Private odyssey: Responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal

Dorothy A. Ostrowski
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork

Part of the Education Commons

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Work by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.
PRIVATE ODYSSEY:
RESPONSIBILITIES, CHALLENGES, AND NEEDS OF THE
BEGINNING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

by

Dorothy A. Ostrowski

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Martha Bruckner and Dr. Leon Dappenh

Omaha, Nebraska

June, 2005
DISSERTATION TITLE

Private Odyssey: Responsibilities, Challenges, and Needs of the Beginning Catholic School Principal

BY

Dorothy A. Ostrowski

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

APPROVED

DATE

Dr. Martha Bruckner
6/14/05

Dr. Larry Dlugosh
6/14/05

Dr. Leon Dappen
6/14/05

Dr. Tommie Radd
6/14/05

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The beginning Catholic school principal is subject to a number of unique job-related experiences when assuming a leadership role within a school community. The specific responsibilities given the Catholic school principal may vary, providing for different challenges and needs. Preparation for this role may be inadequate, and the effectiveness of any given support is unknown.

This dissertation describes a multi-case, qualitative study involving six participants from a Midwestern, Catholic diocese and explores the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal. The dissertation contains an extensive review of the literature and describes the design and procedures of the study with a summary of the methods and analysis strategies. Job descriptions, interviews, and written responses to provided reflection questions are the primary data sources.

The findings of this study include a number of common themes relating to the job experiences of the beginning Catholic school principal. All of the participants in the study describe the responsibilities as numerous, varied, and overwhelming. Job descriptions are only sometimes provided or reviewed prior to assuming the position.
Participants believe that university preparation programs provide a relatively solid knowledge base in school leadership, but lack a critical experiential component. The area of “spiritual leadership,” inherent in the role of the Catholic school principal, is often inadequately defined and omitted from preparation programs. Although beginning principals are faced with numerous challenges, the greatest is perceived as supervising and evaluating faculty. And, beginning Catholic school principals seek assistance and support from a variety of sources.

This study includes recommendations for universities, Catholic school central offices, and pastors and presidents in preparing, assisting, and supporting beginning Catholic school principals. Implications for further research are also included.
To my parents,
Kazimiera and Joseph Ostrowski,
to whom I owe safe passage
through life's troubled waters.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 – Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Perspective</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 – Literature Review</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Effective School Leader</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges Facing New Principals</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Clarification</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Problems</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catholic School Leader</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Preparation Programs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships and Field Experiences</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Programs</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Mentor Programs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5 — Discussion ................................................................. 141

The Participants and Their Jobs....................................................... 142

Sub-Question #1............................................................................. 144

Sub-Question #2............................................................................. 146

Sub-Question #3............................................................................. 148

Sub-Question #4............................................................................. 151

Sub-Question #5............................................................................. 152

Positive Aspects and Advice............................................................. 155

Recommendations............................................................................ 156

Implications for Further Research................................................... 158

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 159

References....................................................................................... 161

Appendix A: IRB Authorization Letter ............................................. 170

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions............................ 171

Appendix C: Guided Journal Questions ............................................ 173

Appendix D: Auditor’s Report............................................................ 174

Appendix E: Job Description from Diocesan Principal’s Handbook........ 175

Appendix F: Job Description from Participant #3................................ 177

Appendix G: Job Description from Participant #4............................... 180

Appendix H: Cross-case Analysis Guide........................................... 181

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"The hero of the tale which I beg the Muse to help me tell is that resourceful man who roamed the wide world after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. . . . This is the tale I pray the divine Muse to unfold to us. Begin it, goddess, at whatever point you will." (Homer, Odyssey)

Although reform has been a continuing theme in American education, these efforts became much more intense and focused following the release of A Nation at Risk in 1983 (Bjork & Ginsburg, 1995). During the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the nation participated in an extensive educational reform debate (Murphy, 1990). A desire to improve education emerged from the nation's dissatisfaction with the perceived inadequate performance of schools and the belief that these inadequacies caused many of the nation's other problems (Bjork & Ginsberg, 1995). Today, during the course of continued debates, few elements of the educational system have escaped scrutiny.

