

## Perceptions of Catholic Identity: Views of Catholic School Administrators and Teachers

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*This article presents the results of a survey conducted in 2010 of over 3,300 administrators and teachers in Catholic elementary and secondary schools nationally about their understanding of the meaning of the term “Catholic identity.” The survey was conducted in the fall of 2010 in anticipation of a national conference on the Catholic identity of Catholic elementary and secondary schools at The Catholic University of America, October 2-4, 2011. The vast majority of respondents viewed the school’s culture or faith community as the most important component of its Catholic identity. The longer the teacher or administrator worked in Catholic schools, the higher the rating they gave to the essential nature of the school’s faith community to its Catholic identity. Other aspects of Catholic identity that received high ratings were prayer, the content of the religion course, who taught religion, liturgical celebrations, and participation in service. The respondents viewed the percentage of Catholic students as the least important aspect of Catholic identity.*

When I was growing up in Philadelphia in the 1940s and 1950s, the Catholic identity of the parish elementary school and Catholic high school that I attended was not really given a second thought. Clearly, they were schools with a strong Catholic identity. All the teachers in the parish school and all but one of those who taught me in high school were members of religious congregations. Only Catholic children attended our large parish school and all but a very few students in the high school were Catholic. We learned from the *Baltimore Catechism* in the elementary school and the daily high school’s religion classes were rigorously taught like the other academic subjects. Prayers were said at specific times of the day in the elementary school—at the beginning of the day, before lunch, when we returned from lunch, and at the end of the day—and every class in high school began with a prayer. Liturgical celebrations were frequent and religious symbols abounded. We were challenged to be “soldiers of Christ” and to “spread the good news.”

Some years ago I was conducting a meeting on Catholic identity with a

strategic planning committee that was charged with making recommendations about the Catholic schools in a diocese. During the meeting, I was asked, “What do you mean by Catholic identity?” I was taken aback a bit, not by the question itself, but rather by the questioner, a prominent pastor of a parish with a Catholic school. I had conducted a number of such meetings in the past, but no one had ever asked me a similar question. Why was the question arising in the context of this meeting? Was it that the pastor really didn’t know? Was he testing me? Was he trying to clarify the term so that all at the meeting would be on the same page and could discuss the topic with some understanding? While I never pursued his reasons for asking, I had assumed for years that the concept of Catholic identity was so ingrained in those involved with Catholic schools that I could freely use the term and it would be clear what I meant. The pastor’s question prompted me to be more proactive in explaining what I mean, and what the Church means, by the Catholic identity of a Catholic school. So, what does the term *Catholic identity* encompass?

## Review of Literature

### Nature of a Catholic School

The examination of the Catholic identity of a Catholic school must begin with an examination of the nature of a Catholic school. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council described the distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic school in *Gravissimum Educationis*, The Declaration on Christian Education (Paul VI, 1965), as follows:

The influence of the Church in the field of education is shown in a special manner by the Catholic school. No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community 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. (#8)

Thus, what makes a Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, which is found in the educational climate, the personal development of each student, the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

In 1972 the bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter entitled *To Teach as Jesus Did* (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972). In it the bishops delineated a fourfold purpose of Catholic schools: message, service, worship, and community. The bishops indicated that the building of, and the living of, community must be explicit goals of Catholic schools (#108) and that community is not just a concept to be taught, but a reality to be lived (#106). For the bishops, community is a necessary condition for, as well as a goal of, Christian education.

Thomas Groome from Boston College has written extensively about the nature of a Catholic school. Groome (1996) described what makes a school Catholic as follows: “the distinctiveness of Catholic education is prompted by the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself, and these characteristics should be reflected in the whole curriculum of Catholic schools” (p. 107). In a real sense, upon entering a Catholic school, it should be obvious that one has come into a Catholic environment. As stated in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*: “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

In his address to the bishops from Region XIII of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops during their *ad limina* visit on May 5, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI also spoke to the nature of a Catholic school:

First, as we know, the essential task of authentic education at every level is not simply that of passing on knowledge, essential as this is, but also of shaping hearts. There is a constant need to balance intellectual rigor in communicating effectively, attractively and integrally, the richness of the Church’s faith with forming the young in the love of God, the praxis of the Christian moral and sacramental life and, not least, the cultivation of personal and liturgical prayer. (Benedict XVI, 2012)

### **Culture and Community**

An important component of any school is its culture. Support for the importance of the culture of a Catholic school comes from the research on effective schools and the documents of the Church.

A Catholic school by its very nature should have a distinct Catholic culture. Research has shown that good Catholic schools have a “sense of community,” which has a positive effect on the quality of life in the school and contributes to its effectiveness (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993). The importance of a school’s community was noted by James Coleman in a series of studies based on the 1980 U.S. Department of Education sponsored High School and Beyond Study (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). The differences that he saw in the communities in Catholic schools and those he found in many other schools led Coleman to write about the differences between value communities and functional communities (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman, value communities are those that share a common value or values, such as high academic ideals, a preference for a particular type of educational philosophy, or exposure to a particular type of environment. Most private schools, including Catholic schools, should have strong value communities. But Coleman saw Catholic schools as more than value communities, they were also functional communities. A functional community has a particular value orientation, but it goes beyond that. It is a community that functions at a high level; it is efficacious in the sense that the social capital produced by the relationships within the community is instrumental in producing good outcomes (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman, who was not Catholic, used sociological terms to explain the type of community that he observed in Catholic schools. Catholic educators would call this a faith community. The school’s faith community is a functional community that produces social capital and is a major contributor to the effectiveness of the school. It’s the faith community of the school that constitutes an integral part of the school’s Catholic identity (Convey, 1992).

