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PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?**

Carmen Z. Lopez

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN  
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

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of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Carmen Z. Lopez

Date Submitted: March 13, 2024

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Carmen Z. Lopez

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Dr. Richard Bernato

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## ABSTRACT

### A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Carmen Z. Lopez

*“Let it be known to all who enter here that Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen but ever-present Teacher in its classes, the model for its children, the inspiration for its staff.” - Anonymous*

This study explored the journeys and experiences of women leaders in Catholic secondary schools, focusing on their challenges and successes. The research included six participants who held leadership positions ranging from school principal to regional superintendent and represented diverse ages and perspectives. Using a qualitative approach with a case study framework, the study drew on Ciriello’s (1996) theoretical framework and Uhl’s (2020) systemic method of analyzing and reflecting on conflicts, providing the conceptual lens to understand women’s experiences as Catholic school leaders. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participant journaling, utilizing the case study inquiry model to provide a nuanced exploration of these women’s personal and professional trajectories in their roles. The experiences, professional growth, and challenges women face in Catholic education reflect the dynamic nature of leadership within the context of faith-based education profoundly interconnected, with each dimension contributing to the holistic mission of Catholic schooling.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The experiences of women principals in Catholic schools are not well documented for many reasons, some of which point to the limited research on women, women's leadership in schools, and their advancement in general (Caruso, 2012; Shakeshaft, 2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). This study explored the life experiences of the principals related to the furtherance of their careers, the challenges they have met, and their roles as spiritual, educational, and managerial leaders. The need for the study was established by examining the historical context of women within the Catholic Church and their role. It became evident that the historical conditions of Catholic schools' culture and context did not allow women leaders with necessary administrative skills to be identified and selected for principal positions and advancement.

In 1979, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, as detailed in the book "Sharing the Light of Faith" by Bryce, underscored the intricate connection between the Catholic identity of Catholic principals and their administrative leadership roles. The United States bishops elucidated how this identity could be intricately intertwined with the mission of the Church. Throughout the 1980s, numerous documents emphasized the multifaceted responsibilities of school leaders, particularly emphasizing the spiritual and pastoral dimensions inherent to Catholic schools.

A lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school with the best possible professional qualifications, with an apostolic intention inspired by faith, for the integral formation of the human person, in communication of culture, in an exercise of that pedagogy which will emphasize direct and personal contact with students, giving spiritual inspiration to the

educational community of which he or she is a member, as well as to all the different persons related to the educational community. To this lay person, as a member of this community, the family and the church entrust the school's educational endeavor (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, p. 24).

The report highlighted the importance of Catholic school leaders possessing the requisite skills and qualifications to enhance the school's Catholic identity and promote faith development. Given that Catholic education is integral to the church's mission, the principal's role is deemed crucial in shaping Catholic identity.

Throughout the 20th century, numerous Catholic schools in the United States were administered by religious women, underscoring their pivotal role in Catholic education (Caruso, 2012). These religious groups established Catholic schools in the United States to cater to immigrants' diverse cultural backgrounds and address all students' educational needs (James, 2007). There was a massive increase in women entering religious life in 1946. Even though the literature is scarce regarding their role as principals, these religious orders ran all aspects of the schools, from administrative positions to instruction. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles had a huge student population in Catholic schools. Caruso (2012) details the history of the schools and the sisters of St. Louis in Ireland's involvement in the area. The religious orders ran the schools, educating the poor and immigrant children (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Walch, 2003). They were also trained to become domestic helpers.

The rise in women's involvement in religious life corresponded with the growing demand for teachers. It was in 1964 that sisters assumed roles as educational leaders, marking a significant milestone. Caruso (2012) attributes schools' success to nuns' active

participation. Despite being pioneers in these roles, statistics from 1940 reveal that the number of priests in the Boston Diocese surpassed that of sisters. Oversight of religious orders fell under the purview of the local bishop and pontifical office, despite being governed by canon law. The 1960s, coinciding with Vatican II, witnessed cultural revolutions that influenced Catholic education practices. These included the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the women's movement, the Latin American liberation movement, the Watergate scandal, and environmental concerns, each leaving a significant imprint on Catholic education (Caruso, 2012, p. 51). Vatican II prompted a reevaluation of the mission and vision of religious communities, leading to a decline in the number of religious sisters and vocations. With the closure of religious order schools, laymen and women assumed administrative and teaching roles. The patriarchal structure of Catholic education and limited opportunities for women in leadership may have deterred many from pursuing careers in education.

Jamie Manson is a columnist and book editor at the National Catholic Reporter. She attained her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School, delving into theology, spirituality, and sexual ethics during her studies. Additionally, she holds the distinction of being the first openly queer woman featured in the global Catholic media. Her perspectives on the role of women within the Catholic Church and their contributions to American history are empowering. In 2016, Manson wrote in her article “Stop shaming women for seeking power in the church” regarding Pope Francis' commission on women as deacons and the church's doctrine. She highlighted that the doctrine restricted women from assuming roles separate from those of men, elucidating the Catholic Church's perspective that men are inherently designated as leaders and



decision-makers, whereas women are considered as servants and aides. In her article, she states that the pope "has repeatedly said that women are entitled to equal dignity, but he has not said that they are entitled to equal power" (Manson, 2016). The Catholic Church and society, in general, have a history of excluding women from educational and religious leadership roles. The beliefs about women in the church and community have much to do with how they treat women in education and religious leadership roles (Manson, 2016).

Historically, various researchers have acknowledged that women have been underrepresented in high-ranking educational leadership roles, not only with the church but also in the public sector. Despite women being disproportionately represented as classroom teachers, they persist in being underrepresented in leadership roles concerning decision-making within educational administration (Bynum, 2016; Coleman, 2003; Fuller, 2013; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Moorosi, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017; Torrance et al., 2017). Nicdao (2020) (2020, p. xi). According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), it is difficult to document the representation of women in school leadership positions due to the lack of comparable data in the country. It is well known that the Education Departments do not typically release figures differentiated by gender. The lack of role models and systems that support women in leadership has been regarded as one of the most significant factors in increasing women's representation in high positions (Bynum, 2016). This is also known despite the lack of reliable and comparable data in the United States.

The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) is the largest professional education association globally, specifically catering to Catholic educators. Functioning

as a premier professional organization, the NCEA is committed to addressing Catholic school teachers' requirements while also nurturing future leaders' development in education. Its members include over 140,000 individuals who teach in Catholic schools. The NCEA's focus is to support ministry teaching for Catholic educators. The NCEA provides a yearly publication throughout the United States about schools, enrollment, and staffing patterns for Catholic elementary and secondary schools. The NCEA 2022-2023 statistical report on schools does not report the annual data on administrative positions by gender from year to year. To request the gender, the researcher emailed Sr. Dale McDonald from the NCEA asking for the breakdown of women (lay and Religious/Clergy) in leadership (Principals, Assistant Principals, Headmasters, and Presidents) within Catholic secondary schools. In a personal communication, Sr. McDonald responded:

I'm sorry I can't provide the help you need because the data don't exist. The survey question that results in the listing that is in the annual report does not distinguish among the professional staff - teachers are included in that number as well as the school leadership and I have no way of breaking it down other than as it is. Each diocese collects the data for us and sends me only the combined results for all their schools. I don't know of any place where the data might be disaggregated except at diocesan levels, which I don't have access to (D.

McDonald, personal communication, November 18, 2020).

Upon receiving a communication from McDonald's in 2020, the researcher reviewed the data bank. After analyzing Sr. McDonald's response, it was found that the 2022-2023 School Staffing History of full-time staff in Catholic schools does not provide a

breakdown of women (lay and religious/clergy) holding leadership positions such as Principals, Assistant Principals, Headmasters, and Presidents within Catholic secondary schools. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are from the 2022-2023 NCEA statistical report on schools.

### Figure 1

#### *Professional Staff*

##### **Professional Staff:**

- Full-time equivalent professional staff numbered 147,849:
  - 97.7%: Laity (Lay women: 75.0% Lay men: 22.8%)
  - 2.3%: Religious/Clergy (Sisters: 1.3%; Brothers: 0.3%; Clergy: 0.6%)
- The student/teacher ratio is 11.5:1.

### Figure 2

#### *School Staffing*

EXHIBIT 2: School Staffing History					
FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT TOTAL STAFF					
	RELIGIOUS		LAY		TOTAL
	Number	%	Number	%	
1920	45,563	92.0	3,942	8.0	49,505
1930	65,601	90.4	6,951	9.6	72,552
1940	73,960	91.2	7,097	8.8	81,057
1950	84,925	90.1	9,370	9.9	94,295
1960	112,029	73.8	39,873	26.2	151,902
1970	80,615	48.4	85,873	51.6	166,488
1980	42,732	29.0	104,562	71.0	147,294
1990	20,020	14.6	116,880	85.4	136,900
2000	11,011	7.0	146,123	93.0	157,134
2010	5,749	3.7	148,567	96.3	154,316
2020	3,765	2.6	142,602	97.4	146,367
<b>2023</b>	<b>3,334</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>144,516</b>	<b>97.7</b>	<b>147,849</b>

The decline in the number of men and women entering orders is one of the reasons for the changes in the structure of Catholic schools and the increase in laypersons (McDonald & Schultz, 2023).

The Catholic school principal's role is typically delineated across three primary dimensions: spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership (Ciriello, 1994; Nuzzi et al., 2013; Rieckhoff, 2014; Uhl, 2020). As the educational leader, they shape the school's vision and nurture essential leadership competencies, while as the spiritual leader, they foster the growth of the school's Christian community. This involves nurturing ethical and moral development within the school. The managerial leader oversees the various operational aspects of the school, including administration and finance. These roles entail specific responsibilities related to academic excellence, Catholic identity, and school sustainability (Hunt et al., 2001; Rieckhoff, 2014).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, passed by the United States Congress, mandated schools to enhance students' academic performance and held them accountable for their results (Fullan, 2014). Consequently, leadership transitions have become integral to the school community under the NCLB act. Despite the pressure to meet federal government expectations, schools and teachers strive to improve. National reform initiatives are central to educational agendas, with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops advocating for the inclusion of individuals with special needs in regular education programs in 2005. Additionally, the bishops emphasized the importance of recruiting high-quality teachers to serve as school principals, recognizing their potential to enhance academic performance (Taylor & Ryan, 2013). Catholic school administrators are recognized as the spiritual guides within their educational institutions (Ciriello, 1994; Cook & Durow, 2008; Manno, 1985). Since the mid-1980s, there has been a notable rise in the number of female principals. This increase can be attributed to the enduring advocacy of feminist scholars who challenged the viewpoints

of male educational researchers and advocated for greater representation of female principals (Shakeshaft, 1999).

These feminist scholars have contributed to the reform. Skrla and Young (2003) explore the various facets of educational leadership in the book *Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership*. They talk about the different theories and methods used by feminist scholars. They also discuss the ethical implications of researching diverse groups, especially those with special needs. They also discuss the various strategies that feminist researchers use to address multiple problems in the field. They have developed innovative approaches that provide more complex and sensitive results. The book aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the several factors that contributed to the development and maintenance of gender inequality in the United States school systems. Despite the persistent disparities in the representation of women and gender in educational leadership, the topic remains a focus of scholarly inquiry (Blackmore, 1989; Dillard, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). Due to the rise of women's education leadership literature, the criticism of mainstream literature has been instrumental in influencing the policies and practices of educational institutions. Despite the political nature of these theories, their recognition in the literature has been limited.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Given the history and reasons provided in the introduction, a study on women's leadership in Catholic schools was warranted. This qualitative study explored the experiences of Catholic school women leaders in the Archdiocese of New York. This study sought to expand and unpack women's experiences in Catholic secondary schools, focusing on their roles as women in spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership.

This study may be helpful for school leaders and decision-makers better understand women's perspectives and perceptions about their position and role in Catholic schools and for Catholic education in general. Expanding this knowledge base about women administrators and exploring how they have succeeded will increase the number of women in this position (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Despite the increase of female principals and the movement toward equity, according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), women still do not fill school administrative positions. The literature pointed to this reality for public and Catholic Schools.

This study included six female participants from the Archdiocese of New York. Two principals were from a religious order, and three were lay principals; that is, school building leaders not belonging to a religious order. The participants were selected because they were well-positioned to provide meaningful answers to questions posed in this study. The participants completed an initial interview about their spiritual, educational, and managerial practices, how they faced and addressed remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the three practices supported their challenges and barriers. The data sources used were interviews, prolonged observations, and documents.

One strategy to support the study was member checking. Member checking entailed sharing interview transcripts and copies of final reports with participants to represent their voices and opinions (Glesne, 2016). An added strategy was prolonged engagement with persistent observations to establish trust in school leaders and learn their culture. Triangulated data and methodology were used to ensure the validity of the

gathered information. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, I collected and analyzed the compiled data sources using various coding.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Catholic school principals have many responsibilities that are complex to manage (Ciriello, 1998b). Uhl (2020) provides insight into "leaders needing to practice problem-solving by confronting challenges to meet the demands which emerge from new situations and changing contexts in Catholic Education." Ciriello identified three domains of Catholic school leadership in the seminal three-volume books: spiritual, educational, and managerial. This framework and the interplay among the three domains will guide this study. Ciriello's (1998b) framework was developed to guide Catholic school leaders. Spiritual leadership is about developing faith and moral and ethical values. Educational leadership is about creating religious instruction and the whole school community. Managerial leadership is responsible for personnel and institutional management. Educational leadership is a managerial role involving educational leadership and is usually focused on developing the whole student and spiritual leadership. It also consists in celebrating and uplifting cultural and religious differences.

As outlined by Ciriello (1993), the behavior of a Catholic school principal can be described in various forms, mainly because Catholic schools are uniquely organized with strong communities interacting with a hierarchical leadership model. Ciriello (1996) noted that leadership forms several components, including vision, culture, and research. In addition, Uhl (2020) noted the emphasis on problem-solving approaches that prioritize the well-being of individuals and communities. This is strongly developed in the ethos of catholic education, the holistic development of students, and the promotion

of social justice. It is usually done by people who can lead change and improve the Catholic education system.

In 1985, Manno described the capabilities necessary for a Catholic school principal to excel. These include spiritual and academic preparation and leadership skills. The roles of a Catholic school principal can be described as a manager, an educational leader, or a religious leader. Manno (1985) also noted that the school's principal should have the necessary capabilities to create an environment where students can grow in faith. The role of the Catholic school principal is varied. Drahmman and Stenger (1989) noted that the principal's responsibilities include religious leadership, academic leadership, and managerial skills. Manno also identified various capabilities that a Catholic school administrator needs and says that school administrators play a critical role in developing a school climate that encourages social skills.

This study delved into the experiences of women serving as principals in Catholic secondary schools, examining their roles through three key lenses: spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. Ciriello delineated the multifaceted responsibilities of Catholic school principals as spiritual and transformational leaders. According to Ciriello (1994), transformational leaders play a pivotal role in fostering faith development and upholding the school's Catholic identity. Additionally, as cultural leaders, Catholic school principals are tasked with shaping students holistically and embodying the values and expectations of the school's culture (Cook, 2001). Central to the mission of a Catholic school is its Christ-centeredness, and its leaders are called upon to ensure that every aspect of the school reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ. School principals are expected to uphold the religious and communal life of the school



by aligning with the beliefs of the Church. By integrating these beliefs with their managerial leadership, principals support the spiritual, ethical, and communal aspects of their schools through their decision-making processes. While transformational leadership is a component of Ciriello's (1993) framework, it was not the primary focus of the study. These theories are briefly summarized here and further elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

### ***Spiritual Leadership***

Catholic school leaders are required to possess equivalent managerial and educational leadership competencies as their public-school counterparts. The significance of spiritual leadership within Catholic schools has been recognized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2010) (Ciriello, 1994). The spiritual leader of a school is expected to develop a community committed to faith and ethical development (Uhl, 2020; Rieckhoff, 2014). The role of the school's principal has been studied since the 1990s (Ciriello, 1993). However, this position still has more expectations (Ciriello, 1998b). Spiritual leadership aims to promote and develop individuals capable of leading and participating in spiritual activities. Ciriello (1994) defines the competencies of principals as spiritual leaders. The organizations of these competencies are in four areas of responsibility: A spiritual leader works with a school community to develop ethical and faith-based values. Spiritual leadership builds community, develops ethical and moral character, and celebrates faith. Uhl's (2020) faith-inspired action is grounded in their faith traditions; women in Catholic education approach problem-solving as an opportunity to live out their religious values of love, justice, and service. They draw inspiration from their faith teachings, seeking to create

learning communities characterized by kindness, compassion, and a commitment to social justice.

### ***Educational Leadership***

As an educational leader, the principal oversees all aspects of instruction and curriculum to ensure that all students are successful. As spiritual leaders, Catholic school principals are "transformational leaders who facilitate faith development and Catholic school identity in their school (Ciriello, 1994, p. 5). Educational leaders should use data and research to improve the quality of education of all students (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b; Uhl, 2020). The principal monitors the school's data assessments to ensure all students receive the best education possible. They also recruit and train teachers to deliver high-quality lessons for diverse students. Educational leadership is also in curriculum and instruction, guiding and developing education related to religion to educate the whole student. Transformational leaders are people committed to their organization's mission and vision and can inspire and motivate others. Catholic school leaders must develop more profound faith formation to align with the church's teachings. This is especially important since schools are expected to be mission driven. A more dynamic and intentional leadership development program is also needed to maintain the quality of Catholic education.

### ***Managerial Leadership***

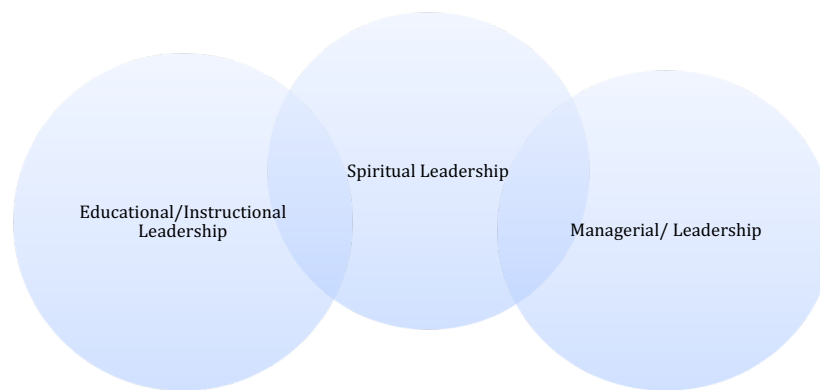
The principal's role encompasses recruitment, staff development, and overseeing institutional management (Rieckhoff, 2014). As the NCEA outlines, principals bear a wide array of duties, including ensuring academic excellence, upholding academic integrity, and managing general administration. Effective school leadership entails adept

management of financial and personnel affairs while adhering to state and local policies, fostering collaboration, and enhancing awareness of their impact on the school and its students (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b; Hallinger et al., 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2020).

Financial planners are pivotal in orchestrating fundraising endeavors and executing efficient strategies (Baxter, 2012; Cattarro & Richard, 2021; Ciriello, 1998b). Spiritual leadership involves nurturing faith and community through service and trust, alongside establishing a moral and ethical framework for management.

### **Figure 3**

*Diagram of Triangulation of Theoretical*



### **Significance/Importance of the Study**

Limited research exists on women's progress among Catholic secondary school administrators. There was a need for more research on women in leadership roles in Catholic schools. This study aimed to help church leaders support women in these roles and to determine if the patriarchal beliefs surrounding women in education made it possible for them to become educational leaders. This study focused on women's various roles in Catholic schools. It also identified these individuals' impact and skills needed throughout remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, this research examined the essential leadership qualities that ensure school success within the Archdiocese across the states by employing educational leaders and creating leadership-centered professional development. Many researchers have examined the progression of women in Catholic education. According to Zamora (2013), examining the advancement in leadership roles within Catholic education highlights the historical context and challenges women face in breaking traditional gender barriers. The author explores efforts to promote gender equality and empower women leaders within Catholic educational institutions.

In Catholic schools, the number of religious people has decreased. Today, only 2.3% of the school's faculty are members of religious orders (McDonald & Schultz, 2021). Catholic school leaders are urged to develop lay faculty members to maintain their religious identity. This study identified the key challenges Catholic school leaders faced and the leadership practices they used to overcome them. Catholic school leaders have various complex skills and responsibilities, and this study helps identify these needs.

### **Connection with Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education**

When one focuses on social injustices, it often stems from the experiences of women and children. In the US, school administrators have the most power to make decisions regarding their schools and students. This is because they are considered the most accountable individuals for the justice or oppression of students. Despite the constraints of federal and state education policies, school leaders can still make decisions and shape their schools' practices. Many scholars noted that some school leaders' resistance to implementing an equity-oriented agenda led to mental and physical

struggles (Theoharis, 2009). This seems to increase in sexual orientation, disabilities, and race factors. These factors connect to leadership and social justice, primarily how women can ensure social justice. Focusing on Catholic leadership has faced challenges in Social Justice Leadership (SJL) and the importance of embedding this leadership into education. For example, St. John's mission statement focuses on social injustice. SJL is needed to understand the whole student in education. To know how SJL works, a leader needs to see that their study environment must be designed to help them develop emotional safety. The leaders must also ensure that their programs and classrooms are designed to provide a safe environment to help students feel secure participating in social justice activities (Young & Laible, 2000).