Central to this discussion is the school administrator, since much attention has been focused on the selection, training, induction, and performance of schools' leaders.

For any school administrator, but more specifically the novice, the transition to a leadership role within a school community brings with it a number of unique responsibilities and challenges. These responsibilities and challenges for which the beginning principal may be inadequately prepared, may potentially impact the professional life of the novice administrator. Given the ineffectiveness of some principal preparation programs (Alvy, 1983; Bjork & Ginsberg, 1995; Bordeaux, 1994; Daresh & Playko, 1993; Goldman & Kempner, 1988; Little, 1988; Murinin, 1989; Niece, 1993;
Spradling, 1988; Weindling, 1990; Word, 1995), how well any beginning principal adapts to his or her role is often left to chance.

In order to provide the beginning principal with a source of support and direction, some districts have established formal mentor programs teaming the new principal with a more experienced administrator (Bass, 1990; Brock & Grady, 1996; Buckner & Jones, 1990). Where such programs are unavailable, new administrators may seek out a similar mentor/intern relationship with someone of their own choosing. However, whether any efforts to meet the needs of the beginning principal are actually effective is, at this point, uncertain.

Although many similarities exist between all beginning school principals, the unique position of beginning Catholic school principals may, in fact, set them apart. Research suggests that the very nature of the role, "Catholic school leader," distinguishes this principal from others (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Carr, 2000; Convey, 2000; Ristau, 1998; Wallace, 1998). The responsibilities given the Catholic school principal may vary somewhat from their public school counterparts. Preparation may be inadequate for the role. The effectiveness of any given support is unknown and the availability of trained mentors may be limited.

In this context, the story of the beginning Catholic school principal is often one defined by confusion and angst. Much like Homer's tale of Odysseus, this hero is similarly left to wander aimlessly and alone, struggling through the first year on the job, in search of safe passage through potentially dangerous obstacles.
Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal. This particular research study was framed by the case study tradition of inquiry. For the purpose of this project, case study is best defined as an exploration of a bounded system (case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998). As in this particular case, when researchers study two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data the term "multi-case" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or "collective case" (Stake, 1995) study is used.

In a multi-case study, the researcher typically conducts a number of interviews based on visits "to the field" to collect interview data to saturate determined categories (Creswell, 1998). This particular study employed an emergent design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which multiple sources of data were gathered (documents, interviews, journal responses) from participants. Through the data collection, a detailed description of each case emerged and an analysis of themes or issues and interpretations or assertions about the cases were made (Stake, 1995). This analysis was rich in the context of each case or setting in which each case presented itself (Merriam, 1988). The data collection process and the comparison of emerging categories was simultaneous and ongoing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process allowed for important understandings to be discovered along the way and then pursued, if necessary, in additional data collection efforts.

The final narrative provides a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases,
called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of these cases (Creswell, 1998). In the final interpretive phase, "lessons learned" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were identified from these cases.

Through triangulation, researchers working within the multi-case tradition make use of multiple and varied sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence of a theme or perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method was utilized in this study through the analysis of documents, interviews, and journal responses. The literature was used for "supplemental validation" (Creswell, 1998) and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing research and theories.

For a multi-case study, the participants must be individuals who have taken action or participated in a process that is central to the study (Creswell, 1998). Utilizing this sampling approach allows the researcher to examine individuals who can contribute to the findings or results.

For the purpose of this study, selection for participation was voluntary and was drawn from a single, Midwestern, Catholic diocese. Participants were determined on the basis of their position as "beginning Catholic school principal" for the 2002-2003 academic year. No distinctions were made on the basis of race, age or gender. Both elementary and secondary school principals were included from both rural and urban settings. Those designated as "lead teachers" were excluded. The information generated by this study is intended to contribute to the general knowledge base of the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal and to facilitate decisions concerning the implementation of assistance programs.
Research Questions

As emphasis has been placed on efforts to find strategies for preparing school leaders that go beyond traditional university-based programs, there is a corresponding awareness that the entire scope of the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal has yet to be identified, and the effectiveness of current efforts to provide assistance for these school leaders is uncertain. Therefore, this multi-case study sought to answer the following "grand tour" (Creswell, 1998) question: What are the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

The following sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What are the assigned and unassigned responsibilities of the beginning Catholic school principal?
2. How well prepared does the beginning Catholic school principal perceive himself/herself for the responsibilities of the job?
3. What are the job-related challenges of the beginning Catholic school principal?
4. What are the job-related needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?
5. How does the beginning Catholic school principal meet the needs created by the responsibilities and challenges inherent in his/her position?

