

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE JOB-RELATED EXPERIENCES OF EARLY  
CAREER CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE MIDEASTERN  
REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

by

Sarah Kerins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. Alderfer's (1969) existence, relatedness, and growth theory provides a foundation to answer the central research question: How do early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States describe their job-related experiences? Participants were purposefully selected from a population of Catholic elementary school principals employed within the Mideastern region of the United States who had completed one but not more than five years of service. Using a transcendental phenomenological research design, data was collected from an introductory survey, semi-structured interviews, two focus groups, and a participant designed plan for professional development. The findings indicated Catholic elementary principals in their early career were motivated by a calling to a vocation in Catholic school leadership as well as the ability to develop and implement a vision for their school. Principals were challenged by limited resources, balancing the demands of the position, and navigating relationships. Finally, principals believed they were supported by diocesan administrators in the areas of human resources and student issues, particularly if the concerns had legal implications. Principals identified six key areas of need: teacher supervision, curriculum decisions, leveraging resources, professional development, communication and diocesan presence. Applications of the research will hopefully lead to improved preparation, induction programs, and support protocols for Catholic elementary school principals.

*Keywords:* leadership, school administration, principalship, Catholic education, principal attrition, principal retention

### **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to Catholic educators everywhere who bring the light of Christ to the children entrusted to their care. May they continue to listen to promptings of the Holy Spirit, plant the seeds that one day will grow and water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

“We know that all things work for good for those who love God,  
who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)

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“Whatever you do, do from the heart” (Colossians 3:23)

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Existence, relatedness and growth theory (ERG)

Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Catholic Education Association (NCEA)

National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The principalship is an increasingly complex school leadership role. While little is written on the history of the American school principal, the position has evolved drastically over the last 100 years (Kafka, 2009). Beyond the managerial tasks, the principal is now responsible for instructional leadership, teacher effectiveness, and academic progress, as well as the climate and culture of the school (Kellough & Hill, 2014). The complexity of the principalship has expanded beyond what is effectively manageable. Considering one third of principals reported they intended to leave their jobs within the next five years (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013), the recruitment, retention, and attrition of these critical school leaders is largely under-researched. Additionally, the overall experience of the first five years of the principalship, a critical window for retention, is also empirically overlooked.

Principals in the Catholic school system have a unique role which includes all the job functions of the public school principalship in addition to acquiring financial resources for scholarships, maintaining and increasing enrollment, and fostering the Catholic identity of the school (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). The challenges of retaining a principal in the Catholic school system are further compounded by interfering pastors (Fraser & Brock, 2006), demanding parents (Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, & Cassel, 2010), and unsupportive superiors (Bigelow, 2017). Further research was needed to explore the experiences of early career Catholic elementary principals, which will hopefully lead to more successful induction and mentorship programs to improve job-satisfaction and retention.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern

region of the United States. Chapter One provides a background of Catholic education and the principalship to frame the problem, purpose, and significance of the research. The research questions, which drive the data collection, are discussed in detail. Relevant key terms are defined to provide further clarity.

### **Background**

An understanding of the history, structure, and governance of the Catholic school system is necessary to fully grasp the experience of the Catholic elementary school principal. Catholic education has a long and rich history, one that began long before the Americas were discovered by European explorers (Walch, 2003). The role of the school principal continues to increase in complexity from its mostly clerical beginnings (Kafka, 2009). Similarly, the Catholic school principalship evolved from mostly religious (priests or religious sisters) to mostly lay leadership whose responsibilities require master's level credentials (Jacobs, 1998). Factors related to job satisfaction, retention, and attrition of Catholic school principals is framed by the motivation theory of existence, relatedness and growth (Alderfer, 1969).

### **Historical Context**

Catholic education in the United States began with European missionaries who established missions and schools to convert Native Americans to Christianity during the 17th century. Most of the missions and their schools faded away due to the Native population's reluctance to accept Christianity. Prior to the American Revolution, attempts to create and sustain Catholic schools found limited success and were either shut down by the colonial government or lacked the necessary funds to continue (Walch, 2003).

According to Walch (2003), the first parochial school, or parish school, was founded in 1783 by Saint Mary Parish in Philadelphia, which still exists today under the name Saint Mary

Interparochial School. Nearly 50 years after the founding of Philadelphia's first parochial school, the influx of Irish and German Catholic immigrants led to social unrest in cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Protestant ministers warned of Catholic conspiracies that would undermine the young nation (Walch, 2003). Anti-immigration sentiment led to riots, such as the nativist inspired Philadelphia Bible Riots. Catholic homes and two churches in Philadelphia burned to the ground resulting in the deaths of 13 people (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Mondale & Patton, 2001).

Common schools were one solution to facilitate the assimilation of immigrants into American society; however, common schools were built on Protestant ideals. Protestant theology permeated the curriculum and anti-Catholic bias was portrayed in school textbooks (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Walch, 2003). As parishes and dioceses grew larger, there was a greater need for Catholic schools to protect the religious faith and traditions of Catholic children. Bishop John Neumann (now Saint John Neumann) established the first parochial school system in Philadelphia in 1852 (Walch, 2003). In New York City, Archbishop John Hughes proclaimed, "We are unwilling to pay taxes for the purpose of destroying our religion in the minds of our children" (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 33). Archbishop Hughes went as far as to demand a portion of New York's common school funds to support Catholic schools but lost the battle. Maine Senator, James Blaine, pushed to prohibit aid to religious schools. The initiative failed at the federal level; however, several states adopted what were known as Blaine Amendments, which disqualified religious schools from receiving taxpayer funding (Burke & Stepman, 2014).

The Catholic bishops of the United States had a strong reaction to the anti-Catholic social and political climate. In 1884, the bishops of the United States held the Third Plenary Council in Baltimore. The council "ordered all parish priests to establish parochial schools within two years

and provided that they would be removed from their posts for failure to do so” (Brinig & Garnett, 2014, p.15). The bishops required the faithful support and effort in every parish to build and establish a school. The council declared “all Catholic parents are bound to send their children to parochial schools unless at home or in other Catholic schools, they provide sufficiently and fully for their Christian education” (Brinig & Garnett, 2014, p. 15; Walch, 2003, p. 61).

The debate over public funding for religiously affiliated schools still rages today, led by the lobbying efforts of school choice advocates. As of the 2016-2017 school year, 13 states and the District of Columbia have private school voucher programs. In voucher programs, the funding follows the child and parents to use state allocated funds to pay for private school tuition. Eighteen states have scholarship tax credit programs where individuals or businesses (or both) receive tax credits for donating to scholarship organizations that provide tuition assistance to students (Schultz et al., 2017). In the Mideastern region, Maryland and the District of Columbia have voucher programs and Pennsylvania is the only state to have a tax credit program. The challenge with tax credit programs is that scholarship funding depends upon revenue generated from participating donors, which is not consistent from year to year.

Other examples of public funding used for private schools are student transportation, textbook loan programs, Universal Service Schools and Libraries Grants (E-Rate), and funding from Every Student Succeeds Act (EdChoice, 2017; Schultz & McDonald, 2018; Schultz et al., 2017). In the most recent Supreme Court ruling involving a religious institution and public funding, the Court ruled that government agencies cannot deny access to government grants which are meant for a secular purpose to religious institutions. In the *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer, Director, Missouri Department of Natural Resources* (2017) ruling is a

glimmer of hope for school choice advocates that Blaine Amendments will be abolished once and for all.

The parish is a geographic boundary. In cities with a historically dense population of Catholics, such as Chicago or Philadelphia, it was common for a person to answer the question “Where are you from?” with the name of a parish rather than a street address (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Catholic schools were originally established as parochial, or parish sponsored. The school, as a part of the parish, was traditionally governed by the pastor (priest who manages a parish) (Rieckhoff, 2016). Statistical data from the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) showed that Catholic school enrollment hit its peak in 1965 with 5.6 million students and almost 13,500 schools (Schultz & McDonald, 2013). Economic and demographic trends led to the decline of enrollment since the 1960s and resulted in the closing and consolidation of many Catholic schools. Over the last two decades, Catholic school enrollment declined 24.5% (Schultz & McDonald, 2013). Currently, there are 1,835,376 students enrolled in 6,352 Catholic elementary and high schools nationwide (Schultz & McDonald, 2018).

There is some disagreement among researchers regarding how or if child abuse scandals within the Catholic Church in the United States affected Catholic school enrollment. McDonald and Schultz (2018) attributed the decline in enrollment to downturned economic trends, demographic changes, and increased tuition rates. Three recent studies (Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015; Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2012; Moghtaderi, 2018), all which controlled for economic factors, Catholic population, and the Hispanic population, found the child abuse scandals had a negative effect on Catholic school enrollment. Dills and Hernandez-Julian (2012) found that the child abuse scandals had a statistically significant effect on Catholic school enrollment; however, the magnitude of the effect was extremely small. In contrast, Bottan and Perez-Truglia (2015)

discovered “there is a significant drop in the number of Catholic schools in zip codes affected by scandals” (p. 10). Moghtaderi (2018) replicated both studies (Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015; Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2012) and reported the high-profile media coverage after 2002 had a negative impact on Catholic school enrollment. Moghtaderi (2018) argued up to two thirds of the enrollment decline after 2002 could be attributed to the child abuse scandals. Interestingly, a recent study explored the disaffiliation of young Catholics and only two percent of respondents mentioned the sex abuse scandals as a reason for leaving the Church (McCarty & Vitek, 2018).

Catholic dioceses across the country are recognizing more than ever their future depends upon attention to the lessons of the past as well as attention to the research on Catholic disaffiliation. The future of Catholic schools also depends on their financial sustainability, which is driven by planning, stewardship, and a reputation for academic excellence. Disaffiliated Catholics, if grouped together, make up the second largest religious group in the United States (Riley, 2016). Fewer baptisms (Gray, 2018) and a declining weekly Mass attendance (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2018) may impact Catholic school enrollment and donorship. The future of Catholic schools requires lay leaders and religious leaders work together to create and carry out strategic plans to ensure success, such as the Archdiocese of New York’s Pathways to Excellence (Dolan, 2013).

The Archdiocese of New York’s Pathways to Excellence strategic plan required a modernization of the school governance model giving authority to regional school boards (Office of the Superintendent of Schools, 2010). The plan also requires all parishes to contribute to Catholic education even if a school is not located within the parish boundary. While the regional boards have a majority of clergy, they also include lay persons with specific skill sets in finance, marketing, development, facilities, and other areas (Smith, 2013). Bold strategic plans are

necessary to sustain Catholic schools in the United States, especially in states where voucher programs are not available.

### **Social Context**

The importance of the principal regarding student success is second only to the teacher (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Quality leadership is necessary for any school to have ongoing success. Because Catholic schools are funded primarily through tuition, operational vitality in addition to academic quality is essential for a sustainable future. Catholic schools emphasize community, and their disappearance in urban areas due to financial constraints had a measurable impact on crime rates. According to Brinig and Garnett (2012), crime rate in police beats which included Catholic schools were at least 33% lower than police beats without Catholic schools. While charter schools tend to mimic Catholic schools in all but religion, charter schools had no effect on crime rates (Brinig & Garnett, 2012).

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, lamented that Catholic leaders must cease having a hospice mentality regarding the viability of Catholic schools. In response, the philanthropic community, independent think tanks, and consulting firms have researched ways to improve operational vitality to sustain Catholic schools (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011). The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools included effective governance as the key to success because leadership provides the necessary direction and authority to ensure effective operations and a sustainable future (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

**The principalship.** Studies involving school principals were limited until over the last two decades; perhaps spurred by the increased political interest in education beginning with the creation of the U.S. Department of Education in 1979 which ultimately led to the scrutiny of

school leadership and regulatory legislation. With the shift from the principal as manager to the principal as instructional leader (Sergiovanni, 2009), there is an increasing number of studies regarding the impact of the principal on student achievement. The debate is ongoing as to whether the school principal has a direct influence on student achievement or an indirect influence based on leadership qualities that inspire teacher performance and in turn affect student achievement (Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015).

The impact of the principal on teacher job satisfaction and organizational commitment is well documented (Dou, Devos, & Valcke, 2017; Ilgan, Parylo, & Sungu, 2015; McKinney, Labat & Labat, 2015; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Taliadorou, & Pashiardis, 2015; Wahab, Fuad, Ismail, & Majid, 2014). The scope of research on principal effectiveness also measured influence on school climate (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015; Eranil & Özbilen, 2017; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006) as well as the overall impact on school improvement initiatives (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017). While specific leadership behaviors of the principal may not individually impact student achievement directly, the synthesis of effective practice in all areas of school leadership will create a school culture which is conducive to student success.

With the expanding role of the school principal comes an increase in challenges. The position is incredibly difficult for novice principals whose preparation often lacks practice in the soft skills (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Studies related to challenges in the principalship showed difficulty with time management, discipline, school finances, and human resource management (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Karakose, Yirci, & Kocabas, 2014; Oplatka, 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014), as well as navigating relationships with stakeholders (Beam, Claxton, & Smith, 2016; García-Garduño, Slater, & Lopez-Gorosave,

2011). Several researchers report the salary and occupational stress were factors in decreased job satisfaction (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015; Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

Public school superintendents, charter school management groups, and their respective teachers and students are certainly affected by principal turnover (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015; Snodgrass, 2018; Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013). According to Cullen and Mazzeo (2007), “A one standard deviation fall in the pass rate is associated with an increase in turnover of 3.4 percentage points” (p. 11). Private schools also struggle with retention of school administrators (Goldring & Taie, 2014). While national and international studies highlight the challenges of the principalship, only two published studies investigated the attrition, retention, and job satisfaction of Catholic school principals (Durow & Brock, 2004; Fraser & Brock, 2006). Research on the role of the Catholic principalship are consistent with the literature on principal job satisfaction; however, maintaining school enrollment and relationships with pastors are additional challenges unique to the Catholic school system (Brock & Fraser, 2001; Durow & Brock, 2004; Rieckhoff, 2014). Both studies included principals with varying levels of experience. This study will hopefully contribute to the literature on Catholic elementary principal retention and attrition by describing the experiences of Catholic elementary school principals specifically in their early career.

**Catholic schools and society.** The cultural impact of Catholic schools in America cannot be understated. Catholic schools were originally established to serve the poor and the marginalized. In the 21st century, Catholic schools still successfully serve families in poverty. Chávez, Holyk-Casey, Huchting, Martin, and Ruiz (2014) reported 98% of low-income students in Los Angeles Archdiocesan high schools graduated in four years compared to 69% of their

low-income peers attending California public high schools. Catholic schools initially were able to offer education tuition free largely because the schools were staffed with women religious (female members of a religious order) (Brinig & Garnett, 2014). Today, the urban Catholic schools struggle to survive due to financial pressures and the decline of religious orders committed to the ministry of education (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

In 1920, the majority (92%) of Catholic schools were staffed by men or women who professed a religious vocation (priest or religious sister or brother) (Schultz & McDonald, 2018). According to Caruso (2012), by the mid-19th century, school faculty were dominated by women, and the Catholic school system employed most of its teachers through women religious orders. Cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s led to the departure of many religious women. The feminist movement resulted in more career opportunities for women and contributed to the decline in those seeking a religious vocation. Changes, which resulted from the Second Vatican Council, required religious communities to renew their charisms and some religious orders moved out of teaching and into other ministries, whereas previously the ministries of health care and education were predominant (Caruso, 2012). According to Caruso (2012), as religious communities declined in numbers, they were forced to withdraw from service to schools, resulting in a painful departure for the whole parish community. In 2018, only 2.6% of school staff were classified as clergy or religious (male or female member of a religious order) while 97.4% of Catholic school staff were lay persons (Schultz & McDonald, 2018).

The mission of the Catholic schools in the United States is just as important in the 21st century as it was in the 19th century. The Catholic school is a place where children and their families encounter the risen Christ. The mission of the school is first and foremost to evangelize (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Catholic schools are sustained by the

Gospel witness, shaped by community, and committed to educating the whole child (Dosen, 2016a). Well trained, effective leadership is necessary to carry out the mission and ensure the future of the Catholic school system in America, which has molded and shaped countless minds and hearts over the centuries.

**The Catholic school principalship.** The role of the Catholic principal in the 21st century includes spiritual leadership, instructional leadership, financial management, development and marketing, faculty supervision, enrollment and recruitment, as well as student supervision (Boyle et al., 2016; Ciriello, 1996). The Catholic school principal must be very attuned to the needs and wants of the community, especially when parents have so many educational options, many of which are no cost charter or public schools. According to Nuzzi, Holter, and Frabutt (2013), Catholic elementary school principals identified marketing, Catholic identity, enrollment management, and long-range planning among their top priorities. Enrollment and finances were among the principals' biggest concerns (Nuzzi et al., 2013).

Focusing on the wants and needs of parents to maintain enrollment can derail attention to the religious mission of the school. In a study of one northeastern Catholic high school, Fuller and Johnson (2013) found the school's efforts to maintain its Catholic identity was minimized in pursuit of academic excellence. With the disappearance of religious orders as leaders in the Catholic school, the Catholic school principal now fulfills the role of spiritual leadership. The bishops of the United States recognized the importance of lay teachers and administrators as faith leaders. They wrote, "The preparation and ongoing formation of new administrators and teachers is vital if our schools are to remain truly Catholic in all aspects of school life" (p. 10). In order to maintain the school's Catholic identity, principals must be prepared to provide opportunities for faith formation of the faculty, students, and parents.

The third prong of Catholic school leadership, academic excellence, is as important as operational vitality and Catholic identity. Simon and Robbins (2018) presented recent research that indicated Catholic school parents believe encouraging individual and critical thinking as well as preparing children to successfully enter the job market are more important than deepening children's relationship with their religious faith. This is a dramatic shift from the 2014 study conducted by Gray (2014) and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate where parents ranked a quality religious education as more important than academic quality. The most recent study presented by Simon and Robbins (2018) calls Catholic school principals to recognize the deep need for evangelization among the parents while maintaining superior academic quality in order to attract and retain students and achieve financial sustainability.

### **Theoretical Context**

The existence, relatedness, and growth theory (Alderfer, 1969) provided a framework to understand the job motivations of early career Catholic elementary school principals. Clayton Alderfer (1969) advanced the work of Abraham Maslow (1943) by further refining the theory of human needs. Alderfer's (1969) existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory regrouped Maslow's (1943) needs categories and placed them on a continuum from most concrete (existence) to least concrete (growth). Alderfer (1969) applied the needs continuum specifically to job satisfaction. Existence needs are largely physiological but also include the need for physical safety. Relatedness refers to interpersonal safety needs, love, and the esteem of others. Growth needs include self-esteem and Maslow's (1943) concept of self-actualization.

In the context of job satisfaction, Alderfer (1969) related existence needs to financial security. Relatedness needs included relationships with colleagues and superiors. Having the opportunity to use and improve job-related skills is categorized as a growth need. The ERG

theory (Alderfer 1969) frames the experiences of the Catholic school principalship and their needs in order to persist in the position. The ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) has never been applied in the context of the Catholic school principalship, nor school leadership in general.

Only one study exists that relates the ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) to an educational setting. Conducted by Ud Din, Khan, and Murtaza (2011), the study explored job motivation of Turkish teachers in the context of four motivation theories: Maslow's need-hierarchy theory (1943), Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), Alderfer's ERG theory (1969), and McClelland's achievement theory (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). Ud Din et al. (2011) found that social prestige was a determining factor in choosing a teaching career. This study does not generalize well to the teaching profession in the United States where teachers are not as socially valued as they are in Turkey (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2013). This study will hopefully extend the ERG theory to school leadership and to Catholic School leadership specifically.

## **Conclusion**

Stability in Catholic school leadership is necessary for the success of the school to attain its religious and academic goals. The mission of Catholic education is, first and foremost, to carry out the salvific mission of the Church (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). To carry out the mission of Catholic education successfully, the Catholic school system needs well-prepared leaders and effective means of support in order to reduce the potential for attrition. Policymakers and central office leadership will benefit from a deep dive into the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in order to best support their existence, relatedness, and growth needs. A gap in the literature exists because there is no research giving a voice to early career Catholic elementary school principals.

### **Situation to Self**

Having served as a principal in a Catholic elementary school for approximately six years, I have just emerged from living the experiences of the participants I studied. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the “researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways” (p. 16). The constructivist philosophy embraces the assumption of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Using a social constructivist framework, I recognized the ontological nature of this study where my worldview of the Catholic elementary school principalship was uniquely different from the worldview of other principals. A phenomenological research design allowed me to discover the essence of the multiple realities of the early career Catholic elementary school principal (Creswell, 2013).

From an axiological perspective, I admit my own experiences created values and biases (Creswell, 2013). During my seven years as a Catholic elementary school teacher, I had the opportunity to work for a principal who realized my leadership potential and prepared me for the day I would set foot in my own school as principal. I also had the opportunity to participate in a newly formed leadership academy for aspiring leaders in the diocese where I was employed. When I accepted my first principalship in the neighboring diocese, attending their leadership academy for new principals was deemed unnecessary for two reasons. I had already received Catholic leadership training in the former diocese. Secondly, the travel distance (nearly two hours) to attend weekly meetings was prohibitive for a new principal with a young family. Every county was assigned one of two assistant superintendents whose support I relied on far more often than I would like to admit.

Comfortable with the norms of my previous diocese, this new diocese felt like the *Wild*

*West*. I was informally assigned a mentor my first year, but the vast differences between all schools within the diocese made the mentor's advice incompatible with my situation in most instances. In the fall of my second year, a change in leadership at the diocesan level provided more support, resources, structure, and expectations. I was encouraged to dream big and supported in those endeavors; however, I encountered the political nature that exists in every organization on the macro-level. I experienced frustration and ultimately heartbreak at the micro-level which has shaped the leader I am today and certainly changed my worldview. So that I did not taint my interpretation of the research, I chose to use a transcendental phenomenological design, which forced me to bracket out my own experiences so that I could accurately describe the perspectives of the participants through a purified consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).

Constructivist epistemology is rooted in Descartes' philosophy that reality exists only in the mind and truth is, therefore, subjective (Moustakas, 1994). Epistemologically, I minimized distance between myself and the participant by interviewing and observing them in the participants' natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through interviews and document analysis, I assembled the subjective realities of the participants to develop themes and capture the overall essence of what it means to be an early career Catholic elementary school principal. My hope is that the voices of the participants will lead to more appropriate preparation and support than was available to me in the early part of my career.

### **Problem Statement**

In recent studies related to the challenges of the principalship and job satisfaction, the research indicates that principals find the managerial demands of the position to be insurmountable (Barnett et al., 2012; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Karakose et al., 2014; Oplatka,

2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 11% of private school principals left the profession during the 2012-2013 school year (Goldring & Taie, 2014). Of the 11% of principals who relinquished their positions, those with three to five years of experience had the highest attrition rate (15.3%). The Catholic elementary principalship is distinct from public and even other private religiously affiliated schools because of the dynamics related to the multi-directional structure of educational governance within the Catholic Church and her respective dioceses as well as increasing emphasis on enrollment, scholarships, and spiritual leadership (Rieckhoff, 2014). The principal influences the academic achievement of students, school climate, and teacher job satisfaction (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2015; Taliadorou & Pashiardis, 2015); therefore, it is critical to understand their experiences. To prevent attrition, it is necessary to understand job motivation and challenges in order to identify and implement appropriate support for Catholic elementary school principals in the early part of their careers.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. Early career principals were selected from several dioceses within the Mideastern region and had between one and five completed years of experience in the role of a Catholic elementary school principal. Job-related experiences are defined as any experiences or relationships directly related to the profession. The theory which guided this study is the existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory developed by Clayton Alderfer (1969). The ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) furthered the research of Abraham Maslow (1943); however, in contrast to Maslow, Alderfer (1969) determined satisfaction of lower-order needs is not

necessarily “a prerequisite for the emergence of higher-order needs” (p. 142). Based on the themes in the literature related to job satisfaction and the challenges of the principalship, the needs of Catholic elementary school principals correspond with Alderfer’s (1969) existence, relatedness, and growth categories. For a principal to persist in the position, existence, relatedness, and growth needs are not required to be satisfied in any specific hierarchical order.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research on the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals is empirically, theoretically, and practically significant. The study adds to the literature related to principal motivation and job satisfaction. Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory was expanded to the application of job-related experiences of the principal, specifically, the Catholic elementary school principal. Additionally, the research is practically significant because it sheds light on the needs of elementary principals, specifically in the field of Catholic education and influence leadership preparation, induction programs, and support protocols at the diocesan level.

### **Empirical Significance**

Research related to the principalship has examined job satisfaction, workload, scope of responsibilities, and challenges. In research specific to the Catholic school principalship, researchers investigated recruitment, retention, attrition, and the pastor-principal dynamic (Brock & Fraser, 2001; Durow & Brock, 2004; Fraser & Brock, 2006). In a multi-case study, Ostrowski (2005) described the experiences of first year principals in one diocese. By expanding the research over several dioceses and beyond the first year of experience, this study revealed a more universal description of the job-related experiences of the Catholic elementary school principal. Diocesan leaders and philanthropic foundations, which support Catholic education, can utilize

the data from this study to improve professional development, mentorship, and coaching for novice leaders in Catholic schools.

Nuzzi et al. (2013) conducted the most comprehensive study of Catholic school principals which spanned nationwide. The mixed methods study was designed to more “fully understand the vision, hopes, insights, and day-to-day successes and challenges” (loc. 27) of Catholic school principals across all age groups and years of experience. The results revealed the needs, perceptions, and attitudes of Catholic elementary school leaders. Nuzzi and colleagues (2013) called for more professional development in the areas of academic, administrative, instructional, and spiritual needs. Additionally, Nuzzi et al. (2013) reiterated the expanding role of the principal and the need for effective distributed leadership within the school. While there are studies that address the first-year Catholic school principal, Catholic elementary school principals nationally, and Catholic school principals who have left the profession, research describing the experiences of Catholic elementary principals across multiple dioceses with one to five completed years of service did not exist. This study of Catholic elementary school principals in the early part of their career addressed a gap in the literature.

### **Theoretical Significance**

Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory refines Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation by re-categorizing Maslow’s (1943) needs categories and applying them to job motivation. Existence, in the job context, relates to satisfactory compensation and protection from legal issues. Relatedness describes needs related to human resource management, relationships with stakeholders, and recognition from peers and superiors. Growth needs describe opportunities for professional development and career advancement. Having never been applied in the context of

the principalship or Catholic education, the study expanded the ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969), particularly for employment research on mid-level and top-level managers.

### **Practical Significance**

Effective principal preparation programs can better prepare future leaders to persist in the principalship. Research on the job-related experiences of Catholic elementary school principals can inform those who prepare induction programs and professional development programs. In most cases, the parish pastor or an advisory board is responsible for hiring the principal. By understanding the factors that lead to burnout and attrition, the pastor and board can more effectively support a new principal. Having support systems already in place, such as an induction program, peer network, or mentoring program (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Della Sala et al., 2013; Lochmiller, 2014; Sciarappa, & Mason, 2014), may serve as a recruiting tool to attract more highly qualified candidates.