The Church calls Catholic schools to be faith communities, dedicated to fostering both social reform in light of Christian values and the personal sanctification of the students (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979). The major documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education from 1977 to 1997 emphasized the importance of the faith community in the Catholic school. In *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), the Congregation directed that the Catholic school “...must be a community whose

aim is the transmission of values for living” (#53). *Lay Catholics in Catholic Schools: Witnesses to the Faith* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982) specified that the educational community of a Catholic school must be in the process of becoming a Christian community and a genuine community of faith (#41). Finally, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997) describes the Catholic school as a place “in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony” (#11).

### Curriculum

The curriculum of a Catholic school, in addition to containing academic subjects like all schools, also has a religion curriculum. In addition, teachers should look for opportunities to integrate Catholic teachings throughout the curriculum.

The code of canon law establishes that, first and foremost, a Catholic school is characterized by excellence (Canon 806). As indicated in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*, a 2012 publication from the Center for School Effectiveness at Loyola University Chicago in partnership with the Roche Center for Catholic Education at Boston College, a Catholic school “has a clearly articulated rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st Century skills and Gospel values” (Standard 7). Students should be exposed to the great wealth of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The teachings of the Church are to be presented with the same rigor and academic expectations accorded to other subjects in the curriculum.

In the Vatican document *The Catholic School* (1977), the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education speaks to the formation of the whole person in a Catholic school, which includes “preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, and developing awareness of the transcendental and religious education” (#31). In like manner, Standard 2 of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* specifies that an effective Catholic school “provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture and life” (Standard 2).

An important component of the curriculum of a Catholic school is the teaching of religion. Studies have shown the importance of the knowledgeable and committed teachers of religion and the problems that can occur when teachers of religion do not know or do not fully accept some Catholic teachings themselves (Cho, 2012; Galetto, 2000).

While the religion course must be the central component of the curriculum of a Catholic school, equally important is the integration of Catholic teachings in all aspects of the curriculum. The content of a Catholic school is a “synthesis of culture and faith and a synthesis of faith and life” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, #37) and all academic subjects can contribute to the development of a mature Christian (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, #40).

### Administrators and Teachers Supporting Catholic Identity

Good administrative leadership and effective, committed teachers are important for the success of any school. The important roles of administrations and teachers in Catholic schools have been affirmed by Church documents, individual scholars, and empirical research.

The Church has been clear about the importance of administrators and teachers in supporting the Catholic identity of a school and the development of its faith community. In the document from Vatican Council II, *Declaration on Christian Education*, the Council Fathers wrote: “But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world” (Paul VI, 1965, #8). The Congregation for Catholic Education in the document *The Catholic School* wrote: “The extent to which the Christian message is transmitted through education depends to a very great extent on the teachers” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). And again in its document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, the Congregation stated that “the prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

Individual scholars who have studied Catholic schools also affirmed the importance of the principal and the teachers in creating the environment necessary for a good Catholic school with a strong Catholic identity. Particularly important in Catholic schools are the leadership of the principal and the commitment of the teachers (Convey, 1992; Cook, 2001, 2002; Cook & Simonds, 2011; Helm, 1989; Tarr, Ciriello & Convey, 1993). Ciriello (1998a, 1998b, 1998c) in her seminal works on the Catholic school principal illustrated the importance of the principal as the spiritual leader, academic leader, and managerial leader

of the school. Schuttloffel (1999, 2008) has written extensively on the Catholic school principal as contemplative leader. Cook (2001) described Catholic school principals and teachers as “the architects of Catholic culture.” Shimabukuro (Shimabukuro, 1998, 2008; Shimabukuro & Fox, 2010) wrote about the ideal Catholic school teacher being among other things a community builder and committed to the spiritual formation of students. Jacobs (1996, 1997) reminded Catholic school teachers that they have to be mindful of their ministerial role.

Empirical studies have consistently shown the importance that Catholic school administrators and teachers place on Catholic identity in a Catholic school and the development of its faith community. In *The Catholic High School: A National Portrait* (Yeager, Benson, Guerra, & Manno, 1985), 87% of the high school principals included the building of community as one of the top seven educational goals for their schools. More principals ranked this goal first or second than any other goal, and 72% of them believed their schools were quite good or outstanding in building community among the students and staff.

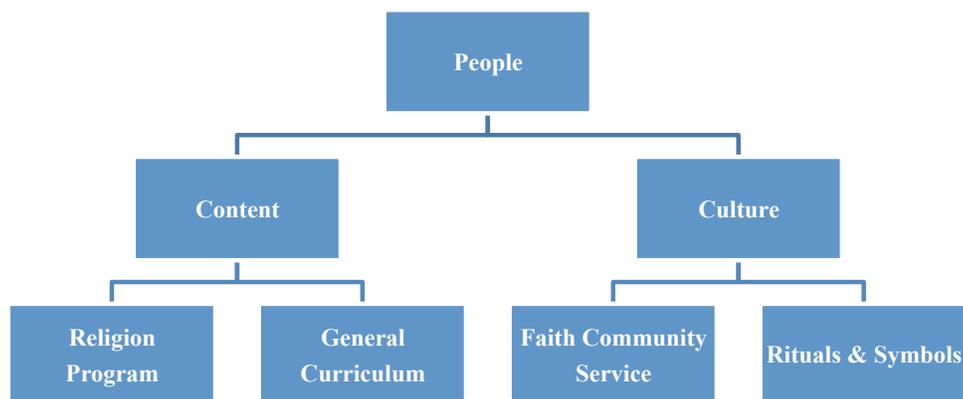
In a 1990 survey of 783 Catholic elementary school principals, Harkins (1993) found that statements related to the development of the school’s faith community were most often selected by the principals as essential for Catholic schools. Thirty-nine percent of the principals selected a schoolwide emphasis on imitating Jesus as their first priority, while 14% selected developing a caring atmosphere, and 10% selected treating others with respect. Furthermore, at least 59% of the principals selected each of these as being among their top six essential characteristics.

