to live the example of Christ. As a result, sometimes parents or other staff members would turn the “Catholic piece” against the principal at a perceived injustice and cry, “I thought you were a Catholic school.” Benjamin was one principal who felt the burden of these expectations.

Catholic education is, you take the scars, and some a little bit deeper than public school teachers because of the expectations of what it is that we’re meant to do. You know, we’re not just meant to go in and teach. We’re meant to go in and...be an instrument of...I mean, if we’re allowing Christ to work through us, there are going to be times where Christ is actually taking a lashing from those kids or parents or whatever and we’re just there in the middle. We’re the ones who will get the scars, right. And that’s part, and that’s reminder of the whole ministry of what we do. (Group F, p. 9)

In exploring the concept with Benjamin and others, it became clear that Catholic principals cared deeply. Relationships were central. Part and parcel of their vocation was the reality that there was often little separation between work and personal life. Principals lived their jobs and when that passion received scorn or criticism, it hurt. Olivia spoke of a time when she was “cruelly criticized in an email” and that it “absolutely” scarred her. She went on to explain:

If I didn't give a hoot and I didn't spend thirteen hours planning it, it wouldn't bother me...I love our students and they're Christ's gift to us, so things that wouldn't bother other schools hurt us very deeply. (Olivia, p. 10)

The veteran principal, John, knew exactly what Benjamin was talking about. He too had suffered the loss of “faith in humanity” through these encounters. But he added that “every one of those battles that I've gone through has helped me to become who I am. They have helped me to gain wisdom and have helped me to go back to God and say, hey, I need you” (John, p. 13).

In exploring his initial focus group statements in a one on one interview, Benjamin added that sometimes, as a leader, he saw the bigger picture and it caused him pain for somebody else. “You try to help, but there's no point to it. Like, it's not right and it's not ethical...Sometimes that can cause pain...for somebody else.” (Benjamin, p. 17). In the same focus group, Charles agreed that when a child doesn't succeed principals bear an “inner scar” because they don't want to see this happen; they don't want to give up on the child (Group F, p. 10).

The concept of “scars of leadership” did not always resonate with the other principals in the study.

We all have been wounded, but I also think that you cannot take this job personally...When someone disappoints you they're not trying to crap on you. I don't think we have a monopoly on woundedness as Catholics...This job, this career, this vocation has been a gift. I've received so much more from it than it has taken from me. So, I don't see woundedness as being part of the equation at all. (Rhonda, p. 13)

Neil had experienced the hurt of leadership, but also consciously worked not to let "people use our faith against us. A big part is forgiveness. I try not to let the wounds accumulate" (p. 15).

In response to the suggestion that principals have to not take their jobs so personally, Benjamin agreed, but suggested that "you have to be bit of a schizophrenic... you can't take anything personally" yet you still need to care immensely. "But it does hurt. I mean it does hurt" (Group F, p. 10).

Entrusted: the responsibilities of the Catholic principal

We're entrusted [with a]...big responsibility. It's really powerful. Something we're gifted to be able to do. To take care of for a little while. (David, p. 25)

Entrusted. A powerful word used by a Catholic high school principal in his attempt to describe the weight of his work. Within the word lies a sense of responsibility and a depth of conviction. Within the word lies the root word trust. Trusted by God; trusted by parents; trusted by the children and the Church. Trust implies that others are counting on you and that what you do matters. At stake are children, God's most precious gift.

Within the overarching theme of entrustment, critical aspects of the Catholic school principalship emerged. Using the words of principals, this section will explore the ramifications of “being entrusted.” A sense of responsibility for all aspects of Catholic education was clear. An interweaving of faith and learning made it impossible to separate the two. Five sub-themes emerged from this data: saved, committed, elevated, witness, and humbled.

Saved: the principal’s role in salvation

We always have to be aware [that], not only are we part of a moral institution, but we are in a leadership position... We have pressures. We are the salvific mission of the teacher. Not just graduation but salvation. It’s a huge opportunity but it’s a pressure at the same time. (Group A, p. 12)

Distinct to the language of Catholic schools and their principals is the concept of salvation. Separate school districts state this in their mission statements. Schools repeat the phrases in their own documents. Principals embrace this concept as central to their work in an evangelizing institution. Helping students reach their potential means encouraging students to fully embrace their life in this world and the next. As well, it means educating the whole child: physically, emotionally, academically, socially, and spiritually. Neil referred often to his motivation to help each child reach his or her potential. This explicit direction had been given to him through his school district’s vision. He referred to it as “a Catholic thing; cherishing those kids and helping them reach their potential. That is the biggest challenge for me” (Neil, p. 16).

Rhonda echoed many of the same sentiments regarding her desire for her students:

You want to do the best you can for the kids in your building. You want them to be successful in their studies and in their faith and in their inner happiness. You know, you want them to do well, so it's a big responsibility. (Group C, p. 8)

John brought wisdom to his focus group and interviews that laid bare the layers of Catholic leadership. His years of experience and his relationship with God combined to provide strong insights into the entrusting nature of the Catholic principalship.

I'm expected to be the calm in the middle of the storm. And there's so many things going on in education; things that can just happen in a school at any time... You have to stand there and be the calm in the middle of everything that's going on. And in two facets: we always are expected to represent Christ in that moment so that's the Catholic piece. I always have to try and bring in the piece and remember, what are my Catholic obligations to everybody? And the second piece is the educational wisdom. I chose to be a teacher, not a priest, so I'm expected to have educational wisdom there. (Group B, p.6)

John's focus on Christ was central to his discussions during the study. Over the years, his relationship with Jesus had grown and he was very firm on the call for principals to be Christ-like. Interestingly, John saw his own salvation as a prime reason for representing Christ. "It's about others, but it's about me as well. It's about my salvation; my development as a human being" (John, p. 10).

Christ stands as the model for Catholic principals and they referred frequently to Jesus in terms of His service and His leadership. Catholic principals felt an added responsibility for their work because of the values Christ represents: love, compassion, human dignity, and hope to mention a few.

I do hold myself to doing more, I guess. I am constantly reminding myself that I am, in terms of leadership, a servant, shepherd, steward. And that is something that is very much tied to your faith. To do what Christ taught us. I think we have some excellent examples of people who have, in our faith, taken some pretty strong stands but with humility, remembering human dignity and I look to those people as role models in terms of what I do in my practice. (Group D, p. 8)

Although Benjamin was a fairly new principal, he had years of experience as a teacher and vice-principal and a strong background in faith. He grew up in Catholic schools, attended a Benedictine seminary for most of his junior high and had a number of years' experience as a religious brother. Benjamin brought to the discussion a fresh perspective. He suggested that "in a Catholic school...you have an opportunity to add a page to the New Testament." This requires principals to make faith come alive in every interaction. Benjamin explained this concept as a "philosophy." "It's not what you do; it's who you are" (Group F, 7). As well, Benjamin found that he needed to pray each morning and reflect at the end of each day in order to be constantly aware and present.

It's much like when we leave Mass...You know, go and serve the Lord. It's not like we're leaving the Church and that's the end of it until next Sunday. We go and live what we believe and, by the very nature that we're Christian, we're carrying on the tradition of Christ, we're carrying on the tradition of the Church; we're carrying on really the Church, which is our Christian witness, so every minute we're alive, we're adding something to the New Testament...we're adding the story of our Christian Faith. (Benjamin, p. 12)

Committed: the principal as moral spokesman and gatekeeper

Principals consistently spoke of “who they are” in terms of their convictions which translated into moral leadership and their responsibilities in this area. Moral leadership required principals to have strong convictions and courage. Conversations regarding moral issues could often be difficult.

Sometimes you have to make moral decisions about faith...and it's about being able to say, no, I'm not going to compromise on this. This is why I exist as a school. I exist because it says St Jude's Catholic School, not St Jude's school. That gives me greater responsibility than just simply school. And that's not always very popular. (Group D, p. 14)

This moral responsibility translated into critical conversations with various constituents of the school, but most often teachers. The idea of morality was a difficult topic for principals to discuss and come to terms with. In Focus Group A, however, one principal provided an image that truly resonated with his colleagues.

I describe it as a circle. I say there's a common understanding of what it means to work in a Catholic school and you, as a Catholic, sometimes one of us will find ourselves outside of that circle. And you have my full support if you are outside of the circle if you're trying to get back into the circle...you're called on, as a principal, to make some judgments about behaviors of what's acceptable. I've been outside of the circle. I tell them. When I do, I try to get back in... (Group A, p. 8-9)

This “outside the circle” image made sense to principals. Critical to the image was the idea that members of the community were actively working to return to the

circle, that their moral growth was not stagnant and that, as Catholic teachers, there was a common understanding that this expectation needed to be fulfilled.

It's that intangible. We say we work with Catholic teachers. In some ways that makes it simple and in some ways it makes it complex. I'm not the only one who's worked with 'Yes, you're Catholic but how well are you practicing your faith?' This is not simple to address. (Group A, p. 8)

In Focus Group E, principals agreed that teachers had a responsibility to be authentic Catholics in their choices and lifestyle and that principals had the responsibility to engage teachers in a conversation that would hold them accountable. These "difficult conversations" were necessary for ensuring that a faithful Catholic culture existed in the school.

Karl A teacher's faith is a "condition of employment. It's why you were hired. And if you cannot live according to these conditions, then you need to make, you need to take a look at why you're here...Why are you teaching in a Catholic school? I don't understand...If faith isn't a big part of your life, why are you teaching in a faith based school?

Lynne Absolutely...It's a difficult conversation...

Karl Absolutely. That's my job. That's why I'm here. To make sure that everything gets filtered down to the students. (Group E, p. 14)

What was the ultimate goal of critical conversations and guidance for teachers? Again we return to the intention of Catholic education: "It's making followers and believers; making disciples of others" (Group E, p. 6).

Many principals referred to themselves as “gatekeepers.” This role for principals involved protecting the Catholic culture of the school and being true to its mission. This responsibility was “entrusted” to principals and they understood the gravity of the task. Within the context of gatekeeper, however, principals felt their role was not to judge, but to love and guide. As shared in Focus Group B: “You can always love the person and not necessarily like their actions. But they know you care about them” (Group B, p. 17).

When dealing in issues of morality and moral decision-making, it was critical for principals to feel secure in their sense of direction. A need for strong reflection and prayer was evident.

As a Catholic administrator you’re always checking and always rechecking motivation for what you’re doing. So you need to have a frame of reference from which to check that motivation. And I think, for most of us, it’s the life of Christ; it’s the Gospels. At least for me it is. I mean, I’m always, you know, always, cause you just want to make sure you’re doing due diligence. (Group F, p. 10)

Being “entrusted” provided principals with both privilege and responsibility to create a Catholic culture and to have impact on the lives of children and adults. In Focus Group F, participants embraced the opportunity this offered. They agreed that as principals they had the avenue to make things happen. It was a unique and exciting position to be in. In Benjamin’s words: “It just never ceases to amaze me [regarding] the potential we have to influence the lives of a lot of people. And with that comes a lot of responsibility. It’s kind of a cool place to be” (Group F, p. 22). Benjamin made his school’s faith life a very personal thing; something that he took seriously. “That’s probably one of the more serious things that I do” (Benjamin, p. 22).

Elevated: the principal's responsibility in ensuring high standards

Embodied in the responsibility of creating Catholic school culture came the directive from principals to ensure that high standards were enmeshed within the school as well. High standards referred to behavior and expectations in faith and learning for both adults and young people. Students, teachers, parents, and community responded to the challenge placed before them. Lynne explained it this way:

Head, heart and feet all have to be aligned. You know, I say feet because you have to be walking in the direction that your head and your heart are. And I think, not to be preachy with people or moralistic, but they have to know that you hold things to a high standard. And morals as well...High morals for this job. (Group E, p. 11)

Rhonda agreed with the goal of high expectations. She believed, "If expectations aren't high, it's pretty easy to give what is expected. You rise to the challenge. There are a lot of expectations, but you know, we're teaching kids so there should be a lot of expectations" (Rhonda, p.14). Olivia's experiences were similar. She too had seen her school community meet the high standards that were continually set for them by the principal.

Witness: the principal as example and role model

Principals were adamant about their role as faith leaders in their schools. The faith life of each Catholic school has been "entrusted" to each principal and this charge

was taken seriously. In Neil's words, "You cannot just be an educator; you have to be a faith leader. [It's] pretty tough to duck from being a faith leader in this school" (p. 14).

The most powerful action of leadership identified was that of faith witness.

If we're not walking that walk...we might as well just be in the public system. I think it starts from the top. I mean, if you in your school are not demonstrating... if they don't see you in church on the weekend, if you're not demonstrating those values, than no matter what you say it's not going to be taken worth a grain of salt...There was a lot of things that I had to change within myself when I took on that leadership role...You were under the microscope. Everybody's watching.

(Group A, p. 5)

Principals agreed that as faith leaders they led by example. "It's not what you say it's what you do" (Benjamin, p. 13). David understood that his students see him as the representative of the church. "All of a sudden I'm supposed to be the spokesman... expected to model in what you say and do and who you are" (David, p. 15). Neil agreed, commenting that "for a lot of our kids we are their primary faith leaders. A lot of kids, even if they are Catholic, they are not going to church. And if they are non-Catholic, we are the only exposure they have to our faith" (Group D, p. 9).

Along with Catholic leadership came a responsibility to be a living example of faith. "There's also that higher level of example that a Catholic administrator has to live up to" (Group F, p. 5). Olivia saw this responsibility and her example as a way of building trust. "You can't ask anyone to do anything you wouldn't do yourself...you have to lead from the front" (Group A, p. 17). Grant agreed, "As a leader, if your trust gets broken you have everybody out there questioning your credibility" (Group A, p. 17).

Principals entrusted as faith leaders needed to witness their faith in real, meaningful ways. Other aspects of the faith community fell under the purview of the principal as well. In Focus Group B, participants identified the important role principals had in supporting their Catholic teachers' faith growth:

We have a common language and we have a common faith and that makes it easy to express our faith journey with others...As leaders we need to ensure that our teachers are comfortable speaking about their faith. The more we talk about it at school the more comfortable teachers are. (Group B, p. 5)

Humbled: principals in their own humanity

A strong sense of humility and humanity emanated from the principals in their discussions and interviews. They had deeply rooted convictions but they did not think they had all the answers. They very much saw themselves on a journey through life like every teacher, parent, and child they worked with. This humility was evident in the way they spoke and in the words they said. While absolutely taking responsibility for far more than one might expect, they also knew their faults and were often willing to use those weaknesses as a means to connect and build trust with their followers.

I don't think that just because I'm a Catholic principal that I know all the moral answers and haven't screwed up...You lose credibility when you make mistakes, but it also aligns you with the person who comes in and says, I really did something wrong...But you have to come from the same place. Listen, I've screwed up too and I don't do everything right all the time. This is what I've learned. I do think you are primarily responsible, but you also have to be a good example of perseverance and forgiveness and everything. (Group A, p. 13)

In Focus Group D, Harold explained that he had had his share of challenges with leadership. His openness in the focus group was a reflection of his openness with his staff as well. He has told his staff about his own difficulties. He told them that this was a common human experience and just because they share a strong faith, everything will not always be wonderful. He testified to obstacles in his work and life and confided that there were times when he has questioned what he is doing.

And I think being authentic like that with your staff, it makes them realize, you know, growing is not that easy. Change is not that easy...There is an opportunity to be truly authentic about your faith...and allowing for people to grow themselves. (Group D, p. 10)

In Harold's discerning process he was aware that sometimes he'd made "decisions without even thinking about that faith component and I've separated the two" (Group D, p. 16). When that has happened he's gone back and admitted that he could have done things differently.

I don't believe you have to be perfect. Because you are going to make mistakes... it's being able to be that human being and also being able to say we have a bigger calling. (Group D, p. 16)

In addition to their humanity and faults, principals admitted to feeling overwhelmed with the task before them. Daniel described the job as "absolutely daunting." He had worked with some administrators who were amazing and he did not think he could do what they did. As a result, he sometimes felt "guilt" and wished he "could be better or do more"(Group C, p. 8).

Olivia's perspective addressed that dual call of the Catholic principal. She described it as having "two bosses." One boss was the school board and the other boss was God.

And when I've made mistakes, which I have, board office has my back. But it's when I let my other boss down that I think I've really failed...We're trying our best and doing our best but we're also flawed, so very often I feel um, almost inadequate. I can satisfy what board office wants. I can do that well. I can do that efficiently, but it's the other level that it's like, oops. (Group A, p.7-8)

Principals identified feelings of inadequacy. Many principals shared a common refrain: "Am I doing enough?" Feelings of guilt were present. Others described the absolute exhaustion that set in. "In this job you're running dry by the end of the week. I drain myself. I'm just so focused. I've got to re-energize for Monday" (Benjamin, p. 18). Rhonda identified the fact that she "could spend 12 hours a day every day at school and sometimes I do" (Rhonda, p. 15).

John realized that he needed to know that God was with him in order to carry the heavy burdens of "all the brokenness and dysfunction of families and children...A Catholic principal is far from free. There are many things he's carrying and praying for" (John, p.12).

In the midst of the challenges and high expectations, some principals had the wisdom to realize that they could not control all the factors. As Catholics, trusting in God often meant letting go of what you cannot control. Nancy made this insight when she said, "I've done all I can do." David, called to the dual vocation of both principal and young dad, said it wisely: "I realize that God is at work in our work and you do your very

best but the world doesn't revolve around you. Some things are out of my hands"
(David, p. 9).

Gathered: the principal in community

Community is a powerful dynamic in a Catholic school and this was evidenced in conversations with principals. Community is a context. Community is a mission. Community is a framework for leadership. Community embraces both learning and faith. Community circles Catholic education. Most undoubtedly God has gathered his people in community.

Within the context of Catholic school community, principals identified central values that grounded and guided the minute-by-minute interactions in their buildings. "Community is relationships" (Group E, Group A) and through relationships key values such as forgiveness, compassion, love, respect, acceptance, and care are communicated. These values were explored in a previous section, but bear restating because they are ingrained within the context of community. Enmeshed in this context as well is the belief in social justice and "seeking of the lost sheep." Many principals expressed their sense of obligation that required them to go further than expected to meet the needs of at-risk children.

Catholic school communities are faith communities and principals embraced their roles as faith leaders within those faith communities. The centrality of Christ; the centrality of the Eucharist (Group B) were essential. Principals themselves identified their desire for community support, collective wisdom (Neil, p. 14) and the contribution of others to help their vision grow (Benjamin, p. 9). Opportunities to gather as a faith community strengthened the principals' own faith and confidence.

I just feel like I'm not alone. You know what I mean? Like everyone I'm with here on Tuesdays...you know, you pray with them together, you sing with them together, you know that if you need them, you know, you're not on your own little island...we're a team. (Group C, p. 7)

Principals identified time as a significant element in building community. Time is required "for your staff to be together, to talk about our faith and what our faith looks like in a Catholic school. Unless you have the opportunity and you take the opportunity to build relationships with people there's no community" (Group A, p. 14). Within this circle of community emerged the following topics: affirmed, cherished, seeking, forgiven, and hopeful.

Affirmed: the principal as positive and caring leader

A common theme to emerge from this study was principals' frequent reflections on bringing a positive, uplifting message to their community and, most specifically, their staff. Experienced principals felt that this affirmation was key to the strength of their school. The more novice principals often identified that this was an area they felt they could do better in. All principals, however, identified this aspect as critical to relationships, community, and school culture.

Neil shared that he continually pointed out the good things in the school and has the staff also share good news messages at the beginning of staff meetings (p. 16). Nancy consciously acknowledged her staff and "advertised" their good work around the district" (p. 8). Olivia made an effort to "find people doing the right things and praise them ad nasueum" (p. 10). The challenge of continually keeping this goal front and center came through in David's reflections when he commented: "I don't give as much

encouragement and positive feedback as I'd like. I know the value of that little note and pat on the back...but finding the hours in a day to get it done" can be difficult (David, p. 11).

John described his intentional efforts to be uplifting and positive. His reflections then moved into thoughts regarding the "burdens" that his staff members were carrying.

There's a very easy team feeling around me...people are not afraid...that Christ centered model of, we're all trying the best that we can or I believe we are...I get more out of my people when I tell them I believe in them, when I tell them that they are rock stars, when I tell them that this place is awesome...I try really hard not to, not to dump on anybody. If there's a problem, let's fix it, let's move on. No judgment...They're carrying heavy burdens as well...burdens that I don't know about, so the more that I can make them feel like, yeah, I want to get up in the morning and I want to go there and I know it's safe for me to work hard and try and, you know? And if I make a mistake, fine. I make a mistake and we move forward...More and more I think my leadership style is just one of people feeling hopeful around me. Feeling positive around me and then they translate that back out to the kids. If a staff is under a veil of negativity, they go back out and they're scared with the kids and it just, it just ripples through the whole school. (John, p. 6)

Nancy also identified the times when she, as a principal, needed to "take care" of her people (Nancy, p. 13).

I do pick up when someone's upset...but I don't let them just be upset and keep walking...You can sense unhappiness. You can either ignore it or you can deal

with it. I deal with everything and I always find if you deal with it and help and support things are much healthier. Your atmosphere is healthier. Your workplace is happier. (Nancy, p. 7)

Nancy went on to share a story of a time when she absolutely insisted that the school counsellor take three days off work. Although the counsellor thought she was handling everything fine, her principal saw otherwise. She even called the counsellor's husband to make sure that there was complete rest and no contact with the school or students through email or text. When the counsellor returned to work she admitted to Nancy that the break had been essential even though she, herself, was unaware of how badly she needed it. Nancy's insight into her staff member's stress allowed her not only to demonstrate compassion, but to do what was best for the individual and the health of the community.

Cherished: the principal's care, acceptance, and love of all children

Repeatedly, in the same words and in different ways, principals told of their abiding and central belief that "children are a gift from God." They told of "cherishing all students" (Respondent, #3), they talked of care, acceptance and love.

I always wrestle with the teachers. I say, did you tell your class that you loved them today? When you say you walk into our school and there's a crucifix. The crucifix is the symbol of Christ's love for us, right?...How often do you say it? "Guys, when you go out on your break, remember that we love you and come back safe". (Group B, p. 15)

This monologue was spoken by a principal in Focus Group B. As a seasoned principal in a school of more than 1,000 students, one might expect some cynicism, or

burn out. Quite the opposite was in fact visible. A big bear of a man, Michael spoke simply and sincerely about love.

The commonality is the expectation on everybody's part that [the principal] loves every kid in that school. And there's no hesitation in that. And if he doesn't, he shouldn't be here. (Group B, p. 15)

Principals did not falter when speaking of the love they had for their students.

Rhonda felt strongly about letting kids know that they're loved.

We're loved by God. I want them to know it doesn't matter what your relationships are on this earth; you're still loved... You're still worthy of love; of respect. You deserve to be treated with dignity because God loves you. That's what we need to spread to them. (Rhonda, p. 9)

This immediate call to love extended beyond principals' relationships with their students to include adults in the school community as well. Principals in Focus Group A shared their stories of "stressful situations" involving students and staff members. One example shared was about a teacher who became pregnant out of wedlock. The debate in the community centered on whether or not the teacher should keep her job. Her principal's response was:

What's the first thing you do in a situation like that? Well, you show love...it's the principal's role to model caring and compassion and...to stand up to those people and say, "No that's not what's going to happen." (Group A, p. 10)

Nick supported this stance when he said, "We deal with some tough situations, but we deal with dignity when we are doing it" (Group D, p. 7).