Research on the job-related experiences of Catholic elementary school principals provides a framework for diocesan leaders to identify and implement appropriate support needs in order to prevent principal attrition. Diocesan leaders cannot ignore elementary principals who are truly pivotal players in the success of the Catholic school system. It may be practical to look at other site-based leadership models, such as the president/principal model, which is successful in most Catholic high schools (Nuzzi et al., 2013). This research contributed to the body of literature on the Catholic school principalship to inspire diocesan leaders, particularly bishops, to recognize the overwhelming role of Catholic elementary school leadership and take action to support principals effectively.

## **Research Questions**

According to Moustakas (1994), the central research question should have “social meaning and personal significance” (p. 104). This transcendental phenomenological study, framed by Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory, described the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals. Phenomenology is a qualitative method of research; therefore, the central and guiding questions were open-ended (Creswell, 2013) to obtain comprehensive, vivid, and accurate descriptions of the participant’s experience (Moustakas, 1994). The research question guided the researcher in the “phenomenological process of seeing, reflecting, and knowing” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59) to uncover the essence of the experience.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States?

Because principals with three to five years of experience have the highest attrition rate (Goldring & Taie, 2014), the central research question aimed to discover the experiences of Catholic elementary school principals during the critical window of the first five years of their career. The central research question is supported by Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory. Alderfer (1969) introduced what he termed the “frustration progression” which refers to the pursuit of lower-order needs when higher-order needs cannot be obtained. Longo, Gunz, Curtis, and Farsides (2016) found that “need satisfaction and frustration best predict well-being and ill-being outcomes, respectively” (p. 312). Thus, work-related outcomes are affected by the satisfaction of human needs and provide a framework for the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals.

**Guiding question one.** What experiences motivate early career Catholic elementary school principals to persist in the position?

Alderfer's (1969) growth category includes Maslow's (1943) construct of self-actualization, which can be defined as reaching one's potential. Further supporting job-related motivation is Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (1985) defined competence as a person's need to feel effective within their important life context. Certainly, self-actualization is rooted in feelings of competence. Personal competence, which includes interpersonal skills, decision making, adaptability, knowledge and skill, accountability, leadership skills, and communication, are positively correlated with job satisfaction and contribute to job-related success (Kaur & Singh, 2017). Motivation to persist and succeed in the work-related context is largely supported by multiple motivation theories (Alderfer, 1969; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1943).

**Guiding question two.** What are the job-related challenges experienced by early career Catholic elementary school principals?

In a study of U.S. and German schools, principals reported the job had become nearly impossible (Hancock & Müller, 2014). Several studies described managerial challenges such as heavy workload, time management (Barnett et al., 2012; García-Garduño et al., 2011; Oplatka, 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014), inadequate facilities (Darmody, & Smyth), and financial concerns (Beam et al., 2016; García-Garduño et al., 2011). Additionally, principals are challenged by student discipline (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Karakose et. al, 2014; Oplatka, 2017), personnel issues (Barnett et al., 2012; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Oplatka, 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014), and expectations or demands of stakeholders (Beam et al., 2016; García-Garduño et al., 2011). Many of the difficulties principals face ultimately lead to stress and may result in dissatisfaction with

the position (Hancock & Müller, 2014). A decrease in motivation as a result of frustration is consistent with the ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) as well as the theory of self-determination where the need for “competence, relatedness, and autonomy...appear to be essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68).

**Guiding question three.** What supports do early career Catholic elementary principals perceive are needed to persist in the position?

Research on the principalship reveals that principals prefer a peer network of support or a mentor (Beam et al., 2016; Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013; Ng & Szeto, 2016). Support from higher-level administrators, such as the superintendent, also contribute to commitment and job satisfaction in the principalship (Chang, Leach, & Anderman, 2015; De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017). In the Catholic school system, the role of the superintendent is sometimes hampered by the control of the pastors; however, two studies have identified the lack of support from the central office as a frustration (Bigelow, 2017; Nuzzi et al., 2013). The ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) need category of relatedness confirms relational support as a factor of motivation. Cooperative work relationships, esteem from colleagues, as well as recognition and support from superiors are components of the ERG relatedness category (Alderfer, 1969).

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are provided for further clarity. In particular, definitions related to Church law and culture are necessary to fully understand the experiences of the Catholic school principal as well as the nuances of Catholic leadership and governance.

1. *Canon Law* – A code of ecclesiastical laws governing the Catholic Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], n.d.b.).

2. *Diocese* – The territorial division of the church entrusted to a bishop responsible for shepherding God’s people in the designated territory (Can. 369).
3. *Existence* – A needs category developed by Clayton Alderfer (1969) as part of the ERG theory, which refers to a person’s physiological and material needs.
4. *Growth* – A needs category developed by Clayton Alderfer (1969) as part of the ERG theory which refers to a person’s desire for personal development.
5. *Inter-parish School* – A Catholic school that is sponsored by one or more parishes; also known as a regional school (Schultz & McDonald, 2013).
6. *Lay/laity* – A member of the Christian faithful who is not ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop (Can. 207 §1) nor is a member of a religious order (USCCB, n.d.a)
7. *Magisterium* – The teaching office of the Catholic Church responsible for interpreting the Word of God, both written and Tradition (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 85, 2016).
8. *Parochial School* – A Catholic school that is sponsored by one parish; also known as a parish school (Schultz & McDonald, 2013).
9. *Relatedness* – A needs category developed by Clayton Alderfer (1969) as part of the ERG theory, which refers to a person’s ability to work to his or her, full potential and develop additional capacities.
10. *Retention* – An outcome of principal succession where a principal remains in their position despite different and available alternatives (Papa, 2007).
11. *Self-Actualization* –According to Maslow (1943), self-actualization refers to the desire for self-fulfillment or to reach one’s full potential.

### **Summary**

The Catholic school system has a rich history in the United States and continues to have an impact on the nation especially for underserved populations. Largely free of government constraints, Catholic schools are able to provide faith formation and innovative instructional programs which makes their existence an important part of American society (Smarick & Robson, 2015). Strong Catholic school leadership is imperative for the success and sustainability of Catholic schools. The attrition rate of private school principals is the highest in the three to five year window (15.3%) (Goldring & Taie, 2014) while their public school counterparts have an attrition rate five percent lower in the same time period. Understanding the needs of Catholic elementary school principals in their early career may help to mitigate burnout and turnover. There was no research giving a voice to early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States; therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two presents an overview of the supporting theory and literature relevant to the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary principals. The ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969) provides a framework to discuss how the continuum of job-related needs affects a principal's motivation to persist in the position. A review of relevant literature funnels from the formal preparation of pre-service school administrators to available supports for novice leaders. The literature demonstrates the impact of the principal on student academic performance, school culture, and teacher job satisfaction. Principal job satisfaction illuminates the challenges and complexity of the position. Ultimately, the experience of the Catholic elementary school principal can only be understood in the context of the structure, governance, and mission of the Catholic school system. This chapter concludes by defining the research problem and demonstrating the gap in the current literature devoted to the issue.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework provides a lens for data analysis. According to Kelly (2010), "Theories arrange sets of concepts to define and explain phenomena, enabling us to move beyond basic description to in-depth description, interpretation and explanation" (p. 286). Similarly, Crabtree and Miller (1999) purported that reality is filtered through a cultural lens. The job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals can be understood through the lens of a motivation theory, which relates specifically to motivation in the context of employment. Motivation theories have evolved over the last century (Alderfer, 1943; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Herzberg, 1966; Maslow, 1943); but Alderfer's (1969) existence, relatedness, and growth theory, derived from Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation,

provided the most suitable organizational framework for job-related experiences in the vocation-driven career of a Catholic school principal.

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation grouped needs into five categories: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow (1943) arranged the categories into a hierarchy, which built from more concrete to less concrete. According to Maslow (1943), lower order needs must be satisfied at least partially before a person can realize higher level needs. Distinguishing the theory of human motivation from early behavioral theories, Maslow (1943) purported, "Classifications of motivations must be based upon goals rather than upon investigating drives" (p. 371). At the bottom of the hierarchy, physiological needs are satisfied by conditions a person requires to survive, such as nourishment, shelter, and sleep. Safety needs refer to physical safety but also include a person's need for an orderly environment. Maslow's (1943) safety needs are not purely physical but have a relational dimension.

Higher order needs become more abstract, beginning with the love construct (Maslow, 1943). According to Maslow (1943), a person desires affection and belongingness. Esteem needs refer to a person's desire for self-respect, which grows out of achievement and feelings of adequacy. The second dimension related to esteem is the desire for prestige or respect from others. When esteem needs are satisfied, a person feels more confident, capable, and necessary (Maslow, 1943). At the pinnacle of the hierarchy is the concept of self-actualization. According to Maslow (1943), self-actualization is the desire to reach one's potential. While the most prepotent goal will dominate the human consciousness, needs do not have to be completely satisfied for higher order needs to emerge (Maslow, 1943). Building on Maslow's (1943) work, Alderfer (1969) reframed the five needs categories into three: existence, relatedness, and growth.

Alderfer (1969) departed from Maslow's theory by placing the needs on a continuum from more concrete existence needs to less concrete growth goals rather than an ordered hierarchy. Alderfer (1969) introduced the frustration regression. When a person cannot attain less concrete goals, he or she regresses and is motivated to seek comfort from more concrete needs (Alderfer, 1969).

### **Existence**

Existence needs include Maslow's (1943) physiological needs category in addition to physical safety. In the context of employment, compensation, benefits, and physical working conditions are considered existence needs. According to Arnolds and Boshoff's (2002) study of top-level managers, pay and fringe benefits eliminated job dissatisfaction, but did not motivate job performance. Similarly, Chen, Park, and Park (2012) found existence needs, such as pay, only lead to job turnover if growth needs are "poorly satisfied" (p. 2091). Research on school principals showed the disproportionate salary was a factor related to job-dissatisfaction (Hancock, & Müller, 2014; Karakose et al., 2014) and that principals felt unappreciated or disrespected (Beam et al., 2016; Hancock, & Müller, 2014). Consistent with the frustration regression of the ERG theory, it is possible when principals feel undervalued, their desire for pay will increase. If the existence need, adequate compensation, is left unsatisfied, the resulting frustration may lead to attrition.

### **Relatedness**

Relatedness needs incorporate acceptance and esteem from others. Unlike Maslow (1943), Alderfer (1969) included safety needs involving personal interaction and esteem from others as part of the relatedness category. A relatedness-safety need, for example, is a positive working environment free from abuse of power. Principals reported that a lack of respect from colleagues made their position more challenging (Beam et al., 2016; Hancock, & Müller, 2014;

Karakose et al., 2014). Additionally, an absence of support from superiors contributed to stress or other difficulties (Beam et al., 2016; De Jong et al., 2017; García-Garduño et al., 2011; Gentilucci et al., 2013). A deficiency of support and respect may contribute to attrition of school principals; however, this may differ in the Catholic school environment. Taking into account the vocational, mission-driven nature of the Catholic school principalship, the relatedness construct may have more of an impact on job-satisfaction than in the public or corporate environment where relatedness was found to have little influence on job satisfaction (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Chen et al., 2012). According to Convey (2014), the school environment and the opportunity to affect their students' spiritual lives, were motivating factors for Catholic school teachers. Furthermore, the religious mission of the school was a highly motivating factor in Catholic school teacher job satisfaction (Convey, 2014); therefore, job-dissatisfaction as a result of unmet existence needs may be partially mitigated by the relatedness construct.

## **Growth**

Alderfer (1969) defined growth needs as “all the needs which involve a person making creative or productive effects on himself and the environment” (p. 146). Alderfer (1969) contended satisfying growth needs requires a person to find opportunities to reach his or her full potential. Arnolds and Boshoff (2002) found in the work environment top managers are motivated primarily by growth needs. Key factors related to top managers' growth needs were a challenging work environment and opportunities for “creativity, self-fulfillment, advancement and autonomy” (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002, p. 712). Chang et al. (2015) discovered a superintendent's autonomy support for a principal was a significant factor in organizational commitment and job-satisfaction. Autonomy, an intrinsic motivator, refers to the principal's ability to be in control of his or her behavior and can be undermined by surveillance and

performance pressures (Chang et al., 2015). Autonomy support, according to Chang et al. (2015), was especially important in the first few years of the principalship before the principal had time to develop an emotional attachment to his or her school. Chen et al. (2012) found the satisfaction of growth needs in public child welfare caseworkers had the strongest effect on job turnover; therefore, the satisfaction of growth needs may overcome dissatisfaction with pay and benefits. Similarly, satisfaction of a principal's growth needs may mitigate frustration with salary, especially in the mission-driven context of the Catholic school work environment.

## **Conclusion**

Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory provides a strong framework to examine the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals. First, existence needs as described by Alderfer (1969) underscore the importance of salary and benefits as a motivating factor of job-retention. The relatedness construct is particularly important to the Catholic school work environment where, "a harmonious working relationship with the pastor or governing body" (Fraser & Brock, 2006, pp. 427-428) are critical factors of job satisfaction. Additionally, the religious community of the Catholic school is a motivating factor in job retention (Convey, 2014). From the perspective of the diocesan office of education, special attention to growth needs, particularly in a principal's early career, may be the key to encouraging persistence in the position. The existence, relatedness, and growth constructs will drive the research questions and analysis of the study.

## **Related Literature**

Effective leadership is essential for the success of a school (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). The school principal has the power to influence change if given the proper level of autonomy and support (Boudreaux, 2017; Chang et al., 2015). Research on the principalship

explored principal preparation programs and their necessary components to ensure graduates are well prepared to tackle the daily and long-term challenges of the position (Campanotta, Simpson, & Newton, 2018; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Murphy, 2006; Reed & Kensler, 2010). Literature describing the challenges of the novice principal are somewhat limited; however, several studies revealed trends that provided insight into the transition to the principalship (Barnett & Shoho, 2010; Beam et al., 2016; Cray & Weiler, 2011; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Karakose et al., 2014; Spillane & Lee, 2014). New principals benefit from mentoring and coaching programs where mentors help the principal think through challenging decisions, work toward goals, and promote retention (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018).

While principal retention and mobility needs further study, research indicates principals have a relatively high turnover rate (Baker, Penswick, & Belt, 2010; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Fuller, Young, & Orr, 2007; Goldring & Taie, 2014). The level of stress and challenges related to a healthy work-life balance likely contribute to the departure of principals (Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014). Catholic leadership has its own unique challenges. Public school principals tend to turnover due to expanding accountability (Mitani, 2017; Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014) while their Catholic school counterparts list Catholic identity, enrollment management, and long-range planning among their top areas of concern (Nuzzi et al., 2013). The retention and attrition of Catholic elementary school principals in their early career is an unexplored area of research.

### **Successful School Leadership**

The ultimate success of a school depends upon the lens through which a person defines the purpose and success of education. American education in the early part of the nation, as Thomas Jefferson described it, was to teach correct political principles and nurture virtuous

citizens (Mondale & Patton, 2001). In the 21st century, the aim of education shifted from one of local citizen to global citizen. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), the mission of the American education system is to “promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (U.S. Department of Education, Mission, 2011). The Christian sees education from a biblical worldview, which takes the parameters of global citizenship to kingdom citizenship. The aim of Christian education is to form students “for a life of responsive discipleship in Jesus Christ” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 4).

The Catholic Church described schools as having the responsibility to “develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life” (Vatican Council II, 1965, No. 5). In synthesizing the national and Christian definitions of educational success, the mission of education has two broad characteristics: intellectual development and moral development. How one defines the moral development of students depends upon the person’s worldview.

Effective school leadership also relies on one’s defined purpose of education. From a purely secular perspective, student achievement, defined as global completeness, involves achieving a set of rigorous standards designed for college and career readiness (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Effective school leadership related to student achievement can be divided into three dimensions: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004). Setting direction, as described by Leithwood et al. (2004), involves identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and creating high performance

expectations. Developing people encompasses providing intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and models of best practice (Leithwood et al., 2004). Redesigning an organization requires improving school culture, modifying organizational structure, and encouraging collaboration (Leithwood et al., 2004).

**Setting direction.** In their five practices of exemplary leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2012) recommended inspiring a shared vision. A shared vision involves setting goals and inspiring others to work toward innovative solutions (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Several studies demonstrated successful principals create a shared vision with clearly defined values and expectations (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Ponomareva, 2015; Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). The timeless wisdom of the scriptures confirm that vision is necessary. As King Solomon wrote, “Without a vision the people lose restraint” (Proverbs 29:18, New American Bible). Jesus led with a vision of kingdom values and so Catholic school leaders inspire those in their charge to “build a small corner of that kingdom in their individual schools” (Dosen, 2016c, p. 12).

**Developing people.** Leaders enable others to act through collaboration, trusting relationships, and increased self-determination (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leithwood et al. (2008) purported leaders have the greatest impact on student achievement by motivating staff, influencing staff commitment, and creating positive working conditions. Providing intellectual stimulation encourages teacher creativity. Coaching and mentoring teachers is a form of individualized support, which can lead to school improvement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Successful, transformational leaders, according to Leithwood and Sun (2012), model ethical and successful behavior

Scribner, Crow, Lopez, and Murtadha (2011) found that successful principals focus on building personal relationships. Five sub themes related to relationship building emerged: getting to know students, being student-centered and not teacher-centered, cultivating a long-term perspective, being a bridge builder for students, and acting morally and ethically (Scribner et al., 2011). For high poverty schools, establishing collaborative and trusting relationships was critical to a principal's success (Kearney & Herrington, 2010) as well as building efficacy among faculty and staff (Ramalho et al., 2010). In the Catholic school, spiritual growth is an additional dimension and of primary importance to fully develop a person. According to the USCCB, formally National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979), "Catholic schools are to be communities of faith in which the Christian message, the experience of community, worship, and social concern are integrated into the total experience of students, their parents, and members of the faculty" (p. 9).

**Redesigning an organization.** Successful leaders challenge the process by searching for opportunities and innovative ways to improve (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). School climate is influenced by the actions and attitudes of the entire school community (Sergiovanni, 2009). Effective leaders overcome attitudes of resistance to change by communicating clear expectations, understanding the need for future certainty, encouraging collaboration, and understanding an employee's need for a reasonable control of their work environment (Sergiovanni, 2009). Ponomareva (2015) found that successful principals had courage to move beyond comfort zones and take calculated, deliberate, and faith-filled risks. Similarly, Kearney and Herrington (2010) discovered that during the change process, successful principals convinced resistant staff to come around to the transformation. Staff members who did not meet the vision were encouraged to find another position or chose to leave the school.

**The moral dimension of leadership.** Sergiovanni (2009) wrote that there is a moral dimension to leadership. Even in the secular worldview, certain universal values are taught to build character and instill virtue (Sergiovanni, 2009). School leaders are required to adhere to ethical principles such as promoting the “professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015, p. 10). School leaders are also responsible for the general well-being of students, safeguarding the values of democracy, and providing moral direction for the school (NBPEA, 2015).

Greenleaf (1977) wrote, people “will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants” (p. 10). Servant leadership is built on the biblical principle found in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is quoted as saying, “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 20:26, New American Bible). Adhering to the biblical principle of servant leadership requires tending to one’s flock rather than lording over them (Dosen, 2016c). Servant leadership should translate from principal to staff to students where the value of service to others is instilled into the entire Catholic school community. A responsibility of the Catholic school principal is to provide students and staff with the opportunities for service to others (Muccigrosso, 1996).

### **The Impact of the Principal**

As the building leader, principals have a positive impact on school culture and school operations. In fact, research has concluded the influence of the principal is second only to the effectiveness of the teacher (Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2003). Research related to the principal’s impact on student achievement produced mixed results depending on the data collection method and statistical procedures (Karadağ et. al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2003). The

most recent research, however, suggests leadership has an indirect impact on student achievement by creating conditions that promote quality teaching and academic performance (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Leadership style is related to the effectiveness of a principal. There are three major leadership practices defined in the literature related to educational leadership: distributed leadership, transformational leadership, and instructional leadership. Distributed leadership practices go beyond delegation and are implemented by taking into consideration leaders (formal and informal), followers, and situations (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Transformational leaders, in the context of education, are value driven and inspire organizational members to be highly engaged in achieving the vision for the school (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Instructional leaders guide teachers by coaching them to use specific strategies that focus on improving student achievement (Hallinger, 2005).

A meta-analysis conducted by Karadağ et al. (2015) examined which leadership style had the largest effect on student achievement using a combined total of 57 research articles and dissertations. The findings indicated that distributive leadership ( $r = .42$ ) and transformational leadership ( $r = .40$ ) had the most impact on student achievement. The difference between the two styles in relationship to student achievement was not statistically significant. Karadağ et al. (2015) found instructional leadership to have a much lower effect ( $r = .24$ ). In contrast, an earlier meta-analysis, which examined 22 studies, found instructional leadership was four times more effective than transformational leadership (Robinson et al., 2008). The disparity can perhaps be the result of the statistical methods, the correlational nature of the study, and the data collection instruments used to determine leadership style in each individual study.

The research on effective principals illuminates specific leadership behaviors, which resulted in higher student achievement. Principals who exhibit a transformational leadership style in conjunction with instructional leadership behaviors have higher student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Through distributive and transformational leadership behaviors, principals shape the climate and conditions for high academic achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Effective leaders were found to articulate a vision and cultivate teacher buy-in, allocate resources appropriately, provide meaningful professional development, promote teacher autonomy, and facilitate trust between the leader and the faculty. School improvement efforts are most successful when there are high levels of trust between the principal and the faculty (Finnigan, 2010). Similarly, Eliophotou-Menon and Ioannouz (2016) reported transformational leadership and the teachers' trust in the leader are highly correlated.

Transformational leadership is also linked with organizational commitment and teacher motivation. Teacher commitment results in dedicated effort to achieve school-wide goals (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006) and effective problem solving (Khasawneh, Omari, & Abu-Tineh, 2012). Research reveals that transformational leadership had a significant effect on the classroom practices, teacher motivation, and the desire to grow professionally (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijssel, 2011). Teacher job satisfaction is also correlated with transformational leadership behaviors (Griffith, 2004; Nguni et al., 2006). According to Nguni et al. (2006), teachers considered transformational leaders to be more supportive and trustworthy.

In general, principal leadership has a positive effect on teacher self-efficacy which in turn impacts teacher performance and student achievement (Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017;

Walker & Slear, 2011). Transformational leadership alone was positively correlated with teacher self-efficacy where idealized influence and intellectual stimulation were the greatest predictors (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Similarly, Dou et al. (2017) reported transformational and instructional leadership combined indirectly accounted for higher levels of teacher self-efficacy. The findings are consistent with previous research which suggested an integration of transformational leadership and instructional leadership lead to higher levels of teacher job performance and student achievement (Duyar, Gumus, & Bellibas, 2013; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008).

Dou et al. (2017) found transformational leadership and instructional leadership positively affect school climate. Teachers are more satisfied, committed, and collaborative. The ethical leadership levels of principals and positive climate practices were also positively correlated indicating that moral, fair, and just decision making is important to teachers (Erani & Özbilen, 2017). Teachers' perception of school climate is positively correlated with their perception of principal leadership (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Similarly, Allen et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and school climate; however, there was no direct relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement or school climate and student achievement.

Through transformational and instructional leadership behaviors, either directly or indirectly, the principal influences the success of the school. Reitzug and Hewitt (2017) developed a conceptual framework based on the research of principals who have led effective school change. Characteristics of a turnaround leader include the ability to set a direction with a vision, mission, and goals. A successful principal develops the individual and the organization. Building connections are equally important and are fortified through communication,

collaboration, and trust. Reitzug and Hewitt's (2017) conceptual framework is consistent with Leithwood and Sun's (2012) transformation leadership practices as well as Leithwood and Strauss's (2009) core leadership practices for turning around schools: direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. The principal plays a vitally important role in both teacher and student success.

### **Principal Preparation**

In recent years, researchers called for attention to educational leadership preparation programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) conducted extensive research on effective principal preparation programs. Darlington-Hammond et al. (2010) identified inadequate preparation and support of principals as a contributing factor to the shortage of quality candidates, especially in high need areas such as urban and rural communities. Given the importance of quality leadership in schools, the effectiveness of preparation programs is critical to provide a solid foundation for novice leaders.

There is limited research concerning the recruitment and acceptance practices of principal preparation programs. Researchers call for values-based admissions or rigorous admissions standards to recruit quality candidates who will not only succeed in the program but in the principalship (Campanotta et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Murphy, 2006; Reed & Kensler, 2010). In six states, performance-based assessments are part of the program admissions process with such artifacts as interviews, evidence of successful teaching, leadership experience, sensitivity to diverse populations, quality communication skills, and analytical abilities (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015).

Levine (2005) called into question the qualifications of principal preparation faculty and reported just six percent of the faculty were experienced principals and two percent were

experienced superintendents. Similarly, Hackmann and McCarthy (2011) found higher education faculty with school administrative experience increased from one third to two thirds from 1994 to 2008. Hackmann, Malin, and McCarthy (2017) advocated for faculty who had prior administrative experience. Universities considered research institutions, on average, have far less faculty with school administrative experience. Hackmann et al. (2017) reported less than half of the educational leadership faculty in research institutions had prior administrative experience whereas about 70% of faculty at comprehensive universities had prior administrative experience.

The effectiveness of principal preparation programs is difficult to evaluate, largely because not all states require tests for licensure (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2016; Orr & Barber, 2009). According to Vogel and Weiler (2014), most states require a valid teacher license, while some will accept a school counselor, psychologist, or similar licenses. Three years teaching experience is necessary to obtain principal licensure in most states; however, some states have no minimum (Vogel & Weiler, 2014). All states required a principal complete a state-approved preparation program, but not all required the preparation program to result in a master's degree (Hackmann, 2016; Vogel & Weiler, 2014).

### **Induction and Mentoring Programs**

While there is little research on principal induction programs, mentoring or coaching are often a component of new principal induction. The literature on mentoring and coaching new building leaders is more robust. Effective mentoring programs provide opportunities for socialization and networking that overcome the sense of isolation in a new administrative role (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). New principals valued their mentor's different perspectives and reflective questions (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006) and appreciated having a coach who was a

colleague, not a supervisor (James-Ward, 2013). Mentors responded that it was important to listen rather than advise and provide encouragement and support rather than assistance with specific skills (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). Novice principals reported a coaching program gave them the opportunity to become comfortable with the profession, develop leadership competencies and manage workplace politics (James-Ward, 2013). According to Celoria and Roberson (2015), mentors provided a safe place to find support for professional growth and dealing with emotional stress, as well as alleviated the feeling of isolation that new principals often experience.