In a survey of 1,076 Catholic elementary school teachers, Kushner and Helbling (1995) found that the teachers were far more likely to indicate that the teaching of religion contributes more to the Catholic identity of their schools than does the presence of Catholic teachers or the presence of religious on the faculty or in the administration. In addition, at least 90% of the teachers indicated that the school has very clear expectations of their role in religious and value education, that they are sure what their role is, and that they feel they have an obligation to promote the religious faith of their students. Similar to the secondary school teachers in Benson and Guerra’s study (1985) the majority of the teachers indicated that a Catholic school should place the most emphasis on developing in its students a personal commitment to Jesus, compared to acceptance of Catholic teachings on moral values, knowledge of doctrine or a clear understanding of the bible.

### Model for Catholic Identity

In outlining my answer to the pastor who asked me about my definition of Catholic identity, it occurred to me that a visual would be helpful in capturing the essence of Catholic identity. The schematic model given in Figure 1 and first presented in *Weathering the Storm: Moving Catholic Schools Forward* (DeFiore, Convey, & Schuttloffel, 2009, p. 35) provides one possible representation of the various dimensions of a school's Catholic identity. At the top of the model are the people associated with the school who are the creators and drivers of a school's Catholic identity, each in their own particular role of administrator, teachers, priest, staff support, or parents since they individually, collectively, and in varying degrees "communicate the message (content) and create the environment (culture) that comprise the essence of a Catholic school" (DeFiore, Convey & Schuttloffel, 2009, p. 34). The communication of Catholic teachings in the religion course and, when possible, in other subjects and the school's environment or culture constitute the major dimensions of a school's Catholic identity. While content is obviously important, research has shown that a school's culture, particularly the type of community it creates, is an important contributor to its effectiveness (Convey, 1992). The environment of a Catholic school supports its Catholic identity through the establishment of a faith community, an emphasis on service, the celebration of rituals (prayer, liturgy, sacraments) and the presence of appropriate symbols (statues, crucifixes, religious pictures). The model also provides a framework as to how to develop measures of a school's Catholic identity.

Figure 1: Components of Catholic Identity



## Method

### Survey

In order to measure how Catholic school administrators and teachers understand the term “Catholic identity” and how their understanding relates to the model in Figure 1, a 3-part online survey was designed. The respondents were informed that the survey was intended to find out what they and other Catholic school educators understand by the term “Catholic identity” and not how they assessed the extent of Catholic identity in their schools, but rather what meaning they associated with the term. They were told that the surveys were anonymous; neither they nor their schools would be identified.

Part 1 of the survey consisted of a single open-ended question that asked the respondents to describe in 10 words or less the first thing that comes to their minds when asked to describe what the Catholic identity of a Catholic school means to them. This question was placed first in the survey so that the items in the subsequent parts of the survey would not influence their responses to this question.

Part 2 of the survey involved the rating and ranking of 12 items based on the dimensions of Catholic identity in Figure 1. The respondents were asked first to rate the items on a 4-point Likert scale (4=Essential, 3=Very Important, 2=Somewhat Important, and 1=Not Important) and then rank them in order of importance. The 12 items in their order of presentation on the survey were:

- The vast majority of students are Catholic.
- A crucifix is present in every classroom.
- Each class begins with a prayer.
- The school has a strong faith community.
- The vast majority of teachers are Catholic.
- The teacher of religion is Catholic.
- Catholic teachings are integrated into academic subjects other than the religion course.
- The principal is Catholic.
- The school’s day begins with a prayer.
- Schoolwide liturgies occur periodically.
- Students participate in Christian service.
- Religion course presents the teachings of the Church.

Part 3 of the survey used a scaling procedure called paired comparisons,

which is designed to rank a set of objects in terms of preference or relative importance by having the respondents select the more important item in a pair of items (Nunnally, 1978). The number of possible pairs of  $n$  items is one-half  $n(n - 1)$ . Such a ranking procedure is normally easier for a respondent to do than the ordered ranking of a set of items. In addition, transforming the results of the pair selections according to a procedure outlined by Guilford (1954) produces a scale with interval measure, whereas simple ranking results in an ordinal scale.

In this study, the administrators and teachers were given all possible pairs, six in total, of four components of Catholic identity and asked to select which member in each pair was more important than the other member in contributing to the Catholic identity of a school. The four components, based on the dimensions of the model in Figure 1, were: (1) *Religion Course Teaches Catholic Doctrine*, (2) *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum*, (3) *Culture and Faith Community*, and (4) *Rituals and Symbols*. The results of the comparisons were then transformed to produce an interval scale. The scale that resulted was used to determine how far apart in importance each of the four components is to one another.

### Participants

Superintendents of Catholic schools in 47 dioceses were invited to assist with the administration of the survey by sending a link for the online survey to their principals and asking them and their teachers to take it. The directions to the superintendents and principals stressed that the survey was designed to determine what the teachers understood by the term *Catholic identity*, not how they evaluated their school's Catholic identity. It was apparent from the returns that not all dioceses followed up with the distribution of the survey. It is important to note here that the responses that were received are not statistically representative of all Catholic schools administrators and teachers since a statistical probability sampling procedure was not employed that would assure a representative sample.