Seeking: the principal's option for the lost

In a Catholic school you crank it up a notch...we're told to leave the 99 and find the one lost sheep. (Group A, p. 2)

In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who leaves his flock to seek the one that is missing. This fundamental "option for the lost" permeates all aspects of Catholic schools. Conversations with principals clearly reflected a view steeped in this encompassing perspective.

I think one of the things that we do as Catholics is take care of the underdog; take care of the ones that are most in need. (Group C, p. 9)

In Focus Group C, principals reflected on how their school division seeks the best possible learning opportunities for their most at-risk students. They "go the extra mile" for students with special needs. The principals were proud of the fact that their district invested additional dollars in this vital area of education. In fact, their district spent more than twice the allocation provided by the government. As a result, the district had often attracted non-Catholic students requiring special programming because parents knew that the Catholic system would do "what's really good for those kids. It's a really big part of who we are" (Group C, p. 10).

Many principals had a personal mandate to help children achieve their potential. Each child required differentiated support to do that. In principals' minds that goes with the job. That "whatever it takes" mentality was common. "I will always take the chance on the kid. We'll always go the extra mile" (Group B, p. 8).

Many stories were told of individual students who'd made it despite the odds. David's narrative told of a girl in grade 9 who was expelled from another school. She

had drug issues, completion issues, attendance issues, and homelessness to deal with.

The progress with her had been “five steps forward, you know, four steps back.”

Ultimately, she was still in the school and doing review for her PATs. The goal was to get her through grade 9.

I think that in a school, if it wasn't a faith focused school, and if I wasn't, in my head, always thinking about that one sheep, it would have been really easy to give up on her. And I'm really, really happy that we didn't...because I see potential. You know, it's there. You'll realize it soon, and hopefully, she does. (David, p. 20)

When she writes her PATs and passes David has asked the parents to come in on the last day. He has promised the parents a celebration. “She needs a positive and let's do that, because that's going to make a huge difference. You know, she needs a pat on the back” (David, p. 20).

In Focus Group D it became clear that principals believed in never giving up on their students. They spoke of hope. They believed that identifying the problem and then taking the next step with help from the school provided the support their students needed to find success. “Now, that we have identified the problem, how are we going to help you?” (Group D, p. 12)

Neil identified building relationships as central to his work with at risk kids. Getting to know them, time together, and little favours went a long way in connecting with the most troubled youth.

I work hard to build relationships; especially with the most difficult ones. It's absolutely critical that I have a relationship with them. For the most part I do.

(Neil, p. 9)

Sometimes those struggling students find success when strong, consistent expectations are applied. From Olivia's point of view, that perspective is what love is all about:

I think people have the wrong interpretation of love across the board. They think that if you love them, let them do what they want...if you love them, don't put expectations...I love you, you go have as much fun as you want...I think when you love someone, you set boundaries and expectations and routines and they feel more comfortable, so they know what to expect. Like, when we discipline kids...rarely are they surprised, you know? (Olivia, p. 8)

Forgiven: principals' perspective on making mistakes

Discipline is a significant responsibility for principals in all schools. Discussions with Catholic high school principals provided unique insights into their perspective on this topic. In describing discipline in the school and the school district, Focus Group B believed that their philosophy was primarily "kind and forgiving."

We talk about our discipline being forgiving in nature, giving kids many, many opportunities to grow and improve and correct their own issues...There's a very forgiving policy even at the district level...there never should be a hopelessness that this can't be changed. (Group B, p.10)

This concept of forgiveness was a recurring theme that frequently emerged in the conversations with principals. Neil believed that "there's always that element of

forgiveness...we care about you and we're going to work together to figure this out" (Group D, p. 15). Ken felt that his Catholic background had a huge impact on the way he worked with kids. His perspective of "looking at the whole child in front of us" was critical. As a result there seemed to be a "forgiveness kind of undertone all the time" (Group C, p. 5).

Schools are safe places to screw up. That's what I tell kids. They're places to screw up in safety. Hopefully you screw up here so we can teach you. You'll learn, because the world won't be so forgiving when you screw up, right? (Group F, p. 16)

Charles felt that discipline was also about learning from your mistakes. "I tell all my students, God doesn't make bad people. He made good people. It's the choices that we make. But we learn from those. That's the gift from God; making mistakes so we can learn from them, you know" (Group F, p. 7). Neil concurred:

[There's] a lot of emphasis on forgiveness. Kids resonate with that message. I want to take care of every kid here and don't want them to go anywhere else. I want to take care of them and help them reach their potential. I really believe that. (Neil, p. 7)

Hopeful: principals on a hope-filled faith journey

Number one I want to make sure that the kids understand that there's a ray of hope at this school. (John, p. 7)

Foundational to being cherished is the opportunity to be forgiven and loved. With love comes hope, and hope may be the biggest indicator of Catholic education. In Catholic schools, hope lies in a relationship and belief in God.

Our schools are an oasis of hope, always...but our difference is, I know for me, it has to do with my journey with God. (Group B, p. 4)

Faith ultimately provided hope for Catholic principals and, in turn, allowed them to bring hope to others. Consistently these principals spoke of hope in all situations. Consistently they saw themselves as key messengers of a hope-filled directive.

I always hope there's hope. You know, that everybody, that hope is one of those things that kind of overrides...It has to do with having a faith and knowing that there's something out there beyond us; that we're loved and that our job is to spread that love and to make sure that, you know everyone has that opportunity.

That to me is what we see in the schools; it is some hope. (Group C, p. 9)

David provided a powerful insight regarding the link between assessment and hope. Under his leadership, his school had implemented assessment practices that allowed students to retest and redo and have multiple opportunities to show what they had learned. He believed that this approach to assessment was hope operating at its best.

A lot of our practice as teachers is to create that sense of hope in kids. And some of our kids are hopeless...and I think, when they see how our teachers go above and beyond, they recognize...That sense of hope starts to build in them and then they can do anything, you know, but without the hope, they're lost. (David, p. 22)

Liberated: The Principal's Freedom to "be" in a Catholic School Culture

Catholicity and our Christianity make my job easier in some ways...What is the one thing that I can automatically say once you step through these doors? What's the one thing that we all have in common? Well, it's our faith journey with Christ. It can be unspoken or spoken at any given moment. It can be overt or

covert...What is it that unifies us? That's very easy in our school. Very easy. I like that. (Group B, p. 13)

One of the most interesting themes to emerge from the research with Catholic principals was their shared sense of freedom as administrators. This freedom was solidly rooted in their common understanding of the mission and purpose of Catholic education. Whether dealing with students, staff, or parents, principals felt these common expectations liberated them and provided a broader mandate for how situations would be dealt with (Group D, p. 7).

It became clear through our conversations, that Catholic principals were very “at home” in Catholic schools. They felt they had the opportunity to be authentic at work. This sense of security translated into a sense of freedom. Specifically principal identified that they could:

- be a part of the welcoming, inviting nature of the school culture;
- be real role models;
- discuss and challenge students about their faith;
- publicly pray;
- respond meaningfully to crisis;
- make decisions rooted and reflective of faith;
- have faith in others;
- evangelize; and
- be at peace with the concept of being called and guided by God.

These “liberties” came from a culture “built around the common understanding of who we are” (Group C, p. 5). One principal felt that his connection with the parish and

priest encouraged him to be up front and public about prayer out on the football field. “It’s like, who we are and we’re not ashamed. We’re right out in the middle in front of everyone” (Group C, p. 6). Another principal suggested that there was freedom to evangelize. “We have that gift that we can utilize in our tool belt when we require it. It’s cool that we can do that” (Group F, p. 5). Topics discussed within this theme are: promised, discerning, mediated, authorized, and focused.

Promised: the principal’s covenant with members of the community

Principals often commented that their Catholic school community came together because of their belief in and their desire for a common purpose and values. Rhonda observed that when parents register their children at a Catholic school, they too are making a “promise” of sorts. The message parents are conveying when they bring their child to a Catholic school is, “we’re sending our kids to you because we believe in all that. We’re not going to argue with you over little things. There has to be trust” (Rhonda, p. 5).

I am luckier than my counterparts...In a Catholic school there is a set of values that are non-negotiable; students and parents know this. I don’t have to argue with someone about whether or not it is okay to steal. Just be registering at my school, students and parents are agreeing to a set of expectations. This makes discipline much easier than my counterparts in public schools. (Respondent #23)

Discerning: the principal’s moral decision making

On a deeper level, principals articulated that this sense of liberty extended into confidence in their discernment. Knowing the Catholic perspective allowed these principals to have a solid foundation from which to respond to a multitude of situations.

A sense of “who we are” takes over. The teachings of the Catholic Church were front and center and generated clear expectations to follow. Catholic principals were guided by an understanding of right and wrong and although “it’s not always black and white...it automatically eliminates some of the options” which makes decision making a little bit easier” (David, p. 18-19).

Documents such as the Catholic Congregations on Catholic Education provided an ethical compass for principals. Basing morality on the teachings of Christ and the Church led principals to a sense of comfort, confidence and an understanding of why a decision needed to be made accordingly.

When we’re talking about a moral issue we have a context to work in and we have guidelines we can use...I find it’s a luxury to be able to say and to deal with crisis in a spiritual and a faith based way. I see the advantage of being in a Catholic school. (David, p. 18-19)

Mediated: the principal connects communities

Mediation refers to the ways principals were able to connect (through Catholic values, practices, prayers, views, and rituals) their communities with the sacred. Principals had confidence in their school community’s ability to provide solace in times of trial and support in times of searching. This freedom to connect and mediate in difficult situations was evident when one focus group reflected on a recent experience of losing a student in a tragic accident.

The Catholic aspect of all of that was truly important...that’s what grounded everybody. To have the staff up there first thing in the morning...to have Father Paul...calm everybody down. And that permeated through everything I think. In

what the teachers told the students and the students were coming in and they were just like numb. What do I do? And it was just like, ‘...go up to the chapel. You know there are some people up there. Go say a prayer. Go write something nice on a card’...You don’t see that in a public system. You see that here and it’s just like, yes, this is what it’s all about. (Group B, p. 3)

This sense of freedom and unity brought comfort in a time of deep loss. Catholic principals agreed that the gift of their Catholic faith was an enhanced opportunity. As Nick stated, “We have the extra tools that we can use” (Group D, p. 13; Group F, p. 5).

Focus Group A suggested that a Catholic school can mediate the larger secular world for children by providing a familiar and safe place for children who come from families with similar values and mores. In many politically correct environments young people are not “free” to express values that are religiously based. For children in families that are, for example, pro-life, finding a safe and supportive environment for those perspectives may be rare.

A Catholic School is “a safe place for kids to have those views...our kids get the other perspective because I think society is not doing a great job creating that balance.” (Group A, p. 4)

Authorized: the principal’s sense of justice

In a world of relative morality, Catholic principals had a strong sense of justice and authority based on their foundational beliefs. This common understanding of faith and morality justified principals as they sought fairness and rightness.

Freedom comes from having a solid sense of what a good Catholic school is supposed to be. Then, when we’re talking about Catholic justice it allows you to

speaking for the poor, speaking for those who can't speak for themselves, speaking honestly from that place of the heart that you're coming from and not having to worry that it's self-serving... I have the freedom to speak with Jesus Christ as my model and my guide, so if I'm off base with something I'm okay with somebody correcting me... There's an added confidence somewhere in there that I'm trying to represent or model Jesus Christ for people. (John, p. 11)

John shared a powerful example of genuine authority and the freedom that comes with it. He referred to a colleague of his who had recently retired and described her as a woman and a leader who had freedom which resulted from a magical combination of "experience as a teacher, experience as an administrator, the heart of a person who walks with Jesus, and tremendous human compassion". Those things combined to give her an "authoritative freedom" in her own school and in her dealings with other principals. She had so much wisdom that came from her "experience and a deep relationship with God." John believed that this kind of freedom has to be earned. You have to have gotten through "some wars to learn something about education. You have to know something about kids and families and teachers" (John, p. 12).

Focused: the principal's attention to what matters

Having the freedom to say, "No" came out loud and clear. With a clear mission, vision and values at play, Catholic school principals knew where they were going. One of the ways to get there was to avoid distraction. Rather than being all things to all people, a Catholic school has the freedom to stay true to its mandate and to avoid those activities that take away from the core focus.

I believe [the principal of the public school] is pulled in many more directions than I am...I can say “No, thank you. No, thank you. We only have things that are linked, you know, linked directly to our faith”...Because you have those guidelines, you have the freedom to actually get your work done and focus on what matters. Focus on what matters... it’s a powerful statement when you’re like, “No, you cannot do that.” (Olivia, p. 7)

Challenged: Leading 21st Century Catholic Schools

Overall and very strongly the tone of this study was one of hope and encouragement. Conversations were affirming and positive. One of the guiding research questions was, however, to identify with principals what their biggest challenges were. As a result of the question a range of issues were identified. Four “big picture” challenges emerged from this study.

1. Sanctified: Catholic schools as holy communities.
2. Committed: Catholic schools and their covenant with parents.
3. Embraced: Catholic schools held in the arms of the Church.
4. Justified: Catholic schools in society.

Sanctified: Catholic schools as holy communities

Catholic schools are holy spaces; holy places; and, as such, require holy hands and hearts to lead and teach. Principals in this study were honest and forthright as they examined the quality of their own schools in light of the expectations (their own and the community’s) for Catholic schools.

I think the idea of authenticity is a constant challenge...we have to step up and ask the question, ‘How’s everything going? Are we on the right path? Are we

doing anything that's contradicting? Are we not walking the walk?' That becomes our responsibility. Yeah, it's a different world out there. We are counter-cultural and the teachers coming in may not be formed and many of them are relativists and we need to bring them to a deeper understanding and so it's our authenticity which comes from our deep understanding of our faith. That's our constant challenge. To keep deepening our faith. (David, p. 19)

Catholic schools, as holy places, need everyone involved to be fully committed to the ideology and practice of faith. In order to be an authentic Catholic school, teachers must be practicing their faith.

I look at my own staff members who don't have their own kids baptized, and I think, wow!..It's hard to find formed teachers. (Group A, p. 18)

Part of the staff's authenticity comes from their real and active participation in their parish. For some schools the dynamic of having teachers who do not live within their school's own community becomes a barrier to teachers' full involvement in the local parish.

I really believe that our staff needs to be really visible in our parishes and I don't see that. To me that's a challenge. I mean, when half your staff is living elsewhere. (Benjamin, p. 19)

If schools are to be effective in promoting the Catholic faith, they must be able to provide an environment that is meaningful for their students. Principals identified that they were challenged by making faith for young people real and relevant. Trying to keep schools vibrant and alive with faith in the face of a secular world was often overwhelming.

I think the changing values of society is my biggest challenge...there's an abdication of responsibility that I'm seeing more and more since I started being a principal. "Well, it's not our fault". (Group E, p. 14)

Relevance in the midst of a secular world was a distinct challenge for Catholic schools and the Catholic faith in general. Principals recognized that students were in their care for a mere six hours a day. The rest of their time is spent in a society that devalues religion and often openly mocks faith. Many parents brought their children to a Catholic school hoping that it would "work miracles" with their kids (Group A, p. 19). In many cases these parents were not active in their faith themselves. The "counter-cultural" nature of Catholic schools was often discussed. In a nut shell, "maintaining relevance in a modern day society" was a major challenge (Group A, p.19).

Relevance involved making connections. For Catholic schools this included connecting faith to real life. Helping students and their families make spiritual meaning in a physical world was complex. The changing nature of society has impacted the family in ways that have had a profound impact on faith as well.

Making our faith real for students. I think our high school students specifically don't understand that connection and I was raised with strong grandparents and parents who had a strong faith and that family abdication, absolutely, that family role is not quite there yet. For me, it's making that faith come alive for kids. (Group E, p. 15)

Maintaining relevance for all stakeholders was a huge issue. The continuum of Catholicity presented a unique challenge. Staff members were at all different places on this continuum. Finding "committed teachers who understand their vocation" could be

difficult (Group F, p. 18). Benjamin believed that “it’s not just enough to say you’re a teacher and I’m Catholic...[They need] a sense of vocation and work ethic” (Group F, p. 18).

Committed: Catholic schools and their covenant with parents

Committed parents are essential to all aspects of a Catholic school. The school’s partnership with parents is fundamental to Catholic teaching. Principals felt that often parents were abdicating their responsibilities in this and other areas of child rearing. The context of the discussions most often related to parents and their lack of will to make decisions regarding their own children’s education; both academically and religiously. Parents were frequently “allowing their children to make their choices” about which school to attend (Group C; Group E). Principals’ Focus Group C found that many students were choosing to go to the “big school” in grade 10; often to avoid taking Religion class.

Frank I would say that 75% of the students in our school division don’t go to church on a regular basis with their parents. And so, then, for us to then turn around and say, we’re going to add on a religion course, that’s a tough sell because they’ve got a lot of other things on their plate already.

Daniel But it’s not something that we’re going to give up. It’s something that we hold high. We’re saying, “No, make the choice.” (Group C, p. 19)

In Focus Group F Charles vented his frustration regarding Catholic kids that were not at his school.

Every Sunday I go to mass and I see kids that are not part of my school. Why is that? You know? They come to mass but they're not in my school community... Parents are allowing children to make their choices where they want to go...It irks me to see those kids in mass but they're not in my school. (Group F, p. 20)

When parents abdicate the responsibility of selecting their child's school, principals felt that their children were missing out on the big picture of education. Many students were "bouncing between schools." They were often looking for the easiest path with their friends.

Our results are significantly higher than other high schools in town and we're trying to educate the parents because the kids kind of want to go to the school that's sexy, dangerous. You know what I mean? ... There might be a police car in the parking lot and you know, people are, drug deals in the hallway. You know, that is kind of cool. Right? They want to have that experience. They don't want to live in the little high school where everyone knows who you are and if you skip mom and dad get a phone call. But in the end result...we're getting 8% higher on diploma results in every subject, so we're trying to say to parents, 8% is the difference between Rutherford and nothing. You know between getting accepted and...(Group C, p. 20)

In Focus Group E the experiences had a familiar ring. Here also, parents were opting out of their decision-making role.

Our declining rates of students actually being engaged in a faith community... comes from that abdication of parents saying, "You can make the decision. When you're ready, you come back to the church."....We just don't do that anymore to

our kids because we don't want to force them, or whatever. And I think, we've lost that aspect. We've lost that and it worries me because I think we're going to get to the same situation that Newfoundland found themselves in by losing their Catholic, their right to Catholic education. (Group E, p. 1)

One explanation for parental "abdication" came from Benjamin in Focus Group F. His argument was that "most adults today are really living 15, 16, or 17 year old faith, so it's no wonder that the choices made are going on" (p. 21). Only recently have there been opportunities for adults to take courses in religion. As a result a lot of parents today have a faith that has not changed much since they were in school.

When parents choose not to support their local school, financial issues arise. Many principals felt that "if our Catholic community supported [us] I'm sure we'd be self sustaining" (Group F, p. 20). This lack of parental support translates into another more serious issue. Without parent support, Catholic schools will be in jeopardy.

If people become complacent it will be gone. It's my fear...My stump speech is "You made this choice to have Catholic education for your children. Do you want it as a choice for your grandchildren? Because if you do, get your kids baptized. Get your kids through the sacraments. Because it will be taken away from you and it won't be your choice any longer. It will be stats Canada's choice because they will say, 'Why should we publicly fund Catholic schools in Alberta?' And the Alberta government will see a declining baptismal rate. If you want Catholic education in your area there needs to be action on your part." So that's what I try and tell parents. (Group E, p. 15)

The challenges in Catholic education were not insurmountable. As a strong, united school community, learning and faith were alive and well. Committed educators and committed parents were evidenced in all schools. In order to remain viable in changing times, supporters of Catholic education will need to renew their commitments and re-establish their priorities. They will need to be vocal and visible. Their actions will need to reflect their values. Principals identified their desire for a committed, supportive community beyond the walls of the school. Parents need to be advocates for Catholic education.

We need our clients [our parents] to recognize and understand and advocate for Catholic education and that is becoming difficult because people aren't going to church. People are sending their kids to us, but they're not practicing. (Rhonda, p. 19)

In addition to this dynamic, many principals had experienced working with parents who were vastly different in terms of what they believe Catholicity is all about. As a result, they had widely different expectations for their Catholic school. Parents ranged from thinking that their local school was "not Catholic enough" to parents that thought "we're too Catholic...We're never going to please everyone" (Group C, p. 20).

People have different perspectives of what it means to be Catholic...everybody's in different places on their faith journey too...so we have lots of people on different ends of the spectrum on their journey and they have their perception of what a Catholic school should be and that doesn't always mesh. (Group D, p. 19)

Embraced: Catholic schools held in the arms of the Church

Catholic schools operate under the auspices of their bishop and in the context of their parish community. Principals recognized that the school's efforts to promote faith needed to be supported in tandem with their own parishes. Two specific challenges within this context emerged from discussions with principals.

They first identified the challenging relationship between school principal and parish priest. Principals shared many stories about times when they had turned to their priest for spiritual counsel or for encouragement. They had good friends that were priests. The priests were often a powerful, positive influence on the school community and on the principal's leadership. In other cases the relationship with the parish priest was less than ideal. Often there was tension and a lack of "being on the same page." Principals were highly impacted by the parish priest and often helpless to affect their relationship with this important faith leader in their community.

We can set our vision for our staff. We can really do anything that we're willing to do. We can lead our students and our parents. But working with our parish priests who are also very strong personalities, I can't. It's hard to make the parish priest be on the same page as you...It's hard to build that community time with them so we can be on the same page. (Group A, p. 18)

A second identified challenge was the church's role in creating relevance for young people. Principals wanted to see thriving youth programs in their parishes. They wanted to see young people who were active, involved, and committed to their faith. This was a need in most Catholic parishes and had direct implications and connections with the Catholic school and their work with young people in faith.

We don't have active enough parishes that promote youth ministry and involvement. And I think that's a challenge. Or sacramental preparation or that link with the school. And if we did have that strong, strong relationship...I think you'd have a lot more force moving behind the Catholic school. Because what we're trying to do is the church for the kids. We can't do it all, plus everything else we're doing. As a principal I feel that's a big tension. (Group B, p. 19)

Justified: Catholic schools in society

It always seems we have to justify...We spend a lot of time justifying the fact that we're Catholic instead of just being ...Why do we have to carry the flag? Why do we have to prove it? Prove it all the time? That's the biggest challenge for me. Justifying. Justifying. (Group B, p. 18)

The theme of justification arose frequently in focus groups. Principals spoke enthusiastically about their Catholic schools and the wonderful learning and loving taking place within their walls. They spoke highly of their teaching staff, their central office, their mission and values. With all this "good" at work, it seemed contradictory to have to justify Catholic education on a regular basis. In Focus Group C, the following conversation emerged:

Frank Sometimes we get so caught up in trying to analyze how we're different in order to justify our existence to the community and the government...I find that very distracting...Because, if you really have to question that, then I don't think you really understand who we are as... Catholic schools...and what we're all about.

Rhonda You're spending a lot of time on that when you could be spending it on other things.