The research reiterates the importance of an induction program with a mentorship or coaching component. According to Sciarappa and Mason (2014), 96% of principals reported mentorship programs were more effective for in-service principals than they were effective during pre-service preparation programs. Spiro, Mattis, and Mitgang (2007) listed several ways principal mentorship programs can fail. Mentorship programs which have unclear goals, insufficient focus on instructional leadership, weak or non-existent training for mentors, and insufficient time to prepare new school leaders for their multifaceted job challenges are not likely to be effective (Spiro et al., 2007). Mentors or leadership coaches can assist principals in overcoming the challenges they will face day to day, particularly with situations involving human relations with staff, students, or parents where the solutions are highly situational.

### **Challenges of the Novice Principal**

The role of the principal has expanded in the last several decades, especially due to political accountability. Novice principals face challenges that go far beyond their managerial role. Spillane and Lee (2014) found in the first three months of service principals are overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of every employee or student in

their care. Workload demands are overwhelming for new principals and create additional tension and stress (Barnett & Shoho, 2010). Novice principals find it difficult to manage task volume, diversity, and unpredictability and report feeling their time is divided in too many directions (Spillane & Lee, 2014). In a study surveying new principals, Gentilucci et al. (2013) found respondents were surprised by the frequency and intensity of the work-related stress they experienced and had difficulty with time management. Spillane and Lee (2014) advised “Leadership preparation and development programs might directly work on the emotional dimensions of the work, including helping novices manage stress and create healthy work environments” (p. 456).

Solving difficult personnel issues is also a significant challenge (Barnett & Shoho, 2010). Northfield (2014) highlighted the importance of building a “trusting professional relationships with their teachers and support staff so that they can find ways to adequately motivate, support, direct and supervise their colleagues’ best efforts” (p. 413). Leaders can build trust by demonstrating their competence through effective performance of managerial and administrative tasks in addition to building positive relationships with staff (Northfield, 2014). Cray and Weiler (2011) interviewed superintendents ( $N = 77$ ) who reported that novice principals struggle with human relations, particularly when it relates to supervision of personnel and instructional leadership. Cray and Weiler (2011) also reported that novice principals lack in political awareness. The superintendents recommended that novice principals learn how to respond to difficult stakeholders and effectively manage conflict resolution. Situational awareness is difficult to teach, which is why leadership preparation programs often do not adequately prepare students in those areas (Cray & Weiler, 2011).

Barnett and Shoho (2010) discovered that new principals spent more time than expected on parental concerns and school related politics. Novice leaders were also surprised by the workload and struggled to maintain a work-life balance (Beam et al., 2016; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Karakose et al., 2014). Furthermore, 20% of novice principals believed support from superiors was lacking and asking for help from superiors was a sign of weakness (Beam et al., 2016). The most surprising theme was perhaps the difficulty novice principals had overcoming the reputation of the previous principal (Karakose et al., 2014) and establishing credibility (Beam et al., 2016).

### **Principal Job Satisfaction**

The job responsibilities of school principals have changed drastically over the last several decades. According to Markow et al. (2012), 7 in 10 principals report the principalship is not the same as it was even five years ago. Seventy-five percent of principals from schools across varying demographics also agree that the job of the principal has become too complex (Markow et al., 2012). While most principals believe they are ultimately accountable for all students in their care (Markow et al., 2012), principals, especially in urban areas, indicate their responsibilities are extensive yet they have limited control and relentless accountability (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010).

A survey of the conditions and concerns of school principals revealed most principals (84%) work more than 50 hours per week compared to 68% of principals with a 50-hour work week in 1988 (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Forty-eight percent of principals reported experiencing significant stress several times per week (Markow et al., 2012), consistent with a study documenting principals' perceptions of work-related stress increased significantly from 2009 to 2012 (Klocko & Wells, 2015).

In-service principals identified several reasons the principalship may be unattractive to aspirants. According to DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003), 93% of principals surveyed ( $N = 1,543$ ) reported work-related stress and 83% reported the long hours made the principalship unattractive to new applicants. Other reasons included pay, accountability, and disrespect from students. Similar studies indicated work-life balance and pay not commensurate with the demands of the position as barriers to becoming a principal (Hancock & Müller, 2014; Karakose et al., 2014). Despite the many challenges, the rewards of being a principal are largely intrinsic (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). When principals feel a sense of autonomy and personal accomplishment, their job satisfaction increases (Chang et al., 2015; Karakose, Kocabas, Yirci, Esen, & Celik, 2016).

### **Principal Workload**

The complexity of the principalship, which continues to expand, is overburdened with responsibilities in a role, which Grubb and Flessa (2006) described as a “job too big for one” (p. 543). Principals often find themselves engaged in variety of task-oriented work, which is managerial in nature and takes away from improving the educational program. The overload on managerial tasks is problematic because research reveals that time spent on instructional leadership activities improves student achievement (Grissom et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Principals have a particularly difficult time managing a work-life balance (Barnett et al., 2012; Beam et al., 2016; Oplatka, 2017). They are often overwhelmed with the demands of the position and as a result experience high levels of stress and a loss of joy in their work (Klocko & Wells, 2015). Answering email communication and phone messages consume much of the principal’s day (Barnett et al., 2012). Principals reported spending 41% of the workday in their offices and only 10% of the workday in classrooms (Grissom et al., 2015). Student-related

issues (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010) and special education compliance (Van Vooren, 2018) were also reported as time consuming activities within the day-to-day schedule of the principal.

Principals report spending an inordinate amount of time on paperwork (Barnett et al., 2012; Hancock & Müller, 2014; Klocko & Wells, 2015) and forms which they suspect no one at central office reads (Oplatka, 2017). Also common are unexpected requests from stakeholders (Oplatka, 2017) and constant interruptions (Klocko & Wells, 2015; Poirrel & Yvon, 2014). Visits from central office administrators (Oplatka, 2017) and increased performance expectations (Klocko & Wells, 2015) contribute to the challenges of the position.

Relationships with students, staff, and other stakeholders can be difficult for principals to navigate. The reputation of the previous principal can make forming relationships difficult (Karakose et al., 2014) and in some cases, novice principals described complications establishing credibility and respect (Beam et al., 2016). Several studies reported motivating teachers, especially those who resist change (Barnett et al., 2012; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Karakose et al., 2014), is particularly challenging.

Principals feel an enormous amount of responsibility, which can lead to high levels of stress with physical and emotional symptoms. According to Poirrel and Yvon (2014), anger in principals is triggered by unforeseen interruptions or roadblocks, unjustified reproaches from the staff, and self-blame for poor decisions. Principals are often blamed for decisions, and if they feel treated unfairly, this may lead to humiliation and impact self-esteem (Poirrel & Yvon, 2014). Time management is also a significant cause of stress and principals with strong time management skills report lower levels of stress (Grissom et al., 2015). Principals are public figures and therefore they may suppress and internalize emotions, which makes self-care even

more important. The importance of managing stress and self-care is confirmed by Australia's education industry healthcare insurer, which reported “the cost of providing psychological services to their members had almost doubled in the last five years” (Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

### **Principal Mobility and Attrition**

The stressful workload of the principalship can lead to principal mobility and attrition. According to Goldring and Taie (2014), of those who were principals during the 2011–2012 school year, 6% moved to a different school, 12% left the principalship, and 5% accounted for principals who had left a school, but their status was unknown. On average, school districts spend about \$14,000 per principal per year for on-the-job support and evaluation (Kaufman, Gates, Harvey, Wang, & Barrett, 2017). Such a large investment in one person is costly if the principal leaves the building or school district completely.

Burnout can lead to principal attrition. Hancock and Müller (2014) found a great disparity between a pre-service principal's expectation of the job and current job satisfaction of in-service principals largely because of the complexity of responsibilities and increased accountability, which has forced principals to spend a significant amount of time apart from their families. Emotional exhaustion is the most common reason for burnout, which could be the result of the high levels of human interaction required of a principal (Kocabas, Yirci, Esen & Celik, 2016). Role conflict due to the demands from many different stakeholder groups can also lead to burnout (Kocabas et al., 2016) and feelings of isolation contribute to loss of job-satisfaction (Bauer & Brazer, 2013). Social support from colleagues can serve as a buffer for potential burnout (Kocabas et al., 2016). Principals reported a lack of support from superiors or navigating politics is a challenging aspect of the job (Beam et al., 2016). When district

leadership gives principals autonomy over supervisory activities, they are more likely to stay in the position (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011).

Principals report the demands of the position are not commensurate with remuneration (Cranston, 2007; Hancock & Müller, 2014; Karakose et al., 2014). Young, Young, Okhremtchouk, and Castaneda (2009) found a negative association between salary of male elementary school principals and intent to leave the position. Principals who take a position in a new school see a five percent increase in salary on average (Baker et al., 2010) and principals who switch school districts increase their salary by \$3,187.42 (Tran & Buckman, 2017). While salary may be an incentive to ascend to the principalship, supportive working conditions entice principals to stay (Pijanowski, & Brady, 2009).

Attrition rates in several studies were considered high. For example, in Missouri, 65% of elementary school principals retained their position in the same school over an eight-year period (Baker et al., 2010). Between 1995 and 2001, nearly 30% of public school principals in Texas left their school after only one year of service (Branch et al., 2009) and about 50% left their position after 5 years of service (Fuller et al., 2007). Similarly, between 2001 and 2008 nearly 21% of principals in Illinois left their schools each year for various reasons (DeAngelis & White, 2011).

### **Leadership in the Catholic School**

The steep decline in Catholic school enrollment since the 1960s led to reform efforts nationwide. To understand Catholic leadership, a working knowledge of what the Church considers an effective Catholic school is necessary. The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012) provides a framework for defining quality in four specific domains: mission and Catholic identity, governance and

leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality. The NSBECS defined nine characteristics of Catholic schools, which are overarching themes that permeate the four domains. Catholic schools are to be centered in the person of Jesus Christ, contribute to the evangelizing mission of the Church, distinguished by excellence, committed to educating the whole child, steeped in a Catholic worldview, sustained by Gospel witness, shaped by communion and community, accessible to all students, and established by the expressed authority of the Bishop.

**Mission and Catholic identity.** Catholic schools, which excel in the mission and Catholic identity domain, have a clearly communicated mission “rooted in Gospel values” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 5). Catholic identity refers to both the content which is taught, and the culture of the school (Convey, 2012). According to Groome (1996), the five distinguishing characteristics of Catholic identity are anthropology, sacramentality, community, tradition, and rationality. Supporting the distinguishing characteristics of Catholic identity are three permeating cardinal characteristics: personhood, justice, and Catholicity.

The NSBECS requires the religious education curriculum to meet diocesan standards and the faculty must be adequately prepared and qualified to teach the religion curriculum (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) so beautifully wrote, “The teacher can form the mind and heart of his pupils and guide them to develop a total commitment to Christ, with their whole personality enriched by human culture” (no. 40). All academic subjects should be taught through the lens of the Catholic faith and Catholic social teaching. Christian service should be an integral part of the curriculum for both staff and students. The leadership is also responsible for the faith formation of the faculty and staff (Ciriello, 1996; Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

**Governance and leadership.** According to Ozar and Weitzel-O'Neill (2012), "Catholic school governance and leadership can be seen as a ministry that promotes and protects the responsibilities and rights of the school community" (p. 7). When Catholic leaders exercise leadership over an organization, it is in service to others and for the leader's own personal growth as a Christian (Haney, O'Brien, & Sheehan, 2009). Leaders in Catholic education are required to lead with servant leadership by following the example of Christ. Greenleaf (1977) brought servant leadership to the forefront of leadership philosophy. van Dierendonck (2011) referred to the work of Greenleaf when he suggested that servant leaders are not motivated by power, but by the need to serve. The practice of servant leadership includes "a commitment to the growth of individual employees" (p. 1231). Servant leaders show love, are humble, altruistic, visionary, trustworthy, and they empower others (Newton & Shaw, 2014).

Catholic schools with excellent governance and leadership also have a diversity of stakeholders who create policies consistent with the mission of the Catholic school. Defiore, Convey, and Schutloffel (2009) reiterated it is "the responsibility of the entire Catholic community—bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and laity—to continue to strive toward the goal of making our Catholic elementary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children" (loc. 163). The governing body and leadership maintain a "constructive and beneficial relationship" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. 8) with diocesan officials and respect the legitimate authority of the Bishop. The leadership is committed to continuous improvement of curriculum, faculty professional growth, operational vitality (Ciriello, 1996; Dosen, 2016c; Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), and effective communication of new initiatives to all stakeholders (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

**Academic excellence.** The Catholic Church has a long-standing tradition of academic excellence dating back to Saint Augustine who was known for bridging the cultural and intellectual gap between classical and Christian civilizations (Gutek, 2011). The Catholic intellectual tradition is built upon the intellectual legacies of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas who emphasized the relationship between faith and reason (Dosen, 2016b). While the academic program must be rooted in the Gospel to achieve the salvific mission of the Church, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) also emphasized the value of knowledge when they wrote, “In helping pupils to achieve through the medium of its teaching an integration of faith and culture, the Catholic school sets out with a deep awareness of the value of knowledge” (no. 18).

Academically excellent Catholic schools have doctrinally sound religious education as well as a rigorous, relevant, and research-based curriculum, which brings faith, culture, and life harmoniously together to shape the whole person (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). Curriculum and instruction should meet the needs of the 21st century learner who is required to meet established and coherent standards across the curriculum (mostly likely devised by the diocesan office of education). Instruction should be designed to engage and motivate all students as well as address students’ varying needs. In an academically excellent Catholic school, faculty engage in professional learning communities and strive for continuous improvement. Faculty professional development should include religious formation (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

**Operational vitality.** Excellent leadership and academic programs which adhere to the mission of Catholic schools all contribute to the last domain, operational vitality (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). Operational vitality refers to the operation of the school and how the school is financially supported. Financial viability was identified as one of the top reasons

Catholic schools close (Defiore et al., 2009). The four key areas are finance, human relations, facilities, and institutional advancement. A sustainable school has a financial plan that considers the educational costs per child and includes expenses for instruction, tuition assistance administration, professional development, facilities, equipment, technology, and program enhancements. Human resource policies are expected to be in line with diocesan regulations and ensure competitive salaries and benefits for employees as well as succession planning. Excellent Catholic schools maintain facilities and technology infrastructure (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Effective institutional advancement includes a comprehensive plan for marketing, enrollment management, and development (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Part of the institutional advancement plan should be comprised of partnerships with businesses and philanthropic foundations, which support Catholic education (Montejano, 2016). School boards, if they are part of the governance structure, are often given authority over the school finances (Sheehan, 1996). Having some type of school board can help to solidify community relationships and encourage investment in the Catholic school.

### **The Structure of Catholic Schools**

Historically, Catholic elementary schools were parish operated. At the elementary level, parish schools are still the most common, representing roughly 66.2% of Catholic elementary schools nationally. Inter-parish or regional schools are usually sponsored by two or more parishes and makeup 12.1% of elementary school structures while 14.9% of elementary schools are diocesan sponsored and the remaining 6.7% are private, or not governed by a diocese (Schultz & McDonald, 2018). The pastor has authority over the parish including oversight of the Catholic school, which is considered part of parish life (Brown, 2010). According to Code of

Canon Law (1983), “Pastors of souls have the duty of arranging everything so that all the faithful have a Catholic education” (Can. 794, §2). The pastor, as head of the parish, also serves in a managerial role, which includes the employment of school personnel. Even though most Catholic elementary schools are still governed by the pastor, the consolidation of parish schools necessitated the evolution of different governance models such as multiple school conglomerates sometimes operated by an independent charitable foundation (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities [FADICA], 2015).

Every diocese has a central office of education, which is governed by higher level administrators (Dosen, 2016b). In most cases, the office of education (or similarly named office) is led by a superintendent (or similar leadership position). According to Dosen (2016b), the superintendent represents the bishop in matters of education, but their authority over the schools themselves is made ambiguous by the authority of the local pastor. The role of the superintendent is to develop policy, oversee school curricula, and provide professional and faith development for principals and teachers (Dosen, 2016b). The superintendent should offer decision-making support to principals and assist in acquiring resources as well as access to training and materials.

The decline in enrollment in Catholic schools led to, in some cases, large scale consolidations and mergers of parishes and schools such as the Blue Ribbon Commission in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Blue Ribbon Commission, formed by Cardinal Justin Rigali, included 16 members from various professional backgrounds: educators, business leaders, pastors and other lay leaders. The commission was tasked with deciding the future course of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (Faith in the Future Foundation, 2012). As a result of the study completed in 2012, the Archdiocese announced the closing of 44

Catholic elementary schools, some of which were regionalized, and four high schools (Roewe, 2012). With a wave of closures nationwide, Catholic leaders across the country sought to solve the Catholic school sustainability enigma. The FADICA (2015) published a report on the governance models of Catholic schools. Their report contained a matrix with two continuums: executive versus collegial (x-axis) and local authority versus central authority (y-axis).

Collegial governance, according to FADICA (2015), gives governing authority of a school to a board or religious congregation. There is a wide range of collegial governance models where boards act in more of an advisory capacity to having specified jurisdiction over certain aspects of school governance (Haney et al., 2009). Executive governance is when authority is vested in a single person, such as a parish pastor. The benefit of executive governance is that it eliminates infighting between conflicting personalities. The downside is that the pastor may not have expertise in education or may be pulled into too many directions in managing the full scope of parish life to devote enough time to managing the Catholic school (FADICA, 2015).

In a school, which has complete local governance, not even the diocese has any decision-making power over the school, and all decisions are made by the pastor or local board. An example of central governance may be a conglomeration of schools run by one board or central office. The elementary school structure can take several forms along the local to central continuum. A school may be operated and financially supported by a parish or a diocese. A private independent Catholic school is a model, which may be approved by the Bishop as *Catholic* but operated by a local board and not at all governed by a parish or diocese. Schools may also be part of a consortium or network with a central brand but still governed locally (FADICA, 2015).

## **The Catholic School Principalship**

The Catholic school principal has a multifaceted role as spiritual leader, educational leader, and manager (Ciriello, 1996). Catholic school systems face the challenge of finding quality teachers and administrators. Over the last decade, Catholic schools have encountered teacher shortages for many of the same reasons the public school system experienced shortages, such as Baby Boomer Generation retirements, additional pressures created by expanding government policy updates, and general public disparagement for teachers. In addition, Catholic schools face a lack of candidates who are committed to the Catholic faith as well as the competition of higher paying public schools (Schuttlöffel, 2007).

According to Schuttlöffel (2007), “Typically Catholic school principals rise from the teaching ranks” (p. 89). As a result, the difficulty related to finding Catholic school leadership can be attributed in part to the teacher shortage. Because principal candidates often receive their administrative credentials at a secular college, they are not prepared for the unique challenges of the Catholic school. In a survey of Catholic superintendents, Schuttlöffel (2003) found the majority of “Catholic school principals graduated from secular institutions and may or may not have completed a diocesan leadership program” (p. 12). The superintendents also reported Catholic leadership programs were most effective in preparing their novice principals over secular and diocesan programs (Schuttlöffel, 2003). Even when committed to the mission of Catholic education, these professional educators may be turned off by the lower salary, which does not compensate for the demands of the position (Schuttlöffel, 2007).

**Principal as spiritual leader.** The principal has the responsibility of faith formation for both staff and students, and increasingly, under-catechized parents. Components of faith, service, and mission must be woven throughout the curriculum and extracurricular experiences.

The role of spiritual leadership in the Catholic school goes beyond leading prayer or organizing service activities. A Catholic school principal must ensure that the budget allows for professional development in religious education for the faculty (Ciriello, 1996). Teachers must be prepared to create a Catholic school environment, which is described by the Second Vatican Council (1965) as,

...a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith. (Vatican Council II, 1965, No. 8)

Religious education in the Catholic schools often includes sacramental preparation which requires special cooperation with the parish or parishes and the teaching of sound moral doctrine (Can. 231 §1). Unfortunately, 37% of Catholic superintendents reported their novice principals were most critically lacking in spiritual leadership and 19% reported novice principals most critically lacked theological knowledge. Altogether, the two religious categories comprised 56% where other superintendents reported administrative skills (32%) and instructional leadership skills (8%) were most critically lacking in novice Catholic principals.

**Principal as educational leader.** Quality instructional leadership and adequate teacher supervision is paramount. As the cost of tuition continues to rise, the quality of the educational program can make or break a school. It is no longer enough to include religion in the curriculum and expect high enrollment. Competition from high performing public schools and the increasing popularity of charter schools has shifted the value of Catholic education in the minds of the public (Simon & Robbins, 2018). The challenges of finances can be a roadblock to

acquiring instructional resources, so Defiore et al. (2009) recommend schools make “optimum use of the federal and state program that are available” (loc. 579). Furthermore, Defiore et al. Schutloffel (2009) recommended federal and state funding should be secured by diocesan leadership rather than local leadership. Just as the principal must provide religious formation for the staff, the principal must also ensure professional development for sound educational pedagogy. The Catholic school principal is responsible to implement the curriculum, which has a rigorous and relevant scope and sequence and is presented through a Catholic worldview (Ciriello, 1996).

**Principal as managerial leader.** Most of the Catholic schools in the nation pay below the public school pay scale (Ruiz, 2015). The debt of higher education has made the choice to teach in a Catholic school a difficult one for many recent graduates of teacher education programs. Instructional quality depends on teacher quality. According to Convey (2014), over 60% of Catholic teachers were motivated by faith to teach in a Catholic school and desired the opportunity to minister to their students. While 60% is unquestionably high, the statistic does leave room to question the strength of spiritual leadership among Catholic educators. The strength of spiritual leadership and knowledge of the faith among teachers, if it is weak, presents a challenge for Catholic administrators. Defiore et al. (2009) reported the demands of the job often exceed the capacity of one person and principals often find themselves doing everything from “social work to plumbing” (loc. 531).

Common to all leadership positions in the education system is the need for political skill to interact successfully with stakeholders. While it is difficult for educators to view the school as a business, it does in fact, operate on many business principles. One of the most important business principles in the Catholic school system is customer service. Parents are paying for the

service of education. Among some populations, this may lead to additional demands placed on the school administrator. Positive relationships with parents, the school board (if applicable), the office of education, parishioners, and especially the pastor contributes to the success and sustainability of the school.

### **The Pastor-Principal Relationship**

A healthy pastor-principal relationship is necessary to unify the parish and the school as one ministry. The mission of the school is foremost the Catholic formation of its children. It is that sense of mission, evangelization, which must drive the relationship between the pastor and the principal. The ability to communicate needs help to facilitate a relationship of trust between two people. Schafer (2003) pointed out the pastor's role as the principal's supervisor can affect the level of trust. Having a clear understanding of roles and expectations can mitigate any anxiety caused by the supervisory role of the pastor (Schafer, 2005). Communication, when expectations are not met, is just as important (Brock & Fraser 2001).

Most Catholic educators are women (Nuzzi et al., 2009; Schultz & McDonald, 2018). Gender relations may play a role in the pastor-principal relationship. Gray and Gautier (2018) studied the beliefs, practices, experiences, and attitudes of Catholic women in the United States. Ten percent of women surveyed ( $N = 1,508$ ) said they experienced sexism within the Catholic Church. Some women among the 10% who reported experiencing sexism classified the Church as patriarchal. One respondent reported, "In my youth, priests were waited upon by nuns or other women in the parish" (p. 26). Sixty percent of women surveyed believe women should be allowed to be ordained permanent deacons while only 21% rated ordaining females as priests an important issue. Broken out into generations, only 19% of Millennial women rated the ordination of women priests an important issue (Gray & Gautier, 2018).

The Catholic Church teaches, “The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king” (United States Catholic Conference, 2000, no. 1546). The ministerial priesthood; however, is limited to men. Pope Saint John Paul II (1995), in his Holy Thursday address to priests, spoke on the importance of women in the life of a priest. Saint John Paul II explained, “the ministerial priesthood, in Christ's plan, is an expression not of domination but of service! Anyone who interpreted it as ‘domination’ would certainly be far from the intention of Christ” (John Paul II, 1995). In the Catholic school system, where the priest most often hires and supervises the principal, the priest’s dichotomous roles as employer and shepherd have the potential to conflict.

A stumbling block to communication between the principal and the pastor is sometimes the result of the pastor’s lack of pedagogical knowledge and curriculum practices as it relates to education in the core subjects. The principal is hired to be the expert in education. Not at all surprising, Brock and Fraser (2004) found that some principals preferred to work with pastors who have had experience or preparation in the field of education. The academic needs of the school drive the budget especially as it relates to personnel and curricular materials. The element of trust plays a key role in the area of academic needs. The pastor needs to trust the principal’s expertise in this area but also be cognizant of financial constraints.

The issue of trust can be tested by parents. In schools where enrollment is low and every student is necessary to ensure the school’s sustainability, parents can sense their power. When parents do not get the answer they want from the principal, the next call is often to the pastor. For a healthy working relationship, the pastor must support the principal and not override decisions made by the principal or allow a parent to sidestep the principal altogether and go right

to the pastor. A pastor's public show of support for the principal is essential (Brock & Fraser, 2001). Even though the pastor's support is essential, "the leadership of the bishop is critically important" (loc. 816, Defiore et al., 2009).

### **Catholic School Principal Attrition**

The Catholic priest is "bound by a special obligation to show reverence and obedience" to the local Bishop (Can. 273). The principal, if he or she is a lay person, is employed by the parish by personal choice. Just as easily as the principal accepts a position at a Catholic school, the principal can move on to another school, diocese, or profession if he or she finds the position undesirable. Durow and Brock (2004) investigated factors leading to retention or attrition among Catholic school principals. Interestingly, not a single participant interviewed left their position for retirement. While 11% of private school principals left the profession during the 2012-2013 school year (Goldring & Taie, 2014), it is interesting to note that in 2003, Catholic superintendents reported only two percent attrition among their principals. Contrary to that finding, Durow and Brock (2004) reported 31.25% of principals in one Midwestern diocese left the principalship or moved to a principalship in a different school within a three-year period. Similarly, Bigelow (2017) reported 42 principals had left their position from only 24 elementary and high schools over a 10-year period in one southern diocese. With no recent national data on Catholic school principal attrition, it is hard to determine why Durrow and Brock's (2004) data as well as Bigelow's (2017) data contrasts the national data from 2003 as well as the data from all private schools in the United States (Goldring & Taie, 2014).

Attrition is often the result of conflicts in school governance, changes in the school's vision, and the school's political climate. The pastor is usually at the center of the conflict, particularly if they were considered autocratic (Durow & Brock, 2004). In a similar study on

principal attrition, Bigelow (2017) reported the unraveling of the pastor-principal relationship significantly impacted principals' decisions to leave their position. While Durow and Brock (2004) described changing personal needs and a lack of advancement opportunities as factors leading to attrition, Bigelow (2017) found the lack of support from the diocesan Catholic schools' office was also a factor in attrition. Defiore et al. (2009) also reported diocesan leadership and "passionate commitment from the bishop" (loc. 565) is critically important. Additionally, principals were found to be dissatisfied with their positions largely because of the growing and complex demands and minimal salary (Fraser & Brock, 2006). Principals believed they were not recognized or appreciated nearly enough for their contributions to the school.