A total of 3,389 surveys were fully or partially completed. Over 1,000 administrators and teachers viewed the survey but did not complete it; although it is possible that some returned to the survey and completed it later. The responses came from teachers and administrators from 36 states. A minimum of 100 surveys were from 12 states: over 400 from New York, between 300 and 400 each from Georgia and New Jersey, over 200 from Florida, and between

100 and 200 each from California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Hawaii, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana. Fewer than 100 surveys each came from Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. Fewer than 10 surveys were received from Arkansas, District of Columbia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

## Results

### Characteristics of the Respondents

Of those surveys where the respondent identified his or her role in the school, 14% came from administrators ( $n = 457$ ), and the remaining 86% were approximately evenly distributed across teachers in grades PK-2 ( $n = 627$ ), 3-5 ( $n = 672$ ), 6-8 ( $n = 751$ ) and high school ( $n = 708$ ). Identifying information was missing on 174 surveys.

Over half (58%) of the surveys with identification came from respondents who had worked in Catholic schools at least 10 years. The highest number of surveys come from those who had worked in Catholic schools for 20 or more years ( $n = 947$ ) followed closely by those with 10 to 19 years of experience ( $n = 930$ ). The remaining returns were from those with 5 to 9 years ( $n = 681$ ) and 1 to 4 years ( $n = 663$ ) of experience.

As expected, the vast majority of respondents, 90%, were Catholic. A slightly larger percentage of administrators (96%) and a slightly smaller percentage of respondents from high schools (83%) were Catholic. Slightly more than half of the respondents (51%) taught religion either as a religion or catechetical specialist or as part of their teaching responsibilities along with other courses.

### Open-Ended Question

The responses to the open-ended question produced a wealth of descriptions of Catholic identity. What is striking is the variety of the descriptions that occurred. Some examples are the following:

- “Keeping Christ as the center of our education” (Grades 6-8, Iowa).
- “Live, talk and teach your faith and beliefs” (Grades 3-5, Massachusetts).

- “Primary objective is to teach children to be Christ-like” (Grades PK-2, Illinois).
- “Supporting teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church” (Grades 9-12, Florida).
- “Teaching Catholic values” (Non-Catholic, Utah).
- “Gospel imperative is taught and lived” (Administrator, Illinois).

Four terms appear in over 10% of the responses: Faith, Catholic, Christ, and Jesus, with Faith appearing in over 20% of the responses (see Table 1). Three percent of the responses contained the combination, “Jesus Christ.” Seven terms or combinations appeared in 5% to 10% of the responses: Liturgy (Eucharist, Mass), Community, Living, God, Values, Teachings and Love (Charity). Other terms that appeared with some regularity were Prayer, Christian, Belief, Follow, Service, and Gospel. Some examples of specific phrases in the responses are: Christ centered (75), Christ-like (52), Catholic Church teachings (50), Catholic values (42), Christian values (37), Gospel values (26), and Faith community (20). Fourteen responses contained the phrase so familiar to Catholic educators in the past, “To teach as Jesus did.” Further analyses revealed that, with few exceptions, the frequency of terms used were similar for Catholic teachers and non-Catholic teachers and for teachers in different grade levels and experience in working in Catholic schools.

Table 1: Frequency of Most Common Terms in Responses to Open-Ended Question about Catholic Identity

Term	Frequency	Term	Frequency
Faith	660	Catholic	613
Christ	447	Jesus	382
Eucharist, Mass, Liturgy	261	Community	246
Living	245	God	232
Values	221	Teachings	197
Charity, Love	181	Follow	124
Belief	126	Gospel	93
Service	95	Spiritual	79
Morality	88	Environment	75
Care, Caring	78	Respect	72
Tradition	72	Faithful	53
Compassion	66	Sacrament	46

Religion	49	Justice	26
Formation	27	Doctrine	19
Kindness	26		

### Ratings of Importance

In rating the 12 items describing aspects of Catholic identity, at least 90% of the teachers and administrators gave essential ratings to three items: *School Day Begins with Prayer*, *Strong Faith Community*, and *Religion Course Presents Teachings of the Catholic Church* (Table 2). Three other items were rated as essential by more than 80% of respondents: *Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies*, *Students Participate in Christian Service*, and the *Teacher of Religion is Catholic*. About three-fourths of the respondents thought that a crucifix in every classroom and the principal being Catholic were essential. Just over 60% rated class beginning with a prayer and integrating Catholic teachings into the curriculum as essential. Finally, 39% rated the vast majority of teachers being Catholic as essential; however, only 15% thought that the vast number of students being Catholic was essential to the Catholic identity of a Catholic school. Clearly in terms of what's essential to Catholic identity, the respondents focused more on what happens in the schools rather than on the characteristics of who attends the school or who teaches in them.