Frank Yeah, on other things. Like, we're already serving and if people want to be part of the community; part of our school's enrolment, we're ready to serve your needs. But, um, the people who don't want to be part of the community, like I find it difficult that we have to justify to them why there's a need for what we are doing

Rhonda But it's a philosophical difference. I mean, many, many people believe that there is a separation between life, education, work and religion. Right? And that there is no reason why we need to be Catholic in our school...Our business is education and that should be the end of it and if you want religion you do that after hours. So, that is very much a protestant belief, this separation of church and state. That is why the protestant faith started. That separation. So, those that don't agree with us never will...because they think that what we're doing is philosophically wrong. So we're never going to convince them. We're never going to get around it. That's just the way it is.

Frank I guess that's what I find frustrating. Because we can spend a lot to time trying to justify that when it doesn't matter what we say. It won't make a difference because they've already made up their mind as to what it should be...I think in the end it becomes quite

distracting for some staff...It creates a level of anxiety that we don't need to deal with. (Group C, p. 16)

In the case of this school district, outside pressures were coming to bear on their Catholic district. The justification challenge was outside the division. In some cases principals felt the challenge to justify came from within. In the case of Focus Group D some of the Catholic schools were small and rural in nature. Much of the questioning about the existence of the school came from those within the system:

Why do we exist? And you have people within your system that are undermining that very existence as well as people outside of the system wanting that as well...there is a strong push that we don't really need this here anymore. It's time to shut down that school. (Group D, p. 19)

One very visible means of commitment came in the form of financial support. Principals had worries over the budgets. Decisions made in the government and at board office had financial implications for schools. There were many examples of Catholic schools investing dollars on priorities that non-Catholic schools may not choose to. There were also examples that required a reinvestment of money that was reflective of what Catholic communities' value.

We're still pushed by the dollar...When you start nickel and diming things and at the heart of the things is your Catholicity, it's sad. I mean, you're being your worst enemy. It's not the outside doing to you. It's from within. (Group F, p. 21)

Rhonda also recognized that there can be in-fighting and tension when times are tough. She emphasized the need to recommit resources to Catholic education.

I think the more financial constraints...when there's no water, the animals start looking funny at each other at the watering hole, right?...You start thinking...You start blaming each other. (Rhonda, p. 18)

Catholic principals are positive thinkers overall, however, and their view of the future was optimistic. Despite challenges and tough times, their faith in God and their commitment to the vocation of educator was a clarion call that that always brought hope.

God's got a plan. As long as we stay true to what we need to do, the people we work with, the kids we work with, and we do great work and we save lives every day. So why would we worry? You know, I used to make way more money in construction, but I go, this is a job I love to do...So we can't worry about it.

(Group B, p. 19-20)

Appointed: Leadership in a Catholic school

In focus group discussions, principals were asked to identify leadership models or frameworks that resonated with their experiences and their belief system. What ensued was a lively debate regarding Catholic school leadership. Predominant models touted were the collaborative/distributive model and servant leadership. As well, images of the principal as shepherd, disciple maker, wine steward, puzzle maker, and conductor were suggested. The conversation regarding models of leadership provided significant insights into what principals believed and into the unique nature of Catholic leadership. The evolutionary nature of leadership was clear as well. These topics have been described by the words: gifted, served, and grown.

Gifted: a community of leaders

In the last few years Focus Group C's district has focused, both at the divisional level and the school level, on developing the strengths of staff members. Using a specific leadership development program throughout the district has caused the leadership teams to be very aware of their own strengths and of the strengths of the individuals they work with.

You discover very quickly that you have lots of different leaders in your building and I think the secret there is to work towards enabling, helping those people who have those skills to discover those skills and also enabling those people to take on those role. And I know in our building that was one of the best things that could have happened. (Group C, p. 8)

This focus group in particular had a strong leaning towards the distributive model of leadership. One of the principals shared that when she began as a principal her first inclination was to live the servant leadership mantra.

You try to do everything for everybody, you know, no one's going to be here before me in the morning and no one's going to leave before me or after me at night. Absolutely. But it doesn't honor other people and their gifts. You know, you think you are, but you're not allowing them to shine or to fulfill their own needs. You're trying to make it as easy as possible for them. (Group C, p. 13)

The distributive model in this division honored people's strengths and appreciated "their gifts and how they were translated in the school. The fact that they knew we recognized and appreciated their gifts just made a world of difference" (Rhonda, p. 11).

Some principals then saw their role as a “maximizer” who “sets people up do [their] best; to shine” (Daniel, p. 8).

This style of leadership reminded principals that they don’t have to be the best at everything. This was modelled to the staff and there was mounting evidence that the teachers were doing the same with their students. Principals challenged teachers to find the strengths in their students, especially those who were “ostracized” (Rhonda, p. 12).

So staff are starting to approach things differently with their own students which is really fulfilling for both the staff and students...I think a lot of us have been able to let go of being so caught up in that responsibility. And allowing other staff to rise to the occasion and share their gifts...It’s really made a huge difference. (Group C, p. 9)

In Focus Group F discussions, a similar message emerged. The principals agreed that there were leadership qualities in teachers and it was important for the principal to let these qualities emerge and encourage them by saying, “Yeah, you’ve got what it takes” (Group F, p. 15).

David’s perspective brought both the visionary aspect of leadership and the collaborative aspect of distribution to mind. Although he admitted that you “can’t build a culture on your own” and that you need to be aware of the “gifts people have,” he was cautious about “what responsibilities you’re giving to people.”

There are certain things I don’t want to give away. In creating this vision, this understanding of the school needs to be done in a certain way. There are some things that are important to deal with yourself...Part of our responsibility is

finding out what each person brings to the table and giving them the opportunity to do that within the context of the vision. (David, p. 22)

This aspect of vision emerged in Focus Group A when Brian shared:

I very much value the articulating of vision and communicating it, working with your staff so they understand direction and they know where you're going and why...I think that gives people confidence to understand what the long term picture is. (Group A, p. 18)

Trust was fundamental to this leadership approach. Trust was based on a solid understanding of each staff member's strengths and weaknesses and knowing what they were capable of. It also involved an element of hope and belief that others could be trusted to do their work well. Focus Group B suggested that one great leadership quality was being willing to trust someone else "even though they may screw up" (Group B, p. 10). Another principal suggested that trust grew as he gained experience and became more comfortable as a leader (Benjamin, p. 4).

Using the parts to make the whole was the image Benjamin suggested when he described the principal as a "puzzle maker."

I consider myself to be a little bit of a puzzle maker...You try and create a puzzle. You find all of the gifts that people have and you try to put them into place, right? And then let people do what they do. And that's kind of what my image of a principal is...is more like a puzzle maker. Because when issues do come, not everybody sees the puzzle. They see the individual pieces, but they have no concept of the overall picture...I find that an awesome responsibility...that's one

of the things that gets my juices going, is you have that ability to work with that, to weave with that. (Benjamin, p. 9)

Served: the greatest among you

I am constantly reminding myself that I am, in terms of leadership, a servant, shepherd, steward, and that is something that is tied very much to your faith. To do what Christ taught us. (Group D, p. 9)

Servant leadership was a phrase that came easily in principals' conversations about leadership. Frequently principals would describe this model as an ideal and would refer to their own role in "doing whatever it takes" to make a school work (Group B). As well, references to the leadership of Christ as the "ultimate servant leader" were common.

In Focus Group B David brought a passionate perspective to the servant leader model:

I remember thinking that servant leadership was kind of wishy washy and it's a cute idea. But you know, the more, I read and...when I started using Christ as your model for servant leadership you're making sure people have what they need; you're walking the walk but you're also very strong. And I think that's where someone says, 'What's your style?' and you say, 'Servant leadership' they think, 'Weak', but to really understand it there's great strength to it. Jesus didn't waver on it. 'Oh that's not a popular idea, well then I'll'...there's no wavering. There's strength there. The idea of building capacity. Jesus took his time to train his disciples, apostles to go off and take his place and to do things the right way. When you look at the model, and you use that, it's hard to go wrong. It doesn't mean you're weak. It doesn't mean you don't stand for something. You know

what you stand for at the same time you're going to support everyone to stand along with you. (Group B, p. 15)

David's point of view brought out some essential elements of servant leadership such as capacity building and the training of followers to carry on the mission. Building capacity referred very much to the distributive model of recognizing the abilities of others and fit solidly into most Catholic principals' view of leadership and culture. In addition, the concept of creating a followership emerged from a number of sources.

John's comment was:

Look how smart Jesus was with his disciples. Show them what it meant and then say, "Look, I'm not here for long. You guys need to build our church." (John, p. 15)

Discipleship was a powerful way of describing the principal's work and was best articulated by Benjamin who explained that "trying to make disciples out of others means not taking away their individuality, but celebrating it." When he considered how Jesus led his apostles, Benjamin suggested that it's like "trying to bring others to a deeper understanding" (Group F, p. 15).

I kind of try and relate a staff member to one of the disciples, cause there are personality traits, right, and sometimes that helps me understand how to deal with them or what I need to do. Some need to be pushed, some need to be challenged, some need to just sit back and some need to be gently guided...or some can guide me, or teach me, or show me...as far as leadership style challenges, I'm all about the challenge. I really am. Like, I don't care how good we think we all are somebody else can be in that seat tomorrow. And so, there's always some areas

that we're strong in, our gifts, our talents. But there's always areas that we can improve. (Group F, p. 15)

Along with the model of servant leader came the goal of helping others achieve their best. This particularly resonated with Catholic principals and their evangelizing mission:

The one I go back to is servant leadership...Our mandate is to help people reach their potential and provide ways for them to do that rather than, sort of, guide them...as a leader I'm here to help you reach your potential and make sure you can do what you need to do to be most effective. And I think that really resonates as a Catholic educator. (Group D, p. 18)

Other metaphorical leadership images were discussed throughout the conversations with principals. One of them was that of wine steward. This concept was first proposed by a priest at the annual Blueprints Catholic administrators' conference and it was an image that really made sense to Nick. He described it this way:

The Catholic administrator is someone who's like a wine steward where you're making sure that all the guests have been invited; that all the resources are there. That the wine is there. That the band is there and you're making sure everything is going and you've got the right people coming and you're there to turn on the mike and then you fade back. You're the wine steward. 'Oh they need a little more wine at table four' and that's what you do. You're facilitating the whole process. That's what's stuck with me...you are basically a maitre de or someone like that. (Group D, p. 17-18)

Nick's leadership description very much recounted the facilitative process that principals deploy; ensuring that everyone's needs are met by taking care in subtle ways. The principal was in the background ensuring things happen. One of the principals in Focus Group B suggested that "we give permission. I think we do lots of things subtly. [You support] openness and initiative when people see you doing things" (Group B, p. 10). In the wine steward image the aspect of serving was also very much in evidence. In Focus Group B a similar idea was shared by Grant when he cautioned that the servant leadership model needed to be about assisting but not "taking the job away" from others. He had observed that sometimes the leader can go too far in "being everything" for everyone. In his ideal the leader provided an example, showed others what to do, supported them and then "lets them go" (Group A, p. 15).

This view of leadership led to the suggestion of principal as "conductor" which addressed again the facilitative nature of leading a school.

It's like the conductor of the band. No one listens to the conductor, but the conductor leads everybody. It may be done silently or quietly but everybody who's out there in the band is watching the conductor and so you need to lead, but you need those people playing those instruments at the right time and right tempo.

(Group A, p. 13)

Grown: the evolutionary nature of leadership

A final element to emerge regarding leadership models referred to the evolutionary nature of leading. In snippets of conversation here and there it became clear that leadership was emergent. New principals led differently than seasoned principals. Experienced leaders were able to reflect on their growth over the years and identified

changes. They no longer worried about “how I’m judged by the superintendent” but cared more about “how my community is functioning” (John, p. 17). Along with this wisdom came a change in leadership style that allowed the principal to “move into a stage of management as coach and developer.” (John, p. 15)

Conclusion

Chapter Four provides a thorough review of the data organized by six prevalent themes. Each theme brings together evidence from the surveys, focus groups, and interviews in this research. Each theme explores a critical aspect of Catholic school leadership in Alberta. The first theme presents the principal’s vocation in terms of his or her sense of dedication, mission, excellence, and investment. Theme two explores the responsibilities of the Catholic principal in terms of his or her role in salvation, moral leadership, ensuring of high standards, role modelling, and humility. Theme three considers the impact of community on the Catholic principalship. This theme is discussed in terms of the principals’ care as a leader, love for all students, efforts with the at-risk, forgiving nature, and ability to provide hope. Theme four presents the concept of freedom within the context of a Catholic school. Freedom is reflected in: the covenant between principal and community, the principal’s decision making ability, mediation of the principal, his or her sense of justice, and the ability to focus on what matters within the school. Theme five considers the challenges currently facing Alberta’s Catholic principals and is framed in four topics: the Catholic school itself, its relationship with parents, its relationship with the Church, and its ability to be relevant in society. Lastly, this chapter presents possible leadership models for Catholic principals. Central to this

section are the shared model of a community of leaders, servant leadership, and the stages of leadership as a principal evolves.

Chapter Five

This study has explored the nature of the Catholic high school principalship with 49 principals through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. What emerged was a rich and complex description of these principals' experiences, passions, commitments, and understandings as formed by and part of their deep and real faith. Without exception, principals responded to questions and conversations with words of faith, hope, promise, and love. Deeply rooted in what they said and, ultimately, in who they are was the spirituality of each principal. Each conversation began with their foundational belief that they were called to Catholic leadership. Each conversation was centered in deeply held convictions of Christ as role model and guide. The language of discussion was Catholic. The apostolic nature of leadership, the gift of children, the sacredness of community, the all-encompassing message of love, and the belief that they each were called to a mission bigger and beyond themselves was unquestionable. The Catholic principal is a spiritual leader.

Through analysis of data, six key themes emerged. Each theme identified and explored significant aspects of the Catholic principal's experience and perceptions. Each theme was developed through close reading of the data and by looking carefully for threads of meaning that were coded and grouped. Through this process commonalities were identified. In many cases, principals were describing common leadership experiences. In some cases, observations stood alone and were not part of the group's understanding. Data in each of the six themes suggested sub themes that required further explanation. As a result of this deep reading and coding, a full and comprehensive

picture of Catholic high school leadership in the province of Alberta has been documented. The picture that emerges is a spiritual picture.

The task of this chapter is to place the themes of this data within the current understandings of Catholic schools, Catholic school leadership, and leadership theory. As well, it is the goal of this chapter to bring to light new findings; new insights; and new ways of knowing that may not have been discussed in current literature.

The findings from this study on the nature of the Catholic school principalship:

1. Are strongly rooted in the literature on Catholic schools and leadership theory.
2. Resonate profoundly with new and emergent theories on transcendental leadership
3. Provide new and challenging insights unique to this study

Subsequently, the analysis in this chapter will be multi-faceted. The first section will scrutinize the themes with reference to current literature on leadership and Catholic schools. Section two will explore the data in terms of spiritual leadership within the context of transcendental leadership. The third section will propose a leadership model for the Catholic principal that has emerged from the work of this study.

Analysis of Themes

The purpose of this section is to reflect on the themes that have emerged from this study's data in light of current literature on Catholic education. When data from the survey, focus groups, and individual interviews were compiled and coded, six complex themes were identified: called, entrusted, gathered, liberated, challenged, and appointed. Each one of these themes offers unique and innovative insights into the leadership of

Alberta's Catholic high school principals. This section is divided into six topics and will explore, in detail, the aspects and implications of each of these emergent themes:

1. Called: the vocation of the principal
2. Entrusted: the responsibilities of the Catholic principal
3. Gathered: the principal in community
4. Liberated: the principal's freedom to "be" in a Catholic school culture
5. Challenged: Leading 21st Century Catholic Schools
6. Appointed: Leadership in a Catholic school

Called: The Vocation of the Principal

Data from this study with Alberta's Catholic high school principals was unanimous in a particularly significant way. When asked, all principals claimed a call to their profession, a sense of vocation. Understanding Catholic leadership as a calling is common language in the literature on Catholic schools (Blanchard, 1999; Bryk et al., 1993; Cappel, 1989; Cook, 2007; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002; Hunt et al., 2000; Mulligan, 2006; OCCB, 1989). "These leaders know and focus on what is important, care deeply about their work, learn from their successes and failures, take calculated risks, and are trustworthy people" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 152). As well, this vocational view of leadership brings to the fore a new way of thinking about school leadership: spiritual leadership. Essential to spiritual leadership is the concept of "calling."

"Doing what it takes" through faith in a clear, compelling vision produces a sense of calling---that part of spiritual survival that gives one a sense of making a difference and therefore that one's life has meaning. (Fry, 2003, p. 714)

Within the theme of vocation, principals shared a strong sense of dedication and mission. This call both sustained and inspired them in their daily work. Additionally, it was clear that principals felt that their work, and the work of those they were responsible for, needed to be done well. Quality matters when important work is being done. Finally, principals were clearly professionals who have invested significantly in this vocation of Catholic leader. Investment included both heart and home. Deep layers of investment involved high levels of risk, and, as a result, the potential for high levels of hurt was evident.

Sustained: a Sense of Dedication

When principals reflected on their vocation of leadership, they also revealed that this sense of calling encouraged them to dedicate themselves fully to the cause of Catholic education. Principals' strong understanding of vocation allowed them to deal with stress, hard work, and long hours. Salary was secondary to the job at hand. Sacrifice was accepted as "part of the job."

Lavery (2012) suggested that "a critical competence of transcendental leaders is the capacity to self-sacrifice in the service of others" (p. 41). Sergiovanni (1994) spoke of the leader's ability to sacrifice "one's self interest for the sake of other community members" (p. 28). Leaders were willing to "give up power and must have low needs for personal recognition and for controlling others" (p. 190). Additionally, these principals were "not afraid of hard work" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 33).

People with hope/faith have a vision of where they are going, and how to get there; they are willing to face opposition and endure hardships and suffering, to achieve their goals. (Fry, 2003, p. 713)

Principals in this study had faith that God was at work and this brought them a sense of peace. Greenleaf (1977) recognized these qualities in the servant leader. He set the leader's real world of work against a backdrop of detachment; a detachment earned by knowing that all is as it should be. "One is always at two levels of consciousness. One is in the real world, concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events" (p. 26).

A sense of tranquility blankets the servant leader. This is achieved by both a conscious and unconscious mindset that armours the leader to "to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the face of stress and uncertainty" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27). For Catholic principals it involves trust in knowing that all is as it should be in God's world.

Inspired: a Sense of Mission

Principals' sense of mission; sense of vision inspired them on a number of levels and kept them going when it would have been so much easier to head for home. Leaders used the vision of Catholic education to encourage staff and students to accompany them on this difficult journey (Bryk et al., 1993). Mission lead to hope and hope lead back to the vocation required to fulfill the mission. "Hope/faith is thus the source for the conviction that the organization's vision/purpose/mission will be fulfilled" (Fry, 2003, p. 713).

In their discussion of transcendental leadership, Sanders et al. (2003) recognized that to truly understand the notion of leadership it is necessary to focus on the internal

development of the leader. They believed that the “core component” of this internal dynamic, was spirituality. Spirituality, in turn, is

concerned with ultimate purpose and meaning in life, which translates into a commitment to God or a higher power, recognition of the transcendent in everyday experience, a selfless focus, and a set of beliefs and practices that facilitates a relationship with the transcendent. (p. 21)

Anointed: a Sense of Excellence

Called by God, “appointed and anointed” (Garvey, 1985). The call of vocation implies dedication of one’s life and one’s passion. Alberta’s Catholic principals, called to leadership, realize that their job is one that must be done well. They themselves have set the bar high because they believe the work that they do matters. This leadership has the power to “transcend competence for excellence by inspiring extraordinary commitment and performance” from principals (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 68).

God has blessed Catholic educational leaders with a unique and crucial mission, namely the work and ministry of carrying forward Christ’s unfinished mission of building the Kingdom of God in Catholic schools. (Cook, 2007, p. 102)

The mission of building God’s kingdom on earth was not taken lightly by Catholic principals in this study. Literature on leadership reinforces the strong sense of responsibility effective, spiritual leaders possess (Cardona, 2000).

Wounded: A Sense of Investment

This theme in the study reflected principals’ vulnerability as a result of caring too much. Principals invested their heart and souls into their vocation and, as a result, hurt deeply when betrayed or criticized. Sometimes the hurt was personal, sometimes the

woundedness came from worry about a decision a student or another member of the community was making. Able to see the “bigger picture,” principals ached for the future of the child at risk. In doing so, their own hearts were put at risk as well, confirming Canavan’s (2003) statement that “effective leadership comes from the inside” (p. 178).

The heart of leadership is much discussed in the literature; both secular and sacred. Palmer (2000), in his book *Let Your Life Speak*, suggested that the power of authentic leadership lies within the human heart. “Authentic leaders...aim at liberating the heart, their own and others’, so that its powers can liberate the world” (p. 76).

Palmer recognized that the leader’s own spiritual journey will determine his or her ability to lead. A strong sense of the leader’s own spirituality is required if he or she is to remain effective and healthy. Good leaders, however, work to find a balance between investment and detachment. Taking the entire responsibility for a situation is neither desired nor helpful. Throughout this study principals identified this ability to let go and leave their worries in God’s hands as a necessary and healthy strategy to their leadership. David put it this way: “At the end of the day, I get down on my knees, and I say to God, you know, thanks for the responsibility and thanks for the gifts that you’ve given me, but it’s your Church and I’m going to bed” (David, p. 9).

Palmer (2000) concurred with David’s wisdom when he described a particular “shadow” he called “functional atheism.” He defined it as the belief that “ultimate responsibility for everything rests with us” (p. 88). This conviction that “if anything decent is going to happen here, we are the ones who must make it happen” can lead to burnout, depression, and despair. He advised those struggling with this particular shadow

to turn the task over to God and the community, realizing that leaders are asked only to what they are able and “trust the rest to other hands” (p. 89).

Spiritually strong Catholic leaders know when to trust in God’s providence (Groome, 2003). Spiritually strong leaders lead from the heart (O’Brien, 2009; Palestini, 2009).

The heart of education is the heart of the educator. Like never before, the future of...education, and particularly of what is done by the designation “Catholic” depends on the spirituality of its educators—what the heart is and what it feels. (Groome, 2003, p. 35)

Entrusted: The Responsibilities of the Catholic principal

The theme of entrustment; the theme of trust that emerged from the data is real and concrete for today’s Catholic principals. Strong images of responsibility were described. At times, principals hinted at the weight of these obligations, but more often they spoke of the opportunity these duties offered. As leaders in Catholic educational communities, principals assumed a mantle that was non-negotiable in terms of the commitment and actions required. Despite the charge, principals embraced these directives as their calling and their privilege.

Catholic communities are communities rooted in trust (CCSTA, 2002; Garvey, 1985; Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1992). As such, all members give and receive within the community. All members have responsibility to the community and for the community. Central to community are relationships. Foundational to relationships is trust.

The school, then, becomes a small church. It has oneness and unity of purpose when the members of that church---parents, staff and students---worship together and share with one another the responsibility of the education of those entrusted to it by God. (Garvey, 1985, p. 45)

As such, Catholic principals have been charged with bringing faith into every aspect of the school (CCE, 1998; Cook, 2007; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002; OCCB, 1989). In Catholic language, the principal is the steward of his or her Catholic school. Stewardship implies trust and in the unique culture of Catholic schools, requires the principal to lead, to follow, to invite, to share, and to protect (Greenleaf, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Stewardship represents primarily an act of trust, whereby people and institutions entrust a leader with certain obligations and duties to fulfill and perform on their behalf...stewardship also involves the leader's personal responsibility to manage her or his life and affairs with proper regard for the rights of other people and for the common welfare. Finally, stewardship involves placing oneself in service to ideas and ideals and to others who are committed to their fulfillment.

(Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 59)

Within the theme of entrustment arose the principal's responsibilities for the eternal lives of the children they served. This clear directive for Catholic educators was taken seriously by participants in this study. Principals also recognized the charge they had to be moral spokesmen for the values of their Catholic community. This involved providing guidance to members of the community, most often staff, and also speaking up on behalf of those who needed an advocate. The principal's responsibility for ensuring

that high standards were set and maintained was central to the trust placed in them by students and parents. Role modelling, or witnessing, was identified by each focus group as “the way” to build trust with members of the community. Only by being authentic and living witnesses can principals expect that others will do the same. Lastly, and along the same lines of thinking, principals knew that it was in their own humanity that they could best be leaders. A willingness to be open, humble, and real allowed principals to responsibly lead their schools. In this manner, trust was built.

Saved: the Principal’s Role in Salvation

In *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* (2002) Catholic educators are reminded that “God desires that every man and woman would see the children as He does...That is why Catholic Education ceaselessly speaks of the gift of salvation to the young. It is a non-negotiable part of our Christian commitment to affirm and celebrate life” (p. 11). From Focus Group A, came the comment regarding the “salvific mission of the teacher. Not just graduation, but salvation” (Group A, p. 12). David went on to describe this mission as one of both opportunity and pressure. Other principals spoke of helping children reach their spiritual potential, wanting students to be their best in regards to their faith development, and representing Christ in every situation. Benjamin expressed the opportunity afforded Catholic principals to “add a page to the New Testament” through each interaction with others (Benjamin, p. 12).

In the Congregation for Catholic Education documents, we are reminded of this critical religious dimension of the Catholic school; a dimension consciously and actively lived by the principals in this study:

The educational value of Christian anthropology is obvious. Here is where students discover the true value of the human person: loved by God, with a mission on earth and destiny that is immortal. (CCE, 1988, #76)

Committed: the Principal as Moral Spokesman and Gatekeeper

With the role of principal comes the expectation to ensure that members of the community; most especially teachers, uphold the moral “contract” they have been charged with (Sergiovanni, 2007). With the title of Catholic teacher or Catholic principal comes the expectation for Catholic commitment in lifestyle, choices, and actions. For principals in this study, issues of morality were integrally tied to the values and standards of the Catholic school community. Although many seemed reluctant to engage in a discussion of moral authority, when asked for specific examples of moral decision making, the principals were articulate.

Bert’s (Group A, p. 9) description of the “Catholic circle” was a catalyst for a discussion about expectations and how to respond to teachers who were “outside” the circle. A number of principals felt strongly that critical conversations were necessary to address the non-negotiable faith elements that were part and parcel of a teacher’s employment in a Catholic school. This gatekeeping task was described as necessary and difficult. Principals were clear that the element of judgement needed to be removed and that the conversations needed to emanate from a place of love and mutual respect.

Mulligan (1994) in his work regarding Catholic education in Canada described the principal as “the most important pastoral agent.” He suggested that the “ongoing formation of teachers” was a principal’s “primary concern” (p. 237). The principal must ensure that competent and committed teachers are authentic witnesses within the Catholic

school. The word “quality” emerged time and time again in the literature regarding Catholic teachers (Cook, 2007; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002; Heft, 2000; Palestini, 2009). Teachers of quality are required. Principals’ commitment to maintaining that quality was undeniable.

Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) suggested that the commitment made by teachers in a Catholic school leads to a form of “consent” in regards to how they should behave and interact. “The school must challenge behaviours and attitudes clearly at odds” (p. 316). The expectation that the principal will assume moral authority in a respectful, charitable way is understood. Thusly,

the presence of moral authority is important because much of what happens in schools involves discretionary action...the value that these communities place on social interactions that are respectful and civil also means that when disagreements do occur, participants presume that good intentions of all concerned. (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 314)

Moral authority in the leadership literature moves into the domain of transformational and transcendental leadership. Transformative leaders are “tight on values” and, as a result, place an emphasis on “doing right things” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 77). The commitment to the values of the Catholic community becomes a covenant between the principal and those he or she leads. This covenant requires obligations on the part of all constituents to uphold the standards and values of the school community. A sense of interdependence results. This moral reciprocity binds the principal and the teachers together in a symbiotic way. Transcendental and transformational leaders lead

with courage; convicted of their commitments; willing to stand for the values of the community they lead.

Real toughness is always principled. It is value based...transformative leaders expect adherence to common values but provide wide discretion in implementation. They are “outraged” when they see these common values violated. The values of the common core are the non-negotiables that comprise the cultural strands, the covenant that defines the way of life in their school.

(Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 77)

Elevated: the Principal’s Responsibility in Ensuring High Standards

The data clearly identified high expectations as a value cherished and espoused by Alberta’s high school principals. The literature as well, attributes high standards for achievement and behaviour to the culture of a Catholic school (Bryk et al, 1993; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002; Hunt, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000). Within that school culture, comes the principal’s responsibility to ensure that these standards are communicated and that processes within the school ensure they are achieved. Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leader may refuse to “accept some of the person’s effort or performance as good enough” (p. 20).

The vision of a school has direct implications regarding a quest for excellence. In describing cultures of faith, Fry (2003) suggested:

In running the race of faith, people must run to win, exercise self-control, and always strive for excellence to exceed their personal best. The race of faith is a marathon not a sprint; it requires endurance, perseverance, and a willingness to

“do what it takes” to do one’s personal best and maximize ones’ potential. (p. 713)

Studies have shown that Catholic schools and their communities evidence “academic press” (Sergiovanni, 2007). Academic press refers to “strongly communicated expectations that students will work on intellectually challenging tasks” (p. 27). This performance is not “scripted” but emerges from “the school’s sense of what is important” (p. 29).

Witness: the Principal as Example and Role Model

The people of our generation prefer witnesses to teachers. (CCSTA, 2002, p. 15)

Principal as role model, principal as witness, and leading by example are constructs that Catholic school principals solidly embraced. Principals in this study were highly aware of playing their own part in the effectiveness of their school community. As leaders, they knew that they had to go first and not ask anyone to do what they themselves had not already done. They understood that others were watching and that often the integrity of the leader and the school would be called into question if principals weren’t “walking the talk.” An integral aspect of this witnessing involved trust. By living their lives authentically, principals felt that others would trust them and, ultimately, follow.

“Leader...by example is the way to build – everywhere” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 85).

Theorists of spiritual leadership suggest that leaders communicate their core values through “personal action” (Fry, 2003, p. 710). Groome (1998) identified witness as one of the five characteristics of a Catholic community. “The witness asked of schools is that they practice what they preach” (p. 206). Catholic school leadership pedagogy refers

specifically to the principal as witness (Bezzina, 2010; CCSTA, 2002; Lavery, 2012; Nuzzi, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992; Warneka, 2008).

Humbled: Principals in their own Humanity

This theme in the data emerged from conversations with principals that illustrated their humanity, their faults, their weaknesses, their honesty, and their trust in God. Being transparent with others (most often their teaching staff) meant that principals would often share their own discouragements and mistakes. By demonstrating personal perseverance, principals were able to demonstrate a forgiving response to their staff. Intrinsic in the human struggle were feelings of inadequacy and exhaustion. With high standards for their own efforts, principals commonly wondered if they had given enough, worked hard enough, and done enough. In addition, they carried the burdens and worries of those they were responsible for. From broken families to hurting staff members, principals often felt the weight of the world upon their shoulders. Ultimately, their faith became the boat that kept them afloat. When they could go no more, they turned their responsibilities over to “let God and to let go.”

In all likelihood, all men and women engaged in Catholic Education have arrived in its vineyards with more worry and weariness than they wanted to bring. We have come [to Bethlehem] like the original cast of characters. We have come weak. And this is a source of sadness to us. (CCSTA, 2002, p. 48)

The principals’ willingness to honestly share their own shortcomings was touching. This unique ability and openness to “reflect on their actions in the light of the Gospel” illustrated principals’ authenticities as “spiritual leaders” (Lavery, 2012, p. 41). As well, principals deliberately and intentionally modelled their own life challenges to

witness to their colleagues that all of us are on a journey of faith. This realistic approach to challenge and journey represent the principals' deeper understanding that they cannot give what they do not have (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002) and that their trials have been part of the formation of their own faith.

This ability by Catholic principals to be both leaders and sinners, reflects Rolheiser's (1999) insight that "all communities of faith mediate the grace of God in a very mixed way. Sin, pettiness, and betrayal are always found alongside grace, sanctity, and fidelity" (p. 127). Mulligan (2006) recognizes that the "integration of faith and life is a struggle" (p. 195). At times principals will be required to be bold. At other times they will need to heal. This experience with the human journey reminds leaders that they "must learn to be comfortable in the mess" (p. 195).

It is not necessary to be free of faults and failures to be faithful to the integrity of the process of Catholic education. Otherwise, none of us would dare to be involved. (OCCB, 1989, p. 26)

Through conversations with principals their hearts were revealed. Leadership literature refers to the heart of leadership in a number of different ways. Palestini (2009) suggested that a challenge for Catholic principals is to "lead effectively in a non-coercive way, that is, lead with heart" (p. 22). What could be more "non-coercive" than the honest sharing of human trials? Linking the conversation between principal and teacher is the bridge of relationship. This should be considered heart leadership at its best.

Gathered: the Principal in Community

Community is integral to the principals in this study and is central to the literature around Catholic schools. Principals understood community in terms of their

responsibility to it and in terms of the support it provided them personally (Bryk et al., 1993). They recognized their obligations to both the learning and the faith communities within their schools (McDermott, 1985). They included parents in their definition of community and they embraced their role within the parish community at large. At the heart of every discussion around community, was the focus on relationships (Cook, 2007; Shimabukkuro, 2000).

Principals articulated their understanding of community in a similar way to Rolheiser's (1999) description of an apostolic community when he said: "Jesus formed a community around himself, animated it, and then left it his word, his spirit and the Eucharist" (p. 113). Through the testimonies of principals time and time again the image of gathering around Christ seemed to best exemplify their common perception and experience of community.

The communal aspect of the Catholic school is supported throughout the literature from church documents, to research tomes, to personal accounts of the Catholic faith journey. It is, in fact, "difficult to over-emphasize" (Nuzzi, 2004, p. 79). "Without community the school drifts aimlessly" (Buetow, 1988, p. 223).

Over and over again principals referred to Jesus as their standard for leadership. In many cases they were referring to his servant model of leadership. Nuzzi (2004) painted a broader image of Jesus' leadership when he considered Jesus' focus on the people around him. When using Jesus as our guide, elements of community become vital.

The life of Jesus provides us with some insight...His convictions manifested themselves in the community and were experienced by others as loving gifts.

While the Gospels frequently report that Jesus is off by himself to pray, he is even more often engaged in caring for others, teaching about God, reaching out to the marginalized and ministering to those who come to him. Jesus is clearly prayerful and his inner journey leads him to be involved in the community and present to others in helpful and giving ways. (p. 79)

This section will seek to unpack principals' own experiences and perceptions of community within the context of the literature. Contained in the broad theme of community, five sub themes will be examined in the light of current understandings. Firstly the principal's affirming and caring nature will be discussed as central to his or her leadership within the community. Hand in hand with affirmation goes the principal's love of all children, especially those who are "lost." The forgiving nature of the Catholic school is lived out by principals in their decisions, actions, and discipline with the ultimate goal of providing a hope-filled environment and experience for their students, families and staff.

Affirmed: the Principal as Positive and Caring Leader

Affirmation refers to the positive and caring nature of the principal. This practice and outlook were evident in much of the data regarding community. Most specifically, this positive perspective was made real in the principal's conscious interactions toward the staff of the school. "Together under the guidance of Christ, we forge a place where we learn from one another...we struggle to complement rather than contradict each other" (CCSTA, 2002, p. 29).

Principals, especially those who were veterans of leadership, fully endorsed a worldview of positivity and optimism. This intentional approach to leadership allowed principals to “serve life, affirm it, and celebrate it” and, therefore, to create a “life giving” culture within the school (CCSTA, 2002, p. 5). Hand in hand with this intentional effort to build up rather than tear down, was the recognition that others were carrying heavy burdens that may be known or unknown to the principal. Through a consciously caring approach, these burdens could be lightened or, at the least, not added to. This caring ethic is a “professional virtue” that places the principal “in service to others.” As servant, the principal fully accepts responsibility to do everything possible to care for the full range of student, teacher and parent needs (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 115).

This caring virtue was evidenced by Nancy who revealed that she made an effort to “deal with everything” and, as result, the “atmosphere is healthier” (Nancy, p. 7). Such caring is the cornerstone of a commitment to serve ideas and people. “Caring involves promoting human development and responding to human needs. This idea equates teaching with caring and caring with teaching as one and the same activity” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 35).

Cherished: the Principal’s Love, Care, and Acceptance of All

Catholic principals throughout this study were effusive in their language of love. Olivia’s description that children “are God’s gift to us” echoes closely the words of Jacob and Curtin (2007) when they recognized that “the communal dimension of Catholic schooling is built upon women and men who possess a profound respect for human beings, each of whom is created in God’s image and likeness” (p. xix). This “language of love” is unique. Conversations freely expressed principals’ passion, care and yes, love,

for their students and their staff. It was a powerful testimony to the character and faith of each principal.

In much the same way, the most eloquent and passionate writing to be found on Catholic education is the 2002 treatise commissioned by the Canadian Catholic Schools Trustees Association. *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* is a moving and poignant rendering of the call to Catholic education and the absolute, unyielding conviction of love for all.

Whom are we willing to love?...You are my child, the Beloved...The Catholic school is the place where we strive to help the young believe these words of revelation. (CCSTA, 2002, p. 7)

The love with which Catholic principals cherish their students is a work of heart. “If we want a person to enter into our heart’s domain, we open wide the doors through kindness, consideration and compassion, attentive care, and tender love” (CCSTA, 2002, p. 32).

Seeking: the Principal’s Option for the Lost

We need to seek out the lost in evangelization. (CCSTA, 2002, p. 44)

Principals frequently referred to their task of “finding the lost,” “taking care of the underdog,” and “going the extra mile.” Referred to as a preferential “option for the lost” (CCSTA, 2002, p. 45), this deep-seated belief ensures that no heart is left behind.

Seeking the lost is a task principals take seriously. Conscious decisions, safeguards of the process, planning of celebrations, unity of community, and building of relationships all come together to provide an opportunity for each student to achieve their potential. At the deepest level of leadership, principals were committed to seeking the lost and letting them know they are loved.

As Catholic education we have a fundamental option for the lost...the worst possible scenario is to be lost and to realize that no one is coming to look for you...no matter how lost our youth may have become, as long as we have breath to draw, we will never stop looking for them. (CCSTA, 2002, p. 45)

Principals realized that this seeking of the lost extended to families at-risk as well recognizing that “schools that communicate high levels of care and concern create a genuine basis for engaging parents, teachers and students” (Manno, 2004, p. 293).

Forgiven: Principals’ Perspective on Making Mistakes

Throughout the study principals revealed their understanding of the formative nature of working with children. Aware that children are growing, testing, pushing boundaries, and figuring out their life’s meaning along the way, allowed principals to take a stance that was very tolerant of mistakes. This forgiving nature surfaced time and again when principals shared disciplinary situations (Mulligan, 2006). Using their own life experience and faith perspective, they worked to communicate a message that allowed for mistakes yet expected better. A message that provided reconciliation and restitution. “We have to extend our caring to forgiving. The forgiveness extended, we then go with the business of making things right” (Starratt, 1991, p. 153).

Hopeful: Principals on a Hope-filled Faith Journey

Catholic schools are homes of hope (Bezzina, 2010; Bryk at al., 1993; CCSTA, 2002; Himsl, 1985; Laplante, 1985). Catholic principals are hope filled leaders (CCE, 1997). The data was clear in this study with Alberta’s high school principals and the literature on Catholic education resounds with a similar message. A school with hope-

filled leadership will be a place where education is seen as a “work of love” (Bezzin, 2010, p. 8). “Hope is necessary for our schools to flourish” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 181).

Principals identified that hope was closely tied with faith; “knowing that there’s something out there beyond us and that we’re loved” (Group C, p. 9). Bezzin (2010) concurred. He suggested that for “Catholic educational leaders, hope takes on a particular complexion” (p. 3). He, as well, proposed that “hope is closely linked to purpose” and that our “lives have a meaning” that is worth “living and dying for” (p. 5).

Hope-less leaders have no place in schools which bear witness to the power of the risen Christ, the ultimate sign of hope... Where Catholic schools are at their best, their leaders are people filled with hope. (Bezzin, 2010, p. 10)

Catholic schools provide quantitative evidence that hope resides within their communities.

1. There is substantial relationship between attending Catholic schools for 10 years or more and being a hopeful person.
2. Catholic education is twice as powerful an influence on hope as is educational level.
3. Catholic education is still the stronger predictor of hopefulness. (McDermott, 1985, p. 56)

Relationships are at the heart of Catholic community and from relationships “hope is born” (Bezzin, 2010, p. 6). These relationships shape people. When teachers prove to students how far they are willing to go to help them succeed (David, p. 22), hope is born. When leaders go above and beyond for their schools, their staff, and their communities, they too inspire hope. Thusly, the hope-filled leader is on a moral journey; a journey of

faith witnessed to all members of his or her school community (Bezzin, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2007).

Liberated: The Principal's Freedom to Lead in a Catholic School Culture

A seeming paradox arose from this study that bears further reflection and invites deeper thinking. Despite the fact that Catholic principals have been charged with greater responsibilities and have allegiance to “more bosses” (Group A, p. 7), they consistently identified a sense of freedom; a sense of liberation within their Catholic school culture and community. Principals spoke of “wholeness” (Rhonda, p. 4) in their work. Opportunities to be authentic and to bring their “true being” to work each day was a sense of relief. While responsibilities rode high, fear rode low.

Nova Scotia no longer houses a Catholic school system. Consequently, in Focus Group B, Nancy shared of a friend's experience back in the Maritimes. This teacher friend was asked to remove her cross necklace upon entering the school. Nancy was horrified and saw this as an imposition, a restriction of freedom. “I mean, I was just shocked. You're kidding me! You can't wear your jewellery?” (Group B, p.5). Principals' feelings of “being at home” (Group E, p.2) and “being who they are” confirm these principals' need to work in an environment that supports, enhances, and integrates their personal lives with their vocational lives.

Catholic principals work in a culture rich with the traditions, rituals, symbols, and stories of Catholicity (Bryk et al., 1993; Cook, 2007; Fry, 2003). This culture is personal and based on relationship. This culture is sensory and story based. This Catholic culture defines who Catholic principals are and what they should do (Palestini, 2009). Rather than constriction, there is freedom. Rather than resentment, there is joy.

Catholicity demands that not only the outcomes but the very processes by which they are achieved embody the gospel values. The creation of a genuine Catholic school culture lies in the synthesis of response and result. (Wallace, 2000, p. 197)

In support of this experience, leadership and educational literature concur with a construct titled: loose and tight leadership. Dufour et al. (2008) defined the phrase as “a leadership concept in which leaders encourage autonomy and creativity (loose) within well-defined parameters and priorities that must be honoured (tight)” (p. 470). Collins (2001) suggests “the good-to-great companies built a consistent system with clear constraints, but they also gave people freedom and responsibility within the framework for that system” (p. 125).

This loose and tight leadership is evident with Catholic principals. The tight parameters of their Catholic paradigm, their Catholic culture, their Catholic community provide clear expectations and directives on what is valued and how these values need to be lived. A clear way of doing things is identified. Within this structure are clear mission and vision. This “community of mind” is a “network of shared ideologies” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 72). The loose aspects of Catholic leadership refer to principals’ liberty within the Catholic school community to embody the virtues they possess as leaders. Their freedom to lead and to love in their own unique and human way allows them opportunities to be effective leaders and authentic witnesses within their place of work.

The “liberating” quality of the Catholic principalship is perhaps one of the most powerful revelations of this study. By embracing this evidence as foundational, subsequent leadership truths are revealed. This study is a study of leadership and, as

such, appropriate models for Catholic school leadership are explored. In our search for relevant leadership exemplars, the school of spiritual/transcendental leadership rings true and resonates most profoundly with the liberating aspect of leadership for Catholic principals. In purporting transcendental leadership, Sanders, Hopkins, and Geroy (2003) suggested:

Our model provides an alternative way of characterizing spiritually oriented leaders, as they strive to integrate spirituality into all aspects of their life. It brings spirituality out of the “closet” and places it where it belongs---in the mind (consciousness), the heart (moral character) the soul (faith) and daily accomplishments of the leader. (p. 29)

Within this section of the chapter the liberating aspect of leadership in a Catholic school culture will be discussed. This piece begins within the circle of covenantal community, where the principal’s relationship with “followers” is foundational. Principals’ decision-making process within this Catholic community will be reviewed. Additionally, appreciating how the principal is able to mediate the secular and sacred worlds by making connections will be explored. Understanding the principal’s authorization to seek justice and to remain focused on the essential aspects of leading the school will close this segment.

Promised: a Covenantal Culture

The covenantal nature of Catholic schools was clear and observable through the stories principals told of their leadership experiences. Common agreements on what the school stood for and common values that grounded understandings created a climate of mutual understanding (McDermott, 1985). Rhonda used the word “promise.” Scripture

and literature on leadership in community use the word “covenant.” “Covenantal communities have at their center shared ideas, principles, and purposes that provide a powerful source of authority for leadership practice” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 2).

The Catholic and Christian meaning of covenant most definitely is a promise. It includes elements of faithfulness, responsibility, and accountability. “The Hebrews knew that their well being – salvation – depended upon faithfulness to their communal covenant....Each individual member saw themselves as crucial to the community’s keeping of the covenant with God” (Groome, 1998, p. 185).

Again the paradoxical nature of liberty makes itself known. The commitment (covenant, promise) that parents have with the Catholic school is binding and each partner in the commitment knows their responsibility. Both members must be accountable for the expectations and behaviours that are inextricably tied to the covenant. However, because of these explicit and implicit agreements, principals are “free” to follow through on expectations and hold all members of the community accountable for ensuring that these standards are met. The need for them to justify their actions is minimized.

Discerning: Moral Decision Making

Catholic principals described a sense of luxury when they reflected on their decision-making processes. A feeling of relief emanated from a clear sense of Catholic direction which, although not clearly indicating “black and white,” certainly helped to “eliminate some options” in the principal’s discerning procedures (David, p. 18-19). This moral certainty rests in the Catholic culture of the school and is identified by Fry (2003)

when he states that “culture consists of the set of key values, assumptions, understandings, and a way of thinking considered to be morally right...” (p. 711).