### **Research Question**

The following research guided this study:

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as Spiritual, Educational, and Managerial leaders?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms have been defined to ensure clarity of expression throughout the study.

*COVID-19* is caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. Many older adults with severe medical conditions like diabetes and heart disease are at increased risk of developing potentially life-threatening complications from COVID-19.

*Barrier*: Merriam Webster defines the barrier as "an obstacle that prevents or blocks movement from one place to another."

*Catholic schools* are those that are committed to the mission of the Catholic Church and are in alignment with their academic mission (Archdiocese)

*Challenge:* Merriam-Webster defines challenge as "questioning the action of saying or showing that something may not be true or correct."

*Educational leaders* are leaders in integrated curriculum design, instruction, and pedagogy rooted in Catholic teaching (Ciriello, 1996).

*Instructional leadership* focuses on managing the school community's diverse learning and cultural diversity. This includes effective recruitment and hiring.

*Layperson/ Laity* is a Catholic school's educational, managerial, or spiritual leader who is not an ordained priest or member of a religious congregation (Ciriello, 1994)

*Secular Order* is the third branch of the Franciscan Family, formed by Catholic men and women who seek to follow Jesus's example.

*Managerial leadership* oversees the various aspects of a school's operations, including hiring and managing the school's staff.

*Practice problem-solving* refers to applying problem-solving approaches, techniques, and strategies in real-world situations (Uhl, 2020).

*Spiritual leadership* is defined by the work of Ciriello (1994); the role of a spiritual leader focuses on four distinct areas: (a) nurturing the faith development of faculty and staff through opportunities for spiritual growth, (b) ensuring quality Catholic religious instruction of students, (c) providing opportunities for the school community to celebrate faith, and (d) supporting and fostering consistent practices of Christian service.

*Social Justice Leadership* is a leader who keeps “at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender disability, sexual orientation, and other students who are traditionally segregated in school” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 11)

*Transformational leadership* is an approach to leadership that causes change in individuals and social systems (Burns, 2012). It includes a leader encouraging individuals to share their power and participate in the school's mission (Northouse, 2010).

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following chapter will elaborate on the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter One and the relevant literature that discusses women leaders in Catholic secondary schools. Ciriello's (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c) leadership model, despite originating in the early 90s, remains relevant in analyzing the experiences of women Catholic secondary principals. Uhl (2020) underscores the significance of addressing complex challenges in Catholic education, enabling leaders to navigate and resolve issues that lack straightforward solutions. Competent school leaders are imperative for the survival of Catholic education today. The identity of a Catholic school hinges on a tripartite leadership model encompassing the principal's roles as a spiritual, educational, and managerial leader (Ciriello, 1996). The fulfillment of the school's mission relies on the integration of these three functions.

The Catholic Church charges school administrators with serving as educational leaders and advocates for the church's mission. They must comprehend their distinctive role within Catholic schools, necessitating the development of their faith formation and the identification of areas for growth implementation. This responsibility has been acknowledged by various education experts (Ciriello, 1996; Cook & Durow; Kerins et al., 2008; Manno, 1985; Uhl, 2020). The duties of Catholic school principals have evolved amidst new challenges, including those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and fundamental shifts in the education landscape. Effective leadership's impact on addressing educational challenges posed by the pandemic is evident in enrollment, turnover, and retention rates (Bellibas et al., 2020; Cook et al., 2021; Ibeawuchi et al., 2021; Qadach et al., 2020). The protracted pandemic has placed



considerable strain on educational leadership globally, resulting in significant disruptions and uncertainties. System leaders, typically catalysts for innovation and progress, have grappled with a lack of precedent to guide effective leadership during such crises.

Catholic school leaders during the pandemic had to learn and create the skills needed to make informed decisions. The faith-based leadership skills required for success during the pandemic had to form a new way of learning. Leadership in the face of the unknown, the pandemic, and what effect it would have on our students, faculty, and community required great flexibility. Schools needed more time to prepare for a remote-teaching regime. The preparation involved ensuring success in transitioning to this remote teaching; this included making sure students took home books, etc., needed for study at home, faculty tying up loose ends; for example, finalizing test results and reports, staff preparation, and training including making arrangements for safeguarding devices (laptops, Chromebooks, and tablets) and how to use additional devices to replicate classroom settings. Teachers also maintained regular contact to support one another in planning and other tasks. School communities had to immediately roll out what would have been months or years to weeks of remote learning.

In adapting to changes, Catholic school leaders must ensure their schools perform well. This study aims to help Catholic school administrators develop the foundations necessary to ensure the success of their schools in the future. The review of literature topics: (a) culture of Catholic schools, (b) expectations for the Catholic school principal, (c) history of women in leadership, (d) women as leaders, (e) barriers and

challenges of women in leadership, and (f) women's leadership styles will help Catholic school principals to ensure the success of their schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study investigated the experiences of female Catholic secondary school principals using Ciriello's (1993 & 1998b) framework, which examines the three dimensions of spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. These theories are briefly outlined here and will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

#### ***Catholic School Principals as Spiritual Leaders***

Several perspectives in studying spiritual leadership concepts provide a framework for spiritual leadership. These frameworks will help focus the present study by highlighting key moments/impacts in the lives of the interview subjects and how they might contribute to the formation of the people they are today. A Catholic school principal is unique in this expectation because they are expected to lead spiritually (Campbell, 2000; Carr, 1995; Carr, 2000; Ciriello, 1994; Ciriello, 1996; Compagnone, 1999; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982; Cook, 2001; Diamond, 1997; Helm, 1989; Jacobs, 1996; Joseph, 2004; Manno, 1985; Moore, 1999; Muccigrosso, 1994; Schuttloffel, 1999; Second et al., 1965; Shula et al. (2022); Wallace, 1995; Wallace, 1998; Wallace, 2000).

As spiritual leaders, Catholic school principals are transformational leaders; they facilitate faith development and Catholic identity in their schools (Ciriello, 1994). The first challenge for school leaders is to make sure that their school is operating efficiently. The American bishops believe schools focused on teaching and learning about the Catholic faith have a distinct advantage over other schools (Bryce, 1979). "If

Christianity is a way of life, then Catholic school education should equal a way of life as well" (Cook, 2001, p. 9). Cook notes that leaders should intentionally cultivate their culture and ethos. Table 1 represents a list of spiritual leadership theorists and theories the researcher will use for the study. Bonfiglio and Kroh (2020) discuss inclusion within Catholic educational institutions. It delves into how Catholic schools conceptualize, develop, and practice inclusive policies and practices to ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, feel welcomed and supported within the school community. This article explored various strategies, challenges, and successes related to promoting inclusion within the context of Catholic education. Moreover, Scherman and Liebenberg (2023) aligned with Kroh (2020), as they found that a sense of community can increase the presence of healthy relationships and collaboration opportunities, creating an environment that supports academic success and personal growth.

Imron et al. (2023) conducted a study focusing on the impact of spirituality on academic engagement among students, particularly within the framework of Islamic educational psychology. Their research delved into how spirituality influences students' motivation and resilience in their academic endeavors. Similarly, Paul et al. (2019) explored spirituality within the workplace, specifically among teaching professionals. Their study examined the correlation between workplace spirituality and workforce agility, investigating how educators' spiritual beliefs and practices affect their adaptability, resilience, and performance in their professional roles. Despite the distinct contexts (academic engagement vs. workforce agility) and study populations (students vs. teaching professionals), both research endeavors shared a common goal of elucidating the role of spirituality in shaping human behavior and functioning. These

studies contribute to a broader comprehension of spirituality's impact across various facets of life, whether in educational or professional milieus.

**Table 1**

*Spiritual Leadership Theorists and Theories*

Theorist	Theories
Ciriello	The spiritual leadership role encompasses four areas of responsibility
Cook & Durrow	Faith Leadership
Drahmann & Stenger	Religious Education
Earl P.H	Faith Formation
Kaya	Spiritual Leadership
Mannos	Spiritual (belief and prayer)
Moreno & Waggner	Spiritual Leadership
Rieckhoff	Faith Leadership
Schultloffel	Theological Education and Spiritual Leadership
Sergiovanni	Catholic faith and doctrine
Uhl	Orchestrating Conflict as a practice-oriented, problem-solving approach
Wallace	Deep understanding of Faith Leader

Catholic school principals must integrate their teachings into their managerial and academic behavior as cultural leaders. They must also support their entire school's spiritual, ethical, and communal life. They should do this by modeling in their actions and words what they are expected to articulate, develop, and maintain their school's Catholic identity and culture. Influential leaders should build their spiritual foundation while serving as community builders (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b). Administrators should

also foster an environment that supports the spiritual needs of others. As a school principal, a spiritual leader must ensure that all faculty and staff are committed to bringing spiritual awareness into the classrooms and throughout the school's community (Ciriello (1998b).

Despite the importance of faith in Catholic schools, most Catholic school leaders have no training in the faith's teachings. Catholic school administrators must promote spiritual development through example. This makes them uncomfortable leading the school. According to Wallace (1995), 70% of principals lack the knowledge of faith based. Influential leaders should show great flexibility in communicating and acting with their followers. As instructional leaders, they should be involved in their curriculum and instruction (Ciriello, 1993).

In 2014, Rieckhoff observed a notable convergence between the responsibilities of Catholic school principals and their counterparts in public schools, alongside challenges stemming from a decline in church attendance. This decline has accentuated the pivotal spiritual role of Catholic school principals in advancing the church's mission within families (Rieckhoff, 2014). Manno's (1985) publication on Catholic school principals offers a comprehensive framework for evaluating and recruiting influential educational leaders, seamlessly integrating various facets of leadership. Competencies, delineated as expected behaviors, form the basis for evaluating school leaders' effectiveness (Ciriello, 1994). These competencies encompass leading by example, fostering a culture of faith and moral development, and implementing religious education. A Catholic school principal's quality can be assessed by examining their demonstrated behaviors concerning faith development (Ciriello, 1994; Muccigrosso,

1994). Table 2 lists spiritual leadership organized within four areas of responsibility from Volume II of Ciriello's (1996) *Spiritual Leadership* books (p. xi) related to areas in this study.

**Table 2**

*The Principal as a Spiritual Leadership: Four Areas of Responsibility*

Area of Responsibility	Competencies
Faith Development	F1. Nurtures the faith development of faculty and staff through opportunities for spiritual growth (“School Administrator (Principal & Assistant Principal) - LinkedIn”) F2. Ensures quality Catholic religious instruction of students. F3. Provide opportunities for the school community to celebrate faith. F4. Supports and fosters consistent practices of Christian services.
Building Christian Community	B1. Fosters collaboration between the parish(es) and the school. B2. Recognizes, respects, and facilitates the role of parents as primary educators. B3. Promotes the Catholic community.
Moral and Ethical Development	M1. Facilitates the moral development and maturity of children, youth, and adults. M2. Integrates gospel values and Christian ethics into the school's curriculum, policies, and life.
History and Philosophy of Catholic Schools	H1. Knows the history and purpose of Catholic schools in the United States H2. Utilizes church documents and Catholic guidelines and directives. H3. Develops and implements a statement of school philosophy and mission that reflects the unique Catholic character of the school

The spiritual mission of a school encompasses various dimensions, and ensuring its alignment with the Catholic Church's teachings is essential for the principal. This entails involvement in religious education and fostering a culture of prayer among students (Boyle et al., 2016; Rieckhoff, 2014). Ciriello (1994) outlines the multifaceted nature of spiritual leadership for Catholic school principals, encompassing responsibilities such as nurturing faith development, fostering Christian community, facilitating ethical formation, and conveying the school's history and philosophy. While existing research predominantly focuses on spiritual growth in elementary schools, this study aims to present significant insights into the spiritual leadership of secondary Catholic school principals (Cook & Durow, 2008; Drahmman & Stenger, 1989; Earl, 2005; Rieckhoff, 2014; Staudt, 2020). The study endeavors to bolster the spiritual leadership of Catholic schools and contribute valuable insights to secondary school principals, particularly by examining the role of women in leadership within the Archdiocese of New York (Muccigrosso, 1994).

### ***Catholic School Principals as Educational Leaders***

Catholic school leaders hold a crucial position in the advancement of successful educational institutions (Rinehart, 2017). Entrusted with the oversight of school operations and academic endeavors, these leaders bear significant responsibility. Educational leadership stands out as the foremost determinant linked to the effectiveness of schools (Sergiovanni, 2006). The role of school leaders stands as one of the paramount considerations for schools in shaping their educational frameworks (Sergiovanni, 2006; Rinehart, 2017). Additionally, principals play a pivotal role in

crafting effective lesson plans and ensuring the proper implementation of educational standards.

The importance of fostering teamwork and professional development for student success is widely recognized (Brauckmann, 2016; Didion et al., 2020). Previous research consistently demonstrates a positive association between effective team building among educators and enhanced student outcomes (e.g., Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2020). For example, Cross et al. (2021) emphasized that collaborative teamwork fosters a nurturing school environment where educators collaborate, share best practices, and collectively pursue common objectives. Moreover, according to Bernacki et al. (2021), cohesive teams are more adept at addressing the diverse needs of students, customizing instruction to accommodate different learning styles, and offering targeted assistance to students facing challenges.

Indeed, the role of principals in education encompasses supporting the development of teachers and fostering a culture of skillfulness and resilience within the education system. Authors such as Cherkowski et al. (2008), Connery (2020), and Marks & Printy (2003) have all emphasized the significance of this aspect of principal leadership. In Marks and Printy's (2003) restructuring of school study in the United States, 300 schools were nominated, 24 elementary, middle, and high schools, eight at each grade level, to participate in the Restructuring study (SRS). Marks and Printy's study are critical because it demonstrates the importance of the absence of shared instructional leadership in schools and the lack of transformational leadership in their findings (Kwan, 2019). The importance of this study is the recognition of instructional



leadership if schools are to improve and of its evolving nature in the professionalism of teachers (Wilkinson et al., 2019).

A study conducted in 2000 by Blase and Blase revealed that influential leaders help their teachers develop by collaborating and sharing ideas. It also revealed that professional development for teachers could be enhanced by various feedback and reflection sessions with their superiors. The key to successful teaching is having the right tools and training to support teachers to help all students reach their potential. This means that they should not only focus on their own needs but also the needs of the students. Catholic school leaders should keep up with the latest education research to get current information. The expectations of the educational leader's role in a Catholic school are high and require that the principal remain dedicated through their professional development (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b).

The educational leader is also responsible for guaranteeing clarity in the school's objectives and ensuring that all teachers receive adequate training to execute them (Lunenburg, 2013; Rodrigues & Avila de Lima, 2021) effectively. Furthermore, the principal oversees that classroom assessments align with the curriculum. In 2014, educational authority Fullan emphasized the importance of principals prioritizing the needs of teachers over solely managing the school's daily operations. Table 3 provides an overview of notable theorists and practices in educational leadership.

**Table 3***Educational Leadership Theorist and Theories/Practices*

Theorist	Theories/Practices
Marks and Printy, Fullan	Educational leadership
Lunenburg	Professional Development
Blase/Blase	Instructional Leadership
Bonfiglio/Kroh	Inclusion practice
Segoranni and Rinehart	Instructional and Effective Leadership
Ciriello	Effective Leadership
Northouse	Leadership has multiple dimensions.
Avolio and Gardner, Shamir Eilam	Authentic Leadership Theory
Eagly and Carli	Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire Leadership
Bass	A trait approach to leadership
Katz	Skills approach to leadership
Evans	Path-goal theory
Heifetz	Adaptive Leadership Theory
Greenleaf	Servant leadership
Burns	2 Types of transformational leadership
Collinson	Critical Leadership Theory
Waters	Positive Education
Kwan	Transformation Leadership Theory

Every school principal must be in the classroom to monitor the teaching and learning process. They are also expected to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction, teaching techniques, and procedures. Educational leaders are advised to utilize data and research in their decision-making processes to ensure alignment with the school's objectives and instructional plans (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b). Principals are further tasked with guaranteeing that these decisions are congruent with the school's instructional goals and serve the explicit instructional aims of their educational leadership (Lunenburg, 2013). In addition, they should communicate with the teachers and other school officials to ensure that their plan goals are met. According to Fullan (2014), the principal should start transitioning into a leading learner instead of a prominent educational leader. This

will allow the school's teachers to focus on their professional development even though many schools have experienced significant growth. Table 4 lists educational leadership from Volume 1 of Ciriello's (1998b. p. xiii) books, providing the two areas of responsibility and their corresponding competencies.

**Table 4**

*The Principal as Educational Leader*

Area of Responsibility	Competencies
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L1. Demonstrates symbolic and cultural leadership skills in developing a school climate reflecting Catholic identity.</li> <li>L2. Applies a Catholic educational vision to the daily activities of the school.</li> <li>L3. Promotes healthy staff morale.</li> <li>L4. Recognizes and fosters leadership ability among staff members.</li> <li>L5. Interprets and uses research to guide action plans.</li> <li>L6. Identifies and effects needed change.</li> <li>L7. Attends to personal growth and professional development.</li> </ul>
Curriculum and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C1. Demonstrates knowledge of the content and the methods of religious education</li> <li>C2. Knows the developmental states of children and youth.</li> <li>C3. Recognizes and provides for cultural and religious differences.</li> <li>C4. Provides leadership in curriculum development, especially for the integration of Christian values.</li> <li>C5. Demonstrates an understanding of a variety of educational and pedagogical skills.</li> <li>C6. Recognizes and accommodates the special learning needs of children with the inclusive classroom.</li> <li>C7. Supervises instruction effectively.</li> <li>C8. Demonstrates an understanding of effective procedures for evaluating the learning of students.</li> <li>C9. Demonstrates the ability to evaluate the general effectiveness of the school's learning program.</li> </ul>

According to the New Thinking About Instructional Leadership study, the managerial role of school principals has become more critical in improving academic performance (Horng & Loeb, 2010). Horng and Loeb noted that school administrators

play a vital role in developing and enhancing academic performance. Although it may pose challenges for school leaders to manage the various aspects of their school, they believe to maintain the belief in the potential of their managerial role to enhance the school's academic performance (Horng & Loeb, 2010). "Management is important in addition to instructional leadership," according to Lunenburg and Lunenburg (2013, p.1).

### ***Catholic School Principals Managerial Leaders***

There has been much literature about the managerial role of school administrators.

"The responsibilities of school principals have evolved to encompass increasingly complex tasks, requiring them to take on additional duties. Catholic school principals play a pivotal role as organizational managers, overseeing various aspects of school operations such as daily functions, budget management, and resource allocation to ensure the school runs smoothly and efficiently (Fusarelli & Malloy, 2016). Their effective managerial leadership is crucial for creating and maintaining a positive school environment that aligns with its mission and values. Moreover, they must balance their roles as instructional leaders and managerial responsibilities to ensure academic success and spiritual growth among students. This role can and should be studied further since it differs from an organization's managerial positions (Horng & Loeb, 2010).

The research conducted by Horng and Loeb (2010) indicates that the managerial responsibilities of school administrators have become increasingly vital. As a result of these escalating demands, principals devote more time to administrative tasks (Fusarelli & Malloy, 2016; Sergiovanni, 2013). Effective managers must understand and provide

input to keep the schools financial and personnel operations in order. Due to the increasing demands for the position, school principals have spent more time on administrative duties than instructional leadership (Schafer, 2004). These duties include supporting the school's financial operations, board involvement, requirements, and personnel policies. To manage schools effectively, the principal must share his or her duties and responsibilities with others. The school's managerial leaders must ensure that the school's operations are carried out correctly. They also must follow the Archdiocesan policies and procedures (Ciriello, 1996, 1998b). Table 5. lists managerial leaders' areas of responsibility from Volume 1 of Ciriello's (1998b. p. xiii) books, providing the three areas of responsibility and their corresponding competencies.

**Table 5**

*The Principal as Managerial Leader*

Area of Responsibility	Competencies
Personal management	P1. Recruits, interviews, selects, and provides orientation for school staff. P2. Knows and applies principles of adult learning and motivation. P3. Knows and applies the skills of organizational management, delegation of responsibilities, and communication skills. P4. Uses group process skills effectively with various school committees. P5. Manages conflicts effectively. P6. Evaluates Staff
Institutional Management	I1. “Provides for an orderly school environment and promotes student self-discipline” (“Principal Job Description - catholic-schools-fwdiocese.org”) I2. Understands Catholic school governance structures and works effectively with school boards. I3. Recognizes the importance of the relationship between the school and the diocesan office. I4. Recognizes the importance of the relationship

Area of Responsibility	Competencies
Finance and Development	<p>between the school and religious congregation(s)</p> <p>I5. Knows civil and canon law as it applies to Catholic schools.</p> <p>I6. Understand state requirements and government-funded programs.</p> <p>I7. Understands the use of current technologies.</p> <p>D1. Demonstrates skills in planning and managing the school's financial resources toward developing and monitoring an annual budget.</p> <p>D2. Understand the basic strategies of long-range planning and apply them in developing plans for the school.</p> <p>D3. Provides for development in the broadest sense, including effective public relations programs (parish[es], church, and broader community) and a school marketing program.</p> <p>D4. Seeks resources and support beyond the school (and parish[es]).</p>

School administrators have many managerial responsibilities, all of which are equally important. The managerial leadership role comprises three significant areas of responsibility: 1. Personnel, 2. Intuition, and 3. Finance and development skills. Table 6 outlines Northouse's (2010, p. 14) Management and leadership functions, demonstrating the importance of the principal's responsibilities.