Theoretical Perspective

In case study research, Yin (1989) discusses dominant modes of data analysis as it relates to theory. One such mode is the search for "patterns" by comparing results with patterns predicted from theory or the literature. Lincoln & Guba (1985) also refer to
"pattern theories" as an explanation that develops during naturalistic or qualitative research. Rather than the deductive form found in quantitative studies, these pattern theories represent a "pattern" of interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yin (1989) also describes "explanation building" as a type of data analysis in which the researcher looks for causal links and/or explores plausible or rival explanations and attempts to build an explanation about the case, and "time-series analysis" in which the researcher traces changes in a pattern over time.

Specifically, this multi-case study was not positioned within any particular theoretical camp prior to data collection. However, after data collection, analysis, and formation of a theoretical model, existing research and organizational socialization theories were introduced to compare and contrast with this theoretical model, thus advancing a "theory-after" perspective (Creswell, 1998).

This study, then, was intended to develop a theory or theories concerning the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal. The literature was used for "supplemental validation" (Creswell, 1998) and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing research and organizational socialization theories (Louis, 1980; Kolb, 1984).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, beginning Catholic school principal is defined as an individual in his or her first-year as a school principal whose sole responsibility is that of head of a Catholic school. Lead teachers have been excluded. Any previous administrator experience was noted and discussed in the narrative.
Case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998).

Collective case study (Stake, 1995) or multi-case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) is the study of two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data.

Mentor is defined as an assigned or unassigned sponsor, advisor, role model, and teacher, actively involved in helping the novice develop and advance (Luebkemann & Clemens, 1994).

Novice or beginner is defined as any individual in his or her first-year in a particular job assignment.

Limitations and Delimitations

A recognized limitation of qualitative research is that it is not generalizable. However, that is not its intent. Instead, this final qualitative project has resulted in the construction of a theoretical perspective based on the participants' experiences. The literature was used for additional validation and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing research and theories for the purpose of contributing to the knowledge base concerning this subject. Generalizations concerning the findings of this study cannot be justified considering the lack of statistical analysis.

A further limitation of this study is the potential for bias given the fact that the researcher is a principal of a Catholic secondary school. However, triangulation of data helped control for this potential limitation.
The study is delimited to beginning Catholic school principals. The existing body of research in this area is limited, yet suggests a differentiation in experiences between the Catholic school principal and other principals (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Carr, 2000; Convey, 2000; Ristau, 1998; Wallace, 1998).

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to contribute to the general knowledge base concerning the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal. The information gained from this study will (1) provide assistance to universities, Catholic school superintendents, and pastors and school presidents in developing programs to support beginning Catholic school principals, (2) provide support for beginning Catholic school principals in dealing with the responsibilities, challenges, and needs inherent to their position, and (3) extend testing of existing research and theories into a new field.

Chapter 2 of this study provides a review of some of the related literature. Topics include the characteristics of the effective school leader, challenges facing new principals, the role of the Catholic school leader, principal preparation programs, internships and field experiences, and mentor programs.

Chapter 3 outlines the research method and includes the design, the researcher’s role, the subjects, the ethical considerations, the data collection/recording/analysis, verification steps, the qualitative narrative, the timeline, and a description of related studies.