Table 2: Average Ratings of Components of Catholic Identity

Component	Mean	S.D.	Essential
School Day Begins with Prayer	3.90	.375	92%
Strong Faith Community	3.90	.343	91%
Religion Course Presents Catholic Teachings	3.88	.403	90%
Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies	3.87	.417	89%
Students Participate in Service	3.85	.433	87%
Teacher of Religion is Catholic	3.77	.555	82%
Crucifix in Every Classroom	3.66	.702	77%
Principal is Catholic	3.66	.649	74%
Class Begins with Prayer	3.46	.815	63%
Catholic Teachings Integrated in Curriculum	3.48	.755	61%
Vast Majority of Teachers are Catholic	3.19	.800	39%
Vast Majority of Students are Catholic	2.82	.762	15%

Table 3 shows the pattern of “essential” ratings across the five subgroups of respondents by grade level. With few exceptions, the relative ordering of the essential nature of the items to a school’s Catholic identity was similar among the five subgroups of respondents. For many components only small differences occurred among the subgroups. Using a criterion of five or more percentage points as a notable variation from the ratings of the entire group, with few exceptions, the percentage of “essential” ratings by high school teachers tended to be lower than the percentages of other groups. On the other hand, a higher percentage of administrators rated the religion teacher and principal being Catholic and the integration of Catholic teachings into the curriculum as essential elements of Catholic identity. Class beginning with prayer received a higher percentage of essential ratings from principals and teachers in PK to 2

Table 3: Components of Catholic Identity Rated Essential by Grade Level

Component	PK-2 n=627	3-5 n=672	6-8 n=750	9-12 n=708	Administrator n=457
School Day Begins with Prayer	95%	94%	93%	84%	94%
Strong Faith Community	94%	92%	93%	85%	91%
Religion Course Presents Catholic Teachings	93%	92%	91%	85%	93%
Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies	89%	90%	91%	85%	93%
Students Participate in Service	90%	87%	87%	82%	90%
Teacher of Religion is Catholic	83%	83%	82%	76%	89%
Crucifix in Every Classroom	87%	84%	79%	62%	72%
Principal is Catholic	79%	77%	74%	63%	84%
Class Begins with Prayer	74%	61%	56%	58%	69%
Catholic Teachings Integrated in Curriculum	66%	63%	63%	48%	70%
Vast Majority of Teachers are Catholic	47%	45%	43%	22%	41%
Vast Majority of Students are Catholic	17%	17%	15%	12%	17%

compared with other respondents. Finally, teachers in the early grades (PK-5) were more likely than other teachers to rate the presence of a crucifix in the classroom as being an essential element of a school's Catholic identity.

In viewing the results by years of experience working in a Catholic school (see Table 4), with only two exceptions, the longer the tenure in a Catholic school, the more likely the teacher or administrator rated the characteristics presented as being essential. Except for having a crucifix in the classroom and the vast majority of students being Catholic, the relative importance of items increased almost linearly from respondents with less experience in Catholic schools to those with more experience.

Table 4: Components of Catholic Identity Rated Essential by Years of Experience

Component	1-4 n=663	5-9 n=681	10-19 n=930	20 or More n=948
School Day Begins with Prayer	90%	91%	92%	94%
Strong Faith Community	90%	88%	90%	95%
Religion Course Presents Catholic Teachings	87%	87%	91%	94%
Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies	84%	86%	91%	93%
Students Participate in Service	84%	86%	87%	91%
Teacher of Religion is Catholic	77%	82%	83%	85%
Crucifix in Every Classroom	76%	75%	79%	77%
Principal is Catholic	63%	73%	78%	81%
Class Begins with Prayer	62%	59%	62%	67%
Catholic Teachings Integrated in Curriculum	51%	56%	60%	73%
Vast Majority of Teachers are Catholic	31%	38%	41%	45%
Vast Majority of Students are Catholic	14%	18%	15%	14%

Table 5 shows the “essential” ratings according to whether or not the respondents were Catholic or whether or not they taught religion as part of their responsibilities. A higher percentage of Catholic respondents and those teachers who taught religion rated the items higher than respondents who were not Catholic or those teachers who did not teach religion.

Table 5: Components of Catholic Identity Rated Essential by Religion and Teacher of Religion

Component	Catholic n=2895	Not Catholic n=319	Teach Religion n=1481	Not Teach Religion n=1259
School Day Begins with Prayer	93%	85%	94%	89%
Strong Faith Community	92%	87%	93%	89%
Religion Course Presents Catholic Teachings	92%	79%	93%	86%
Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies	90%	79%	91%	86%
Students Participate in Service	88%	82%	89%	84%
Teacher of Religion is Catholic	84%	64%	85%	77%
Crucifix in Every Classroom	79%	57%	84%	71%
Principal is Catholic	77%	54%	79%	66%
Class Begins with Prayer	65%	48%	69%	54%
Catholic Teachings Integrated in Curriculum	64%	35%	68%	50%
Vast Majority of Teachers are Catholic	43%	10%	48%	29%
Vast Majority of Students are Catholic	14%	18%	16%	14%

Note. Administrators are included in the percentages for Catholic and Not Catholic, but not included in those for Teach Religion and Not Teach Religion.

### Ranking of Relative Importance

In the previous analyses, it's possible for a respondent to give each of the 12 components the same scale value, e.g., a respondent could indicate that every item represented an essential component of a school's Catholic identity. On the other hand, ranking is a forced choice procedure since only one component can be ranked first, second, and so forth. A ranking task forces a respondent to discriminate among components, each of which the respondent may have thought were an essential or very important component of a school's Catholic identity.

Table 6 shows the average ranking for each of the 12 components. The lowest average score represents the highest relative importance ranking. The three components with the highest average importance rankings are strong faith community, religion teacher being Catholic, and the school day beginning with prayer, respectfully. These results differ slightly from the average ratings.

A strong faith community and the school day beginning with prayer are both among the highest ratings and rankings; however, that the religion course presents the teachings of the Catholic Church falls to fourth in the rankings being replaced in the top three by the religion teacher being Catholic. In addition, the integration of Catholic teachings into the curriculum moves higher in the rankings than in the ratings, whereas students participating in service moves lower in the rankings than in the ratings.