**Table 6**

*The Function of Management and Leadership Practice*

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Management	Leadership
Produces Order and Consistency	Produces Change and Movement
Planning and Budgeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish agendas</li><li>• Set timetables</li><li>• Allocate resources</li></ul> Organizing and Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide structure</li><li>• Make job placements</li><li>• Establish rules and procedures</li></ul>	Establishing direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a vision</li><li>• Clarify big pictures</li><li>• Set strategies</li></ul> Aligning People <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicate goals</li><li>• Seek commitment</li><li>• Build teams and coalitions</li></ul>

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School administrators would be unable to perform these vital managerial duties without the qualities of an effective leader. Leaders can motivate and influence others (Bass, 2000; Laub, 2004). He or she can see a vision and act toward it. According to Bass, leadership is not a single ideal definition as it depends on the context and the level of leadership being explored. There are over 200 diverse ways to define leadership, each with a unique connotation (Rost, 1993). While leaders produce change, managers help keep order and consistency, and a healthy balance is necessary to maintain the organization's growth and success (Zamora, 2013). A good leader does not necessarily need to be a manager. Instead, it is essential to have a broad view of the company and its operations (Hobbie et al., 2010). In addition, school leaders must develop a vision and execute their plans for today's environment. Today, we need leaders with a vision for Catholic education's future.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***Culture of Catholic Schools***

The publication "Your School's Catholic Identity: Name It, Claim It, and Build On It" by Engel et al. (2020) explores the significance of Catholic identity in schools and how it influences various aspects of education, including equity. The authors emphasize the importance of recognizing, embracing, and enhancing the Catholic mission within educational institutions. They argue that schools can create environments prioritizing equity and justice for all students by acknowledging and actively promoting Catholic values. The publication provides insights and strategies for educators to strengthen the Catholic identity of their schools, fostering inclusive and supportive communities where every student is valued and empowered to succeed. Heft (1997) emphasizes the significance of the identity of a Catholic educational institution. The culture of a Catholic school plays a crucial role in establishing its distinctiveness. He explores the interconnections among rituals, practices, habits, and the dynamic between dogma and dialogue, affirming the necessity of both for Christian life and community. Establishing a positive school culture is integral to fulfilling the Catholic mission of the school and effective leadership (Rieckoff, 2014; Engel et al., 2020).

The Catholic schools and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2010) maintain that preparing and recruiting new teachers and administrators is integral to keeping our schools genuinely Catholic. Teachers and administrators should be trained to have solid Catholic bonds. The Catholic educational sectors must have programs that prepare our future school administrators and teachers to achieve the Catholic faith thoroughly. The USCCB asked school leaders to ensure that the Christian



message is integrated into their curriculum and is allowed to foster a climate of the community.

A school principal's comprehension of the core values inherent in Catholic education holds significant importance in shaping the school's culture (Cook, 2001, 2015; Cross et al., 2021; Rhodes et al., 2011). Cook (2001, 2015) and Cross et al. (2021) assert that the Catholic way of life, shaped by Christ and transmitted across generations, is deeply ingrained in the school culture. Cook emphasizes the pivotal role of principals as cultural influencers within the Catholic educational framework, dubbing them the "architects of Catholic culture" (Cook, 2001, p. 2). As key cultural players, principals serve as messengers of the Catholic ethos, while teachers, as highlighted by Cook (2001, 2015), also play critical roles in embodying and promoting the Catholic school's mission.

### ***Expectations for the Catholic School Principal***

Ciriello has developed an instrument to help the school board, the principal, and the entire school grow and benefit. She has offered all the school's students a challenge through this instrument. Ciriello and Uhl draw from personal experiences as associate professors and deans of a school of education and superintendents to create their work. Uhl is more to date with using his case study to provide practice-oriented and problem-solving approaches. Leveraging case studies, Uhl provides a contemporary perspective, offering practice-oriented, problem-solving approaches that complement Ciriello's handbook. Ciriello and Uhl are a must-read literature for stakeholders, Catholic educators, and leaders. Catholic schools have a challenging time finding qualified leaders due to the various responsibilities of a school administrator. Finding the right

leader for a Catholic school can be challenging since the school's spiritual leader also performs instructional and managerial tasks and duties (Ciriello, 1996; Spesia, 2017).

Over the past decade, there has been a growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of positive education interventions in enhancing students' mental health. Waters (2021) emphasizes the importance of advancing the field of positive education to empower educators as effective school leaders. Studies conducted by Waters (2021) and Quadach & Schechter (2019) have consistently shown that implementing positive education interventions can yield significant improvements in various aspects of student well-being, including hope, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, pro-social behavior, school engagement, and academic performance. Despite these evident benefits, further research is required to explore how schools can best implement these interventions with efficacy. Moreover, according to Levin and Datnow (2012), principals need to incorporate data-driven decision-making processes into their adoption of positive education approaches. They argue that principals play a crucial role in shaping the school's vision and culture, leveraging data to inform strategic directions based on prior evidence.

The sixth standard of the National Standards for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) focuses on the necessity of capable leadership within a Catholic school. It emphasizes the empowerment of the governing body to understand and actualize the school's mission and vision ("Principalship - definition of principalship by The Free Dictionary"). Despite the ongoing reforms in Catholic education, the demand for effective school leaders persists. Developing competent leaders is crucial for these institutions to achieve their objectives. While the responsibility of a Catholic school lies

with its leaders and administrators, it is also integral to the church's mission. These leaders are entrusted with translating the school's vision and mission into practice (NSBECS). The mission of Catholic schools aligns closely with the teachings of the church. However, these institutions encounter numerous challenges, exacerbated by the absence of adequate preparation programs.

The Code of Canon 806 requires Catholic schools to be academically superior to their peers. This requires the school's leader to have the necessary training in the Catholic faith. It also requires the school to have effective ways to implement its mission (Hobbie et al., 2010). Catholic school administrators and teachers are responsible for developing and maintaining the school's Catholic identity and culture. The goal of the Catholic school administrator is to provide and ensure that the school's Catholic identity is present and maintained. 2005 Earl discussed balancing the principal's spiritual leadership and academic duties. The Catholic school principal has a unique role in developing the school's religious and educational missions. The principal of a Catholic school should promote the school's academic and religious mission. In 2010, Hobbie et al. noted that the vitality of a school depends on the Catholic leaders' ability to maintain the school's Catholic identity.

In 2005, Earl explained that the role of the school's principal should not be limited to just managing the school's academic programs and activities. The Catholic school principal should also foster the school's religious and educational mission. Unfortunately, despite establishing a national framework for school leadership, no widespread effort has been made to develop Catholic school principal preparation programs. Wharton-Beck et al. (2022) provides a contemporary perspective on the progression in education, focusing

on recent initiatives and trends that have contributed to greater representation and leadership opportunities. The authors discuss the impact of mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and institutional policy changes on educational leadership advancement. In addition, Hayes and Burkett (2020) also reported that principals who experience support, mentorship, and coaching, are more likely to experience higher levels of confidence in their leadership skills. Hayes and Mahfouz (2020) agreed with Hayes and Burkett (2020), as they reported that a principal is more likely to experience success through mentoring, as well as they receive adequate time for mentorship and a healthy pairing with their mentor. Other studies, such as Marino et al. (2020) reported that outside of teachers, principals, and administrators, mentoring can also benefit at-risk youth. These studies highlight the importance of mentoring throughout all different stakeholders of an educational institution.

With the help of researchers, Catholic secondary schools can improve their knowledge of the leadership practices of their administrators. This will help identify and develop future leaders. Catholic school leaders are now tasked with implementing technology in their classrooms and ensuring their students have the necessary academic skills. Healthy enrollment and keeping tuition costs are a constant challenge for educational leaders. Ciriello (1998b) developed a conceptual framework delineating the responsibilities of Catholic school principals, known as the tripartite leadership model. This model outlines the principal's role across three dimensions: spiritual, educational, and managerial (Ciriello, 1998b). In 2008, a collaborative effort between the Catholic school departments of Omaha and Creighton University led to the establishment of a task force aimed at devising a program of study for school leaders (Cook & Durow,

2008; Hobbie et al., 2010). This program entails three primary roles: religious leader, educational leader, and manager, mirroring the extensive leadership responsibilities assigned to Catholic school principals. Drahmman and Stenger (1989) drew parallels between the attributes of a Catholic school principal and those of saints and heroes, underscoring the importance of unwavering faith, moral integrity, dedication, and drive. The framework presented in Figure 4 delineates the multifaceted responsibilities of Catholic school leaders, as outlined by the Archdiocese of Omaha's task force (Cook & Durow, 2008, p. 362; Drahmman & Stenger, 1989).

**Figure 4**

*The Multifaceted Responsibilities of Catholic School Leaders*

<b>Personal Attributes</b>			
<i>An effective Catholic school leader exhibits:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong faith and morals</li> <li>• Awareness of ministry</li> <li>• Vision for Catholic schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial spirit</li> <li>• Passionate commitment</li> <li>• Ability to inspire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Servant leadership</li> <li>• Commitment to social justice</li> <li>• Patience and flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifelong learning</li> <li>• Empowerment/ delegation</li> <li>• Valuing of persons and relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership Capabilities</b>			
<i>An effective Catholic school leader demonstrates capability in each of the six specialized domains listed below.</i>			
<p><b>Faith Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulates and models active faith and morals.</li> <li>• Leads the community in worship and prayer.</li> <li>• Builds school faith community.</li> <li>• Generates a positive Catholic culture and environment in the school.</li> <li>• Facilitates the systematic mission formation of school personnel.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Educational Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspires and leads the school community toward educational excellence.</li> <li>• Fosters a professional learning community that values lifelong learning and involves families.</li> <li>• Recruits, selects, supervises, and evaluates school personnel in light of mission.</li> <li>• Ensures that Catholic teaching and religious values are infused throughout the educational program.</li> <li>• Provides for a high quality religious education program staffed by qualified teachers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community and Political Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positively influences relationships between the school and its communities.</li> <li>• Uses public relations strategies to promote the school and its mission to all publics.</li> <li>• Advocates the support of Catholic schools by the entire Catholic community.</li> <li>• Collaborates and networks with others who share in the mission of Catholic education.</li> <li>• Works with the local Catholic diocese, local public school district, other government agencies, and school parents to access available public funds.</li> <li>• Mobilizes the school community to seek additional public funding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Organizational Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands site-based management in relation to Catholic schools.</li> <li>• Understands Catholic school governance structures, especially the role of the parish pastor, pastoral council, parish finance committee, school board, Catholic Schools Office, and state Department of Education.</li> <li>• Promotes shared leadership in school administration and governance.</li> <li>• Demonstrates effective stewardship of school resources.</li> <li>• Understands school law, public policy, and school safety as they apply to Catholic schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mission Leadership</b></p> <p><u>Catholic Church Teachings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows the fundamentals of Catholicism.</li> <li>• Conversant with Catholic teaching, especially in relation to current moral/ethical issues.</li> </ul> <p><u>History and Philosophy of Catholic Education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows the evolutionary story of Catholic schools locally, nationally, and worldwide.</li> <li>• Understands the distinctive mission and philosophy of contemporary Catholic schools as promulgated by Church documents and scholars.</li> <li>• Communicates the Catholic identity and mission of the school verbally and in writing at every opportunity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategic Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows current trends and directions in Catholic school education.</li> <li>• Inspires all toward a shared vision for the future.</li> <li>• Initiates, monitors, and evaluates the strategic planning process to fulfill the school's mission, actualize its vision, and position the school for the future (e.g., marketing, student recruitment).</li> <li>• Promotes innovation, change, and collaboration in achieving the Catholic educational mission.</li> <li>• Creates a development plan that explores additional sources of revenue (e.g., alumni giving, grants).</li> </ul>			

## *History of Women in Leadership*

Understanding the role of women in leadership necessitates exploring their historical contributions. Throughout the Renaissance, women exerted influence across various spheres, including the military, as empresses, chiefs, queens, and religious figures. Noteworthy examples of influential female leaders span from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Greece, encompassing figures such as Queen Hatshepsut, Queen Isabella the Catholic, Queen Elizabeth I of England, and the Roman Messalina (Klenke, 2017).

As the 19th and 20th centuries unfolded, women increasingly assumed leadership roles in education, social movements, and politics. The seeds of feminism were sown in the early 20th century, embodied by trailblazers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Betty Friedan, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Susan B. Anthony. These women leaders played pivotal roles in advancing women's rights in the United States. Notably, Eleanor Roosevelt's crowning achievement was her instrumental role in crafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Firmly believing in gender equality, she championed the notion that women possessed inherent rights equal to those of men, leveraging her platform as a women's rights activist to advocate for peaceful means of societal improvement.

Numerous religions present women with avenues to break free from oppressive circumstances, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. Within these religious traditions, there exist female figures who are celebrated as heroes. For instance, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is recognized for establishing the first teaching order of sisters and the initial Catholic school in the United States (Brining & Garnett, 2014). However, religion can also be wielded to subjugate and marginalize women, relegating them to subordinate roles. For example, women are typically excluded from leadership positions

such as chaplaincy, with male ministers dominating these roles. Klenke's 2017 study revealed that only two out of nine major religious organizations are headed by women.

Moreover, as outlined in its Catechism, the Catholic Church's doctrine restricts priesthood to men based on the premise that Jesus selected male disciples (Rocca, 2013). Numerous factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in religious leadership, including entrenched hierarchies resistant to change. Certain denominations, like The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Roman Catholic Church, explicitly prohibit women from holding top leadership positions. However, the proliferation of sisters (nuns) in Catholic schools has encouraged women to pursue higher education. While the United States permits women to be ordained and assume prominent religious leadership roles, their representation at the highest echelons remains minimal. Figure 5 illustrates the stark underrepresentation of women in religious organizations, with only four occupying top leadership positions (Shakeshaft, 1989).

**Figure 5**

*Women in Religious Leadership*

Organization and top leadership position	Led by a woman ...	
	in the past	currently
American Baptist Churches USA / General Secretary	X	✓
Episcopal Church / Presiding Bishop	✓	X
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America / Presiding Bishop	X	✓
Union for Reform Judaism / President	X	X
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism / CEO	X	X
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) / Stated Clerk of the Gen. Assembly	X	X
Unitarian Universalist Association / President	X	X
United Church of Christ / General Minister and President	X	X
United Methodist Church / Pres. of the Council of Bishops	✓	X

### *Women as Leaders*

In 2011, Shakeshaft and Grogan noted that women leaders have unique styles and responsibilities. The authors said it is essential to study how women can be leaders, how they act, and their leadership styles. Through a different lens, women can improve their leadership capabilities. In 2011, Shakeshaft and Grogan noted the five ways women lead in education. The five ways include leadership for “relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership, and balanced leadership; they focused on the importance of relational leadership” (p. 6). To understand how women lead, it is essential to examine how they lead. Grogan and Shakeshaft argued that these values and approaches shifted away from the traditional leadership style and replaced it with collaborative, purposeful practice. By studying this leadership style, women can explore different sides of education leadership and develop new theories and solutions. Collaboration, especially in education, is directly linked to motivation and how it impacts effectiveness in collaborative teaching and contributes to professional growth (Anwar et al., 2021).

According to Shakeshaft, women are innately good at leadership qualities: interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, community building, and the marginality of daily work life. These qualities are ideal for women to be influential educational administrators based on their natural female tendencies (Gilligan, 1993), cited by Shakeshaft, 1987. Shakeshaft argues that women should be encouraged to pursue principal roles to provide them with the support and encouragement they need throughout their careers. The idea that women are good at certain qualities makes it a



priority to encourage them to aspire to be principals. These goals also require women to consider the challenges they might face in becoming educators.

According to Eckman, differences in how men and women approach principalship can be traced back to the various barriers they face in becoming educational administrators. Through the interviews, Eckman's (2004) study compared the dynamics of the roles and responsibilities of men and women in education. Five hundred sixty-four principals were surveyed on role conflict, commitment, and job satisfaction. They also discovered that while men tend to have a more substantial group of mentors, women are likely to become principals at a younger age. Aside from having the same responsibilities, women face various challenges in becoming educational administrators, such as family obligations that can affect their time commitment. Kleine (1994) mailed out questionnaires to 480 women nationwide with certification in school leadership. The survey asked women what they should do to become principals. Most answered that they should not neglect their home life and act like men. Kleine noted this was the kind of advice women most likely needed. Women face the most significant challenge as educational administrators in dealing with men, especially those promoted. Women leaders have a sense of perspective and believe all children can reach their full potential. They are focused on team building and discipline. Leaders create and implement values and morals that represent the school's culture. The heart of the school is its belief in these core values.

### ***COVID-19 – Barriers and Challenges***

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented school principals with unparalleled challenges, affecting various aspects of their leadership and management

roles. Numerous researchers, such as Tsagdi et al. (2019) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), point out that principals are instrumental in leading their schools through crisis management and adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. French et al. (2019) stresses the importance of successfully navigating the complexities of remote learning while prioritizing the well-being of students. Additionally, Green et al. (2020) discusses the difficulties of implementing health protocols to ensure the safety of students and staff while keeping school operations going. Moreover, Gross et al. (2021) shed light on principals' increased workload and stress as they balance multiple responsibilities, including communication with stakeholders, decision-making, and resource allocation.

Hofer et al. (2021) explore the role of principals in supporting teachers' professional development and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation in response to new teaching modalities. Didion et al. (2020) is aligned with Hofer et al. (2021), as they reported that when teachers are provided with professional development opportunities, instructional practices can be increased, which in turn increase student achievement scores. Jokić Zorkić et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of principals in addressing equity issues exacerbated by the pandemic, such as disparities in access to technology and learning resources among students. Additionally, Mahoney et al. (2020) emphasize the critical role of principals in promoting resilience and fostering a positive school climate amidst uncertainty and disruption. Weiner et al. (2021) and Weine et al. (2021) highlight the importance of effective leadership, collaboration, and flexibility in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic and ensuring the continuity of education while prioritizing the well-being of students and educators alike. Examining the challenges of maintaining community engagement and parental involvement in a virtual

learning environment, emphasizing the need for principals to build trust and communication channels with families. Williams et al. (2021) highlight the pivotal role of principal leadership in spearheading institutional change and fostering innovation to address the evolving needs of students, ensuring educational continuity both during and after the pandemic. Overall, the authors underscore the significant and multifaceted challenges school principals face in navigating the impact of COVID-19 on education, highlighting the crucial role of leadership in guiding schools through crisis and fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

### ***Barriers and Challenges of Women in Leadership***

The lack of women in secondary schools, considering the prominent levels of completed master's and doctoral work, especially in the assistant principal and principal positions, is extremely surprising. Horowitz et al. (2018) found that women are more likely to perceive barriers to reaching executive leadership roles, largely due to the gender discrimination gap. Their study revealed that 68% of women aged 18 to 49 cited gender discrimination as a contributing factor to their underrepresentation. Additionally, Horowitz et al. noted that women exhibit a stronger inclination to advocate for their beliefs in politics and business and excel in traits such as compassion and empathy. According to the Pew Research Center survey cited by Horowitz et al. (2018), Americans perceive differences in leadership styles between men and women. For example, 38% of respondents believe men possess a superior leadership style. Conversely, 22% of respondents believe that women have a better approach to leadership, while 15% think men are more adept, and 62% believe neither gender has a distinct advantage (Horowitz et al., 2018).

Catholic school leaders face many challenges in becoming successful in their chosen field. These include overcoming various obstacles in becoming a school principal. This topic provides an overview of the multiple factors that affect the success of women in these positions. It also helps identify the common issues that they face. The study aims to analyze the various facets that can create a comprehensive picture of the women leaders of the community. The number of female principals has grown significantly over the past two decades in the public-school sector and private schools; however, the percentage of women in leadership has remained steady over the same period (Hill et al., 2016). Due to the substantial number of schools and the complexity of the data collection, there needs to be current data on the number of women principals. Despite the number of women being represented in education, the number of women in senior leadership positions is still disproportionate (Stout-Rostron, 2017). Even with women's progress in higher education, they face many barriers regarding leadership positions. One is the belief that being a mother and a wife makes it hard for women to handle leadership responsibilities (Bassett, 2009).

In 2009, Bassett noted that despite the changes in society, men still hold beliefs about the appropriateness of women's roles in leadership. In Shakeshaft's (1989) book, *Women in Educational Administration*, she notes that men still have these beliefs. Although men and women hold these beliefs, it is interesting that women are more likely to question their leadership abilities (Sobehart, 2015). Her metaphor of melting glaciers in educational leadership represented obstacles to becoming leaders (Shakeshaft, 1989). She also noted the barriers women face in becoming educational leaders, such as schools, which are often difficult to lead and not by choice. Other scholars agree with this

observation. Studies conducted by international scholars have shown that women are actively being held back in education.