Chapter 4 summarizes the results of the data collection process as each “case” or “participant” is discussed in detail.
Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results of this study and includes common themes, related and emerging theories, recommendations, and implications for practice or further research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

"Today has proved you, Telemachus, neither a coward nor a fool, nor destined to be such. . . . No fear, then, that this journey of yours will end in farce or failure. . . . For am I not your father's friend, and ready to find you a fast ship and sail with you myself?"
(Athene as Mentor in Homer's Odyssey)

Although many recent reports are critical of schools and school administrators, it is a widely held belief that strong leadership could solve many existing problems of the education system and contribute to achieving school excellence (Bjork & Ginsberg, 1995). Supporting this notion, a confirmed relationship has been found to exist between student achievement and goal-oriented schools that are led by competent principals (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Therefore, put simply, America can not expect to have effective schools without effective leaders.

The Effective School Leader

The "effectiveness" of the school administrator has increasingly been defined in terms of an individual being able to provide instructional leadership for the school (Daresh & Playko, 1993). However, while many tend to define instructional leadership largely as the activity of a principal that involves direct contact with teachers and the teaching process, instructional leadership involves much more than teacher supervision (Daresh & Playko). Instructional leadership involves the principal engaging in behaviors and activities that have as their focus the needs of student learners (Daresh & Playko). Effective principals set the tone and the standards at their schools (Phay, 1997). Effective
principals motivate and reward, do long-range planning, develop a vision for the school, and transmit it to the total school community (Phay).

Research indicates that the general skills necessary for effective leadership include critical thinking skills, cross-cultural understanding, a sensitivity to many needs, and the ability to be a change agent where change is necessary (Bordeaux, 1994; Goldman & Kempner, 1988; Murphy, 1990). Effective leaders must also be able to create a vision for the school as well as effective goals and programs, communicate a vision for the school with many and various audiences, and empower teachers and staff as well as the community toward realization of a well-defined vision and clear mission statement (Bordeaux; Goldman & Kempner; Murphy).

Given this context, the selection, training and induction of school administrators has become increasingly more important, and it is in this context that a problem seems to exist. It appears that few individuals who are first moving into school administration are likely to be adequately prepared for this new vision and version of educational leadership and for the challenges inherent to the position.

Challenges Facing New Principals

Unrealistic expectations, management difficulties, staff and student relations, the influence of pressure groups and the school bureaucracy, inadequate preservice training, and a lack of assistance have all been identified as contributing factors to the challenges facing the beginning principal (Alvy, 1983). These challenges can be grouped into three distinct areas: role clarification, technical problems, and socialization to the profession and to the norms of a particular school system (Daresh, 1990).
Role clarification.

Studies have indicated that many beginning principals oftentimes receive written job descriptions that are unclear and offer little direction about specific expectations held by the district (Hart & Brederson, 1996). Others receive a list of rules and regulations or a school-year calendar of expected activities (Hart & Brederson). The lack of formal processes for inducting beginning principals reflects a historical belief that educators "know" what they need to do. However, in reality, this may be far from true. Research has confirmed that this absence of role clarification has contributed to the frustration felt by many beginning principals and has become a contributing factor to a beginning principal's decision to leave the profession (Mackler, 1996).

Technical problems.

Studies have also concluded that there are a variety of technical problems experienced by the beginning principal. These include an inability to set goals and plan (Elsberry & Bishop, 1996), difficulties in overseeing instruction and curriculum development (Elsberry & Bishop), inadequacies in completing staff evaluations (Little, 1988), and inexperience in public relations (Little). For these reasons, beginning principals do not believe that they have been able to behave effectively as instructional leaders (Daresh & Playko, 1993). Compounding these difficulties, the time required for effective school leadership has been reported as overwhelming by beginning administrators (Spradling, 1988). Time management seems to be a particular concern of beginning principals who report that they spend most of their time supervising their schools, interacting with students, staff, and parents, and other activities not directly
involved with instructional leadership (Elsberry & Bishop, 1996). By and large, all of these factors have contributed to a general sense of frustration concerning the extent to which beginning principals believe they are performing up to their own personal levels of competence and expectations (Daresh & Playko, 1993).

**Socialization.**

During the first year, principals must not only develop technical competencies, but must also become a part of the professional and organizational culture of the school. The beginning principal must participate in a process of professional and organizational socialization and learn to adapt to the expectations of the organization and the school (Grover, 1994).