Morally right. Moral leadership. It is at this point that the literature intersects most closely with experiences of Alberta’s Catholic principals. Serviovanni (1992, 1994, 2000, 2007) has written for more than 20 years on the topic of moral leadership. His premise linked a number of key concepts in support of moral leadership. Fundamental to his argument is that the leader is servant first. As such, a servant leader serves his or her community. This community, gathered together with a common vision, mission, and values is a covenantal community. Moral commitment within the community is tied to a common purpose and is built on strong relationships of mutual respect. Covering this covenantal community is a blanket of care, compassion, and love. Moral leadership within a covenantal community produces a new vision of leadership:

A new kind of hierarchy emerges; one that places purposes, values and commitments at the apex and teachers, principals, parents and students below in service to these purposes. Moral authority is the means to add extra value to your leadership practice, and this added value is the secret to bringing about extraordinary commitment and performance in schools. (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 70)

Mediated: Connecting Communities

Catholic culture is a Catholic way of seeing the world. For Catholic principals this culture provided “tools” and “rituals” that allowed them to mediate situations that were difficult. This mediation allowed principals to connect the needs of the secular world with the beliefs of the sacred world. Through tragedy and crisis especially, Catholic belief systems allowed the principal to bring solace, calm, and encouragement to

a community in calamity. In addition, principals agreed that that Catholic school provided students from families of faith a home where they feel safe and secure. Often these children's family values were strongly devoted to Christian principles. In a public school these views were disallowed. In a Catholic school they were embraced. Again, an ability to mediate and connect home life with school life was central.

The community mediates Christ to the world. The word that he spoke is not heard in our contemporary world unless it is proclaimed by the community. The power that flowed forth from him in order to enable response is no longer effective unless manifested by the community. As God once acted through Christ, so he now acts through those who are conformed to the image of his Son and whose behaviour pattern is an imitation of his. (O'Connor as cited in Rolheiser, 1999, p. 80)

Authorized: Speaking for Those in Need

Within the theme of liberation emerged the sub-theme of authorization. "Catholics believe that all people have social responsibility to protect all human life by working for justice" (Cook, 2007, p. 17). One participant in particular was able to articulate the principal's sense of justice when speaking for those who are disadvantaged. He felt his "authority" to do so emanated from "a solid sense of what a good Catholic school is supposed to be" (John, p. 11). Covenantal community is the context when discussing John's insight. His observation that "if I'm off base with something I'm okay with somebody correcting me" is a clear indicator of covenantal community at its best. In similar words, Rolheiser (1999) using scripture as his inspiration (John 21:18)

suggested that once you are part of a covenantal community “others will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go” (p. 61).

Both John and Rolheiser identified a key aspect of this liberating, yet accountable, covenantal culture. It involves commitment to others who share your beliefs and values. Principals in this environment do not act alone, but are answerable to other members of their community. Conversely, this accountability works as a charge to principals to “speak up” for those who cannot speak for themselves. This moral responsibility expects Catholic leaders to be the voice for the voiceless and to, perhaps, lead others (because of their commitment to the community) where they may “not want to go.”

A covenant is a binding agreement that, like a marriage, “binds us for better and for worse” (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 61). In a Catholic school community the principal has binding responsibilities to take care of all, especially those most vulnerable. Groome (1998) made strong statements in his chapter: *A Faith that Does Justice*. In it, he claims that justice is not an option; it is a mandate (p. 379). He grounded this understanding in the knowledge that how God relates to us is how we are to relate to others: “People of the covenant are to imitate God’s ‘option’ for the poor and oppressed. As God does so should God’s people do” (p. 367). Catholic principals are especially mandated, because of their unique positioning and opportunity, to seek justice. And, within the covenantal community of their Catholic school, they have liberty to do so.

Focused: Staying true to a Catholic mandate

Because Catholic principals lead in communities with a clear and common mission, they are able to focus on what is truly important and disregard whatever else might take attention away from this vital mandate. Through the words of principals in

this study it became clear that they valued this singularity of purpose. They felt advantaged in their ability to commit their energies to a well-defined and meaningful mandate. This focus gave them courage to say no to outside agencies who clamoured for attention. The modern school has become the panacea for the ills of society. Programs, speakers, and expectations line up outside the principal's door daily. So many demands are placed before schools that go far beyond an educational directive. Although all principals must separate the superfluous requests from what are necessary, Catholic principals are provided the advantage of a mandate that allows them to say, "No."

Collins (2001) in his book *Good to Great* introduced and explored the "hedgehog concept." This idea relates to our discussions regarding focus.

Hedgehogs...simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea, a base principal or concept that unifies and guides everything. It doesn't matter how complex the world, a hedgehog reduces all challenges and dilemmas to simple – indeed almost simplistic – hedgehog ideas. For a hedgehog, anything that does not somehow relate to the hedgehog idea holds no relevance. (p. 91)

The powerful insight here is simplicity. "Hedgehogs see what is essential and ignore the rest" (p. 91). So too, do Catholic principals intent on preserving the essence of their school's mission. Principals simplify and make decisions based on what they are called to do. And, as such, they are able to dismiss the never-ending distractions that would draw them and their community away from the real work at hand.

Challenged: Leading 21st Century Catholic Schools

A guiding and fundamental question in this research was, "What are the challenges facing Alberta's Catholic high school principals?" The needs of each

community can be vastly different. Principals of schools of 1,500 students will have different tensions than principals of schools with 100 students. Rural and urban communities provide unique contexts for their Catholic schools. Sixteen different separate school districts provide sixteen different perspectives on leadership and education. A range of challenges, thusly, emerged.

Despite the contextual diversity, however, there were more commonalities than differences. Alberta's Catholic schools and, subsequently their principals, face situations that are universal to the province's Catholic schools and, one would posit, to the nation's Catholic schools. Four sub-themes emerged. Following the title of each sub-theme, an essential focus question leads the discussion around data from this study and the literature. The sub-themes have been ordered to create a process of examination from the inside out, beginning with self reflection on the authenticity of Alberta's Catholic high schools; moving to the challenges regarding relationships and commitments between parents and the Catholic school; then reflections on Catholic schools within the context of their parishes and in relationship with their own parish priests; and finally, society at large is brought into the discussion as concerns regarding the justified and viable nature of Catholic schools are reviewed.

Sanctified: Catholic Schools as Holy Communities

Are Catholic schools who they say they are?

Catholic principals are reflective creatures. As spiritual leaders they are at home in a state of reflection. Without prompting, they were the first to ask: "Are we who we say we are? Are we authentic? Are we doing enough? Am I an effective leader? Are the teachers on my staff committed to the mission of our school?" These hard hitting

personal questions were the crux of the matter. Catholic schools cannot begin to critique others if they, themselves, are not doing what they have been called to do.

Self-examination is an ongoing process. It is both cyclical and regenerative and the answers are always changing. The questions, however, begin and continue the critical dialogue that must be part of the Catholic school experience. History in Canada has proven that publicly funded Catholic education can be “taken away.” All it requires is a lack of authenticity and effort on the part of the schools. If Catholic education is not distinct and unique, what’s the point? If Christ is not present and permeated throughout every aspect of the school, children should be able to walk down the street to their public school and take catechism on Saturday morning. The argument is valid.

Thusly, every single focus group spontaneously suggested that they, as principals, harbour a fear that Catholic education could be “taken away” from them. This theme emerged more than six times. Alberta’s principals know that they must actively create authentic and vibrant Catholic communities or risk the possibility of losing the opportunity to do so. This concern was very much on the minds of principals.

With this responsibility front and center, the conversation begins with “How are we doing?” The data reflected that most of the challenges identified in response to that question were focused in two areas: the quality of the teachers and creating relevance for students. Quality of teachers was often described as their commitment to their Catholic faith through witness and participation in the parish. Principals looked for teachers who had a sense of vocation that reflected their absolute call to teaching in a Catholic school. Recognizing that teachers were on their own journey of faith meant that faculty members ranged from “small c Catholics to big c Catholics” (Group D, p. 20). Although this

would be expected in a community, it provided a challenge to principals in meeting the needs and expectations of this wide range of teachers. Everyone's definition of Catholicity was not the same.

In their pastoral letter titled: *A Burning and Shining Lamp: The Role of the Teacher in the Catholic School* (2007), the Bishops of Alberta addressed the challenges placed before teachers in a Catholic school. They recognized the teachers' call to a vocation that "at times seems overwhelming...Teachers, like all of us, are on a journey of faith, and they must be allowed every opportunity to develop and be formed into 'burning and shining lamps' for Christ" (p. 2).

The teacher in the Catholic school 1) knows Christ and his Church, 2) is a model of faith in the Trinity, 3) is an advocate for social justice, and 4) is supported by the faith community. In this letter, Alberta's Bishops understood that "this lamp can be easily extinguished...by discouragement, exhaustion, or a perceived lack of support" (p. 4). In response they called upon parents, priests, and the Church community to "care for, nurture and celebrate our teachers" in their "vital ministry and mission" (p. 4).

James Mulligan's (2006) research on Catholic education presented a "realistic picture of the actual state and the possible potential of public Catholic education across Canada" (p. 18). Through interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups, Mulligan explored the complex state of Catholic schools in Canada. In his discussion regarding the formation of teachers, he identified three indicators or "poverties" that characterize the life and teaching of many Catholic educators: a poverty of theology, a poverty of learning, and a poverty of spirituality.

Teachers in Catholic schools may not be preaching from pulpits, but they certainly can minister from the sacred place of the classroom. The teacher's spiritual life and the students' fundamental hunger for God make the classroom sacred. When teachers have no inner life or when they fear tending to the life of the spirit, there is little chance that the gospel will be communicated effectively. And there is a good chance that the exciting evangelizing mission of the Catholic educator will be reduced to drudgery. (p. 230)

The literature is clear. Catholic teachers need support, formation, and encouragement if they are to do the critical work they been called to. Spiritual growth within community provides the best hope for the future authenticity of our Catholic schools.

Creating relevance for students was a second area of authentic concern identified by this study. As high school principals, participants in this study were working with the most challenging age group, teenagers. Characterized by a need to question authority and seek acceptance from their peers, teens can be highly critical of religion. Principals shared stories of kids skipping school when mass was held or registering at another school in order to avoid taking a mandatory Religion class. Tempered with each challenge, however, were stories of youth who were passionate and involved on their own spiritual journey. The majority of focus groups told stories of mission trips and of students returning home "absolutely changed" (Group C, p. 6). In one large high school a passionate young chaplain was energizing the faith life of the school. Youth rallies and trips to youth conferences were underway. Recounting the tragedy in one high school

upon losing a student to a sudden death, the principal highlighted the powerful response of the students in coming together as a community of faith to heal and find peace.

As leaders of communities of young people, principals have a particular charge; a particular passion for teens. As Catholic leaders well aware of their salvific mission, Catholic principals were absolutely committed to ensuring that young people have opportunities to witness real faith in action and embrace Catholic beliefs in relevant and meaningful ways. They spoke of wanting students to understand that there is “something bigger” than their own lives (Olivia, p. 2). They spoke of standing by their expectations that all students will enrol in religion classes (Group C). They spoke of wanting their students to find meaning in a secular world of empty promises and dangerous dreams.

In Mulligan’s (2006) book on Catholic education he addressed six key issues that he believed are currently impacting evangelization and demand the attention of Catholic educators and the Church. These issues are on the hearts of young people (both students and young teachers) and finding a Catholic response that is meaningful to youth will be critical. They are:

- the brokenness of life,
- same sex relationships,
- assisted suicide,
- pluralism of belief and practice,
- faith literacy for Catholic educators, and
- inclusion of women. (p. 103-104)

In the search for relevance, Catholic high school principals are instrumental in connecting young people to the 21st century Church. Their unique understanding of

adolescents and their primary role as “faith leaders” in the Catholic school community make it imperative that these principals find ways to bridge the gap between teens and the Church.

It is not right that people so young live a life of such meaninglessness. Catholic education must offer a meaningful alternative, and it can do this because it is grounded in a way of life: Jesus’ life. For children and adolescents socialized in a culture and everyday life in which they experience so many conflicting values and behaviours, the greatest contribution the Catholic school and Catholic educators can make is to offer certainty about what it is to be human and to be loved by God. (Mulligan, 2006, p. 299)

Committed: Catholic Schools and their Covenant with Parents.

Are Catholic parents doing what it takes?

Perhaps the most overwhelming challenge for principals (based on the amount of concerns and conversation generated on this topic) was that of parents. Catholic principals recognized that their clients were the parents of their Catholic community. As such, the goal of the school was to meet the needs of these parents and to expect, in turn, support. Principals needed and wanted committed Catholic parents as partners in this endeavour. This, quite often, was not the case. A range of parental issues were identified by the principals. They included:

- abdication of responsibility;
- parental lack of will;
- short-sightedness regarding their children’s education academically and spiritually;

- choosing to send their children to the public school;
- parents who were not actively practicing;
- parents who want faith for their children but are not willing to witness;
- decline in receiving the sacraments;
- spiritual immaturity, and
- parents whose faith reflected the wide ranging continuum of Catholicity.

Quite simply, principals felt that parents were often not stepping up in regards to their responsibility and their duty in raising children of faith. Educational choices were “left to the child.” Parents were ignoring the sacraments and, as a result, rates of Baptism and Confirmation are declining. It was suggested that parents themselves had often not grown in their spiritual maturity. The last attention they had given to their own spiritual growth had taken place when they were in school. Adult formation was not evident or at play in their decision making process.

This lack of will and commitment in regard to their children’s academic and spiritual education led to one of two actions. Either parents registered their children at the public school or they brought them to the Catholic school and hoped that the school would provide the faith element that was absent at home. Either way, principals felt abandoned in the work they were committed to doing. Raising Catholic children requires a partnership, a bonding between home and school. This was noticeably absent.

Catholic teachings are clear about the central and primary role that parents play in the education of their children (OCCB, 1989). In addressing parents in their document, *This Moment of Promise* (1989), the Ontario bishops stated:

You are the primary educators of your children. Catholic schools can only extend and complement the educational process which you have begun and are continuing with your children. We encourage you to take your own faith development as seriously as you take that of your children. We invite you to become more involved in shaping educational policies and directions-- particularly those dealing with religious and family life education programs, personal development courses, and child and day care programs. Seek out and insist on ways of becoming more closely related to those who are teaching your children. Consider the opportunities offered by parent organizations in our schools. Catholic schools will be greatly enriched by your efforts to bridge the gap between parish, home and school. (OCCB, 1989, p. 6)

Ontario's Catholic bishops encouraged parents while at the same time they gave credence to a parent's feelings of exhaustion, stress, confusion, and inadequacy. They reminded parents that Catholic schools do not expect perfection from families and that the school exists in a supportive role for parents as their children grow in faith. Catholic schools are designed to work in collaboration with parents (USCCB, 2005, p. 3).

Alberta's bishops used the scripture from Luke 2:46 to illustrate the beautiful connection of faith and parenting.

Luke's account of the child Jesus in the Temple is one of the few Gospel glimpses into the life of the Holy Family. We cannot help but feel the anxiety of Mary and Joseph as they search for their lost child, and their relief when they find him. The account is not, however a tale of a missing child. Indeed, what Mary treasures in her heart after being reunited with Jesus is that he found his way to the house of

his Father. Now he leads all his disciples, including his earthly parents, to his heavenly Father. We, the bishops of Alberta, invite you to treasure the gift of our Alberta Catholic schools. Their mission is to assist you in your great vocation as parents of nurturing the faith life of your children, so that they may follow the pathway to their heavenly Father. (ACCB, 2006, p. 1-2)

The bishops then presented five fundamental principles regarding the role of the Catholic parent:

1. The Catholic parent is the primary faith educator of the child.
2. All Catholic parents have a right to Catholic education for their children.
3. It is the duty of Catholic parents to entrust the education of their children to Catholic schools wherever it is possible.
4. Catholic parents must be attentive to the faith education that the Catholic school provides.
5. Catholic parents must be actively involved in the school life of their children. (p.2-3)

Mulligan (2006) recognized that one of the greatest challenges of Catholic schools was “partnering with parents in the education of their children” (p. 94). Ongoing dialogue with parents has been ineffective and exhausting. Catholic principals need to look at new ways and new opportunities to open the dialogue with parents regarding a new partnership between home and school for the sake of their children.

Embraced: Catholic Schools held in the Arms of the Church.

How does the Church support Catholic schools?

The Catholic school is situated squarely in the heart of the Catholic Church. This is undeniable and Church documents charge all members of the congregation with responsibilities towards the Catholic school. A Catholic school is Catholic because of the endorsement of its Bishop. The ties are close and binding. Principals in this study, however, shared challenges they faced with their own parish. Two main issues were identified in these discussions. The first referred to the relationship the school has with the parish priest and the need for support from the parish for the school. The second challenged the parish and Church in its effort to address the needs of youth.

Relationships between the principal and the priest were often described as supportive and life giving. A number of principals relied on their priests for spiritual guidance. Many had priests who were dear friends. Ties between the priest and the school were often strong. The converse was also true. Building a relationship with the parish priest was often identified as a challenge. Making time to be together and dealing with different priests and their own personalities was difficult.

Recognizing that the Catholic school resides within the “arms of the Church” paints a picture that suggests mutual support, love, and understanding. This point was recognized by Ontario bishops when they confirmed:

As bishops, we are committed to working together with parents and educators to realize this new possibility of becoming more of a Church community for the sake of our young people. Together we face the task of developing schools into communities of faith in which the requirements of good citizenship will be

learned in a vital way from the perspective of the message of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. (OCCB, 1989, p. 2)

Principals in this study sometimes found the parish to be overly demanding expecting the principal to be at every function and involved in every group (Group F, p. 11). There were cases of principals feeling judged and criticized by their own parish community. Principals reported that their teachers sometimes avoided mass at their school's parish because parents would want to address school issues on Sundays or corner the teachers during parish events. The constant balancing act for principals was between ensuring that their teachers were fully supporting the parish and yet, being respectful of the teachers' own needs and faith development.

On the other hand, principals just as often spoke of the parish being "very passionate" about their little school (Neil, p. 15) and of the strong community that existed between sister schools and their parish (Group B). In many cases, parish groups were involved in the school providing support to families in need through compassionate care initiatives. Parents' strong desire to enhance the faith life at the school could result in the principal having to say no to certain requests. Benjamin's perspective was that he sometimes had to "resist" requests that pushed the school towards becoming its own "church."

But our school is a school not a church. And that's...what I've tried to bring about. We're an extension of, and a support of, but we're not a replacement of the Church. And that's kind of one of the challenges I find. (Group F, p. 4)

The second concern is a hurdle for both parish/Church and school. Making faith real and meaningful for its young people is not an easy task. Schools are challenged by

this situation, no doubt. Principals identified, however, that the Church has a role to play in this as well. The school cannot be all things to its Catholic children. They need help. They need to put some of those concerns on the plate of the Church. The creation of youth programs and events that promote relevance for young people are essential. For schools whose clientele is all youth, this is particularly of concern.

The Ontario bishops in their seminal document: *This Moment of Promise*, charged all priests to “make present the mysteries of faith which gather together and sustain a Catholic educational community” (p. 8). They reminded the clergy that as they support the school in their efforts in faith development, social outreach, and liturgical celebrations both the parish and the school will benefit. “Through your priestly ministry, the sacramental life of the Church can signify that our faith is not only something to be learned, it is also a mystery to be celebrated” (OCCB, 1989, p. 8).

Recognizing that differences of opinion will exist, it is expected that priests and educators will be engaged as partners rather than adversaries. The USCCB (2005) recommend that programs be developed that will assist pastors and clergy to understand and appreciate “the critical value of our Catholic schools in fulfilling the teaching ministry of the Church” (p. 14).

Mulligan (2006), himself a priest, acknowledged that the home-school-parish connection has been greatly compromised of late. He suggested that the reason for this dysfunction was poor communication and he attributed this to two factors: 1) the personality and the openness (or lack of openness) of the pastor, and 2) the personality and sense of ecclesial community (or lack of sense) of the principal and/or the teachers. Two central questions arise from this discord: “Is the parish priest open and sympathetic

to Catholic education? Do the principal and teachers have any understanding of the basic Christian community formed and shaped by the parish?” (p. 94)

Through his work, Mulligan was able to detail a number of issues of perceived disconnect from both a school’s and a priest’s point of view. The conversation he shares is engaging and hard hitting. He concludes with nine suggestions for a “working agenda” to enhance communication between parish and school:

1. Renew the efforts to take up conversation between parish and school.
2. The Church must speak not from authority, but from an “earned right.”
3. Catholic teachers are in urgent need of ongoing formation in faith.
4. New ways of collaboration must be explored.
5. Lay ministry needs to be promoted.
6. Sunday preaching needs to “touch the lives of the people.”
7. We need to take to heart and take to action the preferential option for the poor.
8. Sunday preaching needs to “depend on Jesus.”
9. Laity must recognize the burdens of priests; the complex and overworked nature of their vocations; and provide support and work more closely together. (p. 100-102)

Justified: Catholic Schools in Society.

How do Catholic schools exist within a secular world view?

Our young people are the Church of today and tomorrow. (USCCB, 2005, p. 8)

Catholic schools are alive and well in Alberta. The fact that they are thriving within a society that is so outwardly secular and so outspoken in its secular beliefs is

nothing short of a miracle. Catholic school principals describe their schools as “counter cultural” (Cook, 2007; Focus Group A, p. 19). This refers to the fact that many of the teachings, values, and activities that take place within the schools’ walls are antithesis to today’s society. Catholic schools are places of morality where values are defined and taught. Modern society prescribes a more relative morality where individuals decide what is good or right or just. Catholic schools, anchored in 2000 years of scripture and tradition believe that morality is not relative. Truths exist and these are defined and followed in a Catholic school.

Not surprisingly, Catholic schools are “unto themselves” in today’s world. As such, their views and their practices are radically different. Principals were clear. One of the biggest challenges they face is creating relevance for their Catholic community in a secular world. Children attend school for up to six hours a day. The rest of the time they are immersed in and bombarded by the values of popular culture. It is therefore not surprising that principals wrestle with the incongruence that arises when these worlds collide.

Passionate words were spoken by principals who were utterly “worn out” by having to justify their existence to those within and those outside their community. Principals felt that much of their energy was spent in this debate rather than spent in focusing in other areas. In many cases this call to justify was “hopeless.” Rhonda suggested that when you are speaking a language of faith with those who don’t believe there is no common ground. Paradigms, worldviews, mindscapes...however you want to describe it; these are the means by which individuals view the world and debating each other’s causes is often pointless.

Within the theme of justification arose the issue of financial viability. Most of the time spent justifying related to an underlying concern of dollars and cents. At the provincial level, the argument continues to rage over the necessity for two arms of public education. Justifying Catholic education to the public and the government is often done as a response to their desire for fiscal change. Justifying Catholic education to Catholic parents within a parish also emanates from the need to pay the bills. Schools in Alberta receive funding according to their student enrolment, so when Catholic principals see their own constituents' children heading to another school in the community, they also pay the price in their school budgets. Money plays a huge role in justifying Catholic education.

In small towns, student enrolment is a constant tug of war. The viability of the local Catholic school is ultimately at risk when enrolments drop below the critical level. Knowing that all Catholic children were not necessarily attending their school was a source of angst for these principals. Additionally, the need to justify the school's existence within a milieu of declining population was of particular challenge.

Appointed: Leadership in a Catholic school

As result of this research, insights regarding Catholic school leadership emerged. Recognizing that the principal in a Catholic school has a complex and a “seemingly impossible” task (Mulligan, 2006; Traviss, 2004) would suggest that the leadership abilities and behaviours these principals deploy would be complex as well. When principals in this study were asked to describe a leadership model that best encapsulated their own experiences as a leader, the responses were varied and yet contained strong, common threads. Principals were most likely to put forth the concept of servant

leadership as a construct that resonated with their own values and beliefs about leadership. In terms of practical examples, however, the most commonly shared stories centered on recognizing, appreciating, and relying on the “gifts” of their colleagues. The word “gift” in itself, is an inherently Catholic term used to refer to the abilities and talents a person possesses (McDermott, 1985; Palestini, 2009). The idea of “gift” implies that this talent has been received from God and is an ability that God expects will be used to and for the betterment of others and the world at large.