In 1989, Shakeshaft established the foundational concepts regarding women and the gender and cultural obstacles impeding their presence in educational administration. Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that “White males hold power and privilege over all groups” (p. 83). Nirigliano (2017) observes, “The concept of male dominance elucidates the origins of barriers hindering women's educational advancement.” The traits defining successful principals vary markedly, distinguishing them from their counterparts. Male and female principals exhibit markedly different characteristics. Schools serve as reflections of the societies in which they operate. The pressures of culture affect how they work, and women aspiring to become principals should recognize these issues. The charges for women as school leaders are to winnow down to the problems holding back their performance.

Women still face many challenges in becoming school leaders, even though the number of women in school leadership has increased. Shakeshaft (2006) finds that Goffman's stereotype remains the same despite the rising number of women in school leadership. They must also overcome various obstacles, such as gender discrimination and expectations. High-profile women in public roles can help women break the mold of typical female behavior. There are many factors that women face when attaining leadership positions. In a study conducted by Rieg and Helterbran in 2004, they identified ten key issues that prevent women from obtaining academic positions. Numerous studies have determined women's obstacles when securing leadership positions. As studies on women's leadership have increased, reports of obstacles and

challenges have been replaced with uplifting studies. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft, reflections on women's leadership have shifted their focus to how women lead.

Miller's (2022) work adds to the ongoing discussion surrounding advancements in Catholic education by exploring how gender intersects with other identity factors like race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. The author emphasizes the need to confront systemic inequalities and advocate for inclusive leadership approaches to facilitate progress across all levels of Catholic educational establishments. Together, these studies offer insights into the journey of women's advancement in Catholic education, spanning from historical obstacles to present-day efforts focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women in leadership roles. Moreover, Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) reported that inclusive leadership practices must encompass all areas of an educational institution; principals must adopt an inclusive leadership approach to ensure proper training and support are provided for their teachers, as well as the ability to individualize learning environments to benefit all students.

### ***Discrimination, Gender, and Cultural Barriers***

Findings from a study conducted by the Pew Research Center indicated that 60% of women feel compelled to exert extra effort to succeed in politics and business, with 54% perceiving gender discrimination. Shakeshaft's (1989) research highlighted patriarchal ideologies that hindered women's entry into educational administration, primarily driven by male dominance. Coleman's (2007) investigation into women in educational leadership unveiled systemic discrimination against them. Instances

included one woman being denied consideration for a position because a man occupied it, and another being discouraged from working due to her parental responsibilities.

The most prevalent discriminatory messages revolved around women's ability to balance work and personal life, particularly concerning motherhood. Additionally, discrimination against women without children was a notable theme (Coleman, 2007; Stout-Rostron, 2017). Stout-Rostron's 2017 study highlighted many participants' experiences of discrimination and a prevailing male-dominated atmosphere in their workplaces, leading to a reluctance to advocate for themselves. Apart from encountering the glass ceiling, women face challenges in attaining leadership positions due to educational disparities, familial responsibilities, and insufficient support and role models (Stout-Rostron, 2017). The study found that women who reported success in leadership roles often exhibited stereotypical traits such as empathy and the ability to defuse tense situations. Strout-Rostron's 2017 interviews with women leaders in various countries revealed that they had a tough time overcoming traditional barriers to educational leadership. One participant said that she felt intimidated and ashamed. Strout-Rostron also talked to women leaders in various countries, including Mexico, South Africa, Spain, and Colombia. They all said they had difficulty overcoming various barriers (Stout-Rostron, 2017).

In 2009, Acheampong's study revealed that African American principals experienced the same biases and stereotypes in their communities. The research found that the dominant culture in the United States has taught Black people to believe that they are inferior when it comes to being leaders. Aside from race, gender, and religion, the more prominent barriers to women taking on leadership roles are internal (Acheampong,

2009). Through years of socialization, women tend to place limitations on themselves, negatively affecting their confidence and self-esteem. This could also lead to an individual doubting. The 1989 study by Shakeshaft also revealed that women did not believe they were qualified to take on leadership roles. They also lacked confidence when it came to applying for higher positions. Saleem et al. (2022) offer insights into the experiences of education leaders, examining the unique opportunities and challenges and exploring factors such as work-life balance, gender discrimination, and support networks, as well as strategies for overcoming barriers and achieving professional success.

### ***Women Leadership Styles***

Women who become educators enter the field to impact change in schools directly to the students. Nicdao's (2020) thesis focused on women's double standards in reaching leadership positions. Women in professional roles typically work harder to achieve leadership positions (Horowitz et al., 2018). In the survey by Horowitz et al., 48% of women and 57% of male respondents believe women and men have unique leadership styles. While another 44% believe the two are similar. Twenty-two percent of respondents believe that women possess a superior leadership style, whereas 15% attribute this quality to men, with 62% expressing neutrality. Women tend to be perceived as more compassionate and empathetic in politics compared to men. Among women surveyed, 38% described themselves as ethical and adept at negotiating compromises, while an equal percentage emphasized their civility and politeness.

Regarding being pressure-takers, women were tied with men at 17% (Horowitz et al., 2018). The study also revealed that women are more prone to working under pressure than men. Leadership styles have various characteristics. According to a



Women and Leadership 2018 survey, assertiveness can help men in leadership. Still, it is not widely believed that it would benefit women to get a top position. The study revealed that women who are physically attractive and have strong emotional and behavioral characteristics are likelier to be in a top leadership position.

In 1987, Shakeshaft conducted a review which indicated that women administrators possess a distinctive leadership style characterized by collaboration and shared decision-making. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) further delineated various unique leadership styles exhibited by women, including relational, spiritual, balanced, social justice, and servant leadership. The concept of power, encompassing feelings of leadership and authority, often poses discomfort for female administrators and assistant principals. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) observed that female assistant superintendents and administrators experienced heightened levels of discomfort when associated with power.

Subsequent research in 2011 affirmed the divergence between women's and men's leadership styles (Grogan & Shakeshaft). The study found that women have multiple components associated with their professional development. For their research, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) analyzed over 50 studies on leadership styles. They found that differences in how men and women approach leadership were insignificant. The studies were conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. The researchers said the differences might have been caused by the different techniques used to measure leadership. For instance, quantitative and qualitative studies usually focus on the factors related to male leadership. To better understand how women lead, the researchers noted that they should pay attention to the various leadership styles they exhibit.

A culturally responsive school community can forge strong connections with women in leadership by acknowledging, appreciating, and harnessing the diverse perspectives, experiences, and strengths they bring to leadership roles. Women leaders in education play a pivotal role in fostering culturally responsive practices within schools. They champion inclusivity by nurturing a school culture that values and celebrates the rich tapestry of backgrounds, cultures, and identities among students, staff, and families. Moreover, they empower all school community members, including women, to actively participate in decision-making processes and ensure their voices are heard. Women leaders foster a sense of belonging and community among students, staff, and families by prioritizing cultivating trusting, empathetic, and mutually respectful relationships.

Additionally, they advocate for equity by championing fair practices and policies that guarantee all students have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support for academic and social success. Women leaders exemplify cultural competence through their commitment to continuous learning and understanding diverse cultural backgrounds and needs, serving as role models for the entire school community. Ford 2023 emphasizes the importance of educational leaders embracing diversity, fostering inclusivity, and promoting equity within school communities.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

"Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems." ("Transformational Leadership - CIO Wiki") It describes a leader encouraging individuals to share their power and participate in the school's mission (Northouse, 2010). The first concept of transformational leadership

came from Burns (2012). Bass (2000) explained how this style could be measured and the effects on the follower's motivation and performance. Bass (2000) demonstrated that the various psychological mechanisms influencing transformation and transactional leadership could be measured. Additionally, he employed the term “transformational” when describing this leadership style. The followers of a transformative leader feel valued and respected. They also believe they can work harder due to the leader's qualities—the result of the transformative leader's ability to provide his followers with an inspiring vision and mission. The leader's charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention help motivate his or her followers. A follower, a transformative leader encourages others to produce their ideas and solutions to improve the environment.

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that aims to transform individuals and social systems. It can be achieved with various strategies and techniques. Transformational leadership is an action that can be performed in its authentic form. It can help boost the morale and motivation of its followers. The core principles of transformative leadership include cultivating a sense of identity and belonging within a group or organization. They can also motivate followers to take on more responsibility and perform better. Bass (2000) states that leadership can exhibit transformational and transactional characteristics. Over the past few years, numerous studies have indicated that both kinds of leadership can predict various outcomes.

Kwan (2019) revisits the applicability of transformational leadership theory in education, especially concerning instructional leadership and its implications for student performance. Amidst changing educational dynamics, the study evaluates whether

transformational leadership theory retains its efficacy or has become obsolete. By investigating the integrated impact of instructional leadership and transformational leadership, the research seeks to comprehend how they collectively influence student outcomes. These insights enrich ongoing dialogues within educational administration by offering insights into the efficacy of transformational leadership theory in enhancing student success and broader educational results.

### ***Social Justice Leadership***

In 2011, Shakeshaft and Grogan explained that social justice involves transforming education conditions for all students' benefit. Social justice leaders aim to create conditions that improve the educational environment for all students. According to Cuervo (2016), social justice does not have a definite meaning. Instead, it has been associated with various terms such as merit, need, and fairness. "With the NCLB, the reality is that the field of education leaders in the United States for the past decade has been occupied with making a difference in student achievement" (Grogan, 2017, p. 3). Women in leadership roles have been known to make a difference in the lives of children. Leaders for social justice believe that they must change the world's institutions and make it a better place for children. "Women tend to talk about wanting to make the world a better place, and they usually talk about wanting to change the lives of children" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 13). Studies have shown that social justice initially motivates people to enter the teaching field.

Based on Grogan & Shakeshaft's (2011) findings, women often view their careers as avenues for social justice endeavors, contrasting with the perception of male counterparts. They perceive social justice work as collaborative and inclusive of the

entire educational community. Moreover, the study highlights that women attribute hope and faith in God as essential drivers for advancing social justice causes. As stated by Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011, p. 13), "If social justice is the end goal for women, then hope and belief in God are the motors that propel women to change the system." Personally, as a woman of color, I acknowledge that my journey in current roles owes much to the inspiration and support of female leaders.

### ***Spiritual Leadership***

Dantley (2006) defined spiritual leadership as a type focused on cultivating a connection with others and serving educational communities. In 2011, Grogan and Shakeshaft conducted a study that examined the characteristics of spiritual leadership in women leaders. They found that these traits were present in women ages 20 to 60. The study focused on women leaders from various sectors and backgrounds. They were able to gain a deeper understanding of what spiritual leadership is. The study focused on the interconnectedness of women and spirituality. The authors believed that spiritual strength could help individuals connect with others and achieve tremendous success (Bailey et al., 2008). Women focus on spiritual leadership to enhance student learning and academic success. By cultivating spiritual leadership, women can recognize that their gifts are more than just for their advancement (Bailey et al., 2008).

Women prioritize improving their leadership skills by making decisions that support student learning (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). In 2005, Brunner and Grogan discovered that women have an advantage in instructional leadership. This finding supports the idea that instructional leadership is a factor that women consider when hiring. Women are 74.6% more likely to be considered for instructional leadership as a

factor when getting hired compared to 55.2% of their male counterparts (Kowalski et al., 2011). Women tend to make better decisions regarding school districts' decisions on improving student learning (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). They also have more experience in this field (Kowalski et al., 2011). They consider our educational system's emphasis on instruction and learning part of a school's accountability-driven system. Eckman's (2004) study also noted that women have different career paths than men. Due to the varying number of opportunities for leadership for men, women need to be assessed. For male teachers, the traditional way is to become a principal, assistant principal, or superintendent. However, female teachers tend to take a different route, including working with the curriculum. Finally, to align the importance of spiritual leadership and the effects that it can have on an entire school community, Wortham et al. (2020) stated that by offering a spiritual environment, students overall well-being can be increased.

### ***Servant Leadership***

"Service leaders, also referred to as servant and spiritual leaders, aim to acknowledge the dignity and value of every individual, as they are created in the image of God" (Acheampong, 2009, p. 52). Acheampong emphasized the significance of effective leadership for African American Women Catholic school principals; they must align themselves with the school's vision and mission, adhering to the principle that "if one wants to be great, one has to serve first" (p. 53). Servant leadership is a concept that aligns with notions of community and relationship, sharing a common thread of leadership. Its significance seems to be the core of the Jesuit understanding of leadership. Today's management ideas typically focus on goals and outcomes. Despite

having the same opportunities as men, women still do not have the same privileges as their male counterparts when it comes to being servants due to their leadership (Sergiovanni, 2013). The school management and social science models follow a similar approach. Women are not likely to be valued highly in highly male-oriented workplaces. According to Sergiovanni (2013), women are more likely to communicate effectively and spend more time with their partners. Servant leadership requires much work and is linked to the stereotype that women are not good at teaching.

Servant leadership is a concept that draws parallels to the feminist ideals of relationship and community. It is often seen as the key to success in leadership. Servant leadership is a concept that draws parallels to the idea of community and relationships. It is the key to Jesus' understanding of leadership. It is central to the development of the Jesuit worldview. Modern management usually focuses on goals and outcomes (Sergiovanni, 2013). Although women have the same opportunities as males to be valued as servants, they do not have the same privileges as men due to the various facets of their leadership. This is because servant leadership is seen as a source of power and control, differing from the values typically associated with male-dominated workplaces. Because of the various facets of servant leadership, women are less likely to be valued in highly male-dominated workplaces. In 2013, according to Sergiovanni and Shakeshaft's study, women tended to spend more time with others and were likelier to motivate and display concern for others. This is also linked to higher academic achievement and better morale. Also, women tend to focus on achieving goals and satisfying others, and they are good at communicating effectively and inspiring others. This stereotype is also linked to the idea that being a servant leader is a chore (Sergiovanni, 2013). Women

have higher academic achievement and better instructional learning skills. The number of female school leaders also evidences this.

### **Summary**

This study gathered an unbiased and accurate account of these women leaders' experiences. It will ensure that the data collection is collected with the highest integrity. Catholic women secondary principals have presented a unique blend of challenges as they are part of many subgroups who must overcome barriers to attain and maintain school leadership positions. Understanding the various indicators that women need to measure up to be successful in these positions will help improve the support for women in leadership. The participants' responses in the present study will analyze spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership to formulate a holistic picture of women who assume leadership roles in the community.



## **CHAPTER 3 METHOD**

This study explored the life experiences (personal and educational) of Catholic school women leaders, their various leadership practices, and what we can learn from their spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. This analysis was built on the theoretical frameworks of Cirillo (1996) and Uhl (2020). The Focus on the Case Studies in Catholic School Leadership by Timothy D. Uhl (2020) adds to the theoretical framework. Understanding who these women are and how they become leaders. Their leadership roles indirectly affect their schools, especially since female principals in Catholic schools are understudied and underrepresented in research studies, as emphasized in Chapter One. This study analysis was built on the theoretical frameworks unpacking the three lenses of spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. A review of related literature in Chapter Two shows the impact Catholic women's secondary principles have. The literature demonstrates the unique blend of challenges to overcome barriers to attaining and maintaining school leadership positions. Understanding the various indicators that women need to measure up to be successful in these positions will help improve the support for women in leadership. Chapter Three details the methodological features of the study and explains the researcher's relationship to the topic of this study.

### **Methodology**

This research was structured as a case study. A case study involves the study of a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2018, p. 4). Case study research is an excellent way to answer the questions that arise in a study. It allows researchers to gather direct observations and interviews with the individuals involved.

Creswell and Poth (2016) defined a qualitative case study approach as when the "investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 96). ("Prospective teachers' cognitive engagement during virtual teaching ...") The method of the data collection for this study was (a) interviews, (b) on-site observations, and (c) documents describing the nature of the school, and its mission, rules, and procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A case study can also reveal what is being studied, provide insight into the interpersonal behavior and motivation of the participants, and reveal what they are thinking (Yin, 2018).

### **Methods and Procedures**

The research question guided in this study focuses the researcher through the data collection phase:

#### ***Research Question***

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as Spiritual, Educational, and Managerial leaders?

#### ***Setting***

The settings of this study included five Catholic secondary schools and a superintendent throughout New York State. These schools have athletic programs, required content area courses, advanced placement, and University courses. The specific setting of the interviews depends upon the convenience of the participant's availability. The following table illustrates the participating school demographics and structure; it includes the gender in each school, with two schools being co-ed (boys and girls) and

single gender (female in this case). The table provides the student population's size and the Catholic identity of the students and staff.

**Table 7**

*Secondary School Demographics and Structure*

Secondary School Participants	School Gender	Student Population	% of Catholic Student	% Catholic Staff
School A	CO-ED	300 or Less	76 - 100	76 - 100
School B	All Female	300 or Less	26 - 50	76 - 100
School C	All Female	300 or Less	76 - 100	51 - 75
School D	CO-ED	500-749	26 - 50	76 - 100
School E	All Male	750-1000	51 - 75	76 - 100
District F	CO-ED	750-1000	76 - 100	76 - 100

The researcher accessed the research sites by emailing the Office of Leadership within the Archdiocese of New York and requesting permission for the study and approval to solicit secondary women principals (see Appendix C). Once the Office of Leadership approved the study and the solicitation for the participants (see Appendix B), an email was sent informally to introduce the researcher's qualitative study to possible participants (see Appendix D). Once the participants agreed, the researcher scheduled Webex interviews. In addition, the researcher emailed the consent form (see Appendix D), asking them to read the document, sign and return it at their earliest convenience or by the time of their interview. All data is confidential, honoring the participant's privacy and time commitment. Unless otherwise agreed, the participants' names are protected.

## *Participants*

This study was conducted through the schools in the Archdiocese of New York. The schools of the Archdiocese encompass the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island in New York City and the counties of Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester. The Archdiocese of New York's website for secondary schools indicates that 99% of its high school graduates are accepted into post-secondary education. The Archdiocese is committed to ensuring that every student receives the best education possible. Fifteen were coeducational (co-ed), 17 were single-gender girls' schools, and 13 were single-gender boys' schools.

The researcher completed the training as a requirement for expertise in human research protection when doing a study with humans (Appendix L). understood and followed the requirements with the best practices when working on the Institutional Review Board (IRB). There were steps the researcher had to follow before IRB approval. The first step was formally to request to conduct research within the Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of New York. Next, once approved to conduct research by the Superintendent's office, the office of the Associate Superintendent of Leadership formally provided written notice of approval (Appendix B). Then, once the researcher received direct correspondence from the Associate Superintendent Office of Leadership, it was redirected to the Office of Secondary Schools. The steps above were necessary to provide transparency and have a point of contact for information on women leaders in secondary schools. The Office of Secondary Schools is the liaison between the dioceses and secondary school levels. The Catholic Secondary schools within the dioceses collaborated, considering the secondary schools are private and independent from the

dioceses. The researcher emailed ten female principals introducing the research study to them for possible interest (Appendix D).

Once the IRB approval was established (See Appendix A), a follow-up email was sent to eight participants who stated interest in the research. Six participants confirmed their interest of the eight who had taken an interest in the introduction email (Appendix D). The participants had 20 years of experience as a principal, assistant principal, or another form of leadership within Catholic education. five participants were laypersons, and one participant was part of a secular order and of a religious order. The sixth interview with that participant that was part of a secular order and of a religious order was a superintendent. The superintendent was able to provide the researcher with an alternative resource for women leaders with different roles within the diocese in Catholic leadership. Each participant variation explored co-ed student bodies to the single-gender student body, including principals with experience in both elementary and secondary school levels.

The participating schools in the study shared a common goal: to foster an academic environment centered around Christ teachings and promoting excellence in education. All participants vary from lay-single, Lay-single with a secular order, lay-married, and of a religious order. Participants are known to the researcher through leadership events, professional development, and networking opportunities since the researcher was a principal at the elementary school level with the dioceses. The table below illustrates the participant's age range, number of years within the Catholic school education system, and their level of education.

**Table 8***Description of Secondary School Participants*

Participants	Layperson or Religious	Race	Age	Highest level of education	Years of experience in Catholic Schools
Sr. Annette	Layperson Single / Sector Order	Hispanic	46- 65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Barbara	Religious - Orders	White / Caucasian	56- 65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Collette	Religious - Orders	White / Caucasian	46- 65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Deborah	Layperson – Single	Multiracial	56- 65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Evelyn	Layperson – Single	White / Caucasian	56- 65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Francis	Layperson - Married	White / Caucasian	46- 56	PHD	More than 20

***Data Collection***

Data collection took approximately 12 months. The methods included interviews and observations along with document analysis. All the participants had two interviews and were observed in their school setting. The participants were provided with informed consent stating the study's purpose, how the data was collected, and the nature and collection of data with confidentiality (Appendix I). Interviews were scheduled and conducted to accommodate all parties. This was necessary as the participants had full schedules, allowing the interview significant flexibility for researchers and interviewees.