In focusing on the characteristics of Catholic identity that received the highest ranking of 1 indicating they were most important, the five characteristics that appear most frequently are: (1) strong faith community, ranked most important by more than a third of the respondents (36%); (2) importance of the religion teacher being Catholic (12%); (3) importance of the principal being Catholic (11%); (4) the school day beginning with prayer (10%); and (5) the religion course teaches Catholic doctrine (9%). Three-fourths of the respondents rated one of these components as the most important characteristic of Catholic identity. Over half of the respondents (56%) ranked strong faith community either first, second, or third in relative importance as an indicator of the Catholic identity of a school.

Further analysis revealed that the ranking of faith community as the most important characteristic of Catholic identity was similar for administrators and teachers and for Catholic teachers and non-Catholic teachers. The only noticeable difference in the percentages ranking this characteristic as the most important occurred for respondents with 20 or more years of experience, where 42% ranked *Culture and Faith Community* as most important compared with 34% or fewer of those with less than 20 years of experience in a Catholic school.

### Paired Comparisons

Table 7 shows which member of the six pairs of four components of Catholic identity presented to the administrators and teachers was viewed as more important in defining the Catholic identity of a school. Each of the components had been rated by the respondents as being essential or very important to their understanding of Catholic identity, so these items force the respondents to choose one member of the various pairs of important characteristics as being more important than the other.

The first comparison is between the school's *Culture and Faith Community* and the presence of *Rituals and Symbols*. The vast majority of respondents chose *Culture and Faith Community* as being more important to the school's

Table 6: Components of Catholic Identity Ranked Highest in Importance

Component	Rank			Top Three	Avg.
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>		
Strong Faith Community	36%	11%	9%	56%	3.6
Teacher of Religion is Catholic	12%	16%	13%	41%	4.7
School Day Begins with Prayer	10%	12%	11%	33%	5.5
Religion Course Presents Catholic Teachings	9%	11%	9%	29%	6.3
Catholic Teachings Integrated in Curriculum	7%	10%	9%	26%	6.4
Principal is Catholic	11%	7%	7%	25%	6.6
Crucifix in Every Classroom	5%	8%	10%	23%	6.8
Periodic Schoolwide Liturgies	3%	5%	8%	16%	6.9
Class Begins with Prayer	3%	6%	7%	16%	7.3
Students Participate in Service	3%	8%	8%	19%	7.4
Vast Majority of Teachers are Catholic	2%	5%	5%	12%	8.3
Vast Majority of Students are Catholic	0.4%	2%	4%	6%	8.4

Note. The average is based on a scale where 1 is highest and 12 is lowest, so a lower average rank is better than a higher average rank.

Table 7: Paired Comparison Preferences by Function and Grade Level Teaching

	Administrators	PK-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
Rated Faith Community More Important Than					
Religion Course	63%	54%	56%	55%	64%
Integration into Curriculum	69%	60%	59%	68%	79%
Symbols and Rituals	81%	66%	69%	73%	81%
Rated Religion Course More Important Than					
Integration into Curriculum	46%	48%	55%	51%	59%
Symbols and Rituals	59%	55%	60%	55%	64%
Rated Integration into Curriculum More Important Than					
Symbols and Rituals	54%	50%	49%	48%	47%

Catholic identity than the presence of *Rituals and Symbols*. Eighty-one percent of administrators and high school teachers, more than 70% of middle school teachers, and approximately two-thirds of teachers in the PK and elementary grades chose *Culture and Faith Community* as a more important component of Catholic identity than the presence of *Rituals and Symbols*.

The teachers and administrators also selected *Culture and Faith Community* as a more important identifier of the school's Catholic identity than *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum*. The percentage choosing *Culture and Faith Community* over *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* was not as high as in the comparison with *Rituals and Symbols*, but the pattern was nearly the same. The high school teachers (78%) were the most likely to choose the *Culture and Faith Community* as more important than *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum*, followed by the administrators (69%) and middle grade teachers (68%), and finally by the PK and elementary grade teachers at approximately 60%.

The final comparison of *Culture and Faith Community* is with *Religion Course Teaches Catholic Doctrine*. All groups of respondents continue to consider *Culture and Faith Community* as a more important component of a school's Catholic identity than the content of the religion course. Just over 60% of high school teachers and administrators selected the school's culture and faith community as more important than the religion course teaching Catholic doctrine followed by approximately 55% of the other teachers.