Leadership that focuses on the abilities and strengths of others is labelled in the literature as “distributed leadership” (Singh, 2012). The identification of distributed leadership actions as key to the principal’s work was startling, as this model of leadership is largely absent, undefined, and undeveloped in the Catholic leadership literature. Upon further reflection, however, it certainly rings true as a construct solidly anchored in a Catholic worldview. Additionally, Catholic leaders bring a spiritual perspective to this dynamic that is absent from current understandings of distributed leadership.

In this section of the analysis of data, two leadership models will be fully discussed. The first discussion will be focused on shared or distributed leadership; the second will discuss the servant leadership model. Both will be reviewed in terms of the data and the literature. A third topic will provide discussion regarding the evolutionary nature of leadership.

Gifted: a Community of Leaders

The idea of shared, distributed leadership was explained aptly by Rhonda when she said that this style of leadership “honors” people and “their gifts” and allows them “to shine” (Group C, p. 13). The term “shine” is used frequently by Catholics in reference to

the scripture from Matthew 5:16. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Again, the language of faith comes easily to principal’s lips and so clearly frames their understandings of the world and their relationships with those around them.

One of the focus group’s school district had been intentionally studying and applying a leadership view proposed by Rath and Conchie (2008) called, *Strengths Based Leadership*. The impact of this teaching on the principals in the district was noticeable. Each principal in the focus group identified the strengths- based perspective as having significant impact on their leadership style. They also recognized a change within their schools as a result. They felt that they had come to realize, as leaders, that they could “let go” and not be responsible for everything. As well, the teachers in their schools were thriving within this developing environment and were, in turn, using strength finder’s principles with their own students.

Strength-based leadership is based on decades of data which included “more than 20,000 in-depth interviews with senior leaders, studies of more than one million work teams, and 50 years of Gallup Polls about the world’s most admired leaders” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 2). Most importantly, the Gallup team then went on to ask “followers” to explain why they “follow the most influential leader in their life” (p. 2). The three key findings from this research were:

1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths.
2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.
3. The most effective leaders understand their followers’ needs. (pp. 2-3)

The Gallup team suggested, as a result, that the leader must first identify his or her strengths and invest in them. It is the leader's task, in turn, to provide opportunities for his or her staff to identify their strengths. The next step is to maximize that team. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2012) placed strengths-based leadership clearly in the transformative realm and provided a new label, *appreciative leadership*. They believed that "when we work from our strengths there is a sense of joy, flow, energy, and fulfillment; operating from strengths increases people's success, productivity, and performance" (p. 56).

In an effort to place strengths-based leadership and the insights of this study's principals in the wider context of leadership, the school of distributed leadership theory came to the fore. A distributed leadership model permits leaders to "utilize the talents, interests, and knowledge of staff in order to tackle complex work" (Singh, 2012, p. 43).

Leaders must accept...that they cannot bring about change alone, no matter how skilled or knowledgeable they are. They must see the value in involving others and realize that true leadership lies in lighting the fire that ignites the passion and commitment of self and others....They must get to know themselves and others in order to determine strengths and areas of opportunity. (Singh, 2012, p. 43)

Bolden (2011) made the connection between distributed leadership and other terms that have been used to describe similar leadership theory. He claimed that shared leadership, collective leadership, collaborative leadership, co-leadership and emergent leadership all suggest that the idea of leadership is "not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person" (p. 252).

Leithwood et al. (2008) in their “seven strong” claims regarding leadership included, as number five, “school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed” (p. 27). Additionally, these authors suggested evidence “about the superiority...of distributed rather than focused (single-person) leadership” (p. 35). Their discussion goes on to uncover a fundamental concept that bears further debate; namely the topic of power. These authors discovered that “there is no loss of power and influence on the part of [the leader] when...the power and influence of many others in the school increase” (p. 35).

This regard for power was explored by Sergiovanni (2007) in phrases such as “power over” and “power to.” “Power over” emphasized a control by the leader of what, how and when people do tasks, while “power to” views power as a source of energy for achieving common purpose and goals (p. 57). There is a heavy emphasis on following a vision, not a leader. Sergiovanni placed this regard for power in the transformative leader category.

Transformative leaders practice the principle of power investment. They distribute power among others in an effort to get more power in return. They know it is not power over people and events that count but power over accomplishments and the achievement of organizational purposes...teachers need to be empowered to act, to be given the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count. (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 75)

Palestini (2009) confirmed that the Catholic school leader enables others to reach their potential and trusts in the diversity of their gifts. “Leaders must realize that to

maximize their own power and effectiveness, they need to empower others... paradoxically, giving up power amounts to gaining power” (p. 39).

Servant leadership has a particular capacity for embracing this “shared” concept of leadership. Greenleaf (1979) strongly advocated for a community that embraces the person with an “unqualified acceptance.” People “grow taller” when their leaders empathize with who they are and what they are capable of doing. This empathy grows trust. Principals in the study recognized this link between servant leadership and helping others to reach their potential (Group D, p. 18). As the principal serves, he in turn lifts his colleagues up to fully realize their own gifts, talents, and abilities.

Catholic leadership literature makes scant reference to the leader’s role in sharing and distributing responsibility. Although limited, two significant sources were identified. Hunt (2009), in his book regarding Catholic educational leadership, reaffirmed that “in the context of a caring community, teachers can be supported in their efforts to work collaboratively and leaders can create a climate in which all members are empowered to grow both personally and professionally” (p. 95). Palestini (2009), too, entreated principals to “search out and discover the skills people bring.” In doing so, the principal leads with the heart and liberates these “communal gifts” (p. 38).

Leaders are also responsible for effectiveness by being enablers. They need to enable others to reach their potential both personally and institutionally....It begins with believing in the potential of people and trusting in the diversity of their gifts. Leaders must realize that to maximize their own power and effectiveness, they need to empower others...paradoxically, giving up power amounts to gaining power. (Palestini, 2009, p. 39)

Within the discussion of Catholic schools and shared leadership lies the concept of subsidiarity (Buetow, 1988; Bryk et al., 1993; Lavery, 2012; Sergiovanni, 2000). Formulated by Pope Pius XI, the principle of subsidiarity “unites authority with responsibility and by so doing...unites decision making with accountability” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 174). The principal of subsidiarity suggests that decisions need to be made at the “lowest” possible level. “That which affects the local community must be determined by that community” (Buetow, 1988, p. 226). Lavery (2012) suggested that the application of subsidiarity “empowers teachers and other staff, while allowing the principal...to become a mentor and consultant” (p. 38). Sergiovanni (2000) added that “central to the concept of subsidiarity is trust and the willingness to distribute power (p. 174).

In Catholic leadership terms, applying the principle of subsidiarity means that those most closely impacted by the decision should be the ones engaged in making the decision. By sharing leadership, principals distribute decision-making opportunities, ownership, and empowerment. As teachers step up to lead and “share their gifts” and strengths they, in turn, have ownership for the school, community, and decisions. Making decisions at the teacher’s level gives credence to this Catholic practice and supports the work of distributing leadership.

Through David’s reflection during Focus Group A’s time together, a link was made between the distributive model of leadership and Jesus as the ultimate leader (Group A, p. 15). David described Jesus a leader who “built capacity” when he trained his disciples to take his place once he was gone. This apostolic nature of shared leadership is, again, a very Catholic notion. It was a model referred to on many

occasions by the principals. Benjamin, in particular, had a very clear image in his mind of how his leadership was apostolic. He would consciously identify one of his staff members with one of Jesus' twelve. He found this practice helpful in terms of understanding the person and their strengths and weaknesses. He felt that he needed to recognize the staff member's gifts and talents yet, at the same time, challenge and guide them.

Served: the Greatest Among You

Servant leadership was a powerful message Jesus brought to the world 2,000 years ago. In words and actions, Jesus communicated a clear message that leaders lead by serving. This simple message is so complex in nature. Unfortunately, many theorists and practitioners have dismissed the notion of servant leadership as a weak and unrealistic model. In most cases, this is the result of a poor understanding of what the real message is. David had experienced this himself, when he described the conversations he had with others who responded to the idea of servant leadership with a comment of, "weak". David, however, identified a "great strength" in knowing that Jesus did not waver, built capacity with his apostles, and stood for what was right, and good, and true (Group A, p. 15).

This strength was identified by Fitz (2008) when he wrote:

Love and compassion are creative energies that must be expressed with a strength that enables them to hold their own against the evils in our world. Catholic servant leaders understand that true love and compassion exist with a quiet power that seeks neither to dominate nor manipulate, but instead aims to bring life-giving harmony to individuals and communities throughout our world. (xi)

Perhaps a discussion of servant leadership should begin with what it is not. It is not “trying to make others happy,” an impossible task. It does not require the leader to give selflessly 24/7 until he or she is depleted and exhausted. It does not reflect a selfish mentality, where the people in the organization are at the top and the leader is consumed with running behind them attempting to meet their every need. It is not the service of people; it is the service of ideals. It does not enable users; it enables builders and it enables the power of the community.

Catholic principals identified the “facilitative” nature of their work. When Nick proposed the image of a wine steward he was addressing the common conception principals have of needing to make sure all is running as it should. A little attention here, a little effort there, a pat on the back here, and word of direction there, all small, sometimes inconsequential acts that principals engage in minute by minute. The image of conductor (Group A, p. 13) addressed the facilitative and preparatory aspect of leadership as well. Working behind the scenes so the performance can go off without a hitch seems like a credible description of school leadership.

Servant leadership resonates so strongly with Catholic principals for a number of reasons. It is a spiritual, service, ideal oriented, morally guided model of leading. If servant leadership is authentic and effective, those being served will “grow as persons.” The leader will be a listener first and this listening will “build capacity in other people” (Greenleaf, 1979, p. 14).

Love, trust, empathy, compassion, and selflessness are all virtues inherent in this leadership paradigm. Servant leadership requires community, for “any human service where the one who is served should be loved in the process requires community”

(Greenleaf, 1979, p. 138). Servant leaders are smack dab in the middle of this community; positioned in the center of all that is happening within the school (Marzano, 2005). These leaders are especially alert as they pay attention to what is happening around them. “They are closer to the ground, they hear things, see things, know things and their intuitive insight is exceptional” (Greenleaf, 1979, p. 42).

Because of this compassion and this extreme care, servant leaders “carry the burdens of other people” (Greenleaf, 1979, p. 25), a reality lived by principals in this study as well (John, p. 5). This involves, among other things, sacrifice (Blanchard, 1999; Cardona, 2000).

Servant leadership is integral to the writing on Catholic school leadership (Hunt, 2000; Lavery, 2012; Palestini, 2009). It is, without doubt, the most recognized framework in the Catholic school literature. Catholic values of social justice and stewardship are fundamental here. By seeking the common good and by caring for the most at-risk, effective Catholic leaders lead as Jesus led and live, authentically, their Catholic values.

Principals in this study identified their need to pray and put in place routines that would support them spiritually. A number of the participants identified weekend retreats that they treasured as a way of reconnecting with their inner side. A spiritual perspective in the demanding world of leadership requires specific attention. Blanchard et al. (1999) recommended solitude, prayer, and the daily study of scripture as ways to stay on track. They advised servant leaders to keep their “eyes on Jesus, our spiritual true north---and spend time daily asking him for direction and help” (p. 160). Servant leadership is primarily a spiritual practice because, “by leading others, we come closer to God...

Everything we have – our time, our talent, even our very lives – are gifts from God” (Warneka, 2008, p. 36).

Grown: the Evolutionary Nature of Leadership

A third finding in this section on leadership indicated the evolutionary nature of leadership. In both focus groups and interviews, conversations were shaped by the principal’s years of experience in the principalship. Sergiovanni’s (2007) developmental stages of leadership provide insight here. As a leader moves through the four stages of bartering, building, bonding, and binding, sources of authority for leaders change as well; moving from bureaucratic and personal authority to professional and moral authority.

This concept was illustrated most aptly by John when he shared that after 28 years as a principal, he no longer was concerned with being judged by the superintendent. Instead, his yardstick had become the community and how it was functioning (John, p. 17).

Sergiovanni (1994) suggested that leaders must build trust in order to achieve higher states of leadership. Unity and common effort are required. The ties that need to be developed are ties of “we.” “Once a community of mind emerges, it becomes a substitute for leadership” (p. 198).

As well, data from this study gleaned insights into the evolving nature of the principal’s leadership. The most veteran principals in the study identified that as they matured as principals, their role had moved into one of mentor and coach (John, p. 15). In addition to evidence that illustrates that experienced principals no longer judge themselves in the way they did at the outset of their career, this speaks to principals’ growth in terms of how they lead and influence others.

School administrators should strive to be leaders of leaders. As leaders of leaders they work hard to build up the capacities of teachers and others so that direct leadership will no longer be needed. (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 50)

Spiritual Leadership

The literature on Catholic school leadership is sparse. Previous research has been largely done in United States and Australia with occasional contributions from Ireland and Canada. Much of the literature is rooted in the private school model of the United States where top concerns for principals are financial ones. Much of the literature assumes a strong presence of religious in the leadership of the school when, in reality, the majority of today's Catholic high schools are led by lay persons. In Canada, only three provinces have continued with publicly-funded Catholic education. Minimal research exists about the nature of Canada's publicly-funded Catholic schools. As a result, framing this study's findings within the context of a current, robust, critically thinking academic community is next to impossible.

One exception provides a genuinely thoughtful body of literature that has emerged on the topic of leadership in the past decade. The area of spiritual leadership and transcendental leadership opens new possibilities regarding Catholic school leadership. Although discussions of spiritual leadership are evident in Catholic leadership pedagogy, spiritual leadership has not previously been recognized in the secular world of research in leadership. Fry (2003) postulated that a key reason for excluding questions of workplace spirituality from leadership and other theories of management practice to date "appears to be due to the confusion and confounding surrounding the distinction between religion and spirituality" (p. 705). He goes on to

clarify, however, that “the common bridge between spirituality and religion is altruistic love – regard or devotion to the interests of others. In this respect, the basic spiritual teachings of the world’s great religions are remarkably similar” (p. 706).

This “new” spiritual model of leadership is necessary for any framework that would use religion as its base (Sanders et al., 2003). The fact that this burgeoning paradigm is just emerging may be partially attributed to the past emphasis on research within a scientific inquiry domain. Fry (2003) suggested that God and spirituality have been eliminated by past leadership theorists in order to “gain legitimacy as a science” (p. 722). New thoughts, new understandings, and new research have opened the door to spiritual/transcendental leadership as a higher order style of leadership designed to meet the complex needs of our dynamic society.

Spiritual leadership theory can be viewed in part as a response to the call for a more holistic leadership...Such a call that perhaps requires a new organizational paradigm that no longer views the study of the humanistic, spiritual, and natural as separate and independent domains; a worldview that regards workplace spirituality in general and spiritual leadership in particular as vital components for building theory and testing propositions concerning purposeful humanistic systems and their effectiveness. (Fry, 2003, p. 722)

This section will present the newest understandings of transcendental leadership and will place the findings from this study within this emerging leadership framework. Leadership styles that had previously been disregarded due to the “religious” nature of spirituality are now regarded as necessary to a world in drastic need of new forms of leadership that bring hope and fulfillment through the vocation of leader.

The Origins of Transcendental Leadership Theory

Hints of what was to become the theory of transcendental leadership began as early as 1977 with Greenleaf's treatise on servant leadership (1977) in which Greenleaf's metaphor of the leader who was servant first "inspired and aligned with the metaphor of transcendent leader" (Gardiner, 2006, p. 65). Gardiner acknowledged as well Erikson's writing on Mahandas K. Ghandi in which he wrote of Ghandi's understanding that the next step in man's realization of man as one all-human species would be "our only chance to transcend what we are" (Gardiner, 2006, p. 65). Gardiner credited Larkin as the first to "coin the word 'transcendental leadership' to describe a special leadership she observed among leaders who transcended self into compassionate being and action" (Gardiner, 2006, p. 63).

Sanders et al. (2003) suggested that transcendental leadership theory was proposed by Cardona (2000) and was focused on the "the transcendent leader as developing followers' transcendent motivation...Cardona's treatment of transcendental leadership hints at the spiritual dimension of leadership by viewing the transcendental leader as a 'servant-leader'" (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 22).

Transcendental leadership theory as a fully-fledged framework for leadership is barely a decade old. Although this academic discourse in the field of leadership is relatively new, the components of this theory and the practice of this leadership are only fresh ways of describing Catholic leadership practice as old as the Gospel itself.

The Framework

Transcendental leadership is defined as the “developing of leaders beyond the ego towards a higher influence in order to comprehend an extraordinary, spiritual presence in their lives” (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 23). Gardiner suggested:

Transcendent leadership answers a planetary call for a governance process which is more inclusive, more trusting, more sharing of information, more meaningfully involving associates or constituents (almost anything but ‘followers’), more collective decision making through dialogue and group consent processes, more nurturance and celebration of creative and divergent thinking and a willingness to serve the will of the collective consciousness as determined by the group—in essence, a leadership of service above self. (Gardiner, 2006, 72)

Additionally, this style of leadership maximizes human energy and talents and provides new language that “moves us away from the tired language of our transactional/transformational reality into a reality worthy of a united planet, a planet of one humanity, moving from interdependence to wholeness” (Gardiner, 2006, 72).

Liu (2007) in her discussion of transcendental leadership and motivation suggested that this model of leadership “uses values, attitudes, and behaviours (altruistic love, hope/faith, vision) to intrinsically motivate followers” (p. 4). As a result, a real sense emerges that life has meaning. Subsequently, the concept of vocation is central of this framework, as both leaders and followers are infused with a sense of “calling” (Fry, 2003; Liu, 2007).

Fry’s (2003) definition of spiritual leadership identified two key dimensions regarding spiritual leadership theory. The first requires the leader to create a vision that

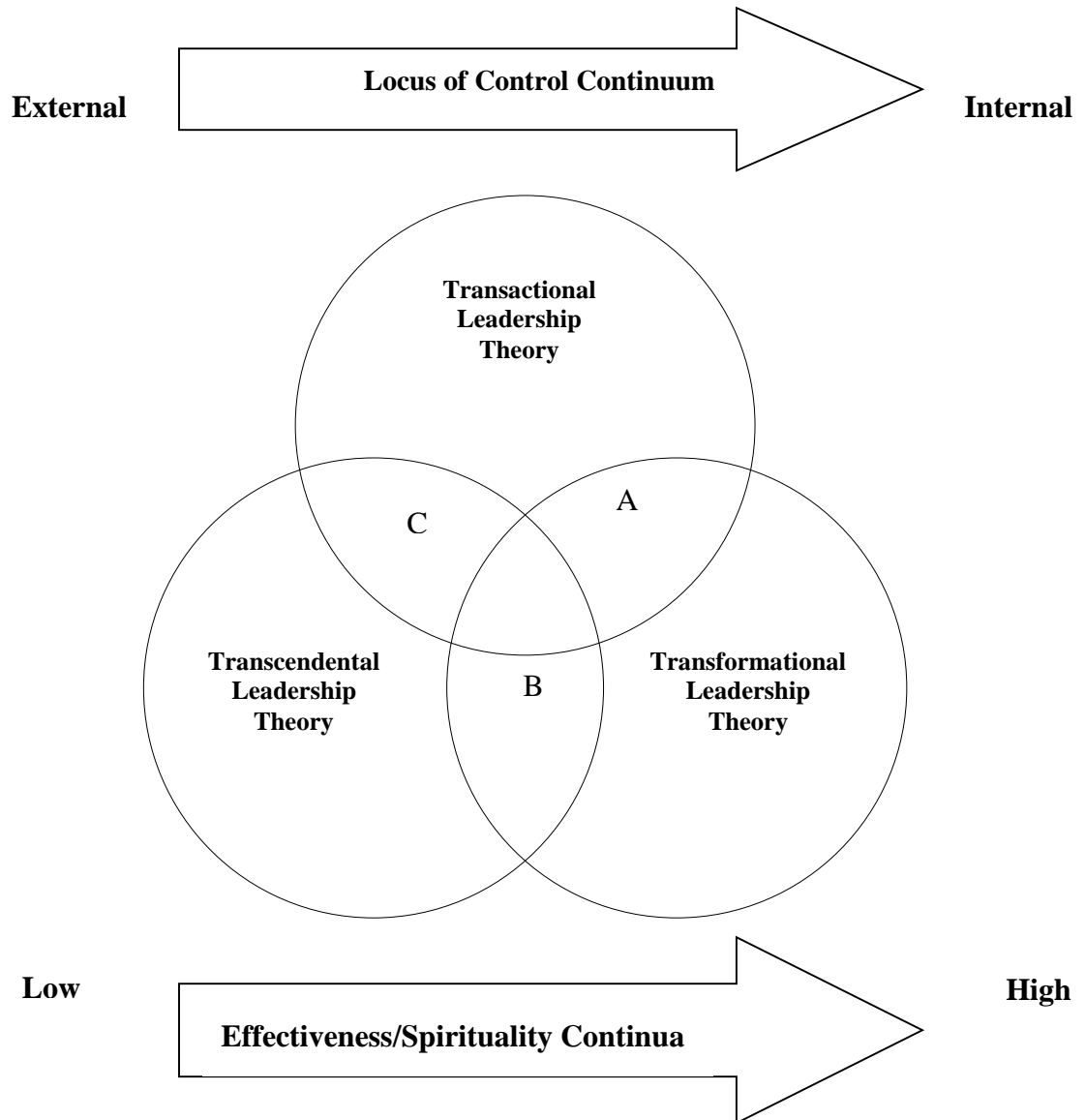
allows members of the community to commit to a life of meaning and to experience a sense of “calling.” Within this dimension of workplace spirituality, Fry identified the need for “interesting and meaningful work” that provides a sense of purpose. The second aspect establishes a culture or community based on “genuine care, concerns, and appreciation for both self and others” (p. 695). This “sense of membership” is foundational to Fry’s position regarding spiritual leadership. Within the dimension of membership lies the sense of connection members seek which allows them to live an integrated life, “so that one’s work role and other roles are in harmony with his or her essential nature and who the person is as a human being” (p. 702). This sense of congruity and personal integrity is supported by Sanders et al. (2003):

The model bridges the gap between spirituality and leadership by stimulating practically and scholarly consideration about their relationship...many leaders may feel that they have to “check their spirituality in the closet before they enter the office,” and by doing so they are unable to be authentic and “whole” in their roles as leaders. Our model provides an alternative way of characterizing spiritually oriented leaders, as they strive to integrate spirituality into all aspects of their life. It brings spirituality out of the “closet” and places it where it belongs---in the mind (consciousness), the heart (moral character), the soul (faith), and daily accomplishments of the leader. (p. 29)

Below is a conceptual model developed by Sanders et al. (2003) that “presents transactional, transformational, and transcendental theories of leadership as being linked together along common continua” (p. 23).

Integration of Transcendental Leadership Theory (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 24)

Figure 5.1.