Some interviews were conducted from home after work hours, while others were conducted during school hours, depending on when the participant was available. The researcher conducted the first interviews, which lasted about forty-five minutes or ninety minutes. The follow-up interview session was ½ hour to forty-five minutes, and one interviewee for sixty minutes. Notes were not taken during the interview as the researcher relied on Webex video, audio, and transcription applications. The interviews with participants were through St. John's Webex.

Once interviews were completed, transcripts were sent to the interviewees for member checking to review the transcripts for validity. The exact process for the follow-up interviews was conducted. Patton (2014) defined "the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind," as noted in Bogdan and Biklen (2016, p. 74). The interview focused on the furtherance of the principal's careers, the barriers and challenges they met, and their roles as leaders using Ciriello's (1998b) framework. Seidman (2019) describes, "the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate" but to get to "the root of in-depth interviews as an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.9). The observations provided insight into how each female leader interacted with staff (both male and female) and addressed any issues that arose in the school related to curriculum and management. The interview questions focused on spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership (See Appendix F & G).

In addition, the researcher utilized observation as a method of data collection. The best-known representative of a qualitative research study is participant observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Furthermore, observation served as a method of data

collection in this study. Participant observation is a prominent qualitative research technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). As described by Bogdan and Biklen (2016), this method involves the researcher immersing themselves in the environment of the individuals under study, establishing rapport, and meticulously documenting their observations and interactions (p. 2). The research incorporated one in-person observation session for each leader as they navigated their daily routines. This observation offered valuable insights into how female leaders engaged with staff, managed curriculum-related issues, and interacted with various members of the school community. It encompassed participation in meetings with students, parents, administrative staff, assistant principals, and faculty throughout the day. This holistic approach comprehensively understood the participants and their modus operandi, facilitating deeper insights during subsequent interviews. Shadowing the participants enabled firsthand observation of their day-to-day leadership practices.

A third method employed in this study was document analysis, complementing the data obtained from interviews and participant observation. Bogdan and Biklen (2016, p. 60) delineate three primary categories of documents: personal documents, official documents, and popular cultural documents. In this research, all three types of documents were scrutinized. Official documents encompass materials generated by organizational personnel for record-keeping and dissemination purposes, including memos, meeting minutes, newsletters, policy papers, proposals, codes of conduct, student records, philosophical statements, press releases, brochures, and pamphlets (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 135).



### ***Trustworthiness***

Qualitative research involves a methodical exploration of individuals, as emphasized by Bogdan & Biklen (2016) and Lincoln & Guba (1985). To enhance the credibility and validity of this research study, the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Glesne (2016, p. 53) and Creswell and Poth (2016, pp. 253-267) were utilized. Additionally, credibility was bolstered through data triangulation, which involves employing multiple data collection methods, sources, investigators, or theoretical perspectives, as suggested by Glesne (2016, p. 53). This approach aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2016, p. 260) assertion that triangulating information from various sources lends validity to research findings.

In this qualitative study, efforts were made to enhance transferability by providing comprehensive and detailed descriptions of each participant's experiences. By utilizing observations and interview transcripts to convey rich descriptions, readers are better able to grasp the contextual nuances interpreted by the researcher (Glesne, 2016, p. 53). A meticulous comparative analysis was employed as thematic patterns emerged during data collection. Following interviews with each participant, recurring themes were compared, and additional themes were incorporated as they surfaced in subsequent data. Subsequently, rich and detailed descriptions were utilized to analyze the data, aligning with the identified theoretical framework to delve into the shared experiences of these female principals.

Member checking was employed to ensure descriptive validity (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This process aimed to verify the accuracy of the study's findings and mitigate any potential miscommunications among the participants. While live conversations facilitate

more direct communication, member checking enabled participants to review written documentation to confirm that their statements were accurately captured and understood.

### ***Research Ethics***

The researcher obtained permission to contact secondary women principals by emailing the Office of Leadership within the Archdiocese of New York and requesting approval to solicit them for the study (see Appendix C). After receiving approval from the Office of Leadership (see Appendix B), the researcher emailed to introduce the study to potential participants (see Appendix D). Once the participants agreed, the researcher scheduled Webex interviews. The consent form (see Appendix I) was sent to the participants, and they were asked to read, sign, and return it before their interview. All data collected was kept confidential to protect the participants' privacy and time commitment. Unless otherwise agreed, the participants' names were protected. The case study was conducted with six participants from the Archdiocese of New York through a purposeful sampling process and recruitment via email. The researcher ensured that all ethical considerations, such as respect, beneficence, and justice, were observed with the participants, as stated in the Belmont Report (Glesne, 2016, p. 159). Before data collection and analysis, the participants were informed of all necessary levels of consent and confidentiality. Upon receiving the consent form, participants signed and returned it via email. To protect the participants' identities, their transcripts and quotes were labeled with pseudonyms. Participants received detailed information about the study's purpose and were assured confidentiality. Interviews were conducted through St. John's WebEx in a private location to ensure confidentiality. Interview recordings were password-protected and kept secure. Observation notes were handwritten and later typed by the

researcher. Document analysis was organized in Microsoft Excel. As part of the coding process, reflective notes were handwritten and then destroyed once a digital version was created. The researcher only shared raw data with the dissertation mentor and checked with the person(s) the data originated from.

### ***Data Analysis Approach***

Data analysis must begin with the first data collection" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 242). The interview was conducted through the St. John's WEBEX application; the participants read the protocol for the interview script before we began the interview (see Appendix J) for the interview and audio recordings with the participant's consent. The participants received the transcripts and provided member checking and validity once reviewed, and confirmation of transcript validity was emailed. The researcher attempted to avoid any bias throughout the process.

The researcher utilized a qualitative data analysis software named Delve. Delve is a user-friendly and collaborative online tool that helps researchers discover reliable human insights. Using this software, the researcher analyzed a process of finding, grouping, and refining iterative and evolving themes. Delve's analysis interface was flexible enough to adapt to my evolving insights, with the ability to nest and merge codes.

First, open coding was used to pinpoint themes by grouping individual data from interviews, observations, and document analysis into categories and subcategories. A second coding cycle was simultaneously completed with data collection to help further determine the participants' nuances. For this, The researcher employed emergent coding techniques supplemented by Saldaña (2016). The data was coded according to the

leadership practices and common themes the women's Catholic secondary school principal brought up. The data was organized into text based on the themes from the various framework components using the Delve. The first cycle in the coding process serves the patterns of the various critical lenses that must be analyzed to produce a conclusion (Saldaña, 2016). The second coding cycle separates the multiple sections into spiritual, educational, and managerial categories. Then, it was coded to reflect the data patterns the interviewee experienced through various lenses (Saldaña, 2016). The data collection was then analyzed based on the experiences of the participants' journey to principalship. In a third cycle after data collection, pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016) was utilized to classify the data into themes and subthemes. Various components of Catholic women's experiences in secondary schools were analyzed regarding their causes, influences, actions, interactions, content, and outcomes. Based on the patterns in the data, the researcher used developed programming to sort them. The coding cycles were repeated until saturation was reached (Saldaña, 2016). Based on a review of related literature, the researcher aligned the data to the research question, theoretical framework, and themes, and triangulated data was obtained by interviewing participants, conducting observations, and analyzing documents. The study's goal was to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the interpretations. In addition, the researcher was mindful of keeping an open mind about what was seen to make an unbiased assessment.

The researcher had a passion for understanding the various facets of the study. This is especially important to ensure the study was completed successfully. As an earlier elementary school principal and an assistant principal in a Catholic secondary school, The researcher had a deep interest in the success of women. The study aimed to

understand the motivations and experiences of the women who have led successful careers as school administrators. This study allowed the researcher to enhance their leadership skills and support other women who aspired to become school administrators.

### ***Researcher Role***

This researcher is a woman who has served as a teacher, Assistant Principal, and principal within the Archdiocese of New York at the elementary and secondary school levels. The researcher is pursuing a doctorate at a Catholic University and is an alumnus of a Catholic grammar school, Catholic high school, and Catholic university. Due to her educational background and career change, this researcher was interested in examining the experiences of women principals in Catholic schools. Since the researcher shared the same background as the interviewees, the ability to relate to the participants and comprehend their experiences was evident. The participants had a common reference point, enabling me to use "emic" words and grasp their thoughts and emotions without further explanation. This researcher consciously tried to avoid bias while observing and asked open-ended questions to encourage the participants to share their thoughts and feelings.

### **Summary**

The present dissertation incorporating interviews, observations, and document analysis. Its aim was to explore the lessons that can be gleaned from the experiences of women principals in Catholic schools and what we can learn from their experiences. Codes were used to identify themes that summarized the leaders' views on their professional growth and the barriers/challenges they faced as Spiritual, Educational, and Managerial leaders. Chapter 4 of this study provides an overview of the data collected

during the interviews, observation, and documents. It will also discuss the findings and themes from the analysis.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

Despite the rise in female principals and efforts towards achieving equity, women remain underrepresented in school administrative roles (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This trend is observed in public schools and Catholic educational institutions, as highlighted in the literature. The need for the study was established by examining the historical context of women within the Catholic Church and their roles. It became evident that the historical conditions of Catholic schools' culture and context did not allow women leaders with important administrative skills to be identified and selected for principal positions and advancement.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences (personal and educational) of Catholic school women leaders, their various leadership practices, and what we could learn from their spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. This study was guided by the following research question:

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as Spiritual, Educational, and Managerial leaders?

This chapter will present the study's findings. The researcher will begin this chapter by providing an overview of the participant's demographic characteristics and the process The researcher followed when conducting the analysis. Then, discuss the study's findings and highlight the thematic categories that emerged from the dataset.

### **Participant Recruitment and Demographic Characteristics**

For this study, the recruitment of six participants represented the Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of New York. The participants had 20 years of experience as a principal, assistant principal, or other form of leadership within Catholic education. All

six participants were laypersons (one of the six was part of a secular order), and of a religious order. The additional interview of a superintendent was for the researcher to have an alternative resource of women leaders who had different roles within the dioceses in Catholic leadership. Each participant variation explored co-ed student bodies to the single-gender student body, including principals with experience in both elementary and secondary school levels. Table 9 below highlights the participants' demographic characteristics.

**Table 9**

*Participant Demographic Characteristics*

Participants	Layperson or Religious	Race	Age	Highest level of education	Years of experience in Catholic Schools
Sr. Annette	Layperson Single / Secular Order	Hispanic	46-65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Barbara	Religious - Orders	White / Caucasian	56-65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Collette	Religious - Orders	White / Caucasian	46-65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Deborah	Layperson – Single	Multiracial	56-65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Evelyn	Layperson – Single	White / Caucasian	56-65	Master	More than 20
Ms. Francis	Layperson - Married	White / Caucasian	46-56	PHD	More than 20



## Data Analysis Process

In conducting data analysis, the researcher employed a qualitative thematic analysis for each data collection method. Before coding, the researcher ensured accurate transcription of participants' interviews to reflect their statements accurately. Utilizing a thematic analysis facilitated the interpretation of qualitative data through coding. Coding involves identifying commonly used words, phrases, and ideas from participants (Saldaña, 2021). The researcher continually identified and developed thematic categories based on these elements throughout the coding process. Table 10 highlights the initial codes from inductive coding, where common words, phrases, and ideas were highlighted without predetermined categories (Saldaña, 2021).

**Table 10**

*Initial Codes*

---

Adjustment	Instructional leadership
Betterment of the school	Journey
Bible	Learning skills
Challenges	Logistics
Change	Mentors
Compassion	Mentorship
COVID-19	Nurturing spirituality
Deal with problems	Opportunities
Different atmosphere	Pandemic
Empathy	PowerPoint
Empower	Professional development
Entire community	Social justice
Experiences	Spiritual aspect
Followed	Successful
Formal	Team building
God	Team planning
Goodness	Thrown into education
Gospel	Unprecedented
High school life	Whole child
Informal	

After identifying the initial codes, I then began the process of breaking them down into thematic categories, as depicted in Table 11 below.

**Table 11**

*Initial Thematic Categories*

Codes	Frequency	Initial Thematic Category
Adjustment	4	<b>Experiences in Participants' New Roles as Leaders</b>
Adjusting	2	
Thrown into education	2	
Successful	2	
Betterment of the school	2	
Nurturing spirituality	3	
High school life	3	
Change	4	
Entire community	2	
Mentors	5	<b>Mentorship</b>
Mentorship	3	
Followed	2	
Journey	2	
Informal	2	
Formal	2	
Spiritual aspect	3	<b>Spirituality and Education</b>
Whole child	3	
Goodness	2	
Compassion	2	
Empathy	2	
God	3	
Bible	3	
Gospel	2	
Instructional leadership	5	<b>Instructional Leadership</b>
Empower	4	
Learning skills	3	
Deal with problems	2	
COVID-19	6	<b>COVID-19</b>
Different atmosphere	3	

Codes	Frequency	Initial Thematic Category
Unprecedented	2	
Logistics	3	
Challenges	4	
Pandemic	2	
Team building	4	<b>Team Building and Professional Development</b>
Professional development	5	
Team planning	3	
PowerPoint	3	
Social justice	2	
Experiences	2	
Opportunities	5	

The final themes that will be discovered in this study will serve as its main findings. Following their initial categorization into thematic groups, This researcher further explored the interview transcripts and reflections. This further exploration aimed to establish precise definitions of the codes in connection with the participants' direct quotations. This is highlighted in Table 12 below.

**Table 12**

*Final Themes*

Initial Thematic Category	Definition of Code	Final Theme
Experiences in Participants' New Roles as Leaders	<i>“Adjusting to high school life. Um, the high school is a totally different animal from elementary school in certain aspects in terms of the students. They're just 8th graders and bigger bodies. That's how I look at them. Sometimes 5th graders. So, in terms of the students, it was basically the same as the nurturing the spirituality, and making sure</i>	<b>Adjusting to New Role</b>

Initial Thematic Category	Definition of Code	Final Theme
Mentorship	<i>that justice in education was at the forefront and they were spiritually fed.” (Participant 1)</i>	<b>The Importance of Mentorship</b>
Spirituality and Education	<i>“That has kind of been mentors to me from a young sister, all the way up till now. I have seen sisters with educational leadership practices that I like to emulate and, going to school for leadership, has given me a background where you're putting into practice what you're learning.” (Participant 2)</i>	<b>The Benefits of Spirituality in Education</b>
Instructional Leadership	<i>“What's great about teaching in a Catholic school is that you can bring God into everything that you do. You're allowed to bring God into your life and into the lives of the students in front of you.” (Participant 4)</i>	<b>Instructional Leadership Benefits the Entire School Community</b>
COVID-19	<i>“As a principle, you have to have some sort of educational vision. And I think your whole team needs to be on board with what your educational vision is. Giving the teachers an opportunity to work with me, or with my assistant principal with their department chairs on how to better their lesson plans had a better assess to students.” (Participant 3)</i>	<b>COVID was Challenging to Navigate</b>

Initial Thematic Category	Definition of Code	Final Theme
	<p><i>floor for the sophomores, moving the teachers, and keeping the kids in one place. So, it was very challenging when we were trying to do scheduling, um, but it was also very challenging coming to school every day, and only having 50 kids in the building.”</i> (Participant 3)</p>	
Team Building and Professional Development	<p><i>“We have to understand that our new people coming in. Don't have any of those experiences. And so how can we provide all of that to make them these really strong, formidable Catholic school leaders. Knowing they're coming with some of those missing parts, and we'll never have the opportunity to experience those missing parts because they don't exist anymore. So, how do we create those opportunities?”</i> (Participant 6)</p>	<p><b>The Importance of Team Building and Professional Development on Student Success</b></p>

Therefore, six themes emerged from the dataset that act as the findings of this study: (a) adjusting to a new role, (b) the importance of mentorship, (c) the benefits of spirituality in education, (d) instructional leadership benefits the entire school community, (e) COVID-19 was challenging to navigate, and (f) the importance of team building and professional development on student success.

The analysis revealed six main themes aligned with various elements of the educational landscape. First, the theme of adjusting to a new role emerged, highlighting

the necessity for support mechanisms and strategies to facilitate smooth transitions in educational positions. This aligns with previous literature on the importance of role transitions in educational settings (Green et al., 2020). Second, the significance of mentorship was highlighted, indicating the critical role of fostering professional growth and development among educators. This finding also aligns with prior research emphasizing the benefits of mentorship programs in educational contexts (Marino et al., 2020). Third, recognizing spirituality in education as a valuable dimension suggests a shift towards a more holistic approach to student and educator well-being. While this theme reflects emerging discussions on incorporating spirituality in educational settings (Waters, 2021), further research may be needed to explore its practical implications.

Fourth, the participants highlighted the theme of instructional leadership, emphasizing its overarching impact on student outcomes and school community dynamics. This finding corroborates previous literature highlighting the essential role of instructional leadership in educational improvement efforts (Qadach et al., 2020). However, amidst these positive trends, the theme of COVID-19 as a challenging navigational hurdle reflects the unprecedented global disruptions faced by educational systems. This theme aligns with previous research that has discussed the need for adaptive responses and crisis management strategies in educational contexts (Hofer et al., 2021). Finally, the importance of team building and professional development on student success demonstrates the interconnectedness between educator collaborative practices and student outcomes. This theme aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of collaborative teamwork in enhancing student achievement (Anwar et al., 2021).

However, future studies may be needed to explore potential discrepancies within these themes and their practical implications for educational practice.

While consistent themes such as mentorship, instructional leadership, and spirituality in education emerged from the dataset, discrepancies were also noted. Variations were observed in the effectiveness of mentorship experiences and perceptions of instructional leadership among stakeholders. Additionally, there were differences in how spirituality was conceptualized and integrated into educational practice. These discrepancies highlight the need for further exploration into factors influencing effective mentorship, consistency in instructional leadership practices, and the implications of spirituality in diverse educational contexts (see Appendix M).

## **Findings**

Six themes emerged from the dataset that act as the findings of this study: (a) adjusting to a new role, (b) the importance of mentorship, (c) the benefits of spirituality in education, (d) instructional leadership benefits the entire school community, (e) COVID-19 was challenging to navigate, and (f) the importance of team building and professional development on student success.

### ***Theme 1: Adjusting to a New Role***

The first theme that emerged from the dataset highlighted how the participants reported that one of the main challenges in their careers was adjusting to their new role as leaders. For example, Participant 1 reported that it was difficult adjusting not only to their new role as a leader, but also a different school level. Sr. Annette stated:

Adjusting to high school life. Um, the high school is a totally different animal from elementary school in certain aspects in terms of the students. They're just

8th graders and bigger bodies. That's how I look at them. Sometimes 5th graders. So, in terms of the students, it was basically the same as the nurturing the spirituality, and making sure that justice in education was at the forefront and they were spiritually fed. (Sr. Annette)

In addition, Ms. Barbara reported that her experience with a religious school was that she was thrown into her role with minimal preparation:

Okay, being a religious [school], we're kind of thrown into education and honestly, I learned the best leadership practices from people that I have. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Collette discussed how one of the biggest challenges in her new role was having to understand that her team did not necessarily always like change. Ms. Collette stated:

The challenges are people that have been here for 1000 years and don't want change and I think naturally as humans, we're very reluctant to change. It's just like a natural thing and it's always well, that's the way we used to do it. And so, when somebody new comes in, and things need to change, really for the betterment of the school, sometimes people can't see that because the change affects them so directly. But they can't get past the fact that it's not about, you know, you alone, it's about the entire community of the school and the betterment of the school. (Ms. Collette)

Ms. Francis agreed with Ms. Collette because they discussed how different people have different ideas about the trajectory of the school, its goals, and how they should be accomplished. Ms. Francis reported:



If you had a person who believed in the school that was a very different trajectory then if you had a person who did not believe in the school and I had both of those during my time and I'll tell you, it's much more challenging to navigate someone who does not support the school and navigate the process of moving the school forward when you have a person who, who doesn't want the school, um, I don't want to say not to be successful, but doesn't see the school as a part of the ministry of the parish. And that's hard, right disappointments. I'd have to say, you know, the disappointments were certainly the things that things happen right? Um, people got hurt emotionally by decisions that were made, or, you know, people had to move on from the organization. (Ms. Francis)

In summary, this theme highlights the participants' experiences of struggling with the challenges associated with transitioning into leadership roles within educational institutions. They discussed struggles such as adapting to new environments, managing resistance to change among colleagues, and navigating differing visions for the school's direction. Participants highlighted the complexities of leading in contexts with minimal preparation and differing perspectives on the school's mission and goals.