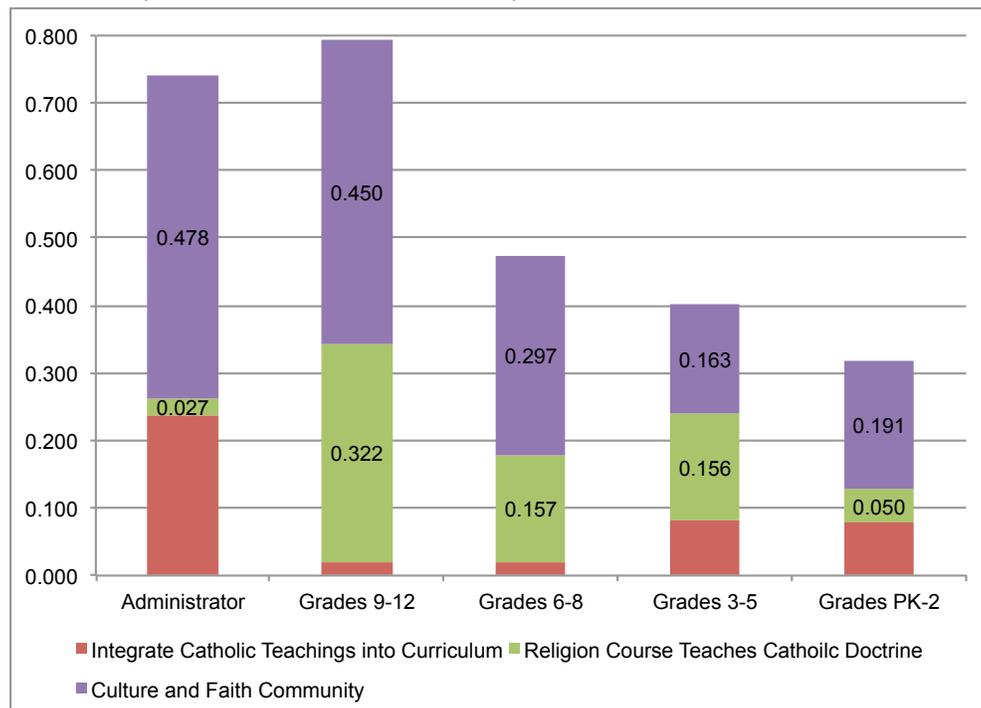
*Religion Course Teaches Catholic Doctrine* was seen as a more important component of Catholic identity than the presence of *Rituals and Symbols* by all groups of respondents. Between 55% and 64% of the respondents felt that teaching Catholic doctrine in the religion course was more important to the school's Catholic identity than were the presence of rituals and symbols. The pattern was somewhat different, however, for whether the content of the religion course was a more important component than integrating Catholic teachings into the curriculum. While more than half of the teachers in grades 3 through 12 felt that *Religion Course Teaches Catholic Doctrine* was more important than *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* as a defining characteristic of a Catholic school, the administrators and teachers in the very early grades thought that the integration of Catholic teachings into courses was slightly more important.

The final of the six comparisons that the administrators and teachers were asked to make was between *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* and the presence of *Rituals and Symbols*. More than half of the administrators

selected *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* as more important; however, the teachers were about evenly split between *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* and the presence of *Rituals and Symbols*. The differences among the subgroups of teachers were not large since all the percentages were 50% or slightly smaller.

Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of how far apart on a common interval scale are the four components of Catholic identity for the administrators and each of the subgroups of teachers. The length of each segment in each column represents the distance in importance between that component and the component below it. In each case, the base from which the distances are calculated is *Rituals and Symbols*, which has been assigned a value of 0, since it had the lowest scale value for each of the subgroups. The shorter the length of the segment, the closer the component is in the respondents' assessment of the importance of that component in contributing to a school's Catholic identity compared with the component below it. The scale value on the vertical axis

Figure 2: Distances in Importance between Adjacent Components of Catholic Identity with Rituals and Symbols as the Baseline as Perceived by the Administrators and Teachers



Note: The base from which the distances are calculated is *Rituals and Symbols*, which has been assigned a value of 0.

represents the total distance in importance of that component on the scale from the base of *Rituals and Symbols*.

The graph shows that relative ordering of the importance of the components for the subgroups is the same: *Culture and Faith Community* is furthest in importance from *Ritual and Symbols*, followed by *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* and *Religion Course Teaches Catholic Doctrine*. Several other patterns are observed in the graph:

- The graph shows that the separation between the four components, which is an indication of how distinct these components are in their order of importance for Catholic identity in the perceptions of the respondents, is greater for administrators and high school teachers than it is for teachers in grades PK-8. In fact, the differences in importance among the components decreases according to the grade level of the teachers, with the high school teachers having the largest variance in importance of the components and the teachers in grades PK-2 having the smallest variance.
- For the administrators and each subgroup of teachers, *Culture and Faith Community* not only is seen as the most important component of Catholic identity, it has the greatest separation in importance from the other components, far greater for administrators and high school teachers than for teachers in grades PK-8. As was previously noted in the ratings and rankings, the importance accorded to *Culture and Faith Community* was greater than the importance accorded to the other three components of Catholic identity.
- Considerable variation exists among the subgroups for the importance of the component representing that the religion course teaches Catholic doctrine. The largest separation in importance of *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* from its adjacent component occurs for high school teachers and the two smallest separations in importance are present for administrators and teachers in grades PK-2. The small differences in importance may be indications of some ambivalence in rating the relative importance of the content of the religion course and the integration of Catholic teachings into other courses in the curriculum. On the other hand, there is clear separation in importance between these two components for the other teachers, with the high school teachers exhibiting the greatest separation.
- Finally, the clearest indication that the culture and faith community of a Catholic school is a more important indicator of a school's Catholic iden-

tity than the presence of rituals and symbols is most evident from the administrators who responded to the survey. The administrators not only had one of the largest separations in importance among the components overall in their response to the importance of integrating Catholic teachings into the curriculum, they also exhibited the largest separation of that component from the base of *Rituals and Symbols*. In each of the subgroups of teachers, the separation in importance between *Integrate Catholic Teachings into the Curriculum* and the base of *Rituals and Symbols* was much less than that for administrators and very small for middle school and high school teachers.

### Discussion

It is clear from the findings that a school's culture or faith community is viewed as the most important component of the school's Catholic identity by the vast majority of the teachers and administrators who responded to the survey. Over 90% of the teachers and administrators saw the school's faith community as essential to the school's Catholic identity. The longer the teacher or administrator worked in Catholic schools, the higher the rating they gave of the essential nature of the school's faith community to its Catholic identity. Furthermore, in every group of respondents, the school's faith community far surpassed the other components in importance.