A= relationship between transactional and transformational theory
B= relationship between transformational and transcendental theory
C= relationship between transactional and transcendental theory

The Data in Light of Transcendental Leadership

In reviewing the data on leadership suggested by this study, a number of correlates between this research and aspects of transcendental leadership were made clear. In the chart below, leadership characteristics identified in the study on Catholic school leadership in Alberta have been listed. Beside each characteristic a corresponding and supportive point in the literature on spiritual/transcendentally leadership has been made.

Figure 5.2. Comparison of Catholic Principal and Spiritual Leadership Characteristics

Nature of the Catholic Principalship in Alberta	Spiritual/Transcendental Leadership
Vocation	Spiritual leadership is a calling created by “doing what it takes” with a clear, compelling vision (Fry, 2003, p. 714).
Intrinsically Motivated	Spiritual leaders deploy an intrinsic motivation cycle based on vision, altruistic love, and hope. Leaders are intrinsically motivated because they “feel alive, energized and connected with their work” (Fry, 2003, p. 718).
Abiding Love of others	Spiritual leaders live the cardinal value of love as they consider their neighbours to be fully as they are (Fry, 2003, p. 708). Transcendent leadership models loving understanding in relationships of shared governance (Gardiner, 2006, p. 64). Cornerstone of all virtues is a leader who leads with love (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 28).
Compelling Vision	Spiritual survival is found in pursuit of a vision of service to others through humility (Fry, 2003, p. 708).
Standard of Excellence	Spiritual vision creates a standard of excellence and striving to exceed personal best (Fry, 2003, p. 711/713).
Hope	Spiritual people of hope have a vision of where they are going (Fry, 2003, p. 713).
Empowerment	Empowerment is the basis for manifesting a culture of altruistic love (Fry, 2003, p. 719). Transcendental Catholic leadership empowers others to assume leadership (Lavery, 2012, p. 40).

Build Capacity/Personal Leadership	Followers begin to develop, refine, and practice their own personal leadership that will also embody a vision of their own lives (Fry, 2003, p. 720).
Trust	Empowered employees commit more of themselves through trust in the leader (Fry, 2003, p. 720).
Sense of spirituality in life	Transcendental leadership is one of developing the leader beyond the ego towards a higher influence in order to comprehend an extraordinary, spiritual presence in their lives (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 23).
Virtues	Intellectual, moral, and theological virtues provide a moral framework: wisdom, understanding, justice, fortitude, love (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 28).
Authentic Spiritual Life at work and at home	Transcendental leadership offers the leader the opportunity for “wholeness” in their role as leaders as they strive to integrate spirituality into all aspects of their lives (Sanders et al., 2003, p. 29).
Witness	The behaviour of the leader is crucial (Cardona, 2000, p. 204) The best way of creating transcendental leadership is by example (Lavery, 2012, p. 41).
Servant	Transcendental leadership begins with a natural feeling of wanting to serve (Cardona, 2000, p. 205). Transcendental leadership emphatically embeds the notion of service as a key component (Lavery, 2012, p. 41).
Integrity- the capacity to sacrifice	The most important competence of a transcendental leader is his capacity to self sacrifice (Cardona, 2000, p. 205; Lavery, 2012, p. 41)
Sense of responsibility for those that are led	Transcendental leaders have a strong sense of responsibility for the people he or she leads (Cardona, 2000, p. 205)
Subsidiary	Transcendental leaders apply the principle of subsidiarity which empowers teachers and allows decision making at the lowest appropriate level (Lavery, 2012, p. 38/40).
Reflection time	The spiritual nature of transcendental leadership encourages principals in Catholic schools to reflect on who they are and who they serve (Lavery, 2012, p. 39).
Community	Leaders and followers have genuine care, concerns, and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership (Fry, 2003, p. 695).

A Framework for Catholic School Leadership

The goal of this section is to synthesize the data and literature on school leadership. It will bring together data from this study with Catholic high school principals as well as current understandings regarding Catholic school leadership as reflected in the literature on the topic. Through a synthesis of practice and pedagogy a framework for the Catholic school principalship will be suggested.

The Catholic Paradigm

Any discussion of leadership in a Catholic school must begin with an understanding of the Catholic paradigm in which the principal and the principal's school operate. This Catholic paradigm refers to the Catholic way of seeing the world and is defined, explained, and espoused in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This document presents "an organic synthesis...as regards both faith and morals" (Catechism 11). The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides the foundation for Catholics' unique understanding of morality, epistemology, ontology, and all aspects of life and death.

Weigel (2004) in *Letters to a Young Catholic* described his personal account of a Catholic way of knowing. He wrote about his own growing up in terms of this "Catholic difference."

Whether we knew it or not (and most of us didn't or didn't know until later in life), this "Catholic difference" wasn't only a matter of how we described ourselves, how we talked, what we wore and ate, where we went to school, and who taught us. The real "Catholic difference" – which was mediated to us by all these other differences – was, at bottom, a way of seeing the world...while Catholicism is a body of beliefs and a way of life, Catholicism is also an optic, a

way of seeing things, a distinctive perception of reality...it's not something you simply argue yourself into. Rather, it's something you experience aesthetically as well as intellectually, with the emotions as well as the mind, through friendships and worship and experiences beyond words as well as through arguments and syllogisms. (Weigel, 2004, pp. 9-10)

In order to fully understand Catholic school leadership it is essential to fully acknowledge the Catholic way of seeing the world. The Catholic paradigm that Catholic principals work within has its ancient beginnings in an ontological understanding of "how things exist; theories of being" (Heymen, 2009, p. 16). A Catholic ontology is rooted in the human desire for God. It is this constant longing that Rolheiser (1999) described as:

an unquenchable fire, a restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, a hunger, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia, a wildness that cannot be tamed, a congenital all-embracing ache that lies at the center of human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else. (p.4)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states "the desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for" (Catechism 27).

The second critical component of the Catholic paradigm rests, epistemologically, in "how we know about these things; theories of knowledge" (Heyman, 2009, p. 16). Revelation, sacred tradition, and sacred scripture form the foundation of Catholic epistemology.

The Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes” (DV 8S1). Thanks to the supernatural sense of faith, the People of God as a whole never ceases to welcome, to penetrate more deeply, and to live more fully from the gift of divine Revelation. The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him. (Catechism 98-100)

The moral teachings of the Catholic Church reflect its ethical dimension. In the Catechism this is referred to as “life in Christ.” Within this perspective the dignity of the human person, the human community, God’s salvation, and the Ten Commandments are discussed. Central concepts that relate to our discussion of Catholic school leadership include freedom and morality, virtues, sin, authority, common good, social justice, the family in God’s plan, respect for human life, and living in truth to name but a few.

Within this section of the Catechism the faithful are reminded that “the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude. He pursues his perfection in ‘seeking and loving what is true and good’” (GS 15 S 2; Catechism 1711).

The way of Christ “leads to life”; a contrary way “leads to destruction”. The Gospel parable of the two ways remains ever present in the catechesis of the Church; it shows the importance of moral decisions for our salvation. (Catechism 1696)

Throughout the research process, principals spoke time and time again about their Catholic way of seeing the world. Through conversation, stories, and dialogue a gentle

awareness of their unique perspective became evident. In Focus Group C, Frank talked about playing hockey with administrators from non-Catholic schools. In locker room chatter he was surprised by what the other principals' focus was. "They don't see it, but it is very different than often the discussion that we have" (p. 15). Harold in Group D also noticed a difference when he interacted with his public school peers as part of an Alberta Education study group. "It was interesting to hear them talk. It wasn't that they had any less concern for their students, or any less of a passion for education. They used a different language and a different way of describing...the language is not common. It's a different view" (Group D, p. 12). Harold's insight leads into an important aspect of Catholic school leadership: language.

Language of Faith

Through words we make sense of our world. Through conversations we build relationships. Our language plays an enormous role in how we think and how we construct meaning in the world. This document is rich with Catholic language. Whether it emerged spontaneously from the principals or whether it was introduced through the Catholic literature, a Catholic paradigm presents specific language laden with meaning. While educational leadership may speak of distributed leadership, Catholic leaders speak of giftedness. When the world speaks of careers, Catholic leaders speak of vocation. References to scripture abound in this document. Words such as "shine," "lost sheep," and "servant" infer a reference to parables and Biblical passages. This language is scattered throughout conversations with Catholic leaders and is so much a part of their lexicon that they often may not be aware of its existence until they have conversations with other educators outside their Catholic paradigm.

Culture and Community

Nestled comfortably and anchored solidly within this Catholic paradigm are Catholic culture and covenantal community; key constituents of Catholic leadership. Both concepts have been fully presented in previous chapters. It is essential to begin this discussion of Catholic school leadership, however, by recognizing the context in which it originates and thrives. This leadership is unique because the Catholic paradigm and Catholic culture are unique. As a result, leadership qualities and leadership attributes will be unique. This is not to say that a number of commonalities amongst all principals, both Catholic and non-Catholic, do not exist. They do. This discussion, however, will focus on the unique nature of the Catholic principalship.

Spiritual Catholic Leadership

Spirituality resides within a Catholic school principal. This “desire for God is written in the human heart” (Catechism 27). Catholics believe that all humanity has this desire. Catholic principals, however, have generally acknowledged and responded to this desire by answering a call to live a life that seeks God. Through their vocation, they have chosen to spend each day growing in their own faith and creating an environment to support others in their “desire for God.” This vocational call cannot be overstated in the defining of a Catholic principal. Throughout the course of this study it became evident that the call to Catholic leadership sustained and inspired the principal. Anointed by God, they invested in His work and were willing to sacrifice personally as a result.

Catholic Mission: Stewardship

Vocational leadership requires an absolute dedication to the mission at hand. For Catholic principals this mission is God’s mission. In their quest to bring themselves and

their school community closer to God, clear vision, values, and beliefs provided direction. Inspired by the vision, these principals seek the greater good. In Catholic language, they become “stewards.” The leader, who is steward, puts others needs before his or her own. Work is in service of others. Personal needs are sacrificed for the common good. The needs of the community are priority and these needs are determined by values normed in the Catholic covenantal community.

The Greatest of all is Love

Fry (2003) suggested that “the common bridge between spirituality and religion is altruistic love – regard or devotion to the interests of others” (p. 106). Love is so evident throughout the work documented here. Love abides in the words Catholic principals use. Love abides in the writing of Catholic scholars and leaders. Love abides in the concrete stories, actions, and examples that principals gave of their work each day. Love blankets the Catholic school. It seeks the lost, cares for the lonely, forgives the wrong-doer, and embraces the soul.

Devoted to Service

This love of others asks leaders to put others before themselves. The servant leader makes other people’s needs a priority. To “lay down one’s life for a friend” is not a weak decision. Servant leaders come from a place of strength. When servant leadership is authentic, the leader makes decisions that enable the community to become better. Individuals within the community are listened to, loved, and encouraged. Through this focus on relationships, the leader hears and understands the needs of others. Giftedness is recognized and all members of the school community: teachers, staff, students, and parents are empowered. All members of this thriving community have

ownership for it and care about its success. They are guided by the Catholic values inherent in the mission and vision of the school. The principal serves as a leader who empowers.

Subsidiarity

Within the school, the principle of subsidiarity is practiced and valued. All members have a stake in this covenantal community. The principal makes every effort to bring decision making authority to those who are directly involved in the decision. Trust is built. Members are held accountable. Commitments to the community are not optional, as it is understood that “how we relate to each other is part of how we relate to God” (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 68). What this community holds and values is sacred, because “community is a sacred idea” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 29).

The complex and dynamic principles of Catholic leadership explored in this section and throughout the research have not been fit nicely into a catchy five-word phrase or impressive diagram. Essentially, all the aspects discussed in this section are key components that describe the head, heart, and soul of leadership. Framing Catholic school leadership in the domain of transcendental/spiritual leadership is vital. The spiritual aspect of this principalship must be integrated and integral to any discussion.

Current literature is still treading lightly in the spiritual realm. Talking about religion is still tenuous. Spirituality seems a safer term. As such, this hesitancy is reflected in the lack of discussion regarding the context of a caring, committed community. New age thinking may play a role here, often seeing spirituality as an individual quest that should be freely determined by the person himself or herself. In contrast, Catholic spirituality can only be done in community. Catholic spiritual

leadership places the leader securely in the center of a covenantal community, bound with others for common purpose and common good. This makes all the difference in a Catholic school.

The search for God is not a private search for what is highest for oneself or even for what is ultimate for oneself. Spirituality is about a communal search for the face of God...(Rolheiser, 1999, p. 69)

Witness

Who leads it all? The Catholic principal as witness. Not a witness of perfection but a witness of authenticity; human yet spiritual, striving for the good of others on a human journey of self in relationship to God. It is through the leader's actions that leadership becomes real; through investment in relationship the real depth of the character of the principal is shown. Despite human failings, authentic Catholic leaders are willing to risk, willing to lead, willing to serve, willing to be.

Who You Are

Sergiovanni (1994, 2000, 2007) is perhaps the greatest spokesman for the metaphor of school as community. Inherent in the image he articulated is a clear vision of who the leader is and what the leader must do. A powerful, powerful picture results:

Principals...must plant the seeds of community; nurture fledgling community and protect the community once it emerges. To do this they lead by following. They lead by serving. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership. They lead by knowing. And, like Plato's Guardians, they lead by being. (p. 203).

They lead by being. Embodied in very action and word is the true heart of the leader. Above all else, leadership in a Catholic school is about who you are. Closing words are given to Benjamin, who said it so well:

In a Catholic school I find you have an opportunity to add a page to the New Testament...you make faith come alive with every interaction...it requires prayer in the morning. It requires reflection at the end of the day....every interaction you have...it's not really something separate from what you do. It's just who you are...It's who you are. (Group R, p. 7)

Chapter Six

Comments on the Study's Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the nature of the Catholic high school principalship. This understanding emerged from the perspectives of Alberta's Catholic high school principals through their exploration and comprehension of their own practices and experiences. Through survey, focus groups, and interviews both a broad perspective and a deeper investigation ensued. The focus of Chapter Six is to discuss and comment on the study's findings. Three guiding questions will organize this chapter:

1. What did the research tell us in terms of the overriding research question?
2. Why was this study significant?
3. Where do we go from here?

The first section will answer, in full, the primary research question that was the impetus for this study: *What does leadership look like in Alberta's Catholic high schools?* The response to the question will include both a quantitative and qualitative discussion. The quantitative response will include demographic information made available through the survey. The qualitative portion will review the "look" of leadership through the themes that emerged. Section two will address the significance of the study with specific regard to the four outcomes identified in chapter one: clarity, expectations, reflection, and academic literature. Section three will make recommendations as a result of this study's findings. Recommendations will be made for the Catholic principal, Catholic school boards, ACSTA, and Alberta Education. As well, areas for future research will be discussed here.

What Does Leadership look like in Alberta's Catholic High Schools?

Catholic education in Alberta is thriving. Catholic high schools in Alberta currently educate 20% of the province's senior high students. There are 99 Catholic high schools in the province of Alberta. Among these 99, 38 high school principals responded to the survey and provided an interesting demographic picture of who these principals are. Three key demographic factors will be discussed here: gender, age, and post secondary education.

Quantitative Demographics

Gender.

Results from the survey indicated that 21% of the respondents were female and 79% were male. Principals in Alberta's Catholic high schools were primarily male. Of the six districts that participated in focus groups for this study, two had no high school female principals at all. In all cases, females were in significant minority. This statistic is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Work in the area of female leadership speaks to the distinct and valuable strengths women bring to leadership.

Mulligan (2006) initiated a number of conversations with priests to explore their perceptions on Catholic education. Interestingly he found that "priests are unanimous in attributing successful collaboration between parish and Catholic school to women." He quoted a parish priest as saying: "women are the engine, energy, heart and soul of any parish and of any Catholic...school" (p. 96). Sergiovanni (2007) suggested that while women "are underrepresented in principalships, they are overrepresented in successful principalships" (p. xii). His explanation for this success rate was attributed to an

understanding of what women valued. Women tended to avoid individualism and competition. Instead they were more concerned with “community and sharing” (p. xii).

An exploration of gender and Catholic school leadership is a topic for another study and will not be debated in full here. However, one crucial point must be made. The framework for the Catholic principalship proposed in Chapter Five is one that resonates in a particular way with the traits and leadership strengths of women. A closer look uncovers some interesting connections. Correlations that bear mentioning are: relationships, leading from the center, and heart.

Relationships.

Throughout the data reported here, the importance of relationships emerged time and time again. Relationships were central to community building, trust, stewardship, and service. The Catholic principal leadership framework proposed in Chapter Five relied heavily on the fact that relationships mattered. Motivated by love for others, Catholic leaders must make relationships their top priority.

Women are relational. Helgesen (1995) purported that women in leadership were less likely to see value in a hierarchy and, instead, saw value in a “web, which affirms relationships [and] seeks ways to strengthen human bonds” (p. 52). Relational leading has been identified as central to Catholic school leadership rooted in a community of relationships. Cardona (2000) described the transcendental leader as one who collaborates with a strong “sense of responsibility for the people he or she leads and serves” (p. 205). Relationship between the two (leader and collaborator) was the result of the “values and behaviours of the leaders” (p. 206).

Leading from the center.

Marzano (2005) has described servant leadership as leading from the center. So too, a woman's way of leading is centered within a web of relationships. "Leading from the center of the web is very subtle, and derives its strength from nourishing and fortifying the bonds between intersecting points" (Helgesen, 1995, p. 54). The desirable center spot allows the leader to draw others closer in a process of strengthening. At the center lies the leader and, as Sergiovanni (2007) points out, "Communities are defined by their centers" (p. 89).

The Catholic principal's non-negotiable is community. It would seem, for many women, a belief in community comes naturally. One must be cautious in generalizing, but also cognizant of the evidence which exists. From the literature, from the data, and from personal experience, women tend to value community and to value connecting themselves in a centered manner to those they lead. "From the center" leading is a result of relationships. From the center leading recognizes the essential context of the Catholic principalship, community.

What does common life or fellowship demand? It demands that there be some real sharing of life together, namely, that we pray together; that we celebrate our rites of passage together; that we celebrate some of our everyday joys, fears, and feasts together; that we are responsible to each other and open to each other as regards mutual correction and challenge; that we are responsible together for the ministry of the church. (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 121)

Heart.

Lastly, transcendental Catholic leadership is heart leadership, confirming that “the heart of education is the heart of the educator” (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2002, p. 14; Groome, 2003, p. 35). So too is the web style of leadership characterized by women. Leading from the center is leading with the heart. Regard for status is ignored. Women recognize that “authority comes from connections to the people around rather than distance from those below” (Helgesen, 1995, p. 55). *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* reminds us that “if we want a person to enter into our heart’s domain, we open wide the doors through kindness, consideration, and compassion, attentive care and tender love” (CCSTA, 2002, p. 32). This need to lead with “both mind and heart” is essential for Catholic principals (Palestini, 2009, p. xiv). Women’s innate leadership qualities often reflect heart leadership at its best.

This demographic statistic regarding gender bears further investigation. Why are women underrepresented in the Catholic high school principalship? What opportunities are being “lost” as a result? If women’s ways of knowing resonate soundly with a Catholic principal’s ways of knowing, how might women enrich the work and effectiveness of the Catholic high school?

Age.

The following three tables present data from the Catholic principals surveyed.

Figure 6.1. Age of Principals

30-40 years	22%
40-50 years	32%
> 50 years	46%

Figure 6.2. Years of Experience as a Principal

< 2 years	10%
2-5 years	32%
6-9 years	24%
10-14 years	10%
> 15 years	24%

Figure 6.3. Years as an Educator

< 10	0%
10-19 years	40%
20-29 years	40%
> 30 years	20%

Alberta's Catholic high school principals in this study were generally very experienced. Almost half of them were 50 years of age or older. Almost a quarter of them had more than 15 years of administrative experience. In this study, experience in the principalship ranged from 1 to 28 years. The majority of the principals were in the highly experienced category however, and for most whose tenure as a principal was five years or less, their years of experience as an educator were many.

Throughout the study great wisdom was evidenced by countless principals. Often their maturity came into play in this wisdom. Maturity in leadership requires spiritual development. Several of the wise, more experienced principals spoke of their deep love for God and were the most outspoken about their love for children. In general, they also exhibited a sense of hope, looking for the best in their communities and constantly finding it. This commitment to lifting up those around them seemed to be common. As John, a veteran of 28 years said, "I get much more out of my people when I tell them I believe in them; when I tell them they're rock stars; when I tell them that this place is awesome" (pp. 5-6).

These veteran principals were less likely to dwell on difficulties, but had more of an attitude that said, “Let’s deal with the problem and move on.” Their acceptance of mistakes allowed them to fix, forgive, and forget. This refreshing perspective was particularly startling as this correlation between experience and hope seemed in direct contrast to common views that suggest that burnout, apathy, and cynicism are more likely to come with age. The principals in this study seemed to mature spiritually through lived experience. This maturity opened their hearts, encouraged their vocation, and inspired their belief in the goodness of man and God. What a wonderful finding!

All principals were on a spiritual journey. As such, it made sense that those who have journeyed the longest would have the most personal insights and the most to share with others. Transcendental leadership operates from the “totality” of a person as a human being (Lavery, 2012, p. 38). As a result, experienced principals are the “full meal deal.” They have been refined by life’s fires and are able to apply their life experiences, both personal and professional, to lead spiritually and authentically. John described his own admiration for one of these wise leaders when he told of a former colleague who, by the end of her career, combined experience and heart to create “magic.” John was able to articulate what this study seemed to prove on many levels. True authority is born of respect and authenticity. Authenticity results from living one’s life with faith, compassion, and love in “deep relationship with God” (John, p. 12).

While giving credence to the immense depth and wisdom experienced principals brought to their leadership and therefore the school, another concern must be addressed. If half of Alberta’s high school Catholic principals are currently 50 or more years old, what is the succession plan? We can assume that many of the next crop of principals are

currently waiting in the wings as vice principals across the province. This training ground is valid, but the vice principalship and the principalship are two entirely different roles. The level of responsibility assumed by the principal can only be assumed by the principal. The only way to truly grasp how to handle this complex role is to live it.

In many school districts, finding passionate committed principals is a real challenge. Fellow educators have seen the workload, the stress, and the responsibility that their own principals experience and they have declined the invitation to walk that same path. If the job is to be attractive to teachers who are watching, significant work will have to be done; both in supporting the current principals in their work and in preparing those who would come after.

Graduate education.

This research showed that 68% of the Catholic high school principals surveyed had a master's degree and 29% had a bachelor's degree. 3% identified that they had other. This is good news for leadership. Principals in this study often identified their graduate work as a turning point in their vocational call. David felt that it was during this stage in his life that he began to see the bigger picture regarding education. Rhonda confirmed this experience. Many principals referred back to concepts that they had learned in their studies, particularly in regard to leadership.

The statistics documented above are a good news story. It would seem that the more education principals have, the more likely they are to bring an enhanced knowledge and understanding to teaching, learning, and leadership. The principal's own schooling brings credibility and expertise to his or her educational leadership.

What has not been documented in this study is the extent to which the participating Catholic principals have studied in terms of their own theological and faith formation. Only one principal in the study claimed any theological scholarship beyond what one would expect as a practicing Catholic. This exception was Benjamin, who had done seminary work and had served as a religious brother for five years. It must be noted that Benjamin was extremely articulate and very capable of reflecting deeply on the Catholic and spiritual nature of his leadership. This would confirm Kelly's (1991) experience in his article for the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association.