### ***Theme 2: The Importance of Mentorship***

The second theme that emerged as a finding highlighted how the participants perceived and experienced the importance of mentorship, not only within their roles, but the trajectory of their careers. For example, Sr. Annette discussed:

Teachers who were new had mentors. We met once a week. Um, I had teachers head up committees. So, um, sort of ease things up a bit. Um, unfortunately, you have those teachers who step up all the time, so you try not to wear them out, you

know, because they have things to do and try to, you know, light the fire of those season. Teachers who are stuck in their ways. (Sr. Annette)

In addition, Ms. Barbara discussed their experiences with mentors and the benefits that they experienced:

That has kind of been mentors to me from a young sister, all the way up till now. I have seen sisters with educational leadership practices that I like to emulate and, going to school for leadership, has given me a background where you're putting into practice what you're learning. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Evelyn reported that she has had a friend who served as a mentor, as she was able to emulate the trajectory of her career, which helped her to advance to leadership roles:

I have a good friend. It's interesting. I just met saw her yesterday. She sits on our board now. She and I started the exact same day in 99, and she was a guidance counselor. She already had her master's degree, and I was a Lasallian volunteer, so she was a couple years ahead of me in terms of education, but we met on that same day and new faculty orientation, and basically have known each other ever since. And it was interesting because her journey I kind of followed her journey, not because I was following her, it just kind of happened that way. She and I had become friends. Yeah, we just she was a guidance counselor, and she became the head of the guidance department. Then she became the academic assistant principal, and then she came to the principal and that's exactly what I did after that. It was almost like, I was a step behind her, almost every almost every way. (Ms. Evelyn)

Finally, Ms. Francis discussed how she experienced mentorship through both informal and formal processes. Ms. Francis discussed:

The woman who was the coordinator at the time, she had just finished maybe a few years prior being at a university, getting her degree in education, she was a school leader, she was an adjunct professor, she was very grounded in Catholic education. She had been in Catholic education, her entire career. Um, and so I met her, and she sort of became my mentor and so the informal became the formal. (Ms. Francis)

In summary, this theme highlighted the participants' recognition of mentorship's vital role in their professional growth and career trajectories. The participants discussed how mentors provided guidance, support, and valuable insights throughout their journeys. However, the participants also reported the diverse forms of mentorship they received, ranging from formal programs to informal relationships with experienced colleagues. They emphasized mentors' influence on their development as educators and leaders, shaping their practices and helping them navigate challenges within their roles.

### ***Theme 3: The Benefits of Spirituality in Education***

The third theme that acts as a finding for this study is that the participants reported the benefits of combining spirituality and education. For example, Sr. Annette discussed how adding a spiritual component to education helps shape a child's entire life. Sr. Annette reported:

The collegial, spiritual aspect of what makes Catholic education so awesome. Being able to not just shape the child educationally, but shape the whole child, even spiritually. That's what's rewarding about it all. (Sr. Annette)

In addition, Ms. Barbara discussed how adding combining spirituality and education allows not only the love of God to be experienced, but also that of the entire community:

What we're trying to do is to have people in the school community, understand that they're loved by God, and that we need to share that each of us is loved by God, and we need to share that love with one another. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Collette reported that by focusing on the Gospels, students can really benefit by being nurtured on a spiritual level. Ms. Collette stated:

By understanding the gospel if we lead by teaching goodness, compassion, and empathy, and at the same time, you know, hold firm to the things that make us different from the public schools, you know, the fact that yes, you're not allowed to do that here because it's a Catholic school that that becomes harder to sell these days, but it's okay for us to hold firm to that to say we teach compassion and goodness and empathy here. But at the same time, we also teach you that you need to be in uniform because of this. And I think all of that can kind of be tied in. If you lead with the gospels, you can't go wrong. (Ms. Collette)

Finally, Ms. Deborah reported that the benefits of teaching at a Catholic school is that teachers can bring God into everything they do:

What's great about teaching in a Catholic school is that you can bring God into everything that you do. You're allowed to bring God into your life and into the lives of the students in front of you. (Ms. Deborah)

In summary, this theme highlights the participants' acknowledgment of the positive outcomes of the fusion of spirituality and education. They emphasized how incorporating a spiritual dimension into the educational experience contributes to the

holistic development of students. Participants discussed the rewarding aspect of shaping the academic and spiritual aspects of a child's life. They pointed out the significance of fostering love, compassion, and empathy within the school community, guided by spiritual principles. Participants also recognized the value of using the Gospels as a foundation for teaching virtues. They emphasized that bringing spirituality into every aspect of teaching is a distinctive and beneficial aspect of working in a Catholic school.

***Theme 4: Instructional Leadership Benefits the Entire School Community***

The fourth theme that is a finding for this study highlighted that the participants perceived that the practice of instructional leadership benefits the entire school community. For example, Sr. Annette discussed how this form of leadership can help teachers become more proficient and efficient within their roles:

You know, sometimes you have teachers who just do what's required and that's it but to empower the teachers to see beyond what's required. Um, so that it enhances them as an educator and the benefits to the students overall. (Sr. Annette)

In addition, Ms. Barbara reported that by utilizing instructional leadership, their teachers can do better within their roles, while also becoming motivated to continue learning as an educator. Ms. Barbara stated:

When they have something where they're successful, they do get better and they do want to learn and it's not like they don't have the ability, the abilities there. They just don't know how to reach it without knowing those learning those skills that they need to be remediate it on. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Collette reported that by utilizing instructional leadership, it helps communicate her vision of the school to other stakeholders:

As a principle, you have to have some sort of educational vision. And I think your whole team needs to be on board with what your educational vision is.

Giving the teachers an opportunity to work with me, or with my assistant principal with their department chairs on how to better their lesson plans had a better assess to students. (Ms. Collette)

Moreover, Ms. Deborah discussed how instructional leadership helps effectively address any problems at the school as teachers are continuously learning and growing:

The world is changing. Yes, there is a certain way that you can teach. But getting to have your teachers learning every year makes you a better school. It opens up the avenues for student's success, but what it also opens up, it helps teachers be able to deal with problems. (Ms. Deborah)

Finally, Ms. Evelyn discussed how instructional leadership helps with hiring practices, knowing what to continuously teach staff members, and to ensure that the students are receiving a strong education:

I think it looks like empowering department chairs. You know, it's making sure we're up to date on what's happening and, and current. But, you know, employing the right people in those positions hiring for, you know, talent, the hiring permission as well. And really making sure that our kids are getting the education, they deserve to be getting, um, so getting into classrooms, you know, informally, you know, more often than formally. Trying to get in there and get and have a real feel for what's happening in a room. (Ms. Evelyn)

In summary, this theme emphasizes the participants' recognition of the positive outcomes of practicing instructional leadership within the school community. They highlighted how this form of leadership empowers and enhances teachers, fostering proficiency and efficiency in their roles. Participants discussed the motivation and continuous learning that instructional leadership can instill in educators, ultimately benefiting the overall educational experience for students. The theme also highlights the importance of effectively communicating the school's vision to all stakeholders and the instructional leadership's role in facilitating this alignment. Furthermore, participants noted that instructional leadership contributes to addressing challenges and adapting to a changing educational landscape, promoting ongoing professional development among teachers and improving the overall quality of education provided to students.

***Theme 5: COVID-19 was Challenging to Navigate***

The fifth theme that emerged from as a finding was that the participants reported that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic was extremely challenging to navigate.

For example, Sr. Annette reported:

When COVID hit, I had no vacation. There was no vacation. Basically, I was there every day planning and collaborating. Even though [at this time] I was lost as a person, I didn't want the kids and the teachers to feel lost. So, I was going out of my mind, they never knew it because I made sure that they were all heard taking care of and [being] accommodated in any way possible. (Sr. Annette)

Furthermore, Ms. Barbara reported how although she felt safe, her team was ready to be back in the school as a community:

It did bring a different atmosphere than you're used to. I do feel safe, I personally have gotten every shot; every person on my faculty was able to get the COVID at least the first and second. I don't know what they're doing after, because we don't really have to keep track, and my people were very conscious of that, but honestly, they were ready for the mass to come off. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Barbara further reported:

The teachers were ready to come back; just having no social activities that first, year when we came back, I only had 15 kids in my building. Fifteen to 30 a day. You have to remember, like, they have younger brothers and sisters their parents were working, so who was going to be home with their brother and sister. If they didn't stay home, so I would say, 95% of my students were at home all day. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Collette reported that they saw COVID-19 as a challenge because no one had ever experienced a crisis as this before. Ms. Collette discussed:

I said to my assistant principal, let's look at it this way. No other administrative team in 100 years has had to do this, so we really don't have a precedent. So, let's kind of figure it out. I think it was very overwhelming. Um, it was very sad to have to close down school. There was a lot of uncertainty, but I think by keeping the kids as priority, and the education as priority, and my teachers really to be honest. I mean, sometimes I complain, but they jumped in no questions asked no hesitation. (Ms. Collette)

Ms. Collette further reported:



There were a lot of things we needed to change, uh, like, you know, we just for logistics itself in the school, like distancing kids and, you know, making one floor for the freshman, one floor for the sophomores, moving the teachers, and keeping the kids in one place. So, it was very challenging when we were trying to do scheduling, um, but it was also very challenging coming to school every day, and only having 50 kids in the building. (Ms. Collette)

Finally, Ms. Evelyn discussed how the challenge that they experienced of COVID-19 was the fear of dying:

The second, this pandemic started, like one of your team members is out. So logistically you're down a person and then the fear of if you get to die.

Personally, what that looks like it, like, just the fear of someone you're close to dying, you know, the fear of what that's going to do to your school, and just the fear, everyone's fear and uncertainty at that time in March and April none of us knew what was going on. Yeah. So it was that and then that layer on top of it.

(Ms. Evelyn)

In summary, this theme highlighted the participants' experiences of struggles with the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants shared challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, from adapting to new safety measures to struggling with uncertainties and fears of personal and communal losses. Despite the overwhelming difficulties, they highlighted their teams' resilience and adaptability in prioritizing students' well-being and maintaining a sense of normalcy.

***Theme 6: The Importance of Team Building and Professional Development on Student Success***

The sixth theme that acts as a finding for this study was the importance of team building and professional development on student success. For example, Sr. Annette discussed how they routinely focused on professional development and team building exercises:

I did a lot of TurnKey. In having teachers, turnkey, they're teaching each other and a lot of. A lot more less meetings of business and more meetings of team building, more meetings of team planning. (Ms. Annette)

Ms. Barbara reported that although they have not focused too much on professional development, it is imperative to do so in the future to help increase student success through proper curriculum development:

Well to tell you the truth there hasn't been much to the professional development here in a while. So, I'm going to I'm using Ean's funds now to get some professional development in our middle States. Academics was one of our objectives and our action plans, so we have a whole plan on curriculum mapping and that is going to be the first [professional development program]. (Ms. Barbara)

Ms. Collette reported how she holds team building and professional development during meetings:

I always had my PowerPoint where the whole screen was not up, so I put up one topic and then I'd ask them a question and then put up the next line and then ask a question on that, and then put up the next line. So, in reality, they [the teachers]

were the ones who actually dictating the notes. And they were taking it one at a time. (Ms. Collette)

Ms. Collette continued to report:

So, I think it's really all about self-evaluation on the teacher's part, which is hard for teachers to do, because the other teacher, so, but I think that's the first thing is self-evaluation on the teachers' part. (Ms. Collette)

In addition, Ms. Deborah also discussed the benefits of a strong professional development program:

One of our professional developments, and it was one of the most well received developments, we had the English department chair. I actually talked about how we have our students right across the curriculum. So, then everybody's on the same page and consistency with the students and what they were doing. Helps to make that easier for them to be successful. (Ms. Deborah)

Ms. Evelyn discussed the different professional development opportunities that they provide to their teachers and staff. Ms. Evelyn stated:

In the past couple years, we did social justice, professional development and things like that. Yeah, like, which was absolutely necessary, and I think worthwhile. Whether its tech, people need, more training, you know. (Ms. Evelyn)

Finally, Ms. Francis discussed how for student success to remain high, it is important to provide professional development opportunities to new people entering the school in their career positions. Ms. Francis reported:

We have to understand that our new people coming in. Don't have any of those experiences. And so how can we provide all of that to make them these really strong, formidable Catholic school leaders. Knowing they're coming with some of those missing parts, and we'll never have the opportunity to experience those missing parts because they don't exist anymore. So, how do we create those opportunities? (Ms. Francis)

In summary, this theme underscores the significance of team building and professional development in fostering student success. Participants highlighted diverse approaches, including TurnKey teaching, curriculum mapping, and social justice initiatives. They emphasized the need for ongoing professional development to enhance educators' skills and maintain consistency across curriculum delivery. The theme also delves into innovative methods, such as interactive PowerPoint sessions and self-evaluation, to engage teachers in learning. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of extending professional development opportunities to new staff, recognizing the need to equip them with the skills essential for effective leadership in Catholic schools.

### **Summary**

Despite the rise in female principals and efforts towards achieving equity, women remain underrepresented in school administrative roles (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This trend has been observed in public schools and Catholic educational institutions, as highlighted in the literature. The need for the study was established by examining the historical context of women within the Catholic Church and their roles. It became evident that the historical conditions of Catholic schools' culture and context did

not allow women leaders with important administrative skills to be identified and selected for principal positions and advancement.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences (personal and educational) of Catholic school women leaders, their various leadership practices, and what we could learn from their spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership. This study was guided by the following research question:

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as Spiritual, Educational, and Managerial leaders?

This chapter presented the study's findings. The researcher began this chapter by providing an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics and the process was followed when conducting the analysis. Then, discussed the study's findings, highlighting the thematic categories that emerged from the dataset. Six themes emerged as findings for this study: (a) adjusting to a new role, (b) the importance of mentorship, (c) the benefits of spirituality in education, (d) instructional leadership benefits the entire school community, (e) COVID-19 was challenging to navigate, and (f) the importance of team building and professional development on student success. The next chapter is Chapter 5 that will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the findings and their implications, experienced limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Despite efforts to promote gender equity, the representation of women in school administrative roles remains disproportionately low (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This disparity persists in public schools and Catholic educational institutions, as evidenced in previous literature. This study's necessity arose from examining the historical treatment of women within the Catholic Church and their roles. It became apparent that Catholic schools' cultural and contextual conditions have historically hindered the identification and selection of women leaders possessing crucial administrative skills for principal positions and career advancement. Thus, this study explored women leaders' personal and educational experiences in Catholic schools, examining their diverse leadership practices while highlighting insights from their spiritual, educational, and managerial approaches. Six themes emerged as findings for this study: (a) adjusting to a new role, (b) the importance of mentorship, (c) the benefits of spirituality in education, (d) instructional leadership benefits the entire school community, (e) COVID-19 was challenging to navigate, and (f) the importance of team building and professional development on student success. In this chapter, the researcher will conclude this study by demonstrating how the findings are in alignment with previous research, answer the research question, and discuss how the findings inform the theoretical framework. Implications for practice and future research, will also be addressed, while identifying experienced limitations.

### **Implications of Findings**

The following research question guided this study:

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as spiritual, educational, and managerial leaders?

Within this section, the researcher will discuss implications of the findings, connecting them to both the research question and theoretical framework that guided this study.

### ***Adjusting to a New Role***

The first theme highlighted how the participants perceived difficulties in adjusting to a new role. These challenges include adapting to new leadership roles, managing resistance to change, and navigating differing visions for the school's direction, highlighting the importance of providing support and resources to empower women leaders in effectively navigating these transitions. This theme offers implications in connection to the research question regarding how women in Catholic education perceive their experiences, professional growth, and barriers as spiritual, educational, and managerial leaders. Women in Catholic education confront the typical challenges of adjusting to new roles and contend with unique spiritual and cultural dynamics within the Catholic educational context (Cattaro & Richard, 2021; Reyes et al., 2022). Their experiences reflect a relationship between their spiritual beliefs, educational practices, and managerial responsibilities, highlighting the importance of understanding and addressing these challenges to foster professional growth and leadership efficacy (Cattaro & Richard, 2021; Reyes et al., 2022).

Within Ciriello's (1993) comprehensive model of Catholic school leadership, this theme provides insight into how women in Catholic secondary school principal roles navigate and embody the spiritual, educational, and managerial dimensions outlined in

the framework. The challenges of adjusting to new roles intersect directly with the managerial aspect of leadership, as leaders must effectively manage organizational change and navigate diverse stakeholder expectations (Ciriello, 1993). Moreover, the spiritual dimension is evident in how these leaders draw upon their faith and spiritual beliefs to guide their decision-making and leadership practices during times of transition (Ciriello, 1993). Thus, this theme highlights the interconnectedness of spiritual, educational, and managerial dimensions within the experiences of women leaders in Catholic education, providing valuable insights for research and practice within this domain.

### ***The Importance of Mentorship***

This theme highlights the crucial role of mentorship in women's professional growth and leadership development within Catholic education (Hayes & Burkett, 2020). Mentors provide guidance and support, contributing to the holistic development of women leaders in spiritual, educational, and managerial capacities (Hayes & Burkett, 2020). This highlights the importance of mentorship in fostering efficacy and resilience within Catholic educational institutions. Mentorship is critical in understanding how women perceive their experiences, professional growth, and barriers as leaders in spiritual, educational, and managerial roles (Hayes & Burkett, 2020). By bridging these dimensions, mentorship enables women leaders to integrate spiritual principles, educational insights, and managerial strategies into their practices, enhancing their effectiveness in Catholic educational settings. In Ciriello's comprehensive Catholic school leadership model, mentorship plays a central role in shaping women leaders' experiences across spiritual, educational, and managerial domains (Ciriello, 1993).



Mentors provide guidance and support, helping women leaders embody the principles of Catholic education and fostering their growth and effectiveness within this context.

### ***The Benefits of Spirituality in Education***

The theme of spirituality in education holds significant implications for women in Catholic educational leadership and the broader educational community. It highlights the transformative potential of integrating spiritual principles into educational practices, nurturing holistic student development alongside academic achievement. Women leaders foster inclusivity and collaboration by grounding leadership in spirituality and promoting a sense of belonging among students and educators. Additionally, the theme marks the importance of the distinctiveness of Catholic educational settings, offering a unique opportunity to cultivate morally responsible individuals (Paul et al., 2020). This theme calls for further research and integration of spirituality into leadership development programs, emphasizing the need for training and support to create spiritually enriched learning environments. Moreover, within Ciriello's (1993) framework of Catholic school leadership, spirituality shapes women leaders' experiences across spiritual, educational, and managerial domains, guiding decision-making, relationship-building, and vision-setting within Catholic education. Grounding leadership in spiritual principles facilitates nurturing environments conducive to holistic student and educator development, showcasing the interconnectedness of spirituality, education, and leadership (Ciriello, 1993).

### ***Instructional Leadership Benefits the Entire School Community***

The theme of instructional leadership and its impact on the entire school community carries implications for educational practice and research. This theme

highlights the role of instructional leadership in cultivating a positive school culture and enhancing teaching methodologies, thereby bolstering student learning outcomes (Hallinger et al., 2020). Effective instructional leadership empowers educators to exceed basic requirements and fosters continuous professional growth and development. Prioritizing instructional leadership ensures that educational institutions deliver a high-caliber education, equipping students with the necessary skills for success in a dynamic world (Kwan, 2019).

Relating this theme to the research question, instructional leadership is a central component of their leadership practices. Women leaders in Catholic educational settings significantly influence instructional methodologies within their institutions, drawing upon their spiritual beliefs, educational expertise, and managerial acumen to facilitate effective teaching and learning (Kwan, 2019). Furthermore, within the theoretical framework provided by Ciriello's (1993) model of Catholic school leadership, instructional leadership plays a vital role in shaping the educational experiences of students and educators across various domains. Grounding instructional leadership in spiritual principles allows women leaders to establish nurturing learning environments that foster holistic development among students and educators. Therefore, this theme highlights the interconnectedness of instructional leadership, spirituality, and education in the experiences of women leaders in Catholic education. In essence, this theme highlighted the importance of strong leadership during times of crisis, marking the importance of the role that women leaders play in guiding their institutions through unprecedented situations. This experience also emphasized the need for ongoing support

and professional development for women leaders, particularly in crisis management and resilience-building strategies.

### ***COVID-19 was Challenging to Navigate***

The theme of COVID-19 challenges highlights the struggles faced by educational institutions. In this study, the participants reported that they found it challenging to adapt to new safety protocols, uncertainties about the pandemic's trajectory, and concerns about personal and communal losses (Jokić Zorkić et al., 2021). The crisis disrupted conventional educational norms, necessitating innovative strategies to safeguard the well-being of students and staff.

Navigating COVID-19 emerged as a response to the research question; women leaders in these roles reported that they were administrators who had to leverage their leadership skills and spiritual convictions to navigate the crisis and support their school communities. Within Ciriello's (1993) model of Catholic school leadership, the theme highlighted the resilience and adaptability demanded of women leaders across spiritual, educational, and managerial areas. Grounding their leadership in spiritual principles and educational expertise enabled these leaders to navigate the pandemic's challenges while staying true to their institutions' mission and values. In essence, this theme highlighted the importance of solid leadership during times of crisis, marking the importance of women leaders' role in guiding their institutions through unprecedented situations. This experience also emphasized the need for ongoing support and professional development for women leaders, particularly in crisis management and resilience-building strategies.

### ***The Importance of Team Building and Professional Development on Student Success***

The theme highlights the role of collaborative teamwork and ongoing professional growth among educators in fostering positive student outcomes. Effective team building fosters communication, supports a collaborative environment, and promotes a culture of collaboration within educational institutions (Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2020). Moreover, investing in professional development ensures educators are updated on the latest teaching practices and trends that enhance instructional practices and strengthen student learning (Cross et al., 2021).