Organizational socialization is the process by which an individual becomes familiar with the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge necessary for participation in an organization (Louis, 1980). Each role change experienced by the individual involves socialization into the new role and setting (Louis). The growing disillusionment among new members of organizations has been traced to difficulties in this socialization process (Louis).

Louis (1980) defined the various stages of organizational entry and socialization as change, contrast, surprise, and sense-making. The transition from stage to stage is often difficult, overwhelming, and plagued with a variety of problems. According to Louis (1980), "The experience is characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload" (p. 230). Not surprising, voluntary turnover during the first
eighteen months on the job has increased among new employees across a wide range of
fields despite growing attention by companies to new member orientation (Louis, 1980).

The organizational socialization problems beginning principals face are similar in
nature and are oftentimes linked to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Brock & Grady,
1996; Daresh, 1990; Grover, 1994). Accustomed to collaborating with other teachers,
beginning principals are often alone with their problems and decisions and do not know
where to turn for help or advice (Brock & Grady, 1996). According to Bolman and Deal
(1993):

Principals often feel like isolated links in the chain of command, caught
somewhere between students, teachers, parents, and the district office. Though
they are surrounded and even overwhelmed by all the people clamoring for their
attention, they often feel deeply lonely. They are starved for the opportunity to
talk openly with someone who can really understand what their life is like. (p. 64)

Opportunities for socialization in school leadership are limited for many
beginning principals. They seldom have structured, formal opportunities to meet
regularly with other principals to talk about shared experiences. Reports indicate that the
meetings they do attend often include all the principals in a district and focus on short-
term problems, and provide little in the way of activities designed for new members of
the group (Hart & Brederson, 1996). In addition, beginning principals report a lack of
feedback concerning the extent to which they are performing their jobs effectively
(Daresh, 1990). This contributes to a deep sense of frustration, uncertainty and isolation
(Daresh).
Catholic schools are among the oldest educational institutions in the United States. In broad terms, the development of Catholic schools can be divided into three periods (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). The first, spanning from colonial times until approximately 1830, represents the birth of a new Church in a new nation (Bryk, Lee & Holland). The second period, from 1830 through 1960, saw Catholic schools expanding rapidly in response to immigration and shaping the formal system that contributed to its American character (Bryk, Lee, & Holland). During the third period, from 1960 to the present, Catholics have become part of the mainstream of American political, social, and economic life, and Catholic schools have become a significant part of the country's educational system (Bryk, Lee, & Holland).

A common feature of Catholic schools is the central role of the school principal. This position requires considerable expertise in a variety of areas including personnel, finances, community relations, curriculum and supervision, and organizational leadership (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

The Catholic school principal bears responsibility for financial management, development and fund-raising, public and alumni relations, faculty selection and supervision, student recruitment, and in many cases, discipline and instructional leadership. The principal must also maintain amicable relationships with the diocese, the neighboring parishes, the religious order, the local community, and the parent body. Serving as teacher, advisor, coach, mentor, counselor, disciplinarian, reconciler, strategist, leader, manager, conserver, recruiter, and
spokesperson, many Catholic school principals operate like owners of small businesses. No task is too big or too small for the principal to undertake, and the variety seems endless. (p. 150-151)

Strong leadership is necessary for the effectiveness of any organization, and Catholic schools are no different in this respect. Specifically, it is the school principal that puts into place the structures that make it possible for any school to prosper and students to excel. Although much of the work of Catholic school principals is similar to that of their public school counterparts, the very nature of Catholic school leadership has a unique, distinctive character (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

First, the Catholic school system has been described as a very “loose federation” rather than an integrated system (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Although external governance structures are complex and varied, nearly all important decisions are made by individual school administrators. In contrast with the central office control found in the public school system, Catholic school principals experience only a limited amount of outside regulation from dioceses and religious orders (Bryk, Lee, & Holland). As a result, Catholic school principals have considerably more autonomy over school matters.