The relationship between the length of time working in a Catholic school and the importance that teachers and administrators assigned to the development of the faith community in the school is an important finding. Hobbie, Convey, and Schuttloffel (2010) had a similar result with their finding that years of teaching in a Catholic school was a significant predictor of Catholic school identity. Since the responsibility for creating the faith community rests principally with the teachers "as individuals and as a community" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), these findings imply that it takes time and experience for teachers to grasp fully the importance of the faith community and their role in creating and sustaining it, which argues for the importance of a stable and experienced faculty. Rapid turnover in a Catholic school may be a prescription for an unfocused Catholic environment. Every effort should be made to retain committed and seasoned Catholic school teachers in order to preserve a strong Catholic identity in the school.

Three of the five other components that received high ratings from the

teachers and the administrators for being essential to a school's Catholic identity are also part of a Catholic school's particular culture. The school's day beginning with prayer sets the tone for the entire day. Periodic school-wide liturgies connect the Catholic school community to the wider Church's Eucharistic celebrations, "the source and summit of the Christian life" as stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1324 (United States Catholic Conference, 1994). Providing students with opportunities for Christian service enables students to put their faith in action and in service to others.

The final two of the six highest rated components of Catholic identity concern what is taught in the religion class and by whom. The vast majority of the teachers and administrators affirmed the essential nature of the religion course presenting Catholic teaching and most placed high importance on the religion teacher being Catholic. Most dioceses have adopted a religion curriculum or have established standards that the religion curriculum should meet. In any event, the religion classes should clearly present the teachings of the Church in a manner that is appropriate to the age of the students. In addition, the religion curriculum should follow the guidelines established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in the *National Directory for Catechesis* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005) and the recently adopted curricular framework for the teaching of high school religion (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008).

The communication of Catholic teachings and values, however, should not be limited to the formal religion courses, but should be infused in all aspects of the curriculum to the extent possible and appropriate. While teachers may find it easier to integrate Catholic teachings in subjects such as English, language arts, social studies, and the sciences, particularly biology, why not also in the mathematics class in the types of word problems presented to the students. In bringing Catholic teachings periodically to other courses in the curriculum other than the religion course, the intellectual environment of the school is enriched and students are helped to see that their faith and beliefs are not compartmentalized but rather are a part of their entire experience, a true integration of "faith and reason."

The component of Catholic identity that showed the greatest variation in the rankings and ratings and among the groups of teachers and administrators was the integration of Catholic teachings into the curriculum. Its mean rating score placed it ninth among the 12 components and the percentage of all respondents that rated it essential would place it in 10th place; however, its average ranking was fifth highest.

While the integration of Catholic teachings into the curriculum did not receive as high ratings on the essential scale as did the content of the religion course overall, it did have higher ratings from administrators and more experienced teachers than from other respondents. On the other hand, the separation in importance of integrating Catholic teachings into the curriculum from the presence of rituals and symbols was the smallest for teachers in grades 6 to 12, the grades that should present the best opportunities for such integration. It would seem that all teachers, but particularly those in the middle school and high school grades, could benefit from professional development that would assist them to develop ways to integrate Catholic teachings throughout the curriculum.

It is also clear from the findings that the majority of teachers and administrators did not consider the proportion of Catholics on the faculty and percentage of Catholic students as being essential elements of a school's Catholic identity. This finding is similar to the teachers in Kushner and Helbling's study (1995) who were far more likely to indicate that the teaching of religion (86%) contributes more to the Catholic identity of their schools than does the presence of Catholic teachers or the presence of religious on the faculty or in the administration. Apart from the religion teacher being Catholic because of the content that the teacher is expected to present and the principal being Catholic because of her or his role in the spiritual leadership of the schools in addition to the academic leadership, the respondents viewed the school's environment, the content that is presented, and the presence of rituals and symbols as more important than the religion of those who taught in the school and the students who attend it.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the teachers and administrators felt that the most important component of Catholic identity in a Catholic school is the school's culture or faith community. The faith community was rated higher than any other dimension of Catholic identity and the term "faith" appeared among the most frequently mentioned attributes in the open-ended question. The teachers and administrators also gave high priority to the content of the religion course, who taught religion and other aspects of the school's environment, prayer at the beginning of the day, periodic liturgical celebrations, and students participating in Christian service.

The lowest priorities assigned by the teachers and administrators as being essential to the Catholic identity of a Catholic school were the percentage of students who are Catholic, followed by the percentages of teachers who are

Catholic. On the other hand, the respondents affirmed the importance of both the principal and the religion teacher being Catholic.

Differences in the perceptions of importance of various components were evident by the length of time the respondents had worked in a Catholic school, with more experienced teachers assigning more importance to the leading component than less experienced teachers, and their role in the school, with administrators assigning the highest ratings, following by teachers in elementary school and finally by high school teachers. In addition, those who taught religion generally gave higher ratings to the components compared with those who did not teach religion, a large number of whom were high school teachers. Finally, Catholic teachers were more likely than non-Catholic teachers to rate a particular component as being essential to the school's Catholic identity.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI was very clear in his presentation to Catholic educators on April 17, 2008 at The Catholic University of America about the importance of education to the Church and, in particular, the education that occurs in a Catholic school with its faith dimension. The Holy Father said: "First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God, who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth." He later continued: "Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates with the ecclesial life of faith" (Benedict XVI, 2008).

For the teachers and administrators of Catholic schools, a school is Catholic not because of its name, or the presence of crucifixes, or because it has a course in religion, or by the percentage of Catholic students, but rather by its Catholic ethos, its faith community, which is manifested in what is taught and how, how people relate to one another, what the environment looks like, what celebrations occurs and, finally, by its name.

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