In relation to the research question, team building, and professional development emerge as crucial to their leadership. Women leaders in Catholic educational roles play a pivotal part in facilitating these initiatives within their institutions. By fostering collaborative teamwork and providing professional growth opportunities, they contribute to creating a supportive and enriching educational environment conducive to student success. In the theoretical framework, this theme highlights the role of these practices in shaping students' and educators' educational experiences (Ciriello, 1993). Grounded in spiritual principles and educational expertise, these initiatives enable women leaders to build a culture of continuous improvement within their institutions.

Because Ciriello (1993) does discuss the role of transformational leadership through his theoretical framework, it is important to highlight how this leadership style could benefit women Catholic leaders. Transformational leadership empowers women in Catholic education by inspiring change, guiding professional growth, and fostering resilience (Cook, 2001). Through shared vision and mentorship, women Catholic leaders following a transformational leadership style can better address the challenges of

adaptation and resistance to change while aligning with the institution's core values (Cook, 2001). During crises like COVID-19, these leaders can exhibit resilience and inspire hope, confidently guiding the school community. In addition, through team building and professional development, transformational leaders are able to cultivate collaboration and innovation, increasing student success.

### **Relationship to Prior Research**

In this section, the researcher will discuss how each theme that emerged as the findings align with previous literature.

#### ***Adapting to New Leadership Roles in Catholic Education***

The first theme highlighted how the participants reported that they experienced time to adjust to their new leadership roles. Previous research has consistently highlighted the complexities inherent in assuming new leadership positions, particularly within the distinctive framework of Catholic educational institutions (e.g., Cattaro & Richard, 2021; Reyes et al., 2022). For example, Cattaro and Richard (2021) reported that challenges often encompass many factors, including the need to acclimate to Catholic schools' unique organizational culture and mission, navigate intricate stakeholder relationships, and effectively fulfill the expectations associated with leadership roles. Previous research conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2020) and Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) has pointed out that it is important to recognize and address adjustment challenges so that a leaders' capacity to impact the school system is done so in a positive and effective manner.

Moreover, previous literature has emphasized the role of providing robust support structures for leaders during their transitional periods (e.g., Rhodes et al., 2011;

Yan, 2019). Hayes and Burkett (2020) found that such support structures manifest in various forms, such as mentorship programs, peer networks, or tailored professional development initiatives. Interestingly, mentorship has been hailed as an essential resource, especially for new leaders. Mentorship can provide new leaders with guidance, encouragement, and insights as they navigate their new roles (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020). Additionally, ongoing professional development opportunities are pivotal in equipping leaders with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to be successful in their leadership positions within Catholic educational settings (Brauckmann et al., 2020).

Previous research has also concluded the significance of understanding the relationships between leadership practices and the unique context of Catholic education (e.g., Webster & Litchka, 2020). Shula et al. (2022) discussed that it is important for leaders to adapt their leadership styles to align with the values and missions of their schools, and to navigate how they can effectively implement the tenants of faith-based education. When implementing spirituality, and moral and ethical leadership, leaders must include Catholic principles into their decision-making processes (Shula et al., 2022). By appropriately adapting to their new positions, leaders can lead and inspire the school community more effectively, while upholding the programming of Catholic education.

### ***The Role of Mentorship in Catholic School Leadership***

The second theme highlighted the participants' perceptions that mentorship is essential in Catholic school leadership. Research has purported the importance of mentorship when it comes to leaders navigating their new roles within their schools (e.g., Hayes & Burkett, 2020). Connery (2020) argued that mentors are invaluable, as

they offer insights to their mentees, while providing guidance and encouragement. Furthermore, Hayes and Mahfouz (2020) discussed how mentorship programs have demonstrated their effectiveness in promoting smoother transitions for leaders, providing them with tools such as essential support and resources necessary for success in their roles.

Previous literature has also pointed out additional benefits of mentorship that reach beyond additional growth. Mentorship helps leaders to experience a culture of collaboration and continuous learning while operating within their Catholic institutions (Cook et al., 2021; Kerins & Spaulding, 2022). Kerins and Spaulding (2022) cemented the benefits of mentorship, stating that it fosters the development of professional networks, enabling leaders to exchange best practices, understand insights from one another's experiences, and collaboratively work toward the shared objective of advancing the mission of education.

Finally, prior research has emphasized the critical role of mentorship in upholding the values and traditions of Catholic education for future generations of leaders. Mentors play a vital role in imparting Catholic principles, ethics, and values to emerging leaders, ensuring the enduring continuity of the Catholic identity within school leadership (Staudt, 2020). Through mentorship, seasoned leaders can pass on their wisdom, knowledge, and commitment to the mission of Catholic education, thereby safeguarding its rich heritage and traditions for posterity.

### ***The Advantages of Infusing Spirituality into Educational Practices***

The third theme highlighted the participants' perceptions of the benefits of infusing spirituality into education. Previous research has demonstrated spirituality's

benefits to the educational landscape, containing both the personal and collaborative dimensions of learning (e.g., Paul et al., 2020). Previous literature has underlined the impact of spirituality on individual students' holistic development. For example, Wortham et al. (2020) stated that by offering a spiritual environment, students overall well-being can be increased. By combining spiritual and religious practices, into the curriculum, teachers and administrators can support students in increasing essential life skills that include empathy and moral reasoning (Gross & Rutland, 2021). Furthermore, research has concluded that combining spirituality and education, students' academic achievement scores can be improved, as it helps to keep them engaged and motivated (Imron et al., 2023).

Previous literature has also pointed out the impact that spirituality can have on the entire school community (e.g., Karadağ et al., 2020). For example, Paul et al. (2019) reported that schools that prioritize spirituality in their educational approach often create a sense of belonging, unity, and purpose among their communities. For example, Scherman and Liebenberg (2023) found that a sense of community can increase the presence of healthy relationships and collaboration opportunities, creating an environment that supports academic success and personal growth. Research has also purported that combining spirituality and school culture, students can experience a climate of respect, tolerance, and inclusivity, where individuals from many diverse backgrounds feel valued, supported, and accepted (Williams & Kates, 2022).

Moreover, previous studies have reported that spiritual leadership can have a profound influence in shaping the ethos of Catholic schools. Principals and administrators play a main role in creating a culture of spirituality within their schools,



as they model authenticity to guide their communities in living out Catholic values (Spesia, 2017). By nurturing a spiritual learning environment, Catholic leaders can inspire and empower their school communities to grow their spiritual identities and deepen their faith.

### ***Instructional Leadership Enriches the School Community***

The fourth theme captured the participants' perspectives and experiences of instructional leadership benefiting the entire school community. Previous research has found many advantages that instructional leadership can offer to school communities (e.g., Hallinger et al., 2020; Kwan, 2019). For example, Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) conducted a study and concluded that it is through the utilization of instructional leadership, principals and administrators can establish high academic standards, set clear goals, provide continuous support, and offer professional development opportunities for their teachers. In addition, Hayes and Burkett (2020) discussed that by engaging in mentorship opportunities, leaders can work to increase a culture of improvement and innovation in teaching, thereby enhancing the quality of offered education. Research has also concluded the effects of instructional leadership throughout the school community (e.g., Hallinger et al., 2020). For example, Bellibaş et al. (2020) argued that schools utilizing instructional leadership demonstrate increased levels of teacher morale, job satisfaction, and collaboration among staff members.

Finally, previous literature has demonstrated the impact that instructional leadership has on student achievement (e.g., Rodrigues & Ávila de Lima, 2021). Studies have shown that schools that follow an instructional leadership approach can experience increased levels of student engagement and academic performance (e.g., Kwan, 2020).

Levin and Datnow (2012) reported that that this form of leadership allows leaders to better make data-informed decisions, as they are more likely to follow evidence-based instructional strategies. By following evidence-based strategies, leaders can also monitor their students' progress better to ensure that their education is aligned with personalized learning needs.

### ***Navigating the Challenges of COVID-19 in Catholic Education***

The fifth theme that emerged discussed how the participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging to navigate. This theme aligned with previous literature as it has been reported that almost all schools throughout the world experienced challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Weine et al., 2021). Schools experienced disruptions from the pandemic that included the need to stop face-to-face instruction and transition to remote classrooms (e.g., Jokić Zorkić et al., 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) reported that during this time, school leaders had to ensure uninterrupted instruction; the shift to remote learning created additional barriers such as worsening equity issues for students from marginalized backgrounds.

Previous research also confirmed the pandemic's impact on the emotional well-being of students. At the beginning of the pandemic, principals, administrators, and teachers all found it challenging to provide their students with appropriate support and resources (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of school leaders in addressing these challenges became critical. Weiner et al. (2021) discussed that during the height of the pandemic, principals were responsible for making decisions to appropriately implement safety protocols, such as social distancing and mask mandates. However, it was found

that leaders who followed effective leadership practices were more successful in addressing such challenges.

### ***Elevating Student Success through Team Building and Professional Development***

The sixth theme highlighted the participants' perceptions of the importance of team building and professional development on student success. Previous research has consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between effective team building among educators and enhanced student performance (e.g., Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2020). For example, Cross et al. (2021) reported that collaborative teamwork fosters a supportive school culture where educators collaborate, exchange best practices, and collectively pursue shared objectives. Furthermore, Bernacki et al. (2021) argued that cohesive teams are better equipped to address diverse student needs, personalize instruction to accommodate various learning styles, and provide targeted support for students encountering difficulties.

Previous literature has also highlighted the impact of ongoing professional development on both teacher efficacy and student success (e.g., Didion et al., 2019). There are many benefits of professional development initiatives for educators, as by completing additional training, they can work to increase best instructional practices in their classrooms (Didion et al., 2019). In addition, Saleem et al. (2021) argued that professional development programs allow educators to continuously upgrade their teaching skills and learn new techniques.

Previous research has also highlighted the importance of aligning professional development initiatives with school objectives and student learning targets (Sancar et al., 2021). Furthermore, Sancar et al. reported that professional development should target

specific areas of improvement identified through comprehensive data analysis and ongoing school evaluation. By aligning professional development opportunities with school improvement plans and instructional priorities, educators can optimize their impact on student learning outcomes and contribute significantly to the holistic success of the school community.

### **Connections of Findings to the Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research question:

1. How do women in Catholic education view their experiences, professional growth, and barriers/challenges as spiritual, educational, and managerial leaders?

This study's findings directly address the research question by providing insights into how women in Catholic education perceive their experiences, professional growth, and the barriers or challenges they face as spiritual, educational, and managerial leaders. Each of the identified themes - adjusting to a new role, the importance of mentorship, the benefits of spirituality in education, instructional leadership benefiting the entire school community, the challenges of navigating COVID-19, and the significance of team building and professional development on student success - offers a more robust understanding of women's leadership experiences within Catholic educational settings. These themes collectively answer the research question by highlighting the multifaceted nature of women's leadership roles in Catholic education and the various factors influencing their experiences, growth, and challenges in spiritual, educational, and managerial leadership capacities.

## **Connections of Findings to the Theoretical Framework**

Embedded within Ciriello's comprehensive framework, delineating Catholic school leadership's spiritual, educational, and managerial facets, this study offers insights into how women in Catholic secondary school principal roles navigate and embody these pivotal dimensions. The framework provides a lens through which to analyze and interpret these leaders' multifaceted experiences, highlighting their integral role in shaping the ethos of their institutions (Spesia, 2017). In spiritual leadership, the findings highlight the leaders' perspectives on fostering faith, moral values, and the Catholic identity within their school communities. These insights highlight the challenges that were experienced when it came to nurturing a spiritual environment, as well as the strategies that have been used to overcome challenges and obstacles. This study also explored how the participants approached religious instruction, student development, and cultural and religious diversity within their schools. The results found that educational leadership played an important in shaping students' growth and development, as it helped leaders uphold the values and mission of their Catholic schools.

Furthermore, within the realm of managerial leadership, the study examined how these principals effectively managed personnel, institutional resources, and school operations. This study uncovered the managerial challenges leaders confronted and the innovative approaches they adopted to ensure the efficient functioning of their schools while prioritizing spiritual and educational imperatives. By embracing Ciriello's (1993) framework, this study emphasized the interconnectedness of these leadership domains, highlighting how spiritual values inform educational practices, which, in turn, influence

managerial decisions. This holistic perspective demonstrates the essential role of Catholic school leaders in integrating faith into all aspects of school administration, fostering a cohesive and purpose-driven environment conducive to student growth and success. Moreover, the findings resonate with the concept of transformational leadership as articulated by Ciriello (1993). Ciriello (1993) portrays these principals as cultural leaders who not only shape the ethos of their schools but also model the expectations of the Catholic faith community. By promoting the development of faith and aligning with the values of a school's culture, Catholic leaders can contribute to the fulfillment of the school's mission.

### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to constraints or weaknesses that may have impacted the study's reliability, validity, or generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, there were some limitations that could have influenced the findings. First, the number of participants that were recruited was particularly small (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This might have restricted my ability to fully capture a range of experiences of women in leadership roles within Catholic schools. Second, researcher bias could have been experienced, as it is a common limitation found in qualitative studies. To mitigate researcher bias, the researcher was able to employ reflexivity and complete member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Third, the findings of this study may not be generalizable beyond the specific context being explored. While the insights from women leaders in Catholic schools are valuable, they may not fully represent women's experiences in leadership roles across different educational settings or cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, despite the discussed limitations, my study still was

able to offer valuable insights into the experiences of women leaders in Catholic schools.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research in Catholic education leadership has numerous avenues for deeper understanding and growth. One implication for future research is a more thorough exploration into the transition experiences of women leaders in Catholic schools, focusing on the specific challenges they encounter and the support mechanisms necessary for a smoother transition. Additionally, there is a need for a more comprehensive examination of the role of spirituality in educational leadership within Catholic contexts, exploring how spiritual values and practices shape leadership behaviors and school culture. Moreover, researchers could investigate specific instructional leadership strategies leaders employ in Catholic schools, examining their impact on student outcomes and the overall dynamics of the school community. Given the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, future research could also explore the lasting effects of the pandemic on leadership practices and the broader school community within Catholic education. Given the way technology was quickly integrated into the Catholic school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, future research should also focus on how leaders leveraged technology during these unprecedented times. Understanding how Catholic leaders leveraged digital tools and platforms that enhanced teaching practices would be important to explore, especially when attempting to uphold the values and traditions of Catholic education. Continuous research into team building and professional development initiatives in Catholic schools can also help to enhance school effectiveness while bolstering student success rates.

Because of the findings that were highlighted in this study, future research should also focus on the intersectionality of leadership identities. By having future researchers focus on how leaders navigate multiple identities (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic background, etc.), challenges and opportunities could be better understood in relation to diversity within a Catholic school environment. Finally, research should also be conducted to investigate the efficacy of alternative models of leadership practices in Catholic schools. Future researchers could investigate innovative practices that leaders follow that foster collaboration, inclusivity, and shared decision-making among all school stakeholders. By addressing these areas, future research can advance the understanding of effective leadership practices and ultimately improve educational outcomes in Catholic schools.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study highlight implications for practice within Catholic educational settings. One significant implication is the challenge leaders face when transitioning into new roles, highlighting the necessity of providing robust support structures during this adjustment period (Wharton-Beck et al., 2022). Catholic schools should consider implementing comprehensive mentorship programs and targeted professional development initiatives tailored to assist these leaders in effectively navigating their new responsibilities (Cook et al., 2022). Additionally, the emphasis on mentorship highlights the value of fostering supportive relationships among leaders within the school community, which encourages collaboration and creates an environment conducive to personal and professional growth (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019).



Another essential implication is the integration of spirituality into education, which emerges as a foundational practice. This suggests an approach to leadership that embraces spiritual values and principles, intertwining them into leadership approaches and the overall school culture. By making instructional leadership skills and practices a priority, Catholic schools can increase their students' learning experiences while promoting the professional development of their staff members (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for adaptable leadership strategies. Through this crisis, it was found that Catholic schools must develop crisis management plans and prioritize the well-being of all community members. This continuously promotes a safe and supportive learning environment. Furthermore, promoting student success through team building and ongoing professional development remains essential. Collaborative leadership approaches and continuous learning opportunities for all staff enhance the school's overall effectiveness and positively affect student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

It is also important for Catholic schools to foster inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments (Bonfiglio & Kroh, 2020; & Ford, 2023). Therefore, leaders must work to create a school environment that acknowledges and celebrates the diverse backgrounds of teachers, students, and their families within the school community. This helps to ensure that equity and justice are accounted for within the school's environment, by creating and implementing policies addressing systemic barriers to learning; this allows more opportunities for all students to thrive in all areas of their lives (Mahoney et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it is essential that Catholic school leaders embrace innovation and adaptability in response to the challenges that have been experienced by the COVID-19 pandemic (Miller et al., 2022). Catholic school leaders should work to create an environment that is creative and innovative so that if any future challenges occur, the school can more easily adapt and respond to challenging learning environments (Miller et al., 2022). Creating an atmosphere of innovation in Catholic schools will help teachers feel empowered to explore new teaching strategies while using different pedagogical and technological approaches that enhance their students' academic outcomes (French et al., 2019). Finally, leaders should continue cultivating partnerships with community organizations (e.g., businesses, non-profits, and higher education institutions) to leverage resources better to enrich educational experiences and broaden the scope of students' goals (Ford, 2023). Embracing these implications will empower Catholic educational institutions to cultivate environments that foster effective leadership and ultimately lead to positive outcomes for all stakeholders, including students, staff, and the broader community.

## **Conclusion**

Despite efforts to promote gender equity, women's representation in school administrative roles remains significantly lower than men's (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This gender gap persists not only in public schools but also in Catholic educational institutions, as previous research has shown. This study's motivation stemmed from examining the historical treatment of women within the Catholic Church and their roles. It became evident that cultural and contextual factors within Catholic schools have historically impeded the identification and advancement of women

possessing essential administrative skills for principal positions and career progression. Consequently, this study delved into women leaders' personal and educational experiences in Catholic schools, exploring their varied leadership practices and drawing insights from their spiritual, educational, and managerial approaches. Six key themes emerged from this investigation: (a) adaptation to new roles, (b) the significance of mentorship, (c) the role of spirituality in education, (d) the impact of instructional leadership on the entire school community, (e) the challenges posed by navigating COVID-19, and (f) the importance of team building and professional development for student success.

These central themes highlight the critical need to address challenges such as mentorship, spirituality, and professional growth to empower women leaders and amplify their impact within the educational sphere. Moving forward, stakeholders in Catholic educational settings need to acknowledge these insights and initiate proactive measures to cultivate inclusive environments conducive to the progression of women in leadership positions. This proactive approach not only advances gender equality but also enriches the educational environment by incorporating various viewpoints and backgrounds, thereby benefiting students, educators, and the broader community.

### **Epilogue, Afterword, or Final Thoughts**

Reflecting on my research journey, I have found profound value in exploring gender equity within Catholic educational institutions. This study was motivated by persistent gender disparities in school administration, evident in public education and within the Catholic Church. The study explored the historical treatment of women within Catholicism and the barriers they faced in advancing to administrative positions due to

various cultural and contextual factors. The complexities of challenges women leaders face in Catholic schools became evident through the emergence of six key themes, such as adaptation to new roles and the importance of mentorship and spirituality. These insights have highlighted a strong need for proactive measures to break down barriers to women's advancement, fostering inclusive environments that support their professional growth. By amplifying the voices and contributions of women leaders, Catholic educational institutions can enrich their communities, promote diversity, and enhance the educational experience for all stakeholders. This research experience has not only deepened my understanding of gender dynamics within educational leadership but also inspired a commitment to advocating for equitable opportunities for women in Catholic educational settings.

## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Nov 30, 2022 12:51:55 PM EST

PI: Carmen Lopez  
CO-PI: Richard Bernato  
The School of Education, Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2023-90** *A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?*

Dear Carmen Lopez:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?*. The approval is effective from November 30, 2022 through November 29, 2023.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category:

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
Professor of Psychology

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER TO ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK



November 24, 2020

Archdiocese of New York  
Dr. Noelle Beale  
Interim Associate Superintendent of Leadership  
1011 First Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Good Morning Dr. Beale,

My name is Carmen Z. Lopez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at St. John's University. My dissertation mentor is Dr. Rosalba Corrado Del Vecchio and she can be reached at [delveccr@stjohns.edu](mailto:delveccr@stjohns.edu) or 718-990-5277. My qualitative research study proposes to explore women's school leadership and how women's leadership makes a difference in Catholic secondary education. The study seeks to identify what leadership practices the women leaders have demonstrated as educational, spiritual, and managerial leaders and their perceptions of these practices.

The purpose of this letter, therefore, is to if I can kindly reach out to principals in the New York Archdioceses to ask for their participation in my research study. I intend to collect data through an online survey, in-person ( or online) interviews, and on-site shadow observations within the COVID-19 circumstances and requirements. Additionally, I may also request you and the principal's permission to hold a faculty focus group consisting of teachers the principal may want to recommend to participate in the study or who may want to volunteer. The focus group can be scheduled on the principal campus or online for the convenience of everyone involved. All information gathered will be anonymous and confidential. Principal, faculty, and school names will not be used, and all Institutional Review Board(IRB) requirements will be observed to ensure confidentiality and to provide opportunities to share findings with participants.