Second, although both public and Catholic school principals focus on academic achievement, for principals in Catholic schools, there is an important spiritual dimension to leadership. According to Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993), "This spirituality is manifest in the language of community that principals use to describe their schools and in their actions, as they work to achieve the goal of community" (p. 156). When Catholic and public school principals are compared, the role of faith leader distinguishes those who
lead Catholic schools (Wallace, 1998). This role requires certain abilities and also requires an individual to fulfill certain responsibilities.

Catholic school faith leaders are responsible for the ongoing development of the school's Catholic identity and the faith formation of the staff and students (Wallace, 1998). Traditionally left to its religious founders, the spiritual development in Catholic schools has more and more become the responsibility of lay leaders. In the late 1970s, lay principals began replacing religious sisters, brothers, and priests (Carr, 2000). The decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life limited the number of sisters, brothers, and priests to fill leadership positions in Catholic schools (Carr).

This trend continues today as the proportion of lay principals exceeds the number of religious principals in Catholic schools (Carr, 2000). In assuming a leadership role, lay persons who serve as Catholic school principals need a strong background in church and Catholic school history and in theology. They also need the opportunity to discern their own faith, especially as it relates to the competencies of an effective school faith leader (Wallace, 1998). According to Ristau (1998), "The person without experience in Catholic schools and without the theological studies that undergird his or her spiritual life has only a slim chance of being recognized as a leader in that setting" (p.54).

Unfortunately, preparation for that role in terms of formal training has been limited (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Carr, 2000; Ristau, 1998; Wallace, 1998). In a study of the nation's lay Catholic high school principals, of the 324 respondents, 70% indicated that they had no formal training preparing them to be faith leaders (Wallace,
More than half had not taken any courses or seminars related specifically to the faith leadership role beyond their bachelor's degree (Wallace).

Spiritual leadership has been found to be an important indicator of Catholic school effectiveness (Convey, 2000). Nurturing principals' spiritual leadership in its early stages of development is also critical to Catholic school effectiveness (Carr, 2000). For this reason, colleges and universities, particularly Catholic institutions of higher learning, are being challenged to provide more resources for the training, preparation, and ongoing development of Catholic school leaders (Carr, 2000).

**Principal Preparation Programs**

Educational reformers agree with those in other professional fields that strong professional preparation programs are necessary to guarantee an adequate supply of competent leaders (Bjork & Ginsberg, 1995). Educational administration programs have been challenged to ensure that future principals are able to work in restructured school contexts, learn new roles, manage bureaucratic controls that inhibit the teaching and learning process, and serve as effective catalysts for change (Bjork & Ginsberg). Unfortunately, not all principal preparation programs can guarantee such success.

In the past, research has been conducted in the area of training for future principals in two developmental stages. In the first stage, from 1959 to 1970, researchers studied the duties, roles, functions, and characteristics of school principals (Mitchell, 1988). In the second stage, from 1970 to 1985, investigators focused on the qualities associated with successful principals (Mitchell). The intent of these researchers was to
improve the quality of education by developing strong educational leaders. This, in turn, led to a thorough investigation of principal preparation programs.

In 1987, the University Council on Educational Administration issued a report on the status of programs for training administrators in the United States, and stated that the programs of that time were characterized by a:

1. Lack of a definition of good educational leadership,
2. Lack of leader recruitment programs in the schools,
3. Lack of collaboration between school districts and universities,
4. Lack of minorities/women in the field,
5. Lack of systematic professional development for school administrators,
6. Lack of quality candidates for preparation programs,
7. Lack of preparation programs relevant to the job demands,
8. Lack of sequence, content and clinical experiences in preparation programs,
9. Lack of a licensure system which promotes excellence, and
10. Lack of a national sense of cooperation in preparing leaders (Earthman, 1990, p.2)

Presently, academic preparation in the form of university-based coursework has been assumed to be improved and an effective way to help future administrators develop an understanding of the field (Daresh & Playko, 1992). It is believed that university courses have the potential to provide information that may be used by the future administrator to address many difficult issues and problems, for which there may not be many clear, practical solutions (Daresh & Playko). Further, academic preparation
through university courses is viewed as a way to enable people to comprehend basic facts, terms, and issues that serve as supplements to the larger field of administration (Daresh & Playko). In reality, however, a number of studies have confirmed that this is