### **Summary**

The literature on school leadership demonstrates the importance of strong administrators. The principal impacts (directly and indirectly) student achievement, climate, and teacher satisfaction. The increasingly complex and expanding nature of the principalship is fraught with challenges and compounded by the demands of stakeholders. Job-related challenges lead to stress and diminished job satisfaction. Supported by the ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969), frustration and lack of motivation may lead to principal attrition. Leadership in Catholic schools includes several dimensions, which are only present in studies related to Catholic education, such as enrollment management, scholarship funding, and school-parish relations. The multi-directional governance of the Catholic school system and the supervision of a pastor can create roadblocks to progress. The additional pressure of building enrollment and related financial concerns contributes an additional layer of stress for the Catholic school principal. Changing demographics of the Church portray a complicated future for Catholic school leadership. With the attrition rate of principals being the highest in the three to five-year window, it was necessary

to investigate the experiences of principals in their early career. The gap in the literature represented the silence of early career Catholic elementary school leaders across multiple dioceses.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

To strengthen Catholic school leadership, stimulate recruitment, and prevent attrition, an in-depth look at the experiences of principals in their early career illuminated the existence, relatedness, and growth needs required to persist in the position. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. Chapter Three provides a rationale for the research design and a description of the procedures. The research questions are supported by the existence, relatedness, and growth theory (Alderfer, 1969) as well as literature relevant to the principalship. Data analysis procedures, validation strategies, and ethical considerations are discussed in detail.

### **Design**

Creswell (2013) described the qualitative method as research that takes place in a naturalistic setting and focuses on the participants' perspectives and subjective views. In this emergent design, the role of the researcher is reflexive (Patton, 2015). Data analysis establishes patterns and themes, which result in a holistic, complex picture revealing the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). To best understand the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals, the participants were studied in their natural environment where they shared the complexity of their profession.

Phenomenology is the most appropriate research design to uncover a common phenomenon among early career Catholic elementary school principals. According to Patton (2015), a phenomenon can be a program, organization, or culture. This study focused on the way the local school culture and larger diocesan culture impacted the principal. The methodology of

phenomenology captures how people perceive, feel, judge, remember, and make sense of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The philosophical underpinnings are rooted in the work of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl and is a return to philosophy (Creswell, 2013) as a means of acquiring knowledge as it appears in the consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Experiences and interpretations are intertwined and together shape a person's worldview. The only way to truly discover another person's experiences is through observation and in-depth interviewing (Patton, 2015).

A transcendental approach allows the researcher to perceive and describe the phenomenon "in a fresh and open way" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes objectivity instead of focusing the interpretations of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The process of Epoche requires the researcher to bracket out his or her own experiences and suspend judgements to view the phenomenon with a "pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Epoche gives the researcher an original vantage point (Moustakas, 1994) from which to view the experiences of the participants free from any presuppositions. The noematic (textural) description is used to answer questions about the nature and qualities of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher arrives at the noetic (structural) description through imaginative variation and describes how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Through the process of transcendental phenomenological reduction, the researcher synthesizes textural and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

This qualitative inquiry was designed to get to the heart of the experience of the Catholic elementary school principal, where the complexity of the job can hardly be captured by rating scales alone. The proposed research question, "What are the job-related experiences of early

career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States?” is open-ended and required in-depth interviews from participants in the field to derive the essence of the experience from multiple perspectives. The participants all experienced the same phenomenon; therefore, the phenomenological method is the most fitting research design. Above all, a transcendental phenomenological approach captured the most unbiased description of the phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this transcendental phenomenological study are supported by Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory as well as the literature related to the school principalship. The central research question is further explored by three guiding questions. The central research question is as follows:

- What are the experiences of Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States?

The guiding questions are as follows:

- Guiding Question One: What experiences motivate early career Catholic elementary school principals to persist in the position?
- Guiding Question Two: What are the job-related challenges experienced by early career Catholic elementary school principals?
- Guiding Question Three: How do early career Catholic elementary principals describe the quality of support they receive to persist in the position?

### **Setting**

The Catholic Church in the United States is divided into 195 dioceses comprised of an estimated 74.2 million people who self-identify as Catholics (USCCB, 2017). The sites for this

research were within six dioceses located in the Mideastern United States. The Mideastern region is defined by the NCEA as including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia (Schultz & McDonald, 2013). Proximity to the research sites was the primary factor for the convenience selection of the Mideast region (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The regional selection of sites in the Mideast, where there is a dense Catholic population (Public Religion Research Institute, 2016), allowed for sampling of principals across multiple dioceses which resulted in a more holistic picture of the phenomenon. Dioceses in the Mideastern region vary widely in Catholic population size and number of Catholic school students. Every attempt was made to include dioceses from a variety of student enrollment sizes to further increase generalizability (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The participants represented four different states and six dioceses. Descriptions of each diocese are omitted to protect the confidentiality of the participants and their respective diocese. Each diocese is so unique, that even by identifying the state, the diocese itself may be identified. Diocese A through E contained schools in all different counties. The participants in Diocese F represented three different counties; however, even schools in the same county were a significant distance apart providing more variability. Out of the 13 schools, 11 had prekindergarten programs beginning at age three and educated students through Grade 8. The other two schools educated students from prekindergarten beginning at age four through Grade 8.

Table 1

*Diocese and School Configurations*

Participant	State	Diocese	County	Grade Configuration
Elizabeth	State 1	Diocese A	County A1	PK3- Grade 8
Anne	State 2	Diocese B	County B1	PK3- Grade 8
Bridget	State 2	Diocese B	County B2	PK3- Grade 8
Felicity	State 2	Diocese C	County C1	PK4- Grade 8
Monica	State 3	Diocese D	County D1	PK3- Grade 8
Philomena	State 3	Diocese D	County C2	PK3- Grade 8
Cecilia	State 4	Diocese E	County D1	PK3- Grade 8
Deborah	State 4	Diocese E	County E2	PK3- Grade 8
Katharine	State 4	Diocese F	County F1	PK3- Grade 8
Laurence	State 4	Diocese F	County F1	PK3- Grade 8
Isabel	State 4	Diocese F	County F2	PK3- Grade 8
Helena	State 4	Diocese F	County F2	PK3- Grade 8
Jane	State 4	Diocese F	County F3	PK4- Grade 8

**Participants**

Moustakas (1994) outlined criteria for selecting participants in a transcendental phenomenological study. All participants experienced the phenomenon, were interested in understanding the meaning of the phenomenon, and willing to participate in a lengthy interview, which was recorded and included in the published data (Moustakas, 1994). The purposefully selected sample included 13 participants who completed between one and four years of service as an elementary principal in a Catholic school thus having experienced the phenomenon being

studied. The sample size of 13 was consistent with recommended phenomenological research methods (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984).

I contacted several diocesan offices within the Mideastern region to request permission to conduct the study and to request names and contact information for potential participants who met the criteria. The recommended participants were either contacted by email or by their own diocesan office and invited to participate in the study (see Appendix C). All interviews took place in a private, quiet location designated by the participant. Each participant was employed in a Catholic elementary school, which was affiliated with a diocese in the Mideastern region of the United States at the time of the study. All participants were from Catholic schools that were governed by their respective diocesan offices of education, which had some jurisdiction over the school and its curriculum. Catholic elementary principals from independent Catholic schools sponsored by a religious order or independent board and do not have an affiliation with the diocesan office of education were not considered for this study due to the large differences in school funding and governance. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their identity. A description of the participants' demographic data can be found in Table 2.

Descriptors for race and ethnicity were developed by NCEA for statistical reporting of Catholic school demographics. Generation spans were developed by the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2018). Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X were born between 1965 and 1980; and Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Generation	Gender	Race	Ethnicity	No. of Yrs. as Principal
Elizabeth	50-60	Generation X	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	4
Anne	30-40	Millennial	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	4
Bridget	60-70	Boomer	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	2
Felicity	40-50	Generation X	Female	White	Hispanic	2
Monica	30-40	Millennial	Female	White	Hispanic	4
Philomena	30-40	Millennial	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	3
Cecilia	40-50	Generation X	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	2
Deborah	60-70	Boomer	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	2
Katharine	30-40	Generation X	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	3
Laurence	30-40	Millennial	Male	White	Non-Hispanic	2
Isabel	60-70	Boomer	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	2
Helena	50-60	Generation X	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	4
Jane	40-50	Generation X	Female	White	Non-Hispanic	2

Most principals had prior experience teaching in a Catholic elementary school. Two of the three participants who reported zero years teaching in a Catholic elementary school taught in a Catholic high school. The other participant who reported zero years in a Catholic elementary school had prior experience in a public education entity. Only 4 out of the 13 participants had teaching experience outside of the Catholic school system. Principals who served in the role of a full time assistant or vice principal in a Catholic elementary school prior to the principalship were originally excluded; however, one participant reported having experience as a part-time

assistant principal while teaching, one participant had a vice principal position in another state outside of the Mideastern region, two participants held dean positions in a high school, and one participant had a supervisory role in a public education entity. Three participants reported prior experience in a business-related career. The inclusion of these participants did not appear to impact the phenomenon based on the consistency of their responses with other participants who did not have previous administrative roles or previous careers outside of education.

### **Procedures**

Contact was made with leadership in diocesan offices of education within the Mideast region of the United States to seek conditional approval for conducting the study. I respectfully requested the appropriate diocesan leader identify names and contact information of principals who fit the criteria to participate in the study. Before contacting potential participants or collecting any data, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the research institution (see Appendix A). When qualified principals were identified, I contacted the principals individually by email (see Appendix C) to explain the purpose of the research and invite them to participate in the study. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Dukes (1984), as quoted in Creswell (2013), recommended a sample size between 3 and 10 subjects; however, Given (2008) cautioned that to achieve saturation, the researcher must look at each piece of data individually to ensure there are no gaps or unexplained phenomena. Data was collected through interviews, document analysis, and a focus group interview. Data collection continued until I ceased “learning something new about the phenomenon” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 346). Data saturation occurred after the ninth semi-structured interview. I continued sampling to confirm data saturation and ceased sampling after interviewing 13

participants. All interviews, including the focus group, were recorded using two electronic recorders. Interview recordings were professionally transcribed and returned to me for further analysis. Interview transcripts as well as the participant generated professional development plans were coded and analyzed for common themes. A textural and structural description was synthesized to deduce the essence of the experience. All data is stored on a password protected computer and backup files were created frequently.

### **The Researcher's Role**

Qualitative research methods employ the researcher as the primary instrument. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), “Naturalist researchers, rather than deny that they influence what they are studying, monitor the impact they have. They are active participants in the research” (p. 17). As the research instrument, I recognized that my experiences as a Catholic elementary school principal opened the possibility for bias in interpretation as well as the potential to influence participant responses. The process of Epoche in the transcendental phenomenological design is critical to the validity of the research. I bracketed, or set aside, any presuppositions to perceive the phenomenon “in a fresh and open way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

I have served as a principal in a Catholic elementary school for nearly six years. I found navigating the first three years was difficult and considered there may be better support mechanisms to assist principals during the critical window of their early career. I was also concerned younger generations of Catholics may not have the knowledge to not only operate a school successfully, but also the capability of maintaining and enhancing their school’s Catholic identity. The mission of Catholic education is to first create intentional disciples. My former superintendent once asked, “Does Christ walk the halls of your school?” (D. Billante, personal communication, October 22, 2015). Such a simple question, yet it illustrates the enormous

supernatural task of the Catholic school principal. Leadership formation and support, through the lens of the Catholic faith, are essential to succeed in the principalship.

Patton (2015) described reflexivity as “turning qualitative analysis on yourself” (p. 700). To bracket my own experiences and biases, I used the process of reflexive journaling. Ahern (1999) recommended beginning the journaling process prior to data collection, especially to, “Recognize feelings that could indicate a lack of neutrality” (p. 407). Being conscious of “bias, values, and experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 216) will increase the intellectual rigor and enhance credibility (Patton, 2015). As an additional safeguard against bias, I did not include principals from the diocese in which I am employed.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected from four sources: an introductory survey, semi-structured interviews, participant generated professional development plans, and a focus group interview. I requested the participants provide the three-year professional development plan prior to the interview so it could be discussed with the participant during the semi-structured interview; however, not all participants finished the document in time. Every principal participated in one of two focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted to minimize the intersection of colleagues from the same diocese, which was unavoidable due to the nature of a principal’s work schedule. The focus group was the last data collection source in the sequence to allow the participants to become more familiar and open with me as well as more comfortable with the topic.

### **Introductory Survey**

Prior to the semi-structured interview, each participant completed an introductory survey (see Appendix D). The survey required the participant to share demographic information such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Demographic information was based on NCEA demographic

categories (Schultz & McDonald, 2018). General professional information was also included in the survey to verify the participant qualified for the research study and provided information regarding the diversity or lack of diversity in the participant sample. At the end of the data collection process, I speculated that age and generation may be significant to the results, so I asked each participant via email for their current age and year of birth.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The primary data source consisted of semi-structured interviews, which captured the participants' descriptions of the job-related experiences (see Appendix E). Qualitative interviewing is reflexive which requires the researcher to consider his or her standpoint as well as "important questions such as 'Who am I in relation to this study?', 'What right do I have to study this research question?', and 'To whom do the data belong?'" (p. 17, Olson, 2011). Semi-structured interviews use information from previous research to construct interview questions (Olson, 2011). I used carefully designed interview questions to capture data that is thorough, credible, and rich. During the semi-structured interview process, I probed participants to provide examples when possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All interviews were recorded by two devices and professionally transcribed.

1. Why did you choose a profession in Catholic education?
2. What was the career path which led you to be a principal in a Catholic School?
3. Describe your experience with the interview and selection process for principals in your diocese.
4. What formal education did you receive to obtain educational leadership credentials?
5. Describe the formal principal induction program through your diocese.
6. Describe your experience receiving formal or informal mentorship.

7. What aspects of the principalship do you believe you were most prepared to handle?
8. How has the diocese supported you in the principalship?
9. What are your leadership strengths?
10. What are the challenges of being a Catholic elementary school principal?
  - a. Follow-up probe: How do you overcome those challenges?
  - b. Follow-up probe: Which challenges do you believe are unavoidable?
  - c. Follow-up probe: What challenges do you encounter with parents and the pastor?
11. What motivates you to continue in your role as principal?
12. What do you believe will be your legacy at this school?
  - a. Follow-up probe: What goals have you already accomplished?
  - b. Follow-up probe: What goals are in process?
  - c. How long do you see yourself in this position?
13. I asked you to write a professional development plan for the first three years of the principalship. Can explain why you chose each topic?
14. How would you compare the reality of the job to your expectations of the job before accepting the position?
15. Please share any information we did not discuss which you believe is important to understanding your experience as Catholic elementary school principal?

Questions one through three were designed to provide background information about the career path of the participants and the motivation behind their chosen career. Background questions identify personal characteristics and the worldview of the participants (Patton, 2015). Beginning the interview with personal questions put the interviewee at ease and conveyed the importance of the participants' personal experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Responses to

question three elicited background information about the dioceses' level of emphasis regarding leadership quality and their level of involvement in the hiring process of principals.

Questions 9, 11, and 12 were designed to answer guiding question one concerning a principal's motivation to persist in the position. Alderfer's (1969) growth construct includes Maslow's (1943) concepts of self-actualization and self-esteem. Self-esteem was found to be positively correlated with job satisfaction and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). Fraser and Brock (2006) cited a commitment to Catholic education, the continuing challenge of the job, and working toward a vision for the school as reasons for Catholic principal retention. The aforementioned reasons are intrinsically motivated and can also be supported by self-determination theory which "proposes that autonomous motivation and intrinsic goals are better predictors of effective performance on heuristic tasks" (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 341). Questions 9, 11, and 12 asked the participant to discuss their motivation and successes as well as provided an opportunity for the participant to share both negative and positive experiences.

Question 10 was designed to answer guiding question two and required the participant to reflect on the challenges of the Catholic elementary principalship. The literature concerning job satisfaction of principals is dominated by challenges related to the position. By positioning a question about challenges later in the interview, the participant was more comfortable discussing difficulties or personal and professional shortfalls (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Questions four through eight were designed to answer guiding question three concerning diocesan support for novice principals. Adequate preparation for the principalship, support from superiors, mentors, or a network of peers is critical for success. Lack of support from superiors was a common theme in the literature (Beam et al., 2016; García-Garduño et al., 2011; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Ng & Szeto, 2016). Questions four and five asked the participant to

share their formal educational experiences as well as ongoing support from their respective diocesan office of education. Question six assessed the principal's access to mentors, formal or informal (Beam et al., 2016; Gentilucci et al., 2013). Support from the office of education usually includes some type of induction process and ongoing professional development opportunities. Support from the office of education can be inadequate largely because the office is understaffed, or the authority of the pastor prohibits their intervention (Dosen, 2016a).

Question eight explicitly addressed the participants' experiences with their diocesan office of education. Depending on funding, professional development can be sparse. Alderfer (1969) included the growth category which envelopes Maslow's (1943) self-esteem and self-actualization. Reaching one's full potential includes opportunities to learn and grow. Ongoing professional development beyond pre-service leadership programs and induction programs is necessary for successful leadership (Miller et al., 2016). Question 13 asked participants to share their needs for professional growth and was designed to answer guiding questions two and three.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested the researcher conclude the interview by bringing "the interviewee (and yourself [researcher]) down from the intellectual or emotional high" (p. 111). Question 14 asked the participant to share whether the principalship was what he or she expected. According to the literature, principals reported their perception of the role of the principal before assuming the position did not match the reality of the position (Gentilucci et al., 2013; Hancock, & Müller, 2014). Question 15 asked the participant to share any topics that have not been addressed to allow room for unanticipated themes as well to reinforce the open-ended nature of qualitative research.

A large portion of the data was derived from the semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed in their school office except for two participants who were

interviewed at their diocesan central office. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 70 minutes and were recorded by two audio recording devices. By scheduling the personal interview before the focus group, I was able to establish rapport with each of my participants. Most of the participants relaxed after the first few questions and the conversation felt like two colleagues sitting down to chat over coffee. Once the interview was finished, many of participants asked me questions about my school and my diocese and wanted to share ideas. It was not surprising that networking with colleagues was found to be a desired need for participants. A sample portion of an interview transcript can be found in Appendix H.

### **Professional Development Plan**

Document analysis is often used in qualitative research as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Documents present insight into social circumstances and may also provide context (Bowen, 2009). According to Miller and Alvarado (2005), “The production of documents indicates many decisions, by multiple people, about what to write, in what style, for what audience, and for what purpose” (p. 349). Documents are analyzed like interview transcripts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012); they are often examined through a process called content analysis where the text is coded to develop themes (Bowen, 2009).

Prior to each interview, I asked the participant to complete a template for a three-year plan of recommended professional development opportunities for early career principals in the participant’s respective diocese (see Appendix G). The purpose of the professional development plan was to triangulate data, and it was especially helpful to answer the third research question, which asked about the quality of support principals received. Originally, I asked participants to have the document prepared before the personal interview so we could discuss it. Most did not have it finished before the interview. Some plans were very detailed and others had sparse

responses. To make the document more meaningful, I discussed the contents with the participants who had it prepared in time for the interview and discussed how they arrived at their decisions as to what professional development opportunities to include (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A sample of the participant submitted professional development plan can be found in Appendix J.

### **Focus Groups**

All principals participated in one of two focus groups to increase validity through triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013) (see Appendix F). The video-conference focus groups were slightly less personal by the nature of the modality, so a certain level of comfort was necessary. The semi-structured interview had a more personal focus, while the focus group questions were designed to gain insight into the broader diocesan perspective. Describing a focus group, Rubin and Rubin (2012) wrote, “Group members respond to each other’s points, agreeing, disagreeing, or modifying in any way they choose” (p. 29). The opportunity for participants to respond to one another encouraged a few topics, which did not arise in the individual interviews. Patton (2015) highlighted the importance of diversity of thought in focus group interviews. A focus group discussion in the format of a video conference provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of a Catholic elementary principal across dioceses and geographic regions within the Mideast.

1. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of mission and Catholic identity?
2. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of curriculum?
3. How can a pastor best support the principal?
4. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in working with boards

and pastors?

5. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of operational vitality?
6. What successes or experiences are you most proud of on the diocesan level?

The questions were selected because the responses were influenced by the governance of the participants' respective diocese. The first five questions were derived from the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The sixth question probed into leadership success at the diocesan level, which can contribute to the mission and commitment of each individual principal. Additionally, the focus group responses further illuminated universal themes.

The WebEx feed was recorded using an audio recorder and the internal WebEx recorder. Each focus group interview lasted about 60 minutes. The first focus group took place shortly after Thanksgiving and participants were rejuvenated from the vacation. Participants from all four states were present and five out of the six dioceses were represented. The second focus group met the following week, and based on what I could see on the video feeds, everyone looked exhausted. The participants who I found to be most talkative in their personal interviews did not contribute as much as I anticipated. Both conversations still revealed rich data, and I believe all participants enjoyed hearing ideas from other diocese and feeling validated that their concerns were somewhat universal. A sample portion of a focus group transcript can be found in Appendix I.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the point in the research process where the data is prepared and analyzed. Moustakas (1994) requires that the researcher analyze data free from judgement and

presuppositions using a process known as Epoche. First, I wrote down a full description of my experiences as a Catholic elementary school principal. Then, I answered the research questions and coded my responses. From the codes, I developed themes and then wrote a textural and structural description of my experience. Throughout the data collection period, I wrote a reflexive journal to reflect on each interview and continue the Epoche process. The reflexive journal in its entirety is not included to protect the confidentiality of the participants and my own confidentiality; however, a portion of the reflexive journal can be found in Appendix K.

Reflexive journaling began before the literature review was written and continued throughout the data collection process. According to Patton (2015), the interviewer and interviewee affect one another. The interviewees certainly stirred within me a personal response to their story.

Recognizing that I had just emerged from meeting the qualifying criteria for participation in my own study, the Epoche process was important.

After receiving the transcriptions from a professional transcriptionist, I listened to the recording and verified the transcription was correct. Each participant was given the opportunity to verify the transcript. None of the participants responded with feedback. I utilized Nvivo software (version 12) as a tool to organize the coding process. Nvivo software refers to codes as *nodes*. Using the Moustakas's (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis, I read each transcript and professional development plan and then sorted the significant statements into concept nodes, a process Moustakas (1994) described as horizontalization. Initially, there were 677 significant statements. Using Saldaña's (2016) two cycle coding process, I further reduced the concept codes into pattern codes. A complete index of concept and pattern codes can be found in the appendices (see Appendix L and Appendix M). I organized the pattern codes into themes and developed a noematic (textural) description for each participant. Then, I used

imaginative variation to develop a noetic (structural) description, which revealed how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Individual textural and structural descriptions were integrated into a composite textural and structural description. I synthesized the composite textural and structural description to portray the *essence* of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). I provided participants with a description of the main themes, the process of member checking, to confirm the description of the phenomenon accurately represents their experiences as a Catholic elementary school principal as well as to clarify any conflicting information.

### **Trustworthiness**

The constructivist nature of transcendental phenomenology demands careful attention to rigorous procedures to establish trustworthiness. The process established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the assurance that the participants' descriptions match the researcher's reconstruction of experiences. Dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative studies and ensures the research process was "logical, traceable, and documented" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). Confirmability requires the data be confirmed with the participants. Finally, transferability requires the researcher to demonstrate the findings are generalizable (Patton, 2015).

### **Credibility**

Credibility was increased by using triangulation where the results were corroborated through three different data sources (Miles, Huberman, & Saladaña, 2014). Triangulation, according to Miles et al. (2014), is the process of pattern matching. If a code or theme can be found in multiple sources of data, it increases the validity of the results (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview, and the participant-created three-year plan of

professional development will hopefully demonstrate consistent findings. In addition to triangulation, the process of bracketing decreased the influence of biases or potential presuppositions (Moustakas, 1994) as a result of my own previous experiences as a Catholic elementary school principal.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

To ensure dependability, data collection continued until data saturation was reached (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As recommended by Creswell (2013), I reported rich, thick descriptions of the interview responses. The process was further documented using reflexive journaling as a method of bracketing (Ahern, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). To increase confirmability, all collected data was analyzed (Schwandt, 2015). There were no outliers or negative cases to report (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). All methods and procedures were thoroughly and sequentially documented (Miles et al., 2014). The purpose and design of the study as well as the research questions were congruent with the supporting theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2014). I also engaged the participants in member-checks of interpretations.

### **Transferability**

The transferability of the research may be impeded by the limits of the Mideastern region. While most studies examined participants from one state or diocese (Bigelow, 2017; Brock & Fraser, 2001; Ostrowski, 2005), this study increased transferability by selecting participants from various diocese across multiple states within the region. To seek maximum variation, every attempt was made to include a diverse sample of participants from various genders and ethnicities. The Magisterium as well as the Code of Canon Law internationally governs the whole Church; therefore, the Church's universal influence over the Catholic school system makes the study more generalizable.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before the research began, I obtained IRB approval (see Appendix A). No participants were approached or interviewed without the appropriate authority of each diocese having given written permission. All participants were provided with the nature and purpose of the research and notified that participation was voluntary. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form prior to the interview and were notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix B). Each participant was given a \$25 gift card as a gesture of gratitude for their participation upon completion. The names of participants and dioceses were given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and to prevent any harm to the participants' respective diocese due to potential negative feedback. All data and audio recordings are kept on a password protected computer and will be destroyed after a period of three years.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. The use of transcendental phenomenology as a research design allowed me to collect data in a setting with which I am familiar and describe a phenomenon I have experienced. Chapter Three provided a rationale for the setting and a description of the participant sample. Methods of data collection, including an introductory survey, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis were described in detail and supported by the literature. The data analysis strategies follow the procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994) for a transcendental phenomenological design. The ethical considerations outlined ensured protection of participants and their respective dioceses. Rigorous

methodological procedures will allow for a trustworthy description of the job-related experiences of early-career Catholic elementary school principals.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. The data was derived from an introductory survey, semi-structured interviews, two focus groups, and a three-year-professional development plan provided by the participants. Chapter Four contains a brief portrait of the participants. The results of this study are presented thematically and according to research question. The results provide a rich description of the experiences of 13 Catholic elementary school principals in the early part of their career.

### **Participants**

The participants in this sample were principals in Catholic elementary schools. Their years of experience ranged from two to four years. The participants represented four different states and six different dioceses in the Mideastern region. The sample contained 13 principals with a wide variety of experiences before entering the principalship. Each participant shared demographic information through an introductory survey, participated in both a semi-structured and focus group interview, and submitted a three-year-professional development plan. The descriptions of each participant show an overall commitment to the mission of Catholic education.

#### **Anne**

Anne is a white female, in the 30 to 40-year age range. She is a lay principal in her fourth year of service. Anne started her career in Catholic youth ministry. She found her way

into the Catholic elementary school principalship because of connections she made with a pastor while Anne was in youth ministry at another parish. She explained,

When I was going through that whole looking for a new job, this was more like nerdy Catholic stuff, but I was ready for something new. I was looking for a new job, so I entrusted it to Saint Joseph. Father John approached me on the feast of Saint Joseph to take this job.