It appears that a link exists between the theological background of the respondents and the ability to discuss a vision of a Catholic high school. With only one exception...the more theological training or intensive in-servicing a principal had, the more articulate was his vision of a model Catholic high school. (p. 51)

This study identified concerns expressed by principals regarding the faith formation of their teaching staff. Literature, as well, suggests that spiritual development enhances authenticity and spiritual leadership. Although this study did not address this aspect of the principals' leadership, literature regarding transcendental leadership suggests that graduate work should be encouraged in order to enhance the principal's understanding of "leadership and theology" (Lavery, 2012, p. 40).

We return to the guiding question of this section: *What does leadership look like in Alberta's Catholic schools?* This section has addressed some of the demographic data regarding gender, age, and graduate education. These are external, quantitative, and objective numbers that help to paint a picture provincially. More difficult to describe are the subjective and qualitative aspects of the Catholic principalship in Alberta.

Specifically, it is those themes that this study has worked to make sense of. The themes of this research have provided a way of organizing and viewing the qualitative data. A brief review and summary of these complex themes will serve to address the research question: What does leadership *look* like in Alberta's Catholic schools?

Qualitative Themes

Leadership looks vocational.

Catholic principals are called to their work. This call originates in their “holy longing” for God: to know Him, to seek Him, to serve Him. Their particular vocation answers this call through that of educator and, eventually, leader. Catholic principals recognize this call within the context of their Catholic ways of knowing and seeing the world. As such, they are sustained and inspired by the mandate of their Catholic mission and vision. They are committed to excellence and this is played out in extreme personal dedication. Personal sacrifice is accepted as a way of life and is often put in perspective by principals when they consider the degree to which Christ sacrificed for love of them. Wounds received through their own sacrifice are reframed in the light of Christ and, subsequently, serve to deepen the principals’ commitment, acceptance of vocation, and spirituality (Benjamin; John; Karl).

Leadership looks responsible.

The principal is responsible for everything (Rhonda; Group A). Both the principals in this study and the Alberta School Act (2000) confirm that the principal is ultimately responsible for everything that goes on within the school. For Catholic principals this includes the spiritual needs of self, children, teachers, and school community. This implies the principal’s responsibility to be a moral agent in decision-

making, direction, and personal lifestyle. It requires humility yet a constant striving for excellence.

Leadership looks communal.

Catholic principals are embedded within community. This is a non-negotiable aspect of Catholic leadership and must be taken as a given and essential component of this unique leadership. Any and all discussions of Catholic leadership must be placed within the context of community. As such, the Catholic principal is relational and caring; driven by an encompassing love for children and adults alike with particular regard for those most in need. The Catholic principal as leader in the center of this community does not ignore problems, but deals with them in a spirit of forgiveness and hope. By facing difficulty and disharmony, problems are solved; the dignity of the individual is protected and allowed to flourish; and the health of the community is enhanced through an understanding that:

...to be an apostolic community...is to stand, shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand, precisely with people who are very different from ourselves and, with them, hear a common word, say a common creed, share a common bread and offer a mutual forgiveness so as, in that way, to bridge our differences and become a common heart. (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 115)

Leadership looks liberated.

The Catholic school principal is free to lead because of the tight but loose parameters of the context within which he or she serves. The Catholic Church provides clearly defined expectations within a paradigm more than 2,000 years old. With clearly articulated beliefs comes a sense of freedom for principals to act within the parameters

communally agreed upon. These agreements with the Church, with parents, with staff, and with students operate as covenants or promises between the principal and those he or she serves. This freedom allows the principal to make decisions, speak on behalf of others, focus on matters of importance, and mediate the secular world with sacred intent. These powerful liberties strengthen the heart, the vocation and the authority of the Catholic principal. This is loose-tight leadership in action.

Leadership looks challenged.

The context for the Catholic school and, therefore, for its principals has drastically changed in the 140 years of Catholic education in Alberta. Small missionary schools founded and run by Catholic religious, primarily nuns, began the movement for Catholic education in this province. In 2013, the metrics of Catholic education are wildly different. High schools range in size from less than 100 to more than 1,500. Schools extend across the province from south to north and rural to urban. Principals are laity who are Catholic, most often “cradle” Catholics. Theological education is minimal. Of most dramatic mention, however, is the changed nature of the society Catholic schools find themselves in. The world of 2013 is highly secularized and highly technological. Parenting has changed significantly, with many parents taking less responsibility for raising their children and with many parents displaying less respect for teachers and principals. Families are less cohesive. Conversations within the home are less common. Children communicate more through social media and text and less through personal, face-to-face dialogue. Catholic schools describe themselves as “counter-cultural” indicating that the values and behaviours of a Catholic school are often in direct contrast to modern culture; today’s society. Set in this milieu, four significant challenges were

identified by Catholic principals: authenticity, partnerships with parents, life in the Church, and meaning for young people.

Leadership looks for authenticity.

A recurring theme in this study arose from principals' comments that they were concerned for the future of Catholic education. The key to addressing this concern was clear for principals: their Catholic schools needed to be authentic. This authenticity began with the teachers and leaders and extended throughout the culture, permeation, and daily interactions of the school. How the educators in the building interacted with students and parents was central. Effective Catholic principals reflectively examine the authenticity of their own leadership and their own Catholic schools and move their community forward toward the goal of authenticity.

Leadership looks for partnerships with parents.

Catholic pedagogy recognizes parents as the prime educators of their children. As such, parents and families are highly valued and respected within Catholic culture. Catholic schools' deep and abiding respect for parents is a fundamental belief. Although Catholic schools seek parental support and partnership, parents are generally less involved in their children's education and more likely to leave decisions regarding learning and faith in the hands of their children. This disconnect has created a huge challenge for Catholic educators and principals. Effective Catholic principals seek ways to build back this relationship with parents.

Leadership looks for life in the Church.

Firmly situated in the Catholic Church, Catholic schools belong to their parishes and are strengthened and supported in relationship with their priest. This mutual

reciprocity means that both school and parish embrace each other. All members of the Catholic community, parents or not, are called on to support the work of Catholic schools. All members of the school community are called on to participate and to actively serve in the parish. Principals recognize that this symbiotic relationship must be nurtured and lovingly tended. Principals in this study were actively working to engage their own staff in the life of the Church. They were actively looking for opportunities to connect with their priests. This mandate was very much an aspect of leadership for principals. Effective Catholic principals seek ways to strengthen relationships with their parish and priest.

Leadership looks to create meaning for young people.

Catholic principals are called to educate children wholly. They are called to prepare them for fullness of life now and in life thereafter. This spiritual charge fuels principals' desire to enliven faith for young people. Highly informed on the nature of adolescents, high school principals know that youth will not engage unless they can make meaning from their experiences. Teens want to ask questions and find answers that matter to them. They want to be part of a community that welcomes their peers and seems relevant in their world. They want a Church that addresses current issues in a thoughtful and compassionate way that, again, makes sense to them. Catholic high school principals know these needs and part of their leadership involves finding ways to bring this goal to reality. Effective Catholic principals seek ways to create a relevant faith for their students.

Leadership looks spiritual.

The final theme to emerge from the data in this study addresses the appropriate factors that create a meaningful and relevant leadership framework for the Catholic principal. This framework is solidly anchored in the transcendental, spiritual paradigm. Principals in a Catholic school very much recognize the giftedness of their staff. They seek to build on their own and others' strengths. This distributed leadership empowers others and enhances collaboration. Equally as strong is the principals' recognition of a call to serve. Principals see their role as one of facilitating the development of others. The principal's service is ultimately service to the values of the community; therefore service to the Catholic nature of their schools.

Significance of the Study

Chapter One suggested that this study on the Catholic high school principalship would be significant in four ways. This section will address those four key areas of significance and provide a description, now that the study has been completed, of how the data and the findings have enriched each topic. The four areas of significance are:

1. synthesis and clarity regarding Catholic leadership in high school
2. articulation of expectations
3. opportunity for personal reflection
4. supplementation of current academic literature on the Catholic school principalship

Synthesis and Clarity

This study has synthesized practice and theory by bringing the voices of Catholic principals into the current understandings of Catholic leadership as espoused in the

literature. In Chapter Four the data spoke for itself. The Catholic principals in the study “socially constructed” meaning through their focus groups. As they listened to each other and suggested varying perspectives, they generated understandings regarding their vocation. The themes that emerged from that data created questions for the nine interviews that followed. With more than 500 pages of transcribed conversation, a wealth of insights and commonalities were evident. In Chapter Five the data was considered in light of the literature and synthesis was attained.

Clarity was achieved by “drilling down” on an idea, concept, or understanding. Both the focus groups and the interviews allowed this probing to occur. Random comments were questioned. Common themes were challenged. Through questions, answers, and questions again, a clarified picture of the Catholic principalship began to take place. Grounded theory methodology allowed the themes to emerge organically without preconceived parameters. A unique picture evolved as common threads were identified. This new way of seeing the data enhanced clarity. The themes that were ultimately selected to describe the data were purposely created to provide a fresh perspective.

Expectations for Catholic high school principals in Alberta

An integral piece of this study was to understand fully the expectations for this province’s Catholic high school principals. In Chapter One, a picture of the dual requirements set before each Catholic principal was described. The first sets of expectations are determined by the Alberta government. Governance regarding curriculum, assessment, provincial testing, and funding is within the purview of Alberta

education. Their standards for the province's principals are clearly articulated in a document titled: *Principal Quality Indicators* (2009).

The second set of expectations is established and directed by the authority of the Catholic Church through the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE). Additionally the bishops of Alberta and the Alberta Catholic School Trustees provide direction to this province's Catholic principals. Olivia described this duality as working for "two bosses." She spoke on behalf of many principals who were keenly aware of their responsibilities to both learning and faith; to both government and Church. Understanding leadership in a Catholic school requires an exploration of both *Catholic* and *school*. Understanding the nature of that leadership role was the purpose of this study.

Results from this study illustrated that Alberta's Catholic high school principals were very aware that their responsibilities to the government and the Alberta Teachers' Association' (ATA) professional code were the same as their public school counterparts. Commonalties they shared with all Alberta high school principals included:

- taking responsibility for student learning;
- curriculum, learning outcomes, and provincial regulations;
- accountability for results; provincial testing;
- research based instruction;
- funding;
- professional development, and
- working with parents.

The literature and the data were clear, however, that Catholic principals must also be spiritual leaders who authentically live their faith through actions and words. Unique

expectations emerged from this directive. Obligations for leadership were expanded to include responsibility:

- for the faith community within each school;
- to represent Christ in every situation, and
- to permeate Catholic teaching throughout every aspect of the Catholic school.

Within the expectations clearly articulated by the Catholic bishops and the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), came even deeper and more intimate commitments that Catholic principals had set for themselves. Throughout this study these deep obligations were evident. Principals' identified such responsibilities as:

- taking care of those most in need;
- bringing a living faith into a secular world;
- building relationships with the parish and priest;
- participating actively in the parish community;
- holding teachers accountable for quality Catholic teaching and lifestyle;
- seeking the presence of God in very moment of every day;
- permeating Christ in all they do;
- teaching a specific set of values and beliefs;
- living a life of faith both in and out of school;
- creating a community of faith, and
- praying; personally and publicly.

How this spiritual authenticity played out in the lives of these Catholic principals is thoroughly explored through this study.

Expectations for Catholic principals abound. An abundance of documents tell Catholic principals what is required of them. It is here that this study had the ability to provide real depth of understanding. Throughout the research, principals themselves were able to articulate the mandates they lived with and worked within. The themes that emerged from this research represented the real expectations of Catholic principals in Alberta. Their responsibilities included their vocation, their students, their community, and all aspects of their Catholic culture. Their responsibilities included the challenges of leading an authentic community in relationship with teachers, parents, priests, and parishioners. It was a complex, spiritual picture of men and women committed to leadership.

Personal Reflection

Personal reflection was identified as one of the four significant purposes of the study. The reflective abilities of the principals in this study were clear. Their skill at identifying aspects of their experiences, their innate understanding of God's hand in it all, and their willingness to expose their personal stories reinforced the reflective nature of these leaders. Lavery (2012) identified this reflective aspect of the transcendental Catholic principal when he proposed that effective reflection involves quality "time in" (p. 40). This time in means that principals need to make reflection an action that becomes the way in which they work. Catholic leaders are often directed to make each day a prayer and to take time to see the sacramental all around them (Groome, 1998). Working reflectively is a way of thoughtfully recognizing "God moments" (John); therefore a way of working in a spirit of prayer and sacramentality.

Reflection is a valuable tool. Reflecting as a way of working is a commendable goal for all leaders. This study carved out a time for principals to be reflective both with their peers and as individuals. Many principals commented on how much they appreciated this time to be thoughtful. They were grateful that they had been listened to. Their understanding of their practice was enhanced by listening to others. And, most importantly, their own internal journeys were enhanced through these reflections.

Supplementation of current academic literature on the Catholic school principalship

Literature on the high school Catholic principalship is limited. Within this province's publicly funded Catholic environment it is negligible. This study and its findings will enhance existing literature by:

- bringing the voice of the principal to the table;
- representing a breadth of perspectives (49% of high school principals in the province generated data for the research);
- presenting a complex picture of the Catholic principalship through 33 themes;
- identifying future questions to be addressed and explored regarding the Catholic principalship, and
- making recommendations to Catholic school boards regarding this central leadership role.

Into the Future

This section of Chapter Six will push discussions forward. The results of this study have been analyzed and interpreted. What are the next steps? Two actions take us into the future: recommendations and research. Recommendations for Catholic principals, Catholic school districts, Alberta's Catholic trustees and the provincial

government will be made. Future research questions that have emerged from the work presented here will be suggested.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Catholic principal.

The recommendations begin with the principals themselves. Given that Catholic principals are responsible for everything that goes on in regards to their Catholic school (both learning and faith), it is imperative that they are the starting point. With this mind Catholic principals are encouraged to:

1. Care for their own souls
 - Take time for spiritual practice: prayer and solitude, Mass and all the sacraments.
 - See God; personally and in those you encounter. Recognize the sacramental moments that are happening around you continuously. Make spiritual reflection “how” you do things.
 - Grow in your own understanding of your faith through intentional opportunities such as: retreats, seminars, theology courses, sacred literature, and conversations with a spiritual advisor or mentor.
 - Use your community as support. This includes other Catholic principals who share your vocation and challenges, your school community who stands alongside you, your parish community, and your Catholic community at large.

- Reflect on the vocational nature of your work. Recognize the call you have received and the greater good it asks of you. Know that God is at work in you and through you.
- Recognize the gifts and abilities of others. By lifting your colleagues up, your own work will be fulfilling.

2. Care for their Catholic community

- Seek authenticity. Be who you say you are. Your commitment to a real community will ensure the future of Catholic education.
- Be a witness and a role model in your actions and words.
- Mentor teachers. Find ways for them to grow in their faith and their knowledge. They cannot give to children what they do not possess themselves. Begin your school community efforts with the teachers in that community.
- Mentor parents. Welcome parents to the school. Partner with them to provide quality education. Have honest conversations and hold parents accountable. For the sake of their children, make real effort with their parents.
- Build relationships with your parish. Take time, make time for the priest. Have a personal relationship; have a professional relationship. Be active in your service within the parish. Make connections with parishioners. Demonstrate and articulate the mutual responsibilities that exist between parish and Catholic school.

- Create relevancy and meaning for your students. Be an authentic Catholic witness for them. Hire the best authentic teachers you can find. Gather a team of faith filled adults who will “make real” Catholic living in today’s world. Facilitate speakers, retreats, events, classroom discussions, service activities, etc. that will bring relevance and current issues to the fore.

Recommendations for Catholic school boards.

1. Hire authentic Catholic principals who are spiritual leaders and called to their vocation.
2. Provide principals with opportunities to grow in their spirituality by facilitating
 - spiritual mentorship;
 - communities of faith and practice;
 - spiritual growth through retreats, speakers, communities of faith, academic course work, and other faith experiences.
3. Identify strong and spiritually potential leaders waiting in the wings. Invite them to leadership and provide them with the mentorship required.
4. Support principals’ efforts to build relationships with parents by challenging and encouraging parents in their vital role. Non-practicing parents could lead to the demise of Catholic education.
5. Support principals’ efforts to build relationships within the parish. Be active and involved alongside the principal. Engage the priests, the bishop, and the parish in these vital understandings regarding Catholic education.
6. Sustain principals in their efforts to create a relevant Catholicity for students. All levels of support (including financial) are needed to meet this critical challenge.

7. Spiritual leadership applies to all leaders in a Catholic school district. These leaders recognize the abilities of and are servant as leaders. The school board and its employees must view their role of one of service, looking to empower and lift up others while serving the values of the Catholic community. Practical ways of freeing and empowering principals to do their work more effectively must be implemented.
8. Allocate financial resources through a Catholic paradigm. Invest in the components that make schools Catholic. Witness to all constituents that Catholic school boards' financial priorities represent Catholic values.
9. Be authentic faith witnesses for principals and their communities. Be who you say you are. As key leaders in Catholic schools authenticity is non-negotiable.
10. Recognize that the context of our Catholic faith is community. Create, enrich, support, deepen, and encourage community.
11. The principal of subsidiarity emerged strongly in this document. This Catholic teaching instructs us to make decisions as close to those involved as possible. Decentralizing values community and its members. Trusting in others' abilities is key.
12. Revisit the role of the "small Catholic high school." Open the conversation about the stresses these schools are facing. Vital questions in this process must be asked:
 - What is the purpose of the small Catholic high school?
 - How do we best support the small Catholic high school?
 - What minimum level of enrolment will allow this school to operate fully?

- How do we stay true to our Catholic mandate in the face of competition?
- Is bigger better?

Recommendations for Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association.

ACSTA has a unique and vital role to play in this province's Catholic education system. As the one body of all Catholic trustees, their impact over the years has been immeasurable. With a mandate "to be the voice of Catholic trustees" and with their "commitment to enhancing the rights of Catholics to education based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (ACSTA, 2010), ACSTA has lobbied on behalf of Catholic education on a multitude of fronts. Most appreciated in the light of this study, is their work in recognizing that the principal is the "linch-pin...on who falls the main responsibility for religious education and life in the school" (Tkach, 1983, p. 364). ACSTA instituted Blueprints, a yearly conference for Catholic administrators that was an intentional effort to support Catholic principals throughout the province. It has had a phenomenal impact. Blueprints is the only opportunity or event within the province that brings Catholic principals together in some way. Based on ACSTA's commitments and role in provincial Catholic education, the following recommendations are made:

1. Revisit the association's commitment to Catholic principals in the province.
The first Blueprints conference was held in 1981. Thirty-two years later it is time to revision ways of supporting and advocating for the Catholic principal in the province of Alberta.
2. Reinvigorate the association's commitment to Catholic parents by engaging them in a current conversation that reflects the realities of the family, society, and Catholic schools in 2013.

3. Renew relationships with the religious community, the bishops and priests who are the pastors of Catholic schools. Facilitate the “big” conversations between Church and school. Mulligan’s (2006) first order of business in resolving issues between priests and principals is to “take up conversation” (p. 100). ACSTA is best placed to initiate provincial dialogue about what the Catholic school needs from the Church and what the priests need from the school.
4. Recharge all trustees in their vital role as trusted advocates and guardians of Catholic education. Alberta requires authentic and committed trustees who perform a leadership role that no one else can do. Ensure that all Catholic trustees are fully committed to the task.
5. Reinvest by funding special initiatives that promote further research within the province regarding Catholic education and enhance Catholic education in general.

Recommendations for Alberta Education.

1. Catholic education in Alberta is alive and well. Commit wholly to fully funded Catholic education and eliminate the conversations that require Catholic schools to justify their existence. That time has come and gone. Let these committed educators know that Catholic education is here to stay.

Further Research

Catholic education, particularly in the province of Alberta, is a largely unresearched area. The more we know, the more likely we are to be excellent. The following areas of research bear further examination:

1. The Spiritual Catholic Leadership framework. What does it look like in other Catholic school settings?
2. The nature of the Catholic elementary principalship in Alberta. What does leadership look like in the province's elementary Catholic schools?
3. Parental voice in Catholic education. What are the issues, the barriers, and the beliefs?
4. Leadership succession in Catholic schools. What are the demographics regarding leadership in Alberta's Catholic schools and what succession strategies exist to ensure strong, spiritual leadership?
5. The Catholic principal's investment in his or her school. A comparison between the two current models of school district principal placement. What are the strengths of a process that moves principals every few years to another school within the district? What are the challenges? What are the strengths of a process that places an unrestricted time limit on a principal's leadership in a particular school? What are the challenges?
6. Women as principals in Catholic schools. What do the demographics say? What does female leadership look like in a Catholic school? What are the barriers for women regarding leadership?

7. The relationship between spirituality and effective Catholic principals.

What aspects of spirituality are central to effective leadership? How are these aspects best developed? What role does theological education have on a principal's spirituality?

8. The role and significance of the small Catholic high school. What is its purpose? What role do they play in Catholic education? What challenges do they face and how are these best resolved?

Conclusions

I'd like to close this dissertation in the same way I began it, from a personal perspective. I became a Catholic principal 17 years ago. As a novice principal I learned through trial, error, success, and adversity. I leaned on those around me. I had a vision and a strong desire to answer the call to Catholic leadership in my community. Confidence, wisdom, and courage grew in incremental steps. My ability to see the strength and leadership in others evolved. Now I am at a stage in my leadership where I, like John, see myself as a mentor and coach ready to shepherd the next flock of Catholic principals. What a journey it has been!

This study on the nature of the Catholic high school principalship has been part of that process. From graduate classes to the total immersion of the literature review to the emergence of research questions to the nine months of survey, focus groups, and interviews which led me across the province and opened my eyes to the cadre of Catholic principal colleagues who, like me, were on a journey of faith and leadership. The experience has been profound.

Now, a year later, after transcribing, rereading, and reflecting on a wealth of conversations, the principals' words are part of my own vocabulary; their lives are part of mine. This experience has expanded my understanding of what I do by taking me beyond the four walls of my own school and the monthly meetings of my own district, to meet principals in the trenches across Alberta. As well, it has taken me from my own finite understandings of spirituality and leadership to the wisdom of great thinkers in spirituality, Catholicism, leadership, and community. They have sharpened my intellect and stirred my heart. I am no longer the principal I was when this research journey began. I am no longer the person I was. I originally believed that this study would allow me to better understand what I do. I now believe that it has allowed me to better understand who I am. And, for that, I am extremely grateful.

As a result of this study, I am a better principal. My colleagues have inspired me to love more and trust more, and leave the rest in God's hands. I have learned the true meaning of servant leadership. That is, to lift others up in the service of my Catholic community's mission and values. I am absolutely convicted of the belief that school is community and that no other metaphor even comes close. And when you place Catholic education and the principalship in the context of community, everything is different. I am renewed in my commitment to build relationships with parents, for the future of Catholic education rests in their hands. I am renewed in my desire to build relationships with my parish and priest, as we are all parts of the body of Christ.

As I close the cover on this significant chapter of my life, I know that Catholic education is in good hands. Our Catholic principals are principals of heart and soul. They are devoted. They are spiritual beings leading lives of sacrifice and joy, doing what

they have been called to do, and loving it intensely. It's who they are; it's who I am; and we are all richly blessed.

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