Since I am seeking to add to the literature about women's administration and leadership from a Catholic mindset, I am excited about this study. I am hopeful that you will allow me to email possible participants of women leaders in the dioceses. If you have any questions, please contact me at 917-327-9308 or [Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu](mailto:Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu)

Thank you so much for your attention and consideration.

Carmen Z. Lopez

Doctoral Candidate  
St. John's University School of Education  
Queens, New York

**APPENDIX C**  
**APPROVAL LETTER**



**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**  
**ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK**

1011 FIRST AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022 PHONE (212) 371-1000 FAX (212) 758-3018

February 20, 2021

Dear Carmen,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write to you today to inform you that your request to conduct research within the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of New York has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Michael J. Deegan.

Carmen Leon will be the point of contact for your study and she will be reaching out to you in the coming days.

Congratulations on this next step in your dissertation process.

Sincerely,

*Sister Anne Massell*

**Sr. Anne Massell, PBVM**  
*Associate Superintendent for Leadership*

cc: Mr. Michael J. Deegan  
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Carmen Leon  
Secondary Schools Administrator

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER TO PRINCIPAL



Principal  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Principal,

My name is Carmen Z. Lopez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at St. John's University. My dissertation mentor is Dr. Richard Bernato, and he can be reached at [bernator@stjohns.edu](mailto:bernator@stjohns.edu) or 631-848-0316.

My qualitative research study proposes to explore women's school leadership and how women's leadership makes a difference in Catholic secondary education. The study seeks to identify what leadership practices women have demonstrated in their educational, spiritual, and managerial roles and their perceptions of these practices.

Therefore, this letter is to ask for your participation in my research study. I intend to collect data through an online survey and in-person (or online) interviews and on-site shadow observations, if possible, within the Covid 19 circumstances and requirements. Additionally, I may request your permission to hold review documentation describing the nature of the school and its mission policies and procedures, including school data.

All information gathered will be anonymous and confidential. School names of the Principal and faculty not be used, and all Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements will be observed to ensure confidentiality and to provide opportunities to share findings with participants.

Since I am seeking to add to the literature about women's administration and leadership from a Catholic mindset, I am excited about this study. I am hopeful that you are willing to be a participant. If you have any questions, please contact me at 917-327-9308 or [Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu](mailto:Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu)

Thank you so much for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carmen Lopez", on a light-colored background.

Carmen Z. Lopez  
Doctoral Candidate  
St. John's University School of Education  
Queens, New York



## APPENDIX E

### PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this dissertation study regarding the experiences of Women Catholic Secondary school principals. All individual responses will remain confidential, and results will only be reported in aggregate. If you have questions regarding this study, do not hesitate to contact the researcher: Carmen Z. Lopez, a doctoral candidate at St. John's University Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu.

#### **Section 1A: Individual Demographics**

1. **What is your current age?**
  - 22-35
  - 36-45
  - 46-55
  - 56-65
  - Over 65
2. **What is your state of life?**
  - Lay-Religious
  - Lay-Former Religious
  - Lay-Single
  - Lay-Married
3. **Race/Ethnicity**
  - American Indian
  - Asian American
  - Black/African American
  - Hispanic
  - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
  - Multiracial
  - White/Caucasian

#### **Section 1B: Religious Formation**

4. **Which Statement best describes you?**
  - born and raised Catholic
  - Catholic convert
  - Not catholic
5. **How many years did you attend Catholic grade school as a student?**
  - Did not attend Catholic grade school
  - 1-3
  - 4-7
  - More than 7
6. **How many years did you attend a Catholic secondary school as a student?**
  - Did not attend Catholic grade school
  - 1-3
  - More than 3
7. **Have you participated in a formation program for religious life?**

- Yes
  - No
- 8. How many college credits do you have in Catholic Theology and Catholic Philosophy?**
- None
  - 1-6
  - 7-12
  - 13-29
  - 30 or more
- 9. Which statement best applies to your catechetical certification?**
- Have not taken any catechetical certification course
  - Prior coursework, but not currently working toward certification
  - Enrolled in catechetical coursework
  - Have catechetical certification

## **Section 2: School Demographics and Structure**

- 10. Student Enrollment**
- Co-educational
  - All Female
  - All Male
- 11. Student Population**
- 750-1000
  - 500-749
  - 499 – 300
  - 300 or Less
- 12. What percentage of your student population is Catholic?**
- Less than 26%
  - 26%-50%
  - 51-75%
  - 76%-100%
- 13. What percentage of your teaching staff is Catholic?**
- Less than 26%
  - 26%-50%
  - 51-75%
  - 76%-100%
- 14. School governance**
- (Arch) diocesan
  - Religious order sponsored
  - Other

### **Section 3: Professional School Experience**

**15. How many years of experience do you have in Catholic schools as a teacher and/or administrator?**

- None
- 1-4
- 5-10
- 11-30
- More than 20

**16. How many years of experience do you have in public schools as a teacher and/or administrator?**

- None
- 1-4
- 5-10
- 11-30
- More than 20

**17. Years of experience as a principal in your current school**

- This is my first year
- 2-4
- 5-10
- 11-20
- More than 20

**18. Total number of years working in Catholic Education**

- This is my first year
- 2-4
- 5-10
- 11-20
- More than 20

**19. Baccalaureate degree**

- Catholic Institution
- Private, non-Catholic Institution
- Public Institution

**20. Master's degree**

- Not applicable
- Catholic Institution
- Private, non-Catholic Institution
- Public Institution

**21. Terminal degree**

- Not applicable
- Catholic Institution

- Private, non-Catholic Institution
- Public Institution

**22. School leadership role**

- President
- Principal
- Headmaster

**Thank you for your participation in this necessary research**

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS A

1. What is your educational background, and how long have you been in the field of Catholic Education?
2. Tell me about your leadership journey. What were the challenges, highlights, and disappointments?
3. What role would you prefer in your current position to focus on?
4. What does **spiritual leadership** mean to you, how do your school's mission and culture impact your spiritual leadership?
5. What does **instructional leadership** mean to you, how do you keep your administrative, department, and students supported with the latest curriculum and assessments?
  - a. What expectations do you have for teacher instruction for student achievement within your organization, and how does professional development fit into that?
6. What does **managerial leadership** mean to you, how do you address the various managerial responsibilities that come with it?
  - a) How do you comply with the rules and regulations of the government and the Archdiocesan diocese's rules and regulations for you?
  - b) How have you managed the challenges and barriers of COVID-19 as a Catholic school principal?
7. Tell me about a story highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of working in an urban school environment.

- a) How does working in a school district environment affect the involvement of parents and community members?
8. What support resources did you need to manage the COVID-19 pandemic challenges?
- a) What do you see as the challenges with the spirituality, instructional, and managerial leadership due to COVID-19?
9. What advice would you give to women aspiring to become administrators?
10. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS B

1. What is your educational background, and how long have you been in the field of Catholic Education?
  - Teacher
  - Assistant
  - Principal
  - Regional Superintendent
  - Associate Superintendent for Leadership
2. Tell me about your leadership pathway.
  - What were the challenges,
  - highlights, and
  - if any disappointments?
3. What role would you prefer to focus on with school leaders in your current position?
4. What does **instructional leadership** mean to you?
5. How does the Archdiocese expect their principal to develop their teachers, department, and students to the latest curriculum and assessments?
6. What expectations do you have for principals to support their teachers with instruction to have student achievement within your organization,
7. What does **managerial leadership** mean to you?
8. How do you address the various responsibilities the leadership role impacts on school principals?
9. How do you comply with the rules and regulations of the government and the Archdiocesan diocese's rules and regulations?
10. What does **spiritual leadership** mean to you?
11. How does the regional superintendent see the school's mission and culture represented by principals and their spiritual leadership?
12. Tell me about a story highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of working with a principal in an urban school environment.
13. How does working in a school district environment affect the involvement of parents and community members?
14. What is the spiritual, instructional, and managerial leadership you are seeking in a school principal?
15. What are the spiritual, instructional, and managerial leadership challenges in hiring a new school leader?
16. What are the pathways into leadership provided by the Archdioceses?
  - Teacher
  - Principal
  - Coach (Outside organizations)
  - positions within the district office
    - What roles will a principal within the Catholic School Education strive for?

## APPENDIX H

### FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did you decide you wanted to become an administrator?
2. Who gave you your first opportunity as a school leader?
3. Did you have teachers who impacted you as a current principal?
4. What advice do you give to women looking to follow in your path?
5. Do you feel that you are a “natural” leader, or is this something you need to develop?
6. What reactions did you get from people (parents, family, community members) when you first became a principal?
7. Please describe the community you currently live in and your role within.
8. Please describe the community you lead and your role within the community.
9. How do you navigate interacting with men in the workplace, especially those you have to deal with regularly?
10. Have you felt out of place or awkward when dealing with a male subordinate within the school?
11. Do you interact differently with men and women in the workplace?
12. Do you feel that the role of women in Catholic schools has changed?
13. Is there a difference between lay, faith-based, and religious women's leadership and with men's leadership?
14. Do you think there is a difference between a woman leading a boy's school and a male leader?
15. Women leaders are extremely large in Catholic education, but what is your next role after the principal/leader role?
16. Is there anything you would like to add regarding the role of principals with women in education aspiring to become leaders and
17. What would be a path to continuing her career in education after becoming a principal?
  - a) What do you see as the challenges with the spirituality, instructional, and managerial leadership due to COVID-19?
18. What advice would you give to women aspiring to become administrators?
19. Do you have anything else you would like to add?



**APPENDIX I**  
**CONSENT LETTER**



Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to learn more about my study. My name is Carmen Z. Lopez, and I am a doctoral student at St. John's University School of Education. I am conducting a research project on women's experiences in Catholic education. I would like to invite you to participate. However, before consenting to participate, I want to inform you of the project, the study procedure, risks, and benefits, and explain the confidentiality agreement.

**Title of Project: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?**

**Procedure:** Capturing your experience is the most important part of this project! Therefore, for this study, I want to learn about your lived experience. I would also like to hear your thoughts on the areas that need support. To ensure I capture your experience appropriately, I may ask you to:

1. online survey on demographics and population (10 minutes)
2. participate in a private interview through St. John's Webex and or phone that will be recorded (60 minutes).
3. a follow interview through St. John's Webex and/or phone will be recorded (60 minutes).
4. allow in-person observation of you in your school environment.
5. permission to hold review documentation describing the nature of the school and its mission policies and procedures, including school data.

**Possible Risks or Benefits:** There are no risks associated with your participation. However, I realize your time is valuable, and I will do my best to adhere to the time periods listed above. Your participation in this study will inform me of your experiences regarding women in leadership in a Catholic school setting. Through this study, I hope to inform community programs, institutions of secondary high school, and policymakers of the experiences and challenges faced by you.

**Confidentiality:** You, as well as others who agree to participate in this study, will have your identity protected. Your identity will NOT be disclosed at any time. All interviews, surveys, documents, and audio files will require a security code to access. These items will be stored with pseudo names and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or at any point do not want to participate further, please feel free to contact:

- *Researcher*, Carmen Z. Lopez at [Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu](mailto:Carmen.Lopez12@stjohns.edu) or (917) 327-9508
- *Dissertation Advisor*, Dr. Bernato at [bernator@stjohns.edu](mailto:bernator@stjohns.edu) or (631) 848-0316
- *Chair of Internal Review Board (IRB)*, Dr. DiGiuseppe at [digiuser@stjohns.edu](mailto:digiuser@stjohns.edu) or 718-990-1955

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in **A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?** and have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to be recorded during the interview and observation

\_\_\_\_\_ I only consent to be recorded for the interview

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX J

### PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SCRIPT



#### PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW

**(Script)**

- **Welcome participants**

- Thank you for participating in this interview to explore women's school leadership and how women's leadership makes a difference in Catholic secondary education. My name is Carmen Z. Lopez, I am the primary researcher in this study.

- **Purpose of the Study**

- The study aims to identify what leadership practices women have demonstrated in their educational, spiritual, and managerial roles and their perceptions of these practices.

- **Participants rights**

- Please be reminded that you may withdraw from this interview without explanation or penalty. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential throughout this study. Your name will not be disclosed or included in any forms, transcriptions, data analysis, or research findings. Pseudonyms will be used when discussing the research. Are you ready to start?

- **Close the interview**

- Thank you once again for participating in this interview. Your contribution and feedback are greatly appreciated and will be helpful for this study. If you don't mind, I will share this interview session with you once it is transcribed to check for the accuracy of the details and interpretations. This will also test the validity of the study. +

## APPENDIX K

### NCEA SCHOOL SUMMARY REPORT

<p><b>C. Staff</b> In C.1. and C.2., include all <b>paid professionals</b> (administrators and faculty) who have responsibility for the teaching/learning process. Do not include development or admissions directors, teachers' aides or support staff. <b>Female Religious are Sisters/Nuns; Male Religious are Brothers.</b> In C.3., please include all staff.</p>	
<p><b>C.1. Professional Staff</b> List the number of <b>all</b> the full- and part-time professional staff in each category.</p>	<p><b>C.2. Full and Part-time Staff:</b> List the numbers of full and part-time paid professionals in the appropriate categories and total them across and down. The added totals in section C.1. and C.2. must agree with each other.</p>
<p><b>C.3.</b> List the number of staff in the appropriate categories. This includes all staff and so should not match C.1. or C.2.</p>	

#### ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

C.1b. Professional Staff Race and Religion	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total
American Indian/ Native Alaskan			
Asian			
Black/African American			
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander			
White			
Two or more races			
<b>TOTAL</b>			*

C.1a. Professional Staff Ethnicity and Religion	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total
Hispanic			
Non-Hispanic			
<b>TOTAL</b>			*

C.2. Professional Staff	C.2a. Full-time	C.2b. Part-time	C.2c. (add C.2a. & C.2b.)
Female Religious (Sisters/Nuns)			
Male Religious (Brothers)			
Clergy			
Lay, Male			
Lay, Female			
<b>TOTAL</b>			*

\*These three numbers must be the same

C.3. Staff by Type	Total
President/Head of School	
Principal	
Assistant Principals	
Guidance Counselors	
Teachers	
Teacher Assistant/Instructional Aide	
Other Staff	

**C.4. Teacher Retention**

In order to calculate teacher retention, please answer the following:

1. Total number of teachers who taught at your school in both 2020-21 and 2021-22	
2. Total number of teachers who taught at your school in 2020-21 who did not return in Fall 2021 for reasons other than retirement	

## APPENDIX L

### NIH CERTIFICATION COMPLETION



## APPENDIX M

### THEMES, PATTERNS, AND DISCREPANCIES

Theme	Patterns	Discrepancies	Participant Quotations
Adjusting to a new role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges of adjusting to new leadership roles within educational institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges of adapting to new school levels or environments.</li> <li>• Difficulties associated with managing resistance to change.</li> <li>• The extent of support and preparation they received for their leadership roles.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Adjusting to high school life is a totally different animal from elementary school in certain aspects in terms of the students.”</i> (Sr. Annette)</p> <p><i>“We’re kind of thrown into education”</i> (Ms. Barbara)</p> <p><i>“The challenges are people that have been here for 1000 years and don't want change”</i> (Ms. Collette)</p> <p><i>“It’s much more challenging to navigate someone who does not support the school and navigate the process of moving the school forward when you have a person who, who doesn't want the school”</i> (Ms. Francis)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapting to new environments.</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing resistance to change among colleagues.</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigating differing visions for the school's direction.</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizing the complexities of leading with minimal preparation and diverse perspectives on the school's mission and goals.</li> </ul>		
The importance of mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The crucial role of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured mentorship</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Teachers who were new had</i></p>

Theme	Patterns	Discrepancies	Participant Quotations
	mentorship in their professional growth and career trajectories.	programs with regular meetings and designated mentors.	<i>mentors. We met once a week” (Sr. Annette)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentors provided guidance, support, and valuable insights that contributed to development as educators and leaders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal mentorship relationships that developed naturally over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I have seen sisters with educational leadership practices that I like to emulate” (Ms. Barbara)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse forms of mentorship, including formal programs and informal relationships with experienced colleagues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varying experiences with the duration and depth of mentorship relationships,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I kind of followed her journey, not because I was following her, it just kind of happened that way. She and I had become friends.” (Ms. Evelyn)</li> </ul>
Benefits of spirituality in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The positive outcomes of integrating spirituality and education.</li> <li>Incorporating spirituality into the educational experience was seen as rewarding.</li> <li>The importance of fostering love, compassion, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varying perspectives on ways in which spirituality should be integrated into the educational experience.</li> <li>The importance of teaching virtues derived from the Gospels.</li> <li>The broader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Being able to not just shape the child educationally, but shape the whole child, even spiritually.” (Sr. Annette)</li> </ul> <p><i>What we're trying to do is to have people in the school community, understand that they're loved by God, and that we</i></p>

Theme	Patterns	Discrepancies	Participant Quotations
	<p data-bbox="602 302 805 407">empathy within the school community.</p> <ul data-bbox="558 449 805 596" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="558 449 805 596">• Bringing spirituality into every aspect of teaching.</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="906 302 1135 554">impact of spirituality on shaping the entire school community and promoting love and empathy.</p>	<p data-bbox="1170 302 1419 554"><i>need to share that each of us is loved by God, and we need to share that love with one another.</i>” (Ms. Barbara)</p> <ul data-bbox="1170 596 1419 1205" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1170 596 1419 1205">• <i>“By understanding the gospel if we lead by teaching goodness, compassion, and empathy, and at the same time, you know, hold firm to the things that make us different from the public schools.”</i> (Ms. Collette)</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="285 1289 521 1467">Instructional leadership benefits the entire school community</p>	<ul data-bbox="558 1289 834 1835" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="558 1289 834 1541">• Positive outcomes of practicing instructional leadership within the school community.</li> <li data-bbox="558 1583 834 1835">• Instructional leadership is empowering, fostering proficiency, and efficiency in teaching roles.</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="862 1289 1135 1871" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="862 1289 1135 1583">• Varying perspectives on the strategies and practices that constitute effective instructional leadership.</li> <li data-bbox="862 1625 1135 1871">• The importance of empowering department chairs and keeping staff up to date with</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="1187 1289 1419 1871" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1187 1289 1419 1688">• <i>“Sometimes you have teachers who just do what's required and that's it but to empower the teachers to see beyond what's required.”</i> (Sr. Annette).</li> <li data-bbox="1187 1730 1419 1871">• <i>“They just don't know how to reach it without knowing those</i></li> </ul>

Theme	Patterns	Discrepancies	Participant Quotations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The motivation and continuous learning that instructional leadership can instill in educators,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>current educational practices.</li> <li>The significance of continuous informal classroom observations for assessing teaching effectiveness.</li> <li>Instructional leadership influences hiring practices and ensures that students receive a strong education.</li> </ul>	<p><i>learning those skills that they need to be remediate it on.” (Ms. Barbara)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Giving the teachers an opportunity to work with me, or with my assistant principal with their department chairs on how to better their lesson plans had a better assess to students.” (Ms. Collette).</li> </ul>
<p>COVID-19 was challenging to navigate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on various aspects of school operations and personal well-being.</li> <li>The need for rapid adaptation to new safety measures, uncertainties surrounding the pandemic's progression, and fears of personal and communal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varying experiences and perspectives on specific aspects of the crisis.</li> <li>The assessments of leaders' teams' responses to the crisis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“It was very sad to have to close down school. There was a lot of uncertainty, but I think by keeping the kids as priority, and the education as priority, and my teachers really to be honest.” (Ms. Collette).</li> <li>“The second, this pandemic started, like one of your team members is out. So logistically you're</li> </ul>



Theme	Patterns	Discrepancies	Participant Quotations
	<p>losses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The overwhelming nature of the crisis and the unprecedented nature of the challenges faced by educational institutions.</li> </ul>		<p><i>down a person and then the fear of if you get to die.”</i> (Ms. Deborah)</p>
<p>The importance of team building and professional development on student success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The importance of team building and professional development in fostering student success.</li> <li>TurnKey teaching, curriculum mapping, social justice initiatives, and technology training.</li> <li>The need for ongoing professional development to enhance educators' skills and maintain consistency across curriculum delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varying perspectives on specific approaches to professional development and their effectiveness in promoting student success.</li> <li>The extent to which they prioritized professional development within their schools.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Academics was one of our objectives and our action plans, so we have a whole plan on curriculum mapping and that is going to be the first [professional development program].”</i> (Ms. Barbara)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“One of our professional developments, and it was one of the most well received developments, we had the English department chair. I actually talked about how we have our students right across the curriculum.”</i> (Ms. Deborah)</li> </ul>

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## Vita

Name	<i>Carmen Z. Lopez</i>
Baccalaureate Degree	<i>Bachelor of Science, Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York Major: Accounting</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2007</i>
Other Degrees	<i>Master of Science, St. John's University, New York, Major: School Building Leadership</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2014</i>
Other Degrees	<i>Master of Science, St. John's University, New York Major: Childhood Education – Change of Career</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2017</i>
Certificate	<i>Advanced Certificate St. John's University, New York: School District Leadership</i>
Date Graduated	<i>January 2021</i>