Anne is working on a terminal degree, which is her only degree in education, and she is not a certified teacher, which made it difficult for her to establish credibility with her faculty. Anne, facing enrollment and financial concerns, has a challenging road ahead to maintain a fiscally sustainable school but her tenacious spirit is up to the challenge.

### **Bridget**

Bridget is a white female in the 60 to 70-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. She began her career at her home parish's school. Bridget shared, "But when I landed here, I just fell into my niche. I love it." She held several teaching and non-academic administrative positions in both a Catholic high school and Catholic elementary school. Bridget discussed her desire to return her elementary school to many of its deep-rooted traditions. As a member of the school community her whole career, it made the transition to the principal's office a bit easier. Bridget seemed particularly interested in advancing curricular programs and discussed a very collaborative approach with the faculty.

### **Cecilia**

Cecilia is a white female in the 40 to 50-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. Family career paths required Cecilia to move frequently. She discussed the comfort of sending her own children to the local Catholic school. When the family settled in

their current location, Cecilia eventually took a position in the school where her children were attending. Cecilia explained why she chose Catholic education, “That's part of what I feel has made me such a great teacher and such a great principal, is connecting the bond of religion and Christ into education.” With a vision of academic excellence, Cecilia participated in a leadership pipeline program and then applied for the principalship at her school when it became available. Cecilia’s persistence allowed her to jump in with both feet and find resources to bring innovative programming to her school.

### **Deborah**

Deborah is a white female in the 60 to 70-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. Deborah discussed how Catholic education chose her, first as a teacher and then as an administrator. Deborah explained, “I had three opportunities to leave and chose not to, just because it fit my family. It fit my life. It fit what I stood for.” She finished her principal certification through a leadership pipeline program in her diocese. Deborah shared she had a one-year stint as a principal in a school that was not the right fit and ended up back in the classroom at the same school where she serves now as principal. Deborah was thrown into the position mid-year after the previous principal left the position after less than a year of service. At the time of the interview, Deborah was facing an uncertain future as the area schools were encountering a potential regionalization; however, Deborah’s trust in God has allowed her to take the uncertainty in stride.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is a white female in the 50 to 60-year age range. She is a lay principal in her fourth year of service. Elizabeth spent all but two years of her career in Catholic education. She was a reading specialist for a public school for a short time after her husband’s career required

they relocate to another state. Elizabeth was thrown into the position mid-year when the previous principal departed. Elizabeth was a beloved teacher in the community, and the pastor and parents looked to her to heal some wounds left by former leadership. The pastor offered the position saying, “The community needs somebody to heal them and you're it.” Elizabeth never intended a career in administration, so she does not have a principal certification or a degree in educational leadership, which created a steep learning curve her first year in the position. Upon entering the school, a person can immediately feel the strength of the Catholic identity, which speaks to Elizabeth’s spiritual leadership.

### **Felicity**

Felicity is a Hispanic, white female in the 40 to 50-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. Felicity began her career in the corporate world. She entered Catholic education while raising her children at the school where they attended. Felicity pursued a master’s degree in education to acquire her teaching certificate. She left Catholic education for two years where she taught in a charter school but felt God calling her to return to the Catholic school. When the principalship opened, Felicity was approached by her pastor to take the position. Felicity shared her deep roots in the school community: “Why Catholic education? Well, first, I’m the principal of the school where I graduated from. My secretary, up until last year, was my eighth-grade teacher.” Felicity leverages her limited financial resources to improve the school’s academic program and relies on her experience from the corporate world to market her school. Felicity hopes her legacy is to make the school financially sustainable for many years to come.

### **Helena**

Helena is a white female in the 50 to 60-year age range. She is a lay principal in her fourth year of service. She began her career in financial marketing. After becoming involved as a parent in the school where she currently serves as principal, she later became a teacher at a neighboring Catholic school. During that time, she pursued a master's degree in education and her teaching certification. Helena acted as a leader on the faculty and then found herself in her diocese's first leadership pipeline cohort. Helena shared why she chose Catholic education: "I really felt more comfortable in Catholic school. It's what my faith was. I just feel much more at home here than when I subbed in the public school." Upon meeting Helena, her devotion to the school and love for Catholic education is obvious. Helena's sense of humor makes her very personable and seemed to help her keep the day-to-day challenges in perspective.

### **Isabel**

Isabel is a white female in the 60 to 70-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. Her personal and professional background is really a colorful mosaic of unique experiences. She had a successful career in the cooperate world but became disenchanted with her colleagues' lack of professional ethics and felt unfulfilled. After taking a year off from the workforce, Isabel decided to pursue a career in education. She found herself teaching in a Catholic high school where she took leadership in her subject area departments. When the principalship opened at one of the elementary feeder schools, Isabel felt compelled to apply for the position indicating that the elementary school needed a principal who was not just dedicated to the principalship but invested in school itself. Isabel shared, "And as it turned out, God opened the window and showed me through it kind-of-thing. And I have been very happy since." Isabel was obviously the right candidate, because she is clearly all-in.

### **Jane**

Jane is a white female in the 40 to 50-year age range. She is a lay principal in her second year of service. Jane started her career in the public school system and then bounced between public school and Catholic school a few times before landing in her current position. In one of the Catholic schools where she served, she had an administrative position concurrent with her teaching position. In her current diocese, she progressed from teacher, to the diocesan leadership pipeline program, to the principalship. She is the first lay principal in her school, which has its own set of challenges. She recognized the school's history and tradition but emphasized that she was leading a school rooted in tradition but with a future. Jane shared a new initiative for her school to emphasize mission: "The only thing that we've really been concentrating on was . . . 'Be who God meant you to be.' So the kids, we say that every day. And it's in everything that we do now."

### **Katharine**

Katharine is a white female in the 30 to 40-year age range. She is a lay principal in her third year of service. She began her career in special education but made her first connection with the Catholic school system when Divine Providence led her to enroll her second child in a Catholic school. Katharine shared, "My older daughter went all through public school. But for some reason with [child name], I feel like the Holy Spirit was sending us a bunch of messages." She ascended to a supervisor of non-public services within a public education entity and was working directly with the Catholic schools. Katharine is very drawn to the diverse population of students at her current school, which made it appealing to accept the principalship. Katharine is exceptionally student-centered, has a vision for the academic program, and is savvy in the way she leverages resources to accomplish her vision.

### **Laurence**

Laurence is a white male in the 30 to 40-year age range. He is a lay principal in his second year of service. He began his career teaching in a Catholic elementary school and then took an assistant principalship in a Catholic high school. Laurence had a vision for innovative curriculum. There was a competitive edge to his initiatives. Laurence commented, “As far as I know, there's only one other school in the diocese right now that's doing anything close to what we're doing or trying to do for that matter.” He described a very collaborative approach and believed including his teachers in the decision-making process as often as possible created buy-in. In his professional development plan, he made sure to include theology because Catholic identity should be front and center.

### **Monica**

Monica is a Hispanic, white female in the 30 to 40-year age range. She is a lay principal in her fourth year of service. Monica shared that she did not initially choose a career in education, but instead wanted to become a lawyer and graduated with a degree in political science. She worked in social services for a short time before making the decision to go into education. Monica explained why she chose Catholic education: “In Catholic school, I think the teachers really saw who I was, and they really helped me. So I wanted to give back, and that's why I became a teacher in Catholic education.”

### **Philomena**

Philomena is a white female in the 30 to 40-year age range. She is a lay principal in her third year of service. Philomena was one of the few participants who was raised in the public education system. She shared her faith journey and how it led her to a position in a Catholic high school. Philomena described the leadership opportunities she had while teaching in a secondary school and then ultimately ended up in her diocesan leadership pipeline program. Philomena's

enthusiasm was contagious as she described her vision for the school and the short-term goals she had already accomplished. Philomena shared the importance of mission: “I never want to forget what the mission is and why we're here doing what we're doing. My leadership strengths, I would say, are definitely the mission portion of it, and the vision.”

## **Results**

Themes which emerged from the data describing the experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals are detailed in Chapter Four. Guiding question one, which addressed motivation, was answered with three themes: calling, leadership ethos, and vision. Guiding question two, which addressed challenges, was answered with three themes: resources, balance, and relationships. Guiding question three, which addressed support, was answered with two themes: received support and desired support. Desired support was broken down into six subthemes. The themes revealed the essence of the experience.

### **Guiding Question One**

What experiences motivate early career Catholic elementary school principals to persist in the position?

Guiding question one was answered primarily by the semi-structured interviews because during the individual interview participants described their personal journey into Catholic leadership. Participants described being motivated by a calling from God. Principals were able to persist in the position because of certain defining leadership characteristics. Additionally, participants were motivated by their vision.

**Calling.** The Catholic Church emphasizes vocational discernment. Typically, these vocations fall into four categories: married life, single life, consecrated life, and for men, priestly life (Noonan, 2005). Within each way of life, God blesses all people with certain gifts and

talents. Eight of the 13 principals specifically mentioned feeling called by God to serve the Church as a Catholic educator. Two described a sense of God pulling them in a certain direction. Katharine told me, “There was just something that pulled my heartstrings. I turned to him [husband] and said, ‘I think I have to talk to somebody about this.’” When speaking about her discernment process before seeking the principalship, Cecilia shared,

But there was this...it actually would wake me up in the middle of the night when I was trying to decide whether to apply, this like, gnawing, "You need to do this. You can make a change. You need to do this. This is what you need to do...So it was really, as strange as it sounds, it was really a calling that this is where I needed to be.

Others described how Catholic education chose them. Jane commented, “I think it chose me, not the opposite way around.” Similarly, Deborah described how a teaching position landed in her lap.

Catholic education chose me, you know what I mean? Really, it really kinda happened that way. I was three days out of graduation from college, single, alone, trying to feed myself, and a girlfriend said to the principal, "I know somebody who could come in and sub for a day." She needed a sub. And at the end of that day, she walked in and said, "I have a second grade, fourth grade and sixth grade position open next year. Which one would you like?"

Despite the financial sacrifice, three participants gave up successful careers in the cooperate world. Felicity bounced from corporate to Catholic education and then to a charter school. She realized that while the financial pressure had eased with a higher salary, Catholic education was where she was called: “I have three kids, so I figured, well, it's time to make some real money because there is no real money here. I realized that that wasn't my calling.” Anne

described being called to lead a Catholic school in challenging times, referring to the recent Pennsylvania Dioceses Victims Report, which listed over 300 predators (not all clergy) who had abused over 1,000 children during an 80-year period.

For whatever reason, I'm leading this ship and I have to do it gracefully whether we're sailing into a long future for our school or if I'm here for more difficult times for the school. I've seen other closures happen in the diocese and I've seen people leave Catholic Education, fine, they want to go to something more stable, they go to public. But, they're angry at the Church. I don't really know why I'm here, but for whatever reason I do feel like God wants me here through whatever is coming down the pipe for [my school].

Many of the participants were educated in Catholic schools at some point in their lives or sent their children to a Catholic school. Several described a sense of comfort with the Catholic school system. Cecilia, whose family moved a few times, recounted the consistency of Catholic schools across the nation. Catholic schools,

...always had sort of the same kind of values and it was just very comforting for my kids to go from one Catholic school to another, because when public school...it was just too much from one public school to another, but the Catholic schools you kind of knew. You know, you wear your uniform, you pray, it's like, consistency.

It is common in Catholic education for teachers to have deep legacies in the Catholic school system. Bridget is the principal at the school operated by the parish where she was baptized:

My mother taught here, my brother taught here for a couple of years before going to public school. In this particular school or parish, I mean I was baptized here, I received my sacraments here, everything has been [at this parish].

Isabel was educated in Catholic institutions all the way through college. After a successful corporate career, Isabel realized she wanted to do something more meaningful: “I really wanted to do something that I felt was meaningful, so I started at [Catholic high school]...And I loved every minute of it, I felt totally, totally like I had found my home.”

Elizabeth discussed how she could not separate her relationship with God from her professional life. Being able to serve in a Catholic school where faith and education are intertwined gives her comfort.

Because it's the only thing I know and feel comfortable with. I feel my whole life is God centered and so it's a place where I'm comfortable. I was raised in Catholic education all the way up through [the] University, and so I don't know, God is the center of who I am as a person and my spirituality, and my church. I taught CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine] since I was a junior in high school. So it was never, not part of who I am.

While over half of the participants described a calling or a feeling of a pull, the others described a feeling of comfort or allegiance to the Catholic school system. While it cannot be said with certainty that the other participants did not feel a specific prompting by the Holy Spirit, the sense of comfort brought by the intersection of faith and academics was woven throughout their responses.

**Leadership ethos.** Most people choose a career based on their personal gifts and talents. Not every teacher is cut out to be a principal. Leadership ethos goes beyond leadership style. Derived from Aristotelian philosophy, ethos involves persuasion through character (Allen, 2017). The leadership ethos of the Catholic school principal is what enables each participant to persist in the position. Participant responses to various questions revealed they saw themselves

as personable, collaborative, resourceful, and invested. Participants were motivated by the impact they had on student learning and embraced spiritual leadership.

***Personable.*** Six of the participants described themselves as personable and saw relationship building as a necessary skill to be successful in a position which requires some political finesse. Cecilia recounted working at the family business as a child and how that taught her to interact with others effectively. She related it to her ability to sell the school to perspective parents: “But I know once I can get them through that door I can sell...the school sells itself, but because I’m a very personable person, I think that’s my biggest strength.” Isabel and Monica described themselves as being patient and compassionate. Isabel emphasized the importance of considering, “each individual case, for what it is” when assessing the needs of others. Helena and Jane found joy in working with families. Helena explained, “The fact that I can sit with a family and kind of come up with a win-win situation is good for me.”

***Collaborative.*** The principals spoke specifically of collaborating with faculty. Laurence recounted previous principals he had worked for throughout his career who were more authoritative. Learning from their mistakes, Laurence was determined to be collaborative.

Hearing feedback from teachers and being able to work with teachers one-on-one or in groups, whatever it may be. Those are some of the biggest things that keep me going with it, because I like that. I like interacting with people like that, and then seeing the benefits of it.

Isabel discussed the importance of building relationships with the faculty: “There needs to be a definite comradery between the principal and the faculty, without losing the authoritative figure, you know, you can’t be buddies, but you can be very collegial.” Isabel related the need to build relationships with the faculty to also avoid feelings of isolation. Katharine, who discussed a

need to change the mindset of some of her faculty, related her instructional coaching as a step toward further collaboration. She said her goal was “trying to bring us to a shared vision.”

**Resourceful.** Limited resources were a challenge for most participants. Several articulated they felt providing a 21st century education was challenging because of limited funding. Perhaps one of the most important qualities the participants exemplified was their ability to leverage their resources creatively. While tuition dollars cover teacher salaries and certain operational expenses, participants relied on *Title funds* or government funding provided through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). Katharine, who had worked in non-public services through a government agency knew her way around Title funds: “I know how to find the funds because I know how to work with Title money and push for what I want and use it smarter.”

Felicity, whose school is in a more urban setting, was emphatic about spending all available Title Funds and using them strategically. She recounted,

I've literally spent every penny that they've had. We have returned 13 cents, and I'm still bitter over it because somebody could've had a cup of coffee somewhere. I think my strength is in knowing what our resources are and building relationships with the people who handle our funding.

Philomena, whose school is also in an urban area, discussed the importance of being creative with resources.

You have to be really creative with the funding that you have, with the ideas that you have, with the data that you have, and figure out how do I move this needle given the parameters of what I'm dealing with? I've gotten really good at being resourceful, and I ask for help.

Based on the information provided by the participants, each diocese represented did not dictate specific instructional programs; therefore, principals had the freedom to choose their instructional materials within certain parameters. This was corroborated by the focus group interviews during the discussion on curriculum. Isabel shared with the group, “There is an awful lot of time and efficiency lost when we all are hunting down [textbooks] because our science books are from when Laurence was an altar boy.” Developing a vision with endless resources is easy; developing a vision with limited resources requires creativity.

***Invested.*** Accomplishing a vision demands more than just creativity and drive, but commitment to the mission. It was clear that most of the participants were invested in their schools and Catholic education in general. Four principals specifically mentioned their investment and passion for Catholic education. Probably the most endearing response was Elizabeth who shared, “Isn't this awful? I'm getting teary eyed. I love this place.” Anne hoped her passion for the school would be contagious and would bring about increased enrollment and buy-in from stakeholders: “I think I am passionate about our school and I think when the passion and love for the school is driving the bus hopefully more people jump on board.” Felicity expressed a similar sentiment when discussing her commitment to her school where she is also an alumna: “My legacy is to ensure that we're open for another 55 years and that we continue to make the impact that we've made in the community.” Felicity emphasized the importance of the Catholic school in the urban community.

Monica saw a broader picture. She described her hope for Catholic schools to thrive and her willingness to fight for their success as a system.

I mean, I think I'm really passionate about Catholic education, and I want to keep the schools going. And I think that what we offer is something that can't be offered at other places. ... if I'm passionate about something, I'll fight for it.

Legacy is deeply rooted in the Catholic school system in the Mideastern United States. Leaders who are invested in the mission and invested in their individual schools are necessary for Catholic schools to succeed.

Principals were motivated by the students, especially seeing their progress. Seven principals commented specifically on loving the students as a motivator. Cecilia exclaimed, Oh my gosh, the kids. I love, love, love the kids. I love being with the kids. I'm out there every morning when they come in. I'm out there every day when they're leaving getting in their cars and their hugs and bonding with them, seeing them grow and develop.

Deborah, Katharine, and Helena expressed similar sentiments. Jane shared that she really loved working with the children and their families: "It's a different part of the desk and you don't just get the kids, you get the families with their problems. The kid comes to you, there's a problem. You deal with it as a family, with the family." Laurence discussed the satisfaction he feels from making an impact academically. Felicity recognized remaining student centered is how a principal knows he or she is making the right decision: "Whether they agree with me or don't agree with me, I think they know that their child's interest is at the heart of anything that I try."

While spiritual leadership is probably one of the most important skills required to be a principal in a Catholic school, it was only discussed explicitly by four principals. This was perhaps because they considered me a colleague as a fellow Catholic school principal, and spiritual leadership was implied throughout our discussion. Anne was probably the most specific

about the mission of Catholic education and her desire to lead her students to Jesus. Anne articulated that she hoped her legacy would be helping her students build a relationship with Christ: “I would hope that what I've left on the building is this idea that that there's joy in the faith and that true happiness comes from a genuine relationship with Christ.”

For other principals, spiritual leadership was evident when discussing servant leadership and relationships with faculty. Katharine shared, “I have walked the walk and I continue to do that. As we're trying to make change and improve things, I will be right there with you to do it.” Elizabeth shared similar thoughts. She discussed a book study among the principals in her diocese where the author advised leaders to *smell like their flock*. Elizabeth reflected on the idea of servant leadership: “Or if there's something to be scrubbed or cleaned or whatever, I feel like my leadership style is to push from the bottom rather than pulled from the top.”

**Vision.** The most common theme in the data centered around vision. Principals described being compelled to accept such a large and challenging position of leadership because they believed they could make a positive change. Anne discussed a previous position in youth ministry leadership and commented, “I ended up taking on the position of [youth ministry leadership]. And it was a struggling school, I was really just passionate about making it work.” Anne’s statement about her passion to make it work accurately illustrates the theme *vision*. Cecilia also described the inner drive she had to improve her school as a teacher and now as a principal. She remarked, “You know how it is when you're doing something for a long time. And I could just see what it could be. And I just couldn't leave it alone.”

Some of the principals spoke directly of projects or innovative goals to work toward their vision. Principals found accomplishing steps toward their vision very rewarding and motivating. Katharine, for example explained,

We did a [accreditation agency] mid review last year, so that's a lot of work to put together everything and where you are. It was actually really rewarding because it made me realize in the short time I had...this was a written document to show all these things that we've done and where we are now and a lot of it was stuff that we had just done in the last two years under my leadership.

Katharine also expressed, "I want to have direct impact on kids and see it." Laurence talked about different curricular initiatives he was implementing and saw his school as a leader in innovation within his diocese. Laurence, too, was inspired by progress. He responded,

What motivates me to continue? I think the biggest thing is it's seeing what your efforts are. You're not just guiding a classroom of 20 kids, you're guiding the entire school. So you get to see the progression of changing something in kindergarten, and one or two. Then all of a sudden, you're trickling that up through, and you get to see that progress made.

Felicity misses the classroom but having the ability to direct the vision makes the principalship worth it. She shared, "I felt like I could make bigger difference. Instead of just one classroom at a time, I could have a bigger impact across the board."

A few principals discussed how change was difficult for the community and sometimes an obstacle to accomplishing their vision. Jane shared how tradition is sometimes used by the faculty as a roadblock to prevent change: "Just because you've been doing it like this forever, doesn't necessarily mean it's right, or it's current, or it's the best thing for everybody. They're [the faculty] seeing that." Philomena expressed similar thoughts about making progress toward goals. She described how she took a gentle approach with change.

For me it's about moving the needle forward, even if it's a centimeter every single day as opposed to pushing and putting a lot of time and energy into really riding a hard line and making changes in that way because I think that's where you damage relationships and that's where you potentially run the risk of damaging culture. I try to couch things in a very sensitive way.

The three-year-professional development plans supported the idea of vision through various topics. Topics such as curriculum development, professional development planning, or strategic planning indicated principals had a vision for their school. For example, Laurence included, “Curriculum: How to effectively assess and modify the curriculum programs within your building as well as where to research new curriculum initiatives.” Being on the cutting edge of curricular initiatives demonstrates the theme *vision*.

While the younger generation of principals seemed to have a broader commitment to the mission of Catholic education, the older generation seemed more committed to their individual schools and school traditions. Isabel said, “[School Name] needed someone who would commit to [School Name], not just to the job of principal.” The Millennial and the younger Generation X principals (birth years between 1975 and 1980) had a more competitive edge to their vision. They also articulated a hope for the future of Catholic education despite the many challenges faced by Catholic schools in the United States.

### **Guiding Question Two**

What are the job-related challenges experienced by early career Catholic elementary school principals?

Despite facing significant challenges in the Catholic elementary school principalship, participants felt prepared to handle spiritual leadership, instructional leadership, and most student

issues. Three themes emerged which answered guiding question two, “What are the job-related challenges experienced by early career Catholic elementary school principals?” Principals experienced a lack of resources, the challenge of balancing tasks, responsibilities, and family life, as well as navigating relationships with personnel and parents.

**Resources.** In guiding question one, which examined motivation, *resourcefulness* was a subtheme of *leadership ethos*. In that context, resourcefulness was the creative way in which participants overcame the challenge of limited funding. *Resources* appears again to answer guiding question two regarding the challenges of setting a budget for the school or overcoming a lack of funding. Helena very succinctly summed up the financial challenges of Catholic schools when she said, “Well, financial challenges abound.” While the Catholic school’s mission is to proclaim the way to salvation to all God’s children, the school must also be operated as a businesses. Catholic schools in the United States are not taxpayer funded and so their competition are the free public schools, free charter schools, and other private schools. Principals expressed that it was a challenge to keep up with innovative curriculum when there was a lack of funding to accomplish innovative changes.

A large budgetary challenge for many Catholic schools is paying teachers a salary that is competitive with public schools. The lower salary contributes to teacher attrition, which in turn affects the quality of education. Isabel shared, “You want quality educators, yet we're paying a third of what public school starting salaries are, and historically that's been a problem here in [diocese name].”

Even larger still is the challenge of curricular resources. Although Laurence had more than adequate access to funding, he recognized his financial limitations.

The biggest challenge I'm finding right now is while Catholic ed is above and beyond what public school is, at the same time, we're also lacking in a lot of areas. From talking to other principals in the diocese and stuff, and a lot of this comes down to finances, is creating a 21st century learning environment for kids. Giving them resources, technology, giving the teachers training to do differentiated instruction in the classroom, trying to do an RTI or MTSS system to try to identify key areas of concern or key areas of strength.

In a focus group session, Isabel commented, "I think more specific to a smaller Catholic school, where yes, there's great ideas, but when you need \$10,000 to start the project, it's nearly impossible." Cecilia summed up the financial struggle of the schools when discussing the challenges of the principalship.

But that's my biggest challenge, is trying to get good teachers and pay them pennies, and trying to get parents in here and giving them the quality education with the lack of funds, trying to be creative with those funds and trying to find the money.

Two principals mentioned the financial status of schools being scrutinized at the diocesan level. The consensus between those two principals is that the school's financial status is the primary concern of diocesan officials. Anne explained, "I think sometimes they [diocese] see things as very black and white, what's your enrollment? Are you paying all of your diocesan payables?" Laurence, who is from a different diocese, mentioned, "The biggest thing in Catholic ed, especially the diocese, is your finances. If you maintain a positive budget, nobody will bother you for the most part." In other words, other aspects of the school's overall health are overlooked in favor of the balance sheet.

Enrollment was a significant factor directly related to funding and resources because the schools were all tuition-based. Six out of the 13 participants specifically mentioned enrollment in their personal interviews, and the topic also came up in the focus group sessions. Monica shared,

And I think the other issue is that you're always focused on enrollment. It's a constant getting kids in, I don't want my school to close. It's always forefront, and it would be nice to be able to do your job without always having to worry about getting kids in the building.

In the focus groups, enrollment was discussed in light of the future of Catholic education.

Bridget expressed her concern for the future of Catholic education: “I see the younger generation more so now looking at the price tag and weighing that against what is important to them.” Jane explained she believed knowing that parents are making an economic decision to choose Catholic education forces schools to up their game: “And, those Millennials are looking at it as consumers. So, it forces us to be the best we can be, better than we were yesterday, and to compete with the free public schools.” Marketing and fundraising topics were mentioned by eight participants in their professional development plans.

While it was not a major theme, the possible effects of Report I of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury, also known as the *Grand Jury Report* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Office of the Attorney General, 2018) ran as an undercurrent in some interviews and focus groups, particularly as it related to the financial status of the diocese. Isabel described the dark cloud that is looming over the Catholic Church right now: “We've seen collections down and collections down in the parish hurts us.” Katharine expressed slight frustration with the perception among parents and teachers that the schools receive funding from the diocese: “The

diocese sends *us* a bill when we send somebody to a retreat or they're out, we get a bill for it. Teachers don't realize that we're not getting any support that way and parents don't realize that.” The reality is, most diocese have little if any funding to support Catholic schools.

**Balance.** Principals feel pulled in too many different directions with an overwhelming amount of responsibilities (Grissom et al., 2013; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2015) and challenged by the endless number of managerial tasks. The node *demands* had 51 significant statements within the one-to-one interviews alone. Isabel explained, “I think what surprised me was the amount of administrative paperwork. I knew there'd be a lot, but boy there sure is.” Anne expanded by describing the need to understand and be able to perform numerous job functions.

You kind of have to be a jack of all trades because I think some people are fortunate enough to have a Marketing Director or an Enrollment Manager. I think mostly a bunch of us are running around like maniacs trying to get pictures of what's going on in our building, throwing it up on social media while still tending to the instruction that's going on in the classroom. I often feel like if I do one thing really well that means that I'd drop something else that's very important. That's a huge challenge.

Elizabeth also described the challenges of delegating. Because there is often no middle management level, the principal must make all of the top-level decisions and often fill in the gaps for job functions where the budget does not allow for extra staff. She shared,

I said to my husband recently, in one day I gave out pretzels, had a conversation with an FBI agent about painting the windows with bulletproof glass stuff, then talked to my curriculum coordinators, did lunch duty, taught a class. There's no middle management. You are all things to all people, and perhaps...even when you delegate, you're still all

things to all people. I think that's the challenge. I think people get burned out quickly because if you're not in a time period of your life that you could give everything to this job, it's nearly impossible to do.

Katharine pointed out in the public-school setting, a principal would have more administrative support. She also commented that the kindergarten through eighth grade age span is difficult to manage by herself. Katharine explained that because principals are constantly pulled in so many directions, it is easy to become reactive instead of proactive: "So you're just feeling like you're reacting and trying to fix things instead of what we really need to do is focus on the big picture and being proactive." Felicity discussed the enormous number of interruptions during the day, which prevents her from working on moving the school forward. Felicity recounted a sign one of her principal colleagues had in her office.

[The sign said] "I was trying to do my job, but all the interruptions kept getting in the way until I realized that all the interruptions are my job," or something like that. I was just laughing. I was like, you know what? It's true. It's like everything is a 9-1-1.

Because the job is so large, it is difficult to manage alone. While many expressed the difficulty of being a one-person-show, feelings of isolation ran as an undercurrent in several interviews. Monica shared,

I think it's overwhelming. I think that you feel like you are hitting your head against the wall, and I don't feel like we have enough support. The [central office supervisor], mine, is awesome. But there are times where I feel very alone. And I've started to, you know as we talked about earlier, find the people that I can call, but there's a lot of...You're alone, and you're in a building where you have nobody...They're kinda all under you, and

you don't have anyone that you can just say, "God, I'm having a really tough day," because you have to be professional.

Isabel shared a similar concern: "There are always days where it gets too much, and so I think principals in schools are often too much alone, in their little island." Katharine expressed she would benefit from having an administrative colleague to bounce ideas. Two principals mentioned it was difficult to reach out to colleagues in other schools because everyone is competing for students. Anne shared, "The principal's position is a lonely job to begin with. It's an even lonelier job when the principals on either side of you are vying for your kids or there's not a lot of vertical support or lateral support." Laurence expressed a similar concern.

But you've got to be careful what you bring up to other schools, because they're competing for the same kids. So, you don't want to bring up problems necessarily to them because you don't know if they're going to use that against you.

Several participants mentioned that a principal lives and breathes the job. Elizabeth commented, "You live and breathe it, and then the alarm company calls you at 2:00 in the morning because somebody from the athletic association put a rock in the door." Some participants discussed the difficult balance between work and family life: "I think the hardest part is being a mom. That's hard. I have three. Seventeen, 15 and 13. And they're all very involved in multiple things." Jane also shared her aging parents contribute to the challenges of finding a work-life balance. Philomena, who does not yet have children, shared her concern for trying to start a family and continue in her position.

I'm 31, I'm unmarried, I don't have children. At some point in the near future, those things may be happening, so I have to consider how do I do that and remain in my position? What are my options? What are some compromises that I might have to make?

Helena had a sense of humor, which puts the principalship into perspective. She had a humorous way of articulating the realities of the job, which kept me laughing throughout the interview. When asked about her legacy, she responded,

Toilets. I upgraded all the toilets when I got here. That was my biggest legacy. Because I walked in here, I was like, "What're we doing here? These are the worst toilets I ever saw." So, I upgraded all the bathrooms.

While upgrading toilets is not the kind of legacy that is statue-worthy, Helena was spot on about the realities of the position. Whether it is upgrading facilities, chasing a bird out of a classroom as Elizabeth described, or fixing leaky toilets (which interestingly was mentioned by three participants), the principal is often a one-person-show.

**Relationships.** Nine principals reported challenges related to the missteps or reputation of the previous principal. Two participants succeeded principals who moved on to be central office administrators, one participant succeeded a principal who had been terminated, and another participant was awarded the job after her predecessor had informed the school community the new principal was to be someone *else* on the faculty. Three participants reported *lame duck* predecessors who were coasting to retirement. One participant faced personal attacks from the preceding principal, which made it challenging to establish credibility. All participants who reported challenges related to their predecessor were able to overcome those challenges by making their own mark on their schools' legacy.

**Personnel.** Principals interact with many different types of stakeholders, but the two which presented the most prominent challenges were personnel and parents. Nine of the 13 participants described challenges with supervising personnel, particularly in two areas: implementing curricular changes and faculty demands. Deborah discussed the difficulty of

getting her faculty to teach curriculum with consistency across grade levels. She explained, “Every teacher's classroom was an island unto itself” and faculty were teaching from different textbook series instead of having a unified approach. Both Felicity, Laurence, and Katharine also described the difficulty of moving the faculty in one direction.

Felicity was surprised by the lackadaisical attitude of some of her teachers.

I was surprised to see how many were not doing what they were supposed to be doing.

That, to me, was shocking. The idea of submitting lesson plans before you taught the lesson, well, you would've thought that I asked for a pint of blood.

While most participants described their faculty as dedicated and professional individuals, they were surprised by some unprofessional behavior they encounter from faculty or other employees. Anne shared a story about her very first day of school her first year as principal.

I did not expect it to be so difficult to pull a faculty together. For many of them I was their sixth principal in 13 years. I had a teacher stand outside of the main office on the first day of school with her hands on her hips and say, “You know, we've had more principals here than we know what to do with. We run this school, we don't need a Principal anymore.”

Helena mentioned, as of the time of the interview, she never formally disciplined a teacher or raised her voice to the faculty but does not have a problem calling them out on ineffective or unacceptable classroom practices from time to time. She did, however, describe a temper tantrum from one of her employees: “I had one come in here, stamping their feet, clapping their hands, and slamming my [desk].”

Elizabeth mentioned being exasperated by the demands of some faculty.

[They ask] "Can I have five minutes?" And I always want to say, do you mean an hour and a half? Because if you mean an hour and a half, could you just say an hour and a half? Because then I could say no, I don't have it.

A few principals shared they chose not to renew the contracts of uncooperative or ineffective teachers. Such a task was easier for some principals than for others because there were no unions or because their state had at-will employment laws. Philomena elaborated on her willingness to work with faculty before stepping toward a non-renewal of contract.

I think there are some principals that look at their staff and say, okay I need to run this person, this person, this person out of the building, and rightfully so. Then I think there's somebody like me who say, okay, if you choose to change one thing in your classroom this year, I'm happy and then next year we'll work on something else, and next year we'll work on something else.

Katharine pointed out that teachers often take student enrollment for granted and in turn put their own job in jeopardy if the school faces closure or constriction of staff. Katharine said teachers often do not realize parents have many educational options: "Parents feel they have a lot more choices, so you can't be yelling at a parent about what they're supposed to do."

***Parents.*** Some principals reported parents could be demanding, particularly because they pay tuition. Cecilia shared, "So sometimes there is a little bit of an entitlement, 'If I pay money here I can tell you what to do.'" Katharine echoed Cecilia when she explained she had to consider enrollment when making decisions about students.

I've worked with some challenging families where it took a lot of time to get us on the same page to make a difference for the kid. That is a huge part of what you do as a principal, working with families, problem solving, trying to get them on board. I would

say that I had solid preparation for that. The difference was I didn't have to do it from an enrollment perspective. There was still always...there's fear of due process and being litigious, so I had to be careful of how I handled it, but it wasn't a fear of, oh, you're going to take them and not pay tuition anymore.

Six principals mentioned enrollment as being a significant concern. Answering the demands of parents takes on a whole different dimension when a principal must consider enrollment in the decision-making process.

Overall, participants shared positive anecdotes about their faculties' commitment to Catholic education and the students. Principals expressed the importance of effective communication and collaboration. Some participants also shared they enjoyed working with families and supporting students, even in the most challenging situation. Most principals saw themselves as personable so building relationships was important to them.

### **Guiding Question Three**

How do early career Catholic elementary principals describe the quality of support they receive to persist in the position?

Participants described the genuine care and concern central office administrators had for their principals. Principals agreed that central office administrators were just a phone call away. They received adequate support for issues with legal implications. Where principals felt diocesan support fell short were in six areas: teacher supervision, curriculum leadership, leveraging resources, professional development, communication, and diocesan presence.

**Received support.** Despite most participants acknowledging central office administrators were as spread thin as the principals were in their schools, 7 out of the 13 participants specifically reported central office administrators immediately return their phone calls. Deborah

mentioned, “You pick up the phone, you call them, and somebody's there to help you answer a question. So, it's really an open-door kind of policy for them, which is really helpful to me.” Referring to phone contact with the superintendent, Felicity said, “As far as any legal advice, definitely my first person before I even make a move.” The seven principals who reported helpful support from the diocese found their central office administrators to be genuinely interested and invested in supporting the principals.

Participants identified two areas which participants found central office administrators to be particularly strong in their level of support: human resources and student issues, especially if the concerns had legal implications. Helena shared, “I've had to contact them on several...not several...two very major discipline issues. I look to them for guidance. Like, ‘This is what I think I should do. Can you look this over?’ And they'll get back to me, and they support me.” Two principals specifically mentioned having to terminate faculty. Cecilia reported her diocese’s human resources department was especially helpful: “That was the most helpful for me, is really HR, to make sure I didn't get myself in any trouble.”

**Desired support.** While seven principals explicitly mentioned diocesan gaps in support, none of the principals reported their central office administrators were *unsupportive*. In fact, the participants specifically stated central office administrators were spread too thin. The total number of schools in each diocese represented in this study ranged from 30 to approximately 200. While each participant mentioned areas where they believed they needed more diocesan support, there were six areas that seemed to be consistent across all six dioceses: teacher supervision, curriculum decisions, leveraging resources, professional development, communication and diocesan presence.

***Teacher supervision.*** Ten out of the 13 participants desired more professional development in the area of teacher supervision. Nine participants either discussed teacher observations in the personal interview or listed it in their professional development plan. Several principals indicated that diocesan expectations of teacher performance were unclear; specifically, principals wanted to know how to identify teaching practices they are observing and match them to the language of the supervision rubrics. In other words, “What does this look like in real life?” Anne’s explanation of her desired professional development topics were earnest. For example, she listed, “The Value of a Walk Through: Present a clear expectation of how regularly walkthroughs should be conducted and in what ways you can follow up with a teacher in order to make an impact on his/her practice.” Anne also suggested, “Observations: What to Expect. Guidance on setting up appointments and mentoring teachers who have been there longer than you would be helpful!” Furthermore, Anne suggested professional development on the pre-conference and post-conference: “Suggestions on how to make this time meaningful rather than perfunctory.” A few principals either specifically stated or alluded to wanting more information about how to give meaningful feedback.

Human resources decisions were discussed by five out of the 13 participants. Three principals were interested in learning more about hiring and firing procedures. Two principals listed *teacher retention* in their professional development plans and a few mentioned the low teacher salary as an obstacle to teacher retention in their personal interview. As previously discussed, a few principals were surprised by the behavior of some of their faculty. It takes a different kind of energy and finesse to manage adults. Monica made an interesting point when she said, “I think a big topic that I don’t think is handled well is supervising adults and teaching adults. Because all of us have skillsets of supervising and teaching children.” A principal’s

focus is primarily the children; however, proficiency in adult education is essential when supervising and mentoring teachers.

*Curriculum leadership.* Curriculum leadership was a hot button issue in both focus groups and individual interviews. Nine out of 13 participants spoke specifically about the way curricular decisions are made at the diocesan level. While principals enjoyed their freedom to choose programs, they pointed out that time was wasted reviewing programs when that could be done more in depth on a diocesan level as long as it was a collaborative process. During the focus group, Katharine spoke passionately about the topic: “I feel strongly at least in our diocese that we could strengthen what we do if there was more, really, coordination of programming between our schools.”

Others agreed with Katharine that principals could save money and time by collaborating with colleagues who already invested in programs other principals are reviewing for purchase. Deborah explained,

We were all using our resources to find what's best for our school instead of collaborating and finding what's best across the board and maybe we don't all have to do the same exact legwork as far as researching. We went with [program name], we bought [publisher], this is our third year now and we're very happy with it, but it literally took a lot of prayer, a lot of research, and then you just cross your fingers and hope you made the right choice at the end.

Helena suggested the diocese take a standardize approach to curriculum so that all schools are on the same page, “They make suggestions, but I just wish it was standardized.” On the flip side, another participant warned the group against standardization of textbooks. Monica shared her frustration with a standardized program.

We actually do have it set down from on high, what we're supposed to do, and what's hard is that, we have such a large diocese and it's so varied that some schools, they have very prescriptive text which works because they have struggling teachers and low achieving students, and so a certain textbook would work for that group. And then it's so varied that there's a lot of frustration with not having choice.

Even with pacing guides and standards, participants expressed there was not consistency from school to school with curriculum implementation. Jane shared, “And so, every school has their own specialty or own flare. So, no cohesiveness in our district and our diocese either. So, each school kind of fends for themselves on everything.” Katharine agreed and said, “There is a curriculum map, but you go to school to school, it's not being implemented. That would be the weak link, I guess.” The challenges with curriculum are related to the previously shared findings in the theme *resources*. Financial resources dictate curriculum decisions from school to school and while participants did not discuss it overtly, the Millennial and younger Generation X principals alluded to frustration with a lack of innovation in curriculum at the diocesan level.

***Leveraging resources.*** The desired need of knowing how to best leverage resources derived from three areas: purchasing power, government funding, and budget planning. Participants overall believed schools could pull together as a system and better pool their resources. If schools had a more unified approach to curriculum development, principals could also pool resources for professional development to assist with program implementation. During the focus group interview, Brigit agreed with the group and added,

Your diocese is writing curriculum guidelines and manuals for the schools, but yet the schools can choose whatever series or textbooks they want. So, when you get together for professional development, but the other schools, as someone said the ideas are great

to share but you might be on a totally different plane because of the series or the book that you're using.

Elizabeth shared a similar sentiment: “I think it would be better if we pooled our resources...But, everybody seems to never be in the same place when we're buying a science program.”

Six out of the 13 principals reported they needed more guidance for using government funds effectively. The topic also appeared in five professional development plans. Cecilia expressed her frustration with the lack of information about Title funds: “No idea about all of that. What is title money? What can it be used for? Nobody explained anything like that to me.” Pooling resources, as several principals suggested, and making large-scale curriculum decisions could lead to more effective spending of Title funds.

The topic of planning a budget was discussed in the personal interviews by five participants. Six participants listed budget planning on their professional development plans. Jane mentioned the lack of preparation for budgetary planning in the leadership pipeline programs. She remembered during her graduate coursework she was not able to view her school’s budget because it was confidential. She said, “Because no matter who I asked about budgets, I would get shut down.” Jane felt that she would have been more prepared to handle the finances if she had been able to practice with a real school budget during her coursework.

Elizabeth discussed the challenge of setting a budget without a background in finances as well as the challenge of working with the parish business manager who does not have a background in education.

So most principals, their wheelhouse is education. So then you're asked to do all these financial things. Until we got our [school] board which we just put in place a couple months ago, the finance person at the rectory would say “Don't you worry your pretty

little head about that. I'm in charge of that. You want something, you let me know", but then you're fighting with them.

Anne also mentioned the difficulty of suddenly being responsible for a million dollar budget without having a background in finance: "Putting together a million dollar budget with not a lot, doing it by myself with a Philosophy background. That was a big learning curve." Cecelia overcomes the challenges of managing a budget by surrounding herself with others who have that strength.

I surround myself with smart financial people. If it weren't for her [secretary with business background], I don't know where I would be, because I just hired somebody new and I wanted to pay her this much and she's like, "Are you off your rocker?"

Instructing a principal on how to put together a budget for a Catholic school, often intertwined with parish finances, is a significant challenge which requires more intense professional development than seems to be offered by principal inductions programs.

***Professional development.*** Eight out of 13 participants addressed professional development for faculty and administrators indicating it is a significant area of need. In Anne's professional development plan, she wrote, "Planning Professional Development: How to assess the needs of your faculty and acceptable resources for planning PD." Knowing where to look for resources to get started in order to plan professional development was a concern. Felicity shared a similar frustration: "I feel like if they gave us more pinpointed resources instead of like, oh, there's a lot of resources out there. I wish we knew like, okay, start here." Felicity's professional development plan supported her response. She suggested dioceses give direction as to what has worked in schools with a similar student population: "Best Practices: PD on what has worked in other schools with similar demographics."

**Communication.** Two key areas were identified in the area of communication: relationships with stakeholders and networking with colleagues. Six out of 13 principals specifically mentioned communication with parents and engaging the community either in their personal interview or their professional development plan. Isabel discussed generational differences between the Millennial parents and teachers from an older generation: “I think you also need to know that people change, and generations change, and the generation that you grew up in, isn't necessarily the generation you're dealing with now.” A few principals mentioned donor relationships, parish relationships, and facilitating conflict resolution with staff.

Laurence recommended an interesting professional development topic for communication. He wrote, “Communication: How to communicate effectively with parents within your school community as well as with your supervisors and peers.” Four principals (three out of the four being Millennials) specifically mentioned networking with peers. In her personal interview, Felicity discussed having other principals conduct a walk-through of her school much like principals do walk-throughs of a classroom: “Having somebody else come in, like, oh, why don't you guys do this? Or why haven't you guys tried this? I think that would be something that would be beneficial.” Philomena emphasized the importance of connecting with colleagues: “Then I would like to see PD on relationships...Relationships with your other Principals in your region. Do you know what your neighboring schools are up against?”

**Diocesan presence.** Participants articulated frustration with diocesan officials' lack of presence. The concept of diocesan presence manifested in three areas: understaffed central offices, central office administrators' lack of physical presence within the schools, and the inaccessibility of the bishop. Cecilia lamented, “My biggest complaint is there's not enough of them. It's like you have three [diocesan administrators] running 100 schools.” Elizabeth shared

a similar sentiment when she said, “And I think the diocese is swamped in terms of what they can provide for all of us.” Katharine pointed out the understaffed diocesan office affects everyone.

We're pseudo superintendents because if I were working in a district, a lot of the things that I do, daily decisions that I make for this building, there'd be a superintendent over... guiding some of those decisions so I could do more *principaling*.

With so many schools in their charge, diocesan administrators have little time to be physically present in the schools. Anne gave a rhetorical summary of a conversation she had with an assistant superintendent regarding an upcoming school visit: “They called the week before and said, ‘We're staying the whole day. We drink tea, not coffee and we're gonna ask you questions all afternoon.’” Anne was not the only principal who felt the diocese had a small snapshot of the good that was happening in her school. Cecilia shared a similar story, “My first year I was visited one time and it was on Halloween. Could you pick a worse day to evaluate a principal?” In fairness to the central office staff, both Cecilia and Anne recognized the central office administrators have an insurmountable amount of responsibility. Anne said, “I've been thinking a lot about the superintendent's role lately, just because I feel like, I feel she's in an impossible position, and she juggles so much.”

One focus group discussed the bishop's lack of accessibility as it relates to the schools. Laurence commented, “One thing that, as much as our bishop is all for Catholic education, I feel like his presence around, we have to beg and plead to get him up to our school.” Felicity shared that her bishop was present for the opening liturgy for the beginning of the school year principals' meeting: “But then I feel that for the rest of the year he's just *the voice*.” Most principals reported they had very supportive pastors. Some participants expressed in the focus

group sessions they wished the pastor would promote the school from the pulpit more frequently and with more enthusiasm.

Isabel believed in general the diocese should do more to promote the schools, especially in light of the *Grand Jury Report*. She explained, “But I think there needs to be more of a push from a diocesan level on the value of Catholic education not being hindered by what’s going on in the background.” While gaps in diocesan support certainly exist, Katharine’s response concerning central office support was sincere: “So my summary would be that our office of education is supportive and generally compassionate and loving.”

### **Textural Description**

The noematic (textural) description is used to describe what the participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Participants experienced a call to a vocation in Catholic school leadership. For some it was overt, for others it was a gentle nudge in the right direction. While principals reported experiencing the joy of working with children and their families as well as mentoring faculty, they faced significant challenges. Participants shared the challenges of limited resources and having to find creative ways to overcome those limitations and remain competitive. Balancing the many demands of the position with family life was also difficult. Relationships with personnel and parents, while they can be positive and inspiring, were sometimes taxing in surprising ways. On the diocesan level, principals have experienced support, especially in the areas of human resources and students; however, they identified gaps in the support they received and believed many of those gaps can be closed with the right leadership and collaboration.

### **Structural Description**

In the noetic (structural) description, the data is examined from different vantage points such as time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others (Moustakas, 1994). Two months before data collection began, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General (2018) released Report I of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury also known as the Pennsylvania Dioceses Victims Report, which listed over 300 predators (not all clergy) who had abused over 1,000 children during an 80-year period. The abuse crisis in the American Catholic Church was first uncovered by the Boston Globe when they broke the story of child sexual abuse within the Archdiocese of Boston (Rezendes, 2002). In response to the crisis, the USCCB (2002) implemented the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. Shame and embarrassment befell the Church in 2002. Public interest and intense scrutiny regarding the issue of clergy sex abuse resurfaced again with the release of the *Grand Jury Report* sixteen years later.

While only three percent of incidents in Pennsylvania had taken place since 2002 after the charter was implemented, the rate of abuse should have been zero. Participants in this study experienced the early part of their career as a principal in a Catholic elementary school with the backdrop of the Grand Jury Report in Pennsylvania (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General, 2018) and facing the likelihood that more states will follow. Participants revealed they were not sure how or if the ongoing investigations will impact their school enrollment; however, participants do believe it has impacted their parishes financially as less people are attending Mass weekly.

Participants are also experiencing the Catholic elementary principalship in a time where the Catholic Church is facing a decline in membership as secularism has taken hold of American culture. Millennials are famous for asking questions that start with “why” and therefore

“because the Church said so” is no longer a convincing answer. Catechesis has fallen short in passing on the rich academic and philosophic cultural traditions of Catholicism. Catholic elementary principals are faced with educating students in a time where most families are not practicing the faith, even if they are registered in a parish. Since recent research demonstrates religious formation is not a top consideration for parents considering a Catholic education (Simon & Robbins, 2018), Catholic elementary principals also face the challenge of balancing their attention between implementing competitive, innovative instructional methods while maintaining the school’s Catholic identity. Consequently, Catholic elementary principals perhaps are leading the Church during the most extraordinary evangelistic opportunity in American Catholic history.

### **Essence**

The overall essence of the Catholic elementary school principalship during this moment in history can best be described in the words of Bishop Kenneth Untener (1979). Catholic elementary principals are “prophets of a future not our own.” The full text of Bishop Untener’s reflection can be found in Appendix O. In the following segment, I break down the reflection and expand on its relationship to the essence of the Catholic elementary principalship.

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.*

Principals aspire to implement a vision, which they believed would positively impact the students and school culture. At the same time, Catholic elementary principals faced significant challenges that hampered the implementation of their vision. Principals were aware of the

limitations, but still wanted to ensure the sustainability of their school so that future leaders would have the opportunity to expand on their vision or allow it to evolve. But, in the end, “the Kingdom always lies beyond us.”

*No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

Despite the challenges with curriculum implementation, Bishop Untener’s words remind us that no program, curriculum standards, or professional development opportunity will ever perfectly or completely accomplish the mission of Catholic education. The issue of limited diocesan presence also underscores the idea that “No pastoral visit brings wholeness.” The mission is bigger than any goals or objectives principals could possibly envision. The mission is bigger than any principal, pastor, bishop, or period of time. After all, our God is immutable, omniscient, and omnipresent.

*This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.*

Here Bishop Untener brings us back to vision and mission. “Without a vision the people lose restraint” (Proverbs 29:18, New American Bible). Bishop Untener also puts into perspective the demands of the position by confirming for principals that they cannot do everything and were not *meant* do to everything. Catholic elementary principals were committed to their students and to laying a foundation of Catholic faith formation. They were committed to not only planting the

seeds of the gospel message, but also planting the seeds of innovation, hoping to watch them grow. Participants recognized Catholic education may look very different in the future, but they also believed it has an important and ongoing role in American society.

*It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.*

### **Summary**

Chapter Four included participant profiles that provided a description of each participant in the study. Eight themes emerged from the data. Participants were motivated to persist in their position because they felt called to Catholic leadership, they embodied leadership qualities, which enabled them to find success, and they were motivated by their vision for the future. Catholic elementary principals faced challenges with resources, finding balance and managing relationships with personnel and parents. Participants described their quality of support as being strong in the area of legal issues, but they experienced gaps in the areas of teacher supervision, curriculum leadership, leveraging resources, professional development, communication, and diocesan presence. Finally, textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon were developed to arrive at the essence of the experience.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. To prevent attrition, it is necessary to understand job motivation and challenges in order to identify and implement appropriate support for Catholic elementary school principals in the early part of their careers. This study examined 13 participants who represented four states and six dioceses in the Mideastern region. First, the findings of this study are summarized through a synthesis of themes and subthemes. The findings are further discussed in light of previous research and the existence, relatedness, and growth theory (Alderfer, 1969). The discussion is organized by topics related to the research question. Empirical, theoretical, and practical implications are provided along with recommendations for each constituency. Delimitations and limitations which impacted the results are explained and suggestions are made for future research related to the Catholic educational leadership.

### **Summary of Findings**

The first guiding question asked, “What experiences motivate early career Catholic elementary school principals to persist in the position?” Participants were motivated by a calling to a vocation in Catholic school leadership. The principals described being called in different ways with very different journeys, but ultimately, they believed they were called to lead during a very challenging period of history in the American Catholic Church. Participants’ visions for their schools was the most prominent reason principals persisted in the position. Principals thrived on seeing progress toward their goals and the impact on student learning.

The second guiding question asked, “What are the job-related challenges experienced by early career Catholic elementary school principals?” Principals were particularly challenged by the lack of resources available to them. Limited funding required principals to be extremely creative and resourceful. Participants also described the difficulty of balance in a very demanding position. The overwhelming sense of responsibility coupled with endless tasks inhibited their ability to be as present as they would like to be during the school day. Achieving a healthy work-life balance was also a challenge and principals described finding ways to effectively manage their time and avoid burnout.

The third guiding question asked, “How do early career Catholic elementary principals describe the quality of support they receive to persist in the position?” Participants described support from central office administrators who were committed to helping principals but were overwhelmed by their own job responsibilities. Diocesan administrators were reported to be especially strong when it came to assistance with human resources and student issues, particularly if the concerns had legal implications. Principals identified six key areas of need: teacher supervision, curriculum decisions, leveraging resources, professional development, communication, and diocesan presence. Three areas, curriculum decisions, leveraging resources, and professional development, were greatly intertwined. The ability to leverage resources directly affected the curriculum decisions and professional development practices of the participants. The issue of diocesan presence indicated participants wanted diocesan administrators to have a true and total picture of all the good that was happening in their schools.

The experiences of the Catholic elementary principal are against the backdrop of the sex abuse crisis and the remnant population of committed faithful in the American Catholic Church. The same vision that drives principals to succeed also presents opportunities for evangelization.

Ultimately, participants hoped to ensure the sustainability of their respective schools and Catholic education in general. Participants recognized they stood on the shoulders of giants like Saint John Neumann, Saint Katharine Drexel, and Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, and understood they are only a small part of the vibrant legacy of Catholic education in the United States.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study confirm and extend previous research in the areas of Catholic educational leadership. Specifically, this study contributes to the literature in the areas of motivation, challenges, and support required to persist in the Catholic elementary principalship. Furthermore, Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory is expanded by applying the theory to school leadership.

#### **Motivation to Lead**

Catholic elementary principals, in their early career, were motivated initially by their calling to a vocation in Catholic leadership. The theme *calling* was consistent with the previous finding that 60% of Catholic teachers were motivated to minister to their students (Convey, 2014) and also consistent with Fraser and Brock's (2006) findings which identified commitment to Catholic education and commitment to the Church as factors of principal retention. A Catholic elementary principal's leadership ethos is also consistent with the literature. Successful principals focus on relationships and remain student-focused (Scribner et al., 2011). High performing schools have leaders who demonstrate collaboration through distributed or transformational leadership practices (Karadağ et. al., 2015; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Catholic elementary principals believed in the importance of building relationships with faculty, which is consistent with the literature on transformational leadership in schools (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Nguni et al., 2006).

Participants wanted to make a difference in their school communities by implementing a vision for a sustainable future. Leithwood et al. (2004) discussed setting direction as an important dimension of successful school leadership. Setting direction includes the ability to implement vision, mission, and goals. A shared vision involves setting goals and inspiring others to work toward those goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Kouzes and Posner (2012) found that successful leaders challenge the process by searching for opportunities and innovative ways to improve. Vision, for the Catholic elementary principals, included creating positive change, which had an impact on student achievement and school culture. On some occasions, participants explained that making innovative changes required challenging deeply rooted traditions.

Catholic elementary principals, especially the younger Generation X ( $N = 2$ ) and Millennials ( $N = 4$ ), were very motivated by opportunities for curriculum innovation. According to previous research, the rewards of being a principal are largely intrinsic (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Autonomy and personal accomplishment increase job satisfaction (Chang et al., 2015; Karakose et al., 2016). Catholic elementary principals expressed accomplishing steps toward their vision was rewarding. This is consistent with the literature that principals are intrinsically motivated by accomplishing goals (Fraser & Brock, 2006).

Two additional dimensions, resourcefulness and commitment to the mission as leadership practices, extended the research on Catholic education leadership. In the literature on both the Catholic elementary principalship and the principalship in general, frustrations related to funding was not presented as a significant factor in job-satisfaction or attrition. Funding was a significant issue discussed by participants in this study. The lack of funding required principals to be very creative with their resources. Commitment to the mission is not a surprising construct in

Catholic leadership; however, this study revealed the generational differences in participants' commitment. It was interesting that the Boomer Generation and the older Generation X principals were more committed to the mission of Catholic education within their respective schools, while the younger Generation X and Millennials seemed to focus more on the big picture of Catholic education.

### **Challenges**

Creating a budget and funding limitations were two of the biggest challenges Catholic elementary principals faced. While the issues of inadequate facilities (Darmody, & Smyth, 2016) and financial concerns (Beam et al., 2016; García-Garduño et al., 2011) were mentioned in previous literature as challenges for principals, both issues seemed magnified in this study. Most of the principals' challenges and needs centered on funding limitations. Participants were especially frustrated that their central office administrators did not give more guidance concerning how to effectively use Title funds. This could be for two reasons. The central office does not have complete control over how a school spends their money and therefore does not require specific programs. Secondly, if the central office did require specific programs, they would have to find a way to fund those programs for schools with limited resources.

In the NSBECS, Ozar and Weitzel-O'Neill (2012) defined a sustainable school as having a financial plan that considers the educational costs per child and includes expenses for instruction, tuition assistance administration, professional development, facilities, equipment, technology, and program enhancements. Based on the responses from Catholic elementary principals, none of the dioceses studied have figured out a formula that works in every situation for charging an appropriately priced tuition while still maintaining enrollment. Ozar and Weitzel-O'Neill (2012) also recommended competitive salaries and benefits for employees;

however, according to the participants, teacher salaries were still well below public school salaries in their area.

Balance in the workplace and between work and home life was discussed at length in previous studies on school leadership. Previous literature revealed that principals often find themselves engaged in task-oriented work instead of focusing on instructional leadership (Grissom et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015). Principals also reported spending too much time on paperwork (Barnett et al., 2012; Hancock & Müller, 2014; Klocko & Wells, 2015). The results of this study are consistent with previous research. It was the high volume of managerial tasks that surprised Catholic elementary principals. A long work week was also consistent with previous literature where most principals (84%) work more than 50 hours per week (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Where the results of this study diverged are possibly the frequency and intensity of the work-related stress (Gentilucci et al., 2013). While participants in this study discussed the long hours, task volume, high demands, and challenges of balancing work and family life, high stress levels were not discussed.

*Developing people* is another leadership dimension developed by Leithwood et al. (2004). Successful principals create conditions that promote quality teaching and academic performance (Day et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). They enable others to act through collaboration and trusting relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). In order to accomplish their vision, participants in this study tried to take a very collaborative approach with their faculty. Despite their collaboration and desire to be innovative instructional leaders, participants still reported challenges with faculty.

Solving difficult personnel issues (Barnett & Shoho, 2010) and challenges motivating teachers were reported in previous studies (Barnett et al., 2012; Darmody & Smyth, 2016;

Karakose et al., 2014). Many participants in this study described the challenges of moving faculty in a single direction as well as difficulties with faculty who resist change. Three principals discussed terminating faculty, which required support from the central office. Some participants shared they were surprised by some of the behaviors of their staff, but believed they were equipped to handle them. Transformational leadership is positively correlated with teacher self-efficacy (Mehdinezhad & Mansouri, 2016). Based on the previous description of the participants' leadership ethos where they were personable, collaborative, resourceful, and invested, Catholic elementary principals are transformational leaders. Participants described success with moving faculty forward to achieve their vision and goals.

Frabutt et al. (2010) also reported demanding parents as a challenge faced by Catholic school administrators, which is consistent with the findings of this study. The most recent literature on the Catholic school principalship cited Catholic identity, enrollment management, and long-range planning among their top areas of concern (Nuzzi et al., 2013). Enrollment and finances were reported by participants; however, the issue of maintaining Catholic identity was seen as a strength for most of the principals in this study and not a concern. Contrary to Schuttloffel's (2003) finding where Catholic superintendents identified spiritual leadership or theological knowledge as the most critical area of weakness in novice principals, the principals in this study appeared to have strong spiritual leadership.

## **Support**

The research on principal preparation programs is sparse. With the exception of one participant, the other 12 principals participated in some form of leadership training whether it was a master's program, certificate program, or diocesan leadership pipeline program. Up until the Levine report was published in 2005, principal preparation programs were found to have

large deficits. The participants in this study believed their leadership programs as well as their teaching experience prepared them well for instructional leadership and student issues.

Principals believed they were unprepared to handle the day-to-day time management and aspects specific to Catholic schools such as specific forms like the budget. The findings in this study are consistent with Schuttloffel's (2003) findings where 32% of Catholic superintendents reported novice principals were most critically lacking in administrative skills compared to only 8% of superintendents who reported novice principals were critically lacking in instructional leadership. Participants in this study also described a more situational learning process would have helped them more than overall leadership philosophy. The need for situational learning practice is consistent with the research, which says situational awareness is difficult to teach (Cray & Weiler, 2011).

According to participants, only two out of the six dioceses had formal mentor programs that extended beyond "call me if you need me." Previous literature found that effective mentoring programs provide opportunities for socialization and networking to overcome the sense of isolation (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). Participants in this study mentioned the importance peer networks and experienced mentors in both the interviews and professional development plans. One diocese, according to the participants, recently instituted leadership coaching, but the program was too new for the participants to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Interestingly, responses about the effectiveness of principal induction programs was inconsistent among participants from the same dioceses.

Support from higher-level administrators, such as the superintendent, also contribute to commitment and job satisfaction in the principalship (Chang et al., 2015; De Jong et al., 2017). The literature on school leadership did not reference specific areas of support from central office

other than instructional leadership. In this study, principals were satisfied with the support they received from central office administrators related to human resources and student issues.

Participants were also confident in the legal advice they received from central office. Catholic dioceses are often the target of litigation for a large variety of reasons, so it is likely that diocesan officials are hyper-focused on legal protection. Two studies identified the lack of support from the central office in the Catholic school system as a frustration (Bigelow, 2017; Nuzzi et al., 2013). Diverging from previous research on Catholic education leadership, this study revealed principals felt supported but were more frustrated by the lack of diocesan presence and an understaffed central office.

Unique to this study are the concerns surrounding curriculum innovation and leveraging resources. Participants in this study wanted more strategic guidance from their central office administrators on utilizing government funding which is consistent with the recommendations from Defiore et al. (2009) which stated federal and state funding should be secured by diocesan leadership rather than local leadership. The competitive innovation principals need in order for their schools to thrive found in this study also extends the literature on Catholic leadership. Participants were frustrated with the broad and lofty curricular support from the central office. Principals revealed frustration with the central office administrators for not providing more guidance related to funding or pooling resources when making curricular decisions. Furthermore, they expressed frustration with limited funding to implement competitive programming options for their schools, which was critical to their enrollment strategy.

Previous literature reported reasons for burnout and attrition among principals. The catalyst for this study was the recent statistic that 11% of private school principals left the profession during the 2012-2013 school year, and of the 11% of principals who relinquished

their positions, those with three to five years of experience had the highest attrition rate (15.3%) (Goldring & Taie, 2014). None of the 13 participants mentioned they felt burned out or were contemplating leaving their position.

### **Theoretical Application**

The existence, relatedness, and growth theory (ERG; Alderfer, 1969) provided a framework to understand the job motivations of early career Catholic elementary school principals. Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory regrouped Maslow's (1943) needs categories and placed them on a continuum from most concrete (existence) to least concrete (growth) and applied the continuum to job satisfaction. Compensation, benefits, and physical working conditions are considered existence needs. Previous research found, for top-level managers, pay and fringe benefits did not motivate performance (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002) and compensation only leads to job turnover if growth needs are not satisfied (Chen et al., 2012). Participants in this study did not mention salary or benefits as a factor for their own job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Salary was only mentioned in the context of teacher compensation.

Relatedness needs include acceptance and esteem from others. Principals reported that a lack of respect from colleagues made their position more challenging (Beam et al., 2016; Hancock, & Müller, 2014; Karakose et al., 2014). Principals did report challenges from faculty who did not embrace their vision. Principals in this study either did not renew contracts of those faculty members or they found ways to help them move toward school goals. Previous research also indicated an absence of support from superiors contributed to stress or other difficulties (Beam et al., 2016; De Jong et al., 2017; García-Garduño et al., 2011; Gentilucci et al., 2013). Participants in this study did not report central office administrators were unsupportive but rather physically absent or too overwhelmed to be more involved. The absence of the central office

staff was inconsistent with previous research because it did not cause principals' enough frustration to slide them backward along Alderfer's (1969) continuum. If anything, it motivated them to persevere.

Satisfying growth needs requires a person to find opportunities to reach his or her full potential (Alderfer, 1969). Growth needs include a challenging work environment and opportunities for "creativity, self-fulfillment, advancement and autonomy" (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002, p. 712). The younger Generation X and Millennial participants in this study craved opportunities to grow professionally and be on the cutting edge of curricular innovation. There was a heightened frustration with the lack of resources or uncoordinated planning for professional development. Although participants reported feeling prepared to be instructional leaders, they were still looking for more guidance from above and expected central office administrators to be ahead of the principals regarding curricular research. Previous research found a superintendent's autonomy support for a principal was a significant factor in organizational commitment and job-satisfaction (Chang et al., 2015). The research findings in this study also diverged from previous research because principals believed they had too much autonomy in some areas. Additionally, principals are employed by the pastor in most cases, so central office administrators do not have as much supervisory responsibility for principals.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The experiences of Catholic elementary principals in the early part of their career as examined in this study revealed empirical, theoretical, and practical implications. Suggestions are addressed to various stakeholders with an interest in the success of Catholic education.

#### **Empirical Implications**

Previous literature defined effective leadership practices of successful principals. This study corroborated previous research on transformational and instructional leadership as successful leadership practices. Furthermore, it confirmed the research that vision, mission, and goals are essential to effective school leadership. This study also demonstrated that principals perceive they impact student learning through teacher mentorship and by creating a positive school culture.

In general, principal job satisfaction was found in previous research to be impacted by workload, scope of responsibilities, and challenges. In the area of workload, this study diverged from previous research largely because of the unique nuances of the Catholic school system. While the participants commented on the workload and task volume, they did not consider the demands to be a source of job dissatisfaction. Principals were more frustrated that they did not have the resources they needed to be academically competitive and on the cutting edge of curricular research. As a result, challenges related to resources hampered participants' recruitment and enrollment efforts.

This study has implications for research specific to the Catholic school principalship. A national study conducted by Nuzzi and colleagues (2013) used mix-methods to survey principals nationwide and across all demographics. A second multi-case study focused on first-year principals in one diocese. This study expanded the literature by including participants throughout six dioceses and beyond the first year of experience and revealed a more universal description of the job-related experiences of the Catholic elementary school principal. By focusing specifically on Catholic elementary principals in the early part of their career, this study filled a gap in the literature.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory is further expanded by applying it to job motivation for Catholic elementary principals in their early career as well as school leadership in general. The results of this study indicated that principals are not motivated by their existence needs. Rather, they are motivated by their calling from God, relationships with colleagues, and support from superiors. Principals in their early career, particularly Millennials, are driven by fulfilling growth needs. Vision, professional development, and successful school advancement are the driving motivators for Catholic elementary principals in their early career. This study adds to the ERG theory that school leaders should be provided networking opportunities, support from superiors, as well as opportunities to grow and implement their vision.

Frustration for early career Catholic elementary principals is caused by the lack of resources to implement their vision. Consistent with the frustration regression of the ERG theory, it is possible when principals feel frustrated, their desire for collegial support will increase. If collegial support is not present, principals will turn to compensation and make an economic choice to persist in the position. If principals are not fulfilled spiritually and professionally, the internal cost-benefit analysis may lead to attrition.

### **Practical Implications**

This research contributed to the body of literature on the Catholic school principalship to inspire diocesan leaders, particularly bishops, to recognize the overwhelming role of Catholic elementary school leadership and support principals effectively. There are implications for diocesan leaders particularly when it comes to support for curricular initiatives. Pastors, boards, and philanthropic organizations are called to support principals with their time, talent, and treasure. Finally, higher education institutions can learn valuable insights about the needs of future leaders.

**Diocesan leadership.** As the leader of the diocese, a bishop's time is in high demand. Based on the responses from principals, top-level diocesan leadership above the office of education administrators could be more engaged in Catholic schools. The youth are the future of the Church. While not all Catholic youth are present in the Catholic schools, the Catholic schools provide clergy with a captive audience and a prime opportunity for evangelization. The increasing number of non-Catholic and *un-churched* Catholic children who attend Catholic schools provide an even wider net for evangelization. While some clergy worry about offending families who attend public schools, or at least this is the perception, Catholic elementary principals want their bishop and other clergy to proclaim the good news of Catholic schools loudly.

The central office is often understaffed and underfunded. It is difficult to be on top of curricular innovations and funding opportunities when central office administrators are swamped putting out fires all day long. A vicious cycle of unaddressed goals that affect the quality of Catholic education in the schools leads to a decline in enrollment. Diocesan leadership who make funding decisions need to find creative ways to invest in a highly qualified, fully staffed central office of education. Central office administrators will have more time to be on the cutting edge of educational research and innovation and also engage in more leadership coaching in the schools thus improving the overall academic quality.

Overall, Catholic education leadership pipeline programs are sorely lacking in the area of practical day-to-day support. Most principals have already attended leadership courses through master's or certificate programs. Principal induction or pipeline programs, which include examples of everyday scenarios that principals experience and problem-solving strategies, would be more effective. Additionally, central office staff should develop a portal of video tutorials

with how to complete certain forms or tasks. Just like the flipped classroom model, principals could reference tutorials at any time. Furthermore, mentoring programs should be replaced with leadership coaches. Dioceses can pull within their ranks of retired principals and utilize Title funds for such a part-time position. A sample three-year professional development plan devised from the findings of this research study is located in Appendix M. The topics in the plan can be combined or reordered in the way that makes the most sense for the diocesan calendar.

Directors of curriculum or administrators in similar diocesan level curriculum positions should be aware of the principals' desire to be on the cutting edge of curriculum innovation. While principals do not want to give up all their autonomy in curriculum development, they are looking for a collaborative approach to curriculum research, implementation, professional development, and funding. The Millennial generation of leadership is competitive, earnest, and fearless. Diocesan administrators can and should empower Millennial principals to take leadership on innovative curriculum research. Central office staff may default toward consulting more experienced principals for various reasons; however, the Millennials are the future of Catholic leadership, have a lot to offer, and should not be overlooked.

Diocesan leadership may also want to explore other models for school structure. While regionalizing schools impacts the clergy involvement, this issue can be overcome with the right guidance from the bishop. Principals in this study reported a fear of reaching out to colleagues in neighboring schools because they were also in competition with each other. Because the Catholic school system is no longer tuition-free and therefore market driven, it may be time to start further consolidating to avoid having schools in close enough proximity to compete with one another. As fewer Millennials identify as religious (The Pew Research Center, 2014), they may also be less attached to the parishes' church and school buildings, so the issue of a

community in turmoil following a school closing or merger will be diminished in the near future. It would also be important to invest in the infrastructure of the new regionalized school so that it has up-to-date technology and appealing facilities which are two areas that make a good first impression with parents who are school shopping.

**Pastors, boards, and philanthropic organizations.** Funding sources were a significant area of concern in this study. In many cases, the pastor or a board of limited jurisdiction hold the purse strings. The pastor has a difficult task balancing what should be spent on the ministry of education versus all of the other ministries in the parish. Realizing that the future of the Church is sitting in desks in the Catholic school, Catholic schools are a wise investment. It is important that bishops place pastors who are invested in Catholic schools in parishes, which have a responsibility to fund a school. Additionally, every parish ought to be responsible for funding Catholic schools even if it does not have a school on its property. Pastors and boards must also be aware of the factors that lead to principal attrition and support their principals by respecting their expertise in the field of education and giving them appropriate autonomy.

Board members not only share their expertise in support of Catholic schools, they are also responsible to help identify and cultivate funding sources. Similarly, philanthropic organizations that support Catholic schools can do so by providing funding for curricular initiatives and implementation. There are many philanthropic organizations that discriminate against religious organizations. Catholic schools educate self-disciplined, ethical, and well-educated future employees. The religious instruction in Catholic schools has little bearing on how children are learning mathematics or how they learn to read. All philanthropic organizations that support educational initiatives should consider supporting Catholic schools.

**Catholic elementary principals.** Catholic elementary principals face the challenge of finding funding for their vision. Recognizing that central offices are understaffed, which likely will not improve in most diocese in the near future, principals should take matters in their own hands by collaborating with peers and forming networks which reach beyond their own diocese. Principals can find colleagues who wish to implement the same programs and pool resources for professional development. They may also want to explore entering into facilities contracts such as copiers and janitorial services to improve purchasing power. Furthermore, principals should form peer networks to avoid feelings of isolation and prevent burnout.

**Catholic higher education.** Master's programs in educational leadership are usually a Catholic elementary principal's introduction to the principalship. Most master's programs are geared toward a secular audience and do not prepare Catholic elementary principals for the challenges of enrollment, marketing, and fundraising. Catholic higher education should consider elective courses for students aiming for Catholic leadership and deeply discounted tuition prices for students who serve in Catholic schools. Higher education in general should also consider a more scenario-based curriculum, which requires students to enhance problem-solving skills all while learning the legal and ethical implications of their decisions.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Several delimitations were implemented in order to narrow the focus of the study and appropriately address the gap in the literature. First, the study was delimited to only principals who were currently serving in Catholic schools. The public school principalship is vastly different. Public or charter schools are mostly taxpayer funded and do not depend on enrollment and tuition as their primary means of income. This study also excluded non-sectarian and other religiously affiliated private schools. Catholic schools in the United States are unique from other

religiously affiliated schools because they are typically subsidized by a single parish or a small group of parishes. Catholic schools are also unique because they operate as a whole system under the authority of the diocesan bishop. Beyond the diocese, there is a national and international influence based on philosophies and guidelines for Catholic schools from the USCCB and the Holy See. Furthermore, Catholic schools sponsored by a religious order or independent board and do not have an affiliation with the diocesan office of education were not considered for this study due to the large differences in school funding and governance.

The study was delimited to Catholic elementary principals and excluded Catholic principals in K-12 school configurations or high school principals. The experience of high school principals is also very different from the elementary principalship because tuition models typically cover the cost to educate and most high schools are not parish sponsored. Pastors have a limited role in most high schools and clergy usually serve as chaplains. Fewer and fewer clergy serve in administrative roles in Catholic high schools because there are simply not enough clergy to run schools and parishes. Student life and academic curriculum are managed with a larger administrative team, where in most of the elementary schools, the principal is the only administrator.

In order to focus on the experience of early career Catholic elementary principals, participants in the study were delimited to Catholic elementary principals with at least one year of service and no more than five completed years of service. Principals with less than a year were not included because they have not experienced the full program at the school where they serve. Without a full year, principals would not have time to evaluate the academic program and school culture and then attempt to develop or implement a vision. *Vision* was a key theme in this study. Finally, the geographic region was delimited to the Mideastern region and dioceses,

which were within a reasonable driving distance from my home. The geographic radius allowed me to interview each participant within their school or diocesan office of education.

Principals who served in the role of a full time assistant or vice principal in a Catholic elementary school prior to the principalship were originally excluded; however, one participant reported having experience as a part-time assistant principal while teaching, one participant had a vice principal position in another state outside of the Mideastern region, two participants held dean positions in a high school, and one participant had a supervisory role in a public education entity. Three participants reported prior experience in a business-related career. The inclusion of these participants did not appear to impact the phenomenon based on the consistency of their responses with other participants who did not have previous administrative roles or previous careers outside of education.

There were several limitations to this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the study was delimited to the Mideastern region of the United States. Catholic education looks somewhat different on the West Coast, deep South and even more different in the rural Midwest, Alaska, and Hawaii. While the Church is universal, principals in other regions of the country would likely face different challenges. Furthermore, not all dioceses in the Mideastern region were invited to participate because their distance was beyond a drivable radius. Five of the six dioceses in this study were smaller in term of the number of Catholic schools while only one diocese was an Archdiocese. Nearly 40% ( $N = 5$ ) of the participants were from the same diocese and 54% ( $N = 7$ ) were from the same state. The qualitative design provided a snapshot in history of the Catholic elementary principalship. A study conducted over a longer period of time may provide a different outcome. Data collected 10 years from now may look very different depending on the religiosity of the nation and any changes to Catholic school funding.

A strength of the study was that participants were varied in the number of years of completed service, which gave a wider range of perspectives. According to national demographic statistics of Catholic educators, the participants reflected the national average in terms of ethnicity, but not race (Schultz & McDonald, 2018) which limits the generalizability of this study. Only one male principal participated in this study, falling short of the national Catholic educator demographic statistics that have a 12% male population in Catholic elementary schools (Schultz & McDonald, 2018). Approximately two percent of Catholic elementary educators are clergy or religious; however, all participants in this study were lay persons (Schultz & McDonald, 2018). This study was delimited to principals in their second through fifth year and were actively employed at the time of the data collection period. The overall attrition rate of private school principals during the 2012-2013 school year was 11% and those with three to five years of experience had the highest attrition rate (15.3%) (Goldring & Taie, 2014). Principals who left the principalship during the three to five-year window were not recruited to participate. The results of this study revealed the frustrations of principals in their early career and how they overcame certain obstacles, but the results omit the perspective of principals who did not persist in the position.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering the findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on this study, further research would benefit Catholic schools in the United States. First, qualitative research on the Catholic principalship beyond the early career and in more diverse school grade level configurations and governance models would provide a more universal picture of the Catholic school principalship and perhaps lead to solutions for funding and governance. A longitudinal study of Catholic elementary principals has the potential to shed light on the breaking point for

Catholic administrators. A longitudinal study also has the potential to see how much progress principals make when implementing their vision or how much their vision has evolved.

Furthermore, a case study or multi-case study on leadership in Catholic schools may clarify the dynamics between the bishop, pastors, principals, boards, and central office administrators.

Another area of research pertinent to the topic of Catholic elementary principals would be a study on Catholic higher education leadership programs and diocesan pipeline programs. The pipeline programs discussed by most participants did not appear to make a huge impact on their ability to navigate the day-to-day realities of the principalship. A quantitative study would allow for comparison between dioceses to see which program components were most effective. A longitudinal study which follows principals over 10 years may also illuminate the success of higher education and pipeline programs.

One key area of interest presented in the findings of this study were the generational differences related to vision and mission. Boomers and older Generation X principals seemed more committed to their respective schools while younger Generation X and especially Millennials had a more competitive edge, thrived on innovative opportunities, and saw a vision for Catholic education which extended beyond their school. Whether the generational differences found in this study were related to age and experience or characteristics of the generation, research which focuses on generational differences specific to the Millennial principal's impact on the Catholic education system would be intriguing.

### **Summary**

This study shared the experiences of 13 outstanding Catholic educators in the early part of their career in Catholic leadership. Their responses and anecdotes were inspiring, poignant, and humorous. Looking toward the future, diocesan bishops need to embrace the spirit of the

Third Plenary Council in Baltimore which mandated Catholic schools as the preferred option for the education of Catholic children. This means that bishops must fully invest in Catholic schools by providing the necessary funding for central office administrators to support principals.

Adequate support has the potential to stop the vicious cycle of sparse resources, limited curricular innovations, decreasing enrollment, which then results in less tuition revenue.

Pastors and faithful Catholics would be wise to realize the potential for evangelization within the walls of the Catholic school. With the right leadership, Catholic schools should strengthen the faith of Catholic children, form the hearts of the un-churched, and answer the call of the Great Commission by providing a first experience of faith for many children who have not heard the gospel message elsewhere. Catholic leaders work toward this mission daily and should be supported in their efforts by the rest of the Church community, both financially and spiritually.

Despite the many challenges, these great leaders have a vision and must be empowered to lead Catholic schools into a bold new future. In less than 10 years, Saint John Neumann, the founder of the first Catholic school system in America, opened 17 Catholic elementary schools, built 89 churches, founded a new religious order, and opened several hospitals and orphanages. Catholic school principals stand on the shoulders of giants. Saint John Neumann and many others who have gone before us, are living proof that vision and mission are the driving force which grows the Kingdom of God. Just as Saint John Neumann's life was the length of a mere breath in God's time, Catholic leaders should be reminded that despite our efforts to lead Catholic schools as the premier centers for the teaching mission of the Church, the Kingdom always lies beyond us. *We are prophets of a future not our own.*

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**APPENDIX A: IRB Application****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 3, 2018

Sarah Kerins

IRB Approval 3465.100318: The Job-Related Experiences of Early Career Catholic Elementary School Principals in the Mideastern Region of the United States

Dear Sarah Kerins,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**The Graduate School**

**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY.

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## APPENDIX B: Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/3/2018 to 10/2/2019  
Protocol # 3465.100318

### CONSENT FORM

The Job-Related Experiences of Early Career Catholic Elementary School Principals in the  
Mideastern Region of the United States

Sarah Kerins  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of early-career Catholic elementary school principals. The hope is that this research will help to shape future support programs for novice Catholic elementary principals. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a principal in a Catholic elementary school which is affiliated with a diocese in the Mideastern region of the United States and you have at least one completed year of service but no more than five completed years of service. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Sarah Kerins, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic Elementary School principals in the Mideastern Region of the United States.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Complete a brief introductory questionnaire: The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete.
2. Submit topics for a three-year professional development plan: A template will be provided. The template will take about 30 minutes to complete.
3. One-on-one interview: The interview will be audio/video recorded and last approximated one hour. The interview will take place in a private location of the participant's choice.
4. Focus group interview: The focus group interview will take place via video conferencing software and will be recorded. The video conference will last about one hour.
5. Transcription Review: The participant will review the transcript of his or her recorded interview. The transcription review will take about one hour.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. As a mandated reported, the researcher is required to report information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. The benefit to society is that the research will hopefully help to shape future support programs for novice Catholic elementary principals.

**Compensation:** Each participant will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after the participant has fulfilled all the required tasks. The monetary value of the gift card will not be prorated if the participant does not complete the required tasks for the study.

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/3/2018 to 10/2/2019  
Protocol # 3465.100318

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, the researcher might publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant including your connection to a specific diocese. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the researcher's chair will have access to the records. The researcher may share the data she collects from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if the data is shared, the researcher will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before sharing the data.

- Participants and their respective dioceses will be assigned a pseudonym. The interview will be conducted in a location of the participant's choice where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- All data and audio/video recordings will be kept in a locked container or password protected computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all professional development plan documents will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- The researcher cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the diocese where you are employed. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Sarah Kerins. You may ask her any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [skerins@liberty.edu](mailto:skerins@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, at [lsspaulding@liberty.edu](mailto:lsspaulding@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/3/2018 to 10/2/2019  
Protocol # 3465.100318

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

### **APPENDIX C: Sample Recruitment Email**

Dear

As a principal in a Catholic elementary school, I am passionate about the mission of Catholic education. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University and am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education (EdD) degree in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my research is to describe the job-related experiences of early career Catholic elementary school principals in the Mideastern region of the United States. My hope is that this research will help to shape future support programs for novice Catholic elementary principals. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

You were identified by the office of education in your diocese as meeting the criteria for my study. If you are 18 years of age or older, are a Catholic elementary principal who has completed at least one year of service but no more than five years, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief 15 minute introductory survey, a one hour in-person interview, a one hour audio conference focus group, and the development of topics you think would be appropriate for three years of professional development for principals in the early part of their career which will take approximately 30 minutes. You will also be given the opportunity to review the transcription of your interview which may take about one hour. Your name, school name, (Arch)diocese, and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, complete and return the consent document by email and then contact me to schedule an interview at [skerins@liberty.edu](mailto:skerins@liberty.edu). A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Sign the consent document and return it by October 15, 2018.

As a colleague in Catholic education, it is my sincere hope that you will share your story with me so that together we can shape the future of leadership development in our Catholic schools and dioceses. If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of your participation as a token of my appreciation.

Thank you for all that you do in His name! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Kerins

## APPENDIX D: Introductory Survey

### Demographic Information

1. **Race**

- ☐ American Indian/
- ☐ Native Alaskan
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Two or more races
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. **Ethnicity**

- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Non-Hispanic
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. **Which of the following best describes you?**

- ☐ Female Religious
- ☐ Male Religious
- ☐ Clergy
- ☐ Lay, Male
- ☐ Lay, Female

4. How many years did you serve as a classroom teacher in a Catholic elementary school?
5. Do you have any experience as a classroom teacher outside of the Catholic school system? If so, what positions did you hold and for how many years?
6. How many years have you served as a principal in a Catholic elementary school (including the 2018-2019 school year)?
7. Did you have any prior administrative experience? If yes, what positions did you hold and in what school system? (Catholic, public, charter, non-sectarian private)
8. For how many different (Arch)dioceses have you worked?

### **APPENDIX E: Semi-structured Interview Protocol**

1. Why did you choose a profession in Catholic education?
2. What was the career path which led you to be a principal in a Catholic School?
3. Describe your experience with the interview and selection process for principals in your diocese.
4. What formal education did you receive to obtain educational leadership credentials?
5. Describe the formal principal induction program through your diocese.
6. Describe your experience receiving formal or informal mentorship.
7. What aspects of the principalship do you believe you were most prepared to handle?
8. How has the diocese supported you in the principalship?
9. What are your leadership strengths?
10. What are the challenges of being a Catholic elementary school principal?
  - a. Follow-up probe: How do you overcome those challenges?
  - b. Follow-up probe: Which challenges do you believe are unavoidable?
11. What motivates you to continue in your role as principal?
12. What do you believe will be your legacy at this school?
  - a. Follow-up probe: What goals have you already accomplished?
  - b. Follow-up probe: What goals are in process?
  - c. How long do you see yourself in this position?
13. I asked you to write a professional development plan for the first three years of the principalship. Can explain why you chose each topic?
14. How would you compare the reality of the job to your expectations of the job before accepting the position?

15. Please share any information we did not discuss which you believe is important to understanding your experience as Catholic elementary school principal?

**APPENDIX F: Focus Group Interview Protocol**

1. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of mission and Catholic identity?
2. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of curriculum?
3. How can a pastor best support the principal?
4. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in working with boards and pastors?
5. If you were superintendent, how would you support principals in the area of operational vitality?
6. What successes or experiences are you most proud of on the diocesan level?



## APPENDIX H: Sample Semi-structured Interview Transcript

- Researcher: What made you choose Catholic ed?
- Participant: I was in the public sector, a supervisor programs for [county names]. I was over two counties, and one of my duties was non-public schools. I supervised the counselor, the speech therapist, reading specialists, those personnel that supported the non-public schools.
- Participant: My middle child had started Catholic school. At that point it was about two years prior, when she went to kindergarten. My older daughters all through public school, [school name]. But for some reason with [child name], I feel like the Holy Spirit was sending us a bunch of messages. People talked to me about Catholic school option. We started to realize versus she would've had half-day at the public school that financially it actually made better sense than what I was paying in child care. . . . [omitted information to protect confidentiality]. We had all these things happen, and we finally made the decision to send her, we were thinking it'd be just for kindergarten.
- Participant: Well, we fell in love with the school and the routine and things about it so we're like, "Okay, we're gonna at least be staying a few more years." So she's in Catholic school, my assignments change and now I'm supervising non-public services and just loving being in sort of that world.
- Participant: Obviously we're devoted, practicing Catholics. My husband went through our RCIA when we got married, which we went together. I felt like that brought us all a little closer to my faith and our faith. So being in that world was great. I would constantly think like, "Oh, maybe when I can retire from this, I'd go work in a Catholic school."
- Participant: So then, I was in this school. I was meeting with the counselor that I supervised, fall, and remember walking out and talking to the principal who was here and saying, "You might just love this school." There was something about it. It's a diverse population. There's just something about walking through here that I was like, "What a neat school," and I've been through many. Just made that off-hand comment.
- Participant: Then, in the spring, we find out my daughter's principal, which was a different school, is retiring, and my husband said, "Oh, wouldn't you love to do that?" Because it was in the bulletin. I said, "I would love to do that, but I can't afford it so let's not even talk about it." Cause I knew where I was in the pay scale and such, and discounted it.

- Participant: Then it was maybe a month later or something that we see in our bulletin the announcement that the principal here was retiring. There was just something that pulled my heartstrings. I turned to him and said, "I think I have to talk to somebody about this."
- Participant: It was then a whirlwind. It was giving up some benefits and pay that I had in the public sector, but I was drawn to this special population, being able to work fully embracing my faith and being able to talk about my faith and pray in school and know that I could have that impact with my faith and make a difference here. That's what put me here. Some days I wonder myself.
- Researcher: What was the career path? I know you described the [former employer]. Where were you prior to that?
- Participant: I started as an emotional support teacher for the [school name], but I was in district. So it's kind of where you wear two hats there. You have to follow the district, but you're technically employed by the [agency], which is how a lot of our special-ed classrooms from the [agency] worked. So I taught emotional support for like eight years. Loved it, loved the challenges. That's part of what sometimes pulls me here too, that I love helping kids that really need it.

## APPENDIX I: Sample Focus Group Interview Transcript

Researcher: Okay, so why don't we take a turn on this one and take a look at curriculum. We'll keep this bird's eye view cause we could really get down to the weeds looking at curriculum, but if you were a superintendent or leader of your diocese, how would you better support curriculum in your diocese maybe better than what you're experiencing now. How could you improve on that?

Participant 1: I would definitely jump in on that because it's probably one of my strong areas. I feel strongly at least in our diocese that we could strengthen what we do if there was more really coordination of programming between our schools.

Participant 2: I 100% agree with that. Our schools don't all do the same things.

Participant 1: Right, and what it says on paper as far as curriculum, doesn't actually translate to implementation. And then the big thing that I circle back to is professional development. And I think that we could do that a lot smarter, and I'm going to add, I came from the public sector before this so I kind of know a little bit about the different in that approach, and so that's probably one of my areas of frustration. Because I came from, they're a big district across the area, that pull their resources that find ways to coordinate schedules and I feel like we're on our own.

Participant 2: And trying to schedule that, trying to fund with professional development, and it doesn't actually translate to the classrooms. So, current research would say that you make a bigger impact if you have coaches and professional development transcends in the classrooms. Not in the workshops here and there, the random workshops. [crosstalk 00:15:37]

Participant 3: Yeah, so this is [name] again, and I hear you loud and clear. I feel like we are lacking in the professional development, and I think it's large and part due to funding, but also due to scheduling. I think part of the professional development is finding the time, right? And finding the limitation within all of the other perimeters, like the collective bargain agreement, and things like that.

Participant 3: But, one thing I will say is I am really proud of seeing the shift from my first year as principal to now. We have a new [administrator] for curriculum and her title is [title], and she is a team. And, one of the things we ruled out is the [name] assessment, and it's by [publisher]. It is a... Has everyone heard of it, and know what I'm talking about?

Participant 3: Okay, so what I love about [assessment], is that it is directly correlated to not only the common core standards, but now the new generation standards, and there is so much data that is generated on an individual level, on a class level, that is directly correlated to standards, and to predict state scores. And it really, really, really

helps with intervention, and it's been a huge, it's really changed the game of my school, and how my teachers look at their students. And how my teachers can target what certain students really, really need to master and achieve. And for me, when I started, I felt like there was such huge instructional gaps with some of my students in pocket, and I really couldn't figure out what was going on.

Participant 3: So, the data was really eye opening for me in terms of just addressing the need of each individual child. I feel like we're able to do that a lot more concretely. But, from a bird's eye view, the other thing that's great, is the [administrator], her team, as well as the [administrator], they have access to the scores. So, if we have a question, or if we can't figure out, you know we've deployed let's say every intervention tactic and we're still not getting the growth results that we would like to see, there is support there. And, we're not the only people analyzing or looking at our scores.

Participant 3: We also have instructional specialist that come each month, and work with either individual teachers or whatever the focus is that year. So this year my focus is math instruction, last year it was ELA and literacy scores, because I saw a huge disconnect with my kindergarten and my second grade. They just weren't where they needed to be. So, we really had to look at what's happening. How do we not only deploy intervention with these students, but how do we improve our instructional practice so that it doesn't continue. And, I just found that we have a wealth of support in that area, and I'm willing to bet that some principals that argue it's too much support.

Participant 1: This is [name] again. I have to say kuddos to you and your diocese. And not to throw mine under the bus, but we are without an [administrator] in charge of curriculum. [identifying information omitted] We are essentially without ever having that whole team, and alignment, and support, and instruction. So, again having what you kind of described, having come from [previous employment], is much more of a districts' kind of motto, and working smarter and cohesively, and that's a big missing part for us in our diocese. [crosstalk] So that's a big area.

Participant 4: Could I? This is [name], can I throw in something about professional development, cause I think that's a huge part of one of the reasons why we're seeing gaps from school to school, and even from classroom to classroom in terms of Catholicity and how to faith is being taught in the classroom.

Participant 4: Because, especially for me coming from the position of a [youth ministry] where all of my staff were volunteering to be there because they love the faith, to jumping into a catholic school where you have a very wide spectrum of people who are practicing, or even Catholic, the whole nature of the mission is I think different, anyways, when it's a job versus a ministry. But, I think for that exact reason it's so important to have some sort of ongoing professional development that's centered around faith, and we do have a [inaudible 00:21:28] certification program, but we use a [program name] step program which is great if online. It's

easy, it's fast, but once your teachers go through that it's done. And I think part of the issue with professional development is funding, but I also think part of it is time.

Participant 4: Because I know there are pretty rigid guidelines in terms of, and some of this is difference of how it looks from school to school, but when our [inaudible 00:21:58] meet to have these conversations, and I think evangelization has to happen at the faculty level as well as we expect it to happen in the classroom. And, you need those tiny little conversions every single day so that our faculties are more connected to our faith, and then you'll see more things happen in the classroom. So, I think some sort of ongoing, even whether it's a program, we use the evangelical program for a while which was really good because it was a conversation starter among the faculty.

Participant 4: But, I think keeping that conversation alive among the faculty is pretty key in terms of getting enriching curriculum.

Researcher: [Name], do you want to jump in?

Participant 2: This is [name]. I feel also that the professional one off are not as effective. We have, our theme this year to focus on was science, and so we have science from the [university name] who come, and they work with the teachers, and pretty closely to plan lessons; they're there all year long. We use some of our title money to do it.

Participant 2: Our testing is similar to, I forget who it was who mentioned it, we use [program name], and the whole diocese of [name] uses it, and we've been learning how to really interpret some of the niddy griddy data and use it direct instruction. So, that's been really helpful.

Participant 2: But, I think I would love to use professional development for as a diocese, almost like a public school district would do. I think if we pulled our money, we could be much more effective at it.

Participant 2: It would be so much better, I think and as principals we've talked about this, but it's hard, I think it would be better if we pulled our resources. So, we all decided on a reading series, or a science program, or something. But, everybody seems to never be in the same place when we're buying a science program, 5 other schools just bought one the year before, or they're not ready to do it this year.

Participant 2: So, from school to school, there lacks cohesiveness, and that worries me a little bit.

Participant 3: If I could just piggy back on that, and speak to maybe the pros and cons. One of the things that came down the pike along with the [assessment] and sort of changing how we look and generate data, my second year as principal, so last year

my entire region implemented [program name] for math. And this year, we all adopted [program name] for ELA literacy from [publisher].

Participant 3: And, because [program name] has its own pluses and minuses because they're phonics is a little shaky, you definitely need to supplement your materials for phonics. And, I think one of the pros is the cohesiveness that you're mentioning, and it also leads into PD's. Because, I found when teachers across schools were using the same curriculum, they were able to share materials, share lesson plans, share ideas, talk about what works, what doesn't work, and that was truly beneficial for my teachers.

Participant 3: Especially my seasoned teachers, who had to kind of rethink how they taught math in a conceptual way. Because [program name] is a lot and certain topics are way more challenging I think to execute than others, and I think the cons of it, is at times I think that teachers feel like we're [inaudible] their creativity. But, overall I think it allows people to open the conversation of best shared practice. And, I think that was really important.

Participant 3: Because, I didn't get the sense that it was something that was happening before.

## APPENDIX J: Participant Submitted Plan for Professional Development Sample

*Please complete a three-year professional development plan for new principals in your diocese. Include 3-5 topics per year and a brief description of each topic.*

### Year 1: Establishing a Culture of Trust

Topic	Description
<i>Faculty Meetings</i>	<i>More than an email: how to maximize time with your faculty to cover the necessary business while building community</i>
<i>Parent Engagement</i>	<i>Capitalizing on BTSN, establishing a regular newsletter, engaging on social media</i>
<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Presenting different models for discipline and the importance of being consistent</i>
<i>Administrative Council</i>	<i>Allow principals to get together to ask questions on specific items in the building, whether this is through mentorship or quarterly meetings. I think new principals need a help line!</i>
<i>Mission and Purpose</i>	<i>General orientation to Catholic Ed, the mission and particular charism of your school</i>

### Year 2: Improving Teacher Practice

Topic	Description
<i>The Value of a Walk Through</i>	<i>Present a clear expectation of how regularly walkthroughs though be conducted and in what ways you can follow up with a teacher in order to make an impact on his/her practice</i>
<i>Observations: What to Expect</i>	<i>While most people stepping into this seat will have some experience of this, it is not on this side of it. Guidance on setting up appointments and mentoring teachers who have been there longer than you would be helpful!</i>
<i>Having Productive Pre/Post Conferences</i>	<i>Suggestions on how to make this time meaningful rather than perfunctory.</i>
<i>Planning Professional Development</i>	<i>How to assess the needs of your faculty and acceptable resources to turn to in planning PD</i>

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### Year 3: Planning a Vision and a Future

Topic	Description
<i>Strategic Planning</i>	<i>Identifying the needs of your school and building a plan of action</i>
<i>Writing your Budget</i>	<i>How to gear your financial plan towards your goals, development and advancement plans</i>
<i>Engaging your School Board</i>	<i>How to work with and build a board of limited jurisdiction</i>
<i>Engaging the Community</i>	<i>How to get involved in the community in a way that moves the mission of the school forward</i>

## **APPENDIX K: Reflexive Journal Sample**

### **Personal Reflection**

When I graduated college and began applying for teaching positions, I expressed an interest in working in a Catholic school. I was publicly educated for all of my schooling, and even though my interest in Catholic education was not a complete shock to my family, the need for a livable salary and benefits outweighed the vocational call in their minds. I took a public-school position as a certified instructional aide and worked for the reading specialist in the Title I program. By Christmas, I was miserable, not because the school was a poor work environment, but because I knew I was not where God called me to be teaching.

An opening for a middle school position was posted on the Allentown Diocese website at a Catholic school nearby my home. The principal who interviewed me was clearly a former nun (IHM it turns out). I also had a third-round interview with a public school. The third round at the public school was challenging. The teachers' union was on strike at the time, so the superintendents' cell phone continued to ring throughout the interview. I was asked to teach a guided reading lesson and the seven principals in attendance acted like children with different learning challenges. Knowing the salary differential, I left the interview and prayed, "Lord, I will go wherever you want me to go, but please, don't give me any choices".

### **Interview Reflection**

The school was an all brick campus in a part of [town name] which had acres of farmland. A rusted silo with blue peeling paint was on the property next to the school. Cecilia has a contagious personality. Her office was decorated very tastefully, and I felt as though I had stepped into the living room of a dear friend to share a cup of coffee.

What stuck out to me was her vision and she was very much like me in that she wanted to move at lightning pace but realized she had to slow down the pace for everyone else's sake. I saw her interactions with a student, and it was obvious she had great relationships with the students and was very engaging. Cecilia had an impressive enrollment increase by expanding her preschool. We have a similar vision in that we both understand successful early childhood programs are vital to future sustainability. We also have a similar vision for finding a curricular niche to set our schools apart from our public-school competition.

## APPENDIX L: Preliminary Code Index

### Motivation

- Call from God
- Catholic Identity
- Catholic School Comfort
- Collaborative
- Fit with personal family
- Impact on Learning
- Invested
- Legacy
- Motivation
- Personable
- Resourcefulness
- Servant Leadership
- Spiritual Leadership
- Student Centered

### Challenges

- Competition Between Schools
- Curricular
- Demands
- Enrollment
- Finances
- Future of Catholic Education
- Grand Jury
- Leadership Strengths
- Parents
- Parish or diocese
- Personal
- Personnel
- Predecessor
- Prepared
- Resources - teachers
- Self-Doubt

### Support

- Advancement
- Boards
- Budget is not my wheelhouse
- Culture, Climate, & Catholicity
- Curriculum Decisions
- Diocesan Consistency
- Diocesan Presence
- General support
- How to deal with stakeholders
- Human Resources
- Induction
- Learning Differences
- Legal
- Leveraging resources
- Mentorship
- Networking
- Pastor
- Practical Day-to-Day
- Professional Development
- Safety
- Spiritual Leadership
- Student Issues
- Teacher Supervision
- Time Management
- Uninformed

### Leadership Profile

- Credentials
- Leadership Path- Mentors
- Leadership Path- Pipeline
- Longevity
- Recruited
- Selection Process

## APPENDIX M: Pattern Code Index by Theme

### **Motivation**

#### ***Calling***

- Call from God
- Catholic Identity
- Personal Fit

#### ***Leadership Ethos***

- Collaborative
- Invested
- Personable
- Resourcefulness
- Impact on Learning
- Spiritual Leadership

#### ***Vision***

### **Challenges**

#### ***Balance***

- Demands
- Personal

#### ***Relationships***

- Parents
- Personnel
- Predecessor

#### ***Resources***

- Curricular
- Financial

### **Support**

#### ***Received Support***

- General support
- Human Resources
- Induction
- Legal
- Mentorship
- Pastor
- Student Issues

#### ***Desired Support***

- Advancement
- Board
- Budget is not my wheelhouse
- Culture, Climate, & Catholicity
- Curriculum Decisions
- Diocesan Consistency
- Diocesan Presence
- How to deal with stakeholders
- Learning Differences
- Legal
- Leveraging resources
- Networking
- Practical Day-to-Day
- Professional Development
- Safety
- Spiritual Leadership
- Student Issues
- Teacher Supervision & HR
- Time Management
- Uninformed

## APPENDIX N: Professional Development Plan

Table 3

### *Year 1 Professional Development Plan*

Year 1 Professional Course Descriptions		
National Standard	Course Name	Course Description
Mission & Catholic Identity	Catholic Identity I: Observing School Culture and Catholicity	Learn the “look fors” as you observe your school’s culture and faith practices.
Governance & Leadership	Principal Portal and Professional Network	Learn how to establish an account on the principal portal where resources and tutorials are stored. Principals will also learn how to engage and establish professional learning networks.
Governance & Leadership	Communication I: Sharing the Good News	Learn effective communication strategies with all stakeholders including inexpensive communication tools and planning for when and how often to communicate.
Governance & Leadership	Communication II: Handling difficult conversations	Learn tips and strategies for reflective listening. Practice scenarios with colleagues and enhance problem solving strategies as well as develop a list of phrases to help with difficult conversations.
Academic Excellence	Government Funding	Learn the laws related to ESSA (2015) and the processes for spending government funds.
Academic Excellence	Teacher Supervision: Evaluation Tools	Principals will be oriented to the teacher evaluation tool and learn tips and strategies for meaningful feedback and evaluation.
Academic Excellence	Data Analysis	Dissert your school’s test score data and learn to make a strategic plan for addressing areas of concern.

Operational Vitality	School Safety I: Crisis Planning	Review and further develop a school crisis plan with the help of diocesan administrators and school safety experts.
Operational Vitality	Human Resources I: Engagement and Separation	Learn the process for hiring employees. Also learn the process for employee improvement plans and separation of employment.
Operational Vitality	Human Resources II: Ensuring Compliance	Review employment laws, insurance compliance, healthcare/FMLA, and safe environment compliance.
Operational Vitality	Budget Planning	Review the school budget plan for the following year with diocesan administrators.
Operational Vitality	Advancement I: Starting an Annual Fund	Learn how to establish an annual fund with practical tips, strategies, and sample engagement materials.

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Table 4

*Year 2 Professional Development Plan*

Year 2 Course Descriptions		
National Standard	Course Name	Course Description
Mission & Catholic Identity	Catholic Identity II: Ensuring an authentic community of faith	Begin a strategic plan for faith formation by modifying or adding traditions and practices. Learn strategies and tips for engaging students and teachers as a faith community.
Governance & Leadership	Parents as Partners in Education	Learn effective tips and strategies for engaging parents in their child's education.
Academic Excellence	Teacher Supervision II: Improving unit/lesson planning using data	Review the Understand by Design Framework, Framework for 21st Century Learning, Rigor and Relevance Framework. Learn how to integrate the three frameworks with effective assessments.
Academic Excellence	Innovative Curriculum Planning I	Learn cutting edge curriculum and instructional practices and how to fund them within limitations.
Academic Excellence	Technology Planning	Begin a strategic plan for technology by investigating which devices and tools are practical and sustainable.
Operational Vitality	Advancement II: Marketing and Enrollment	Learn best practices for marketing and enrollment. Learn creative funding solutions for a marketing plan.
Operational Vitality	School Safety II: Enhancing your Facility	Meet with diocesan administrators and school safety experts to enhance the facility's security and safety features.
Operational Vitality	Legal Issues I: Developing your Handbook	After living through one year of the principalship, tackle changes to the handbook policies. Learn what must be included, should be included, and how to protect a school from litigation.

Table 5

*Year 3 Professional Development Plan*

Year 3 Course Descriptions		
National Standard	Course Name	Course Description
Mission & Catholic Identity	Catholic Identity III: Engaging families in faith	Learn how to engage families in faith formation and the school's faith communities.
Governance & Leadership	Communication II	Revisit and enhance the communication plan to further advance the mission of your school and use your communication tools as part of an advancement strategy.
Academic Excellence	Innovative Curriculum Planning II	Revisit the curriculum plan and adjust according to the previous year's results. Meet with a diocesan administrator and colleague to improve and revise.
Academic Excellence	Inclusive Catholic Schools I: IST Protocols	Learn how to form an IST team and utilize effective IST strategies and support protocols throughout the school year.
Academic Excellence	Inclusive Catholic Schools I: Intervention Strategies	Learn academic and behavioral intervention strategies which can be used in the regular education classroom setting.
Operational Vitality	Advancement III: Developing your Annual Fund	Examine the results of the previous year's annual fund and revise the strategy and materials for the following year.
Operational Vitality	Legal Issues II: Students and their Families	An in-depth exploration at changing family dynamics and their legal implications.

## **APPENDIX O: Prophets of a Future Not Our Own**

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

*Bishop Kenneth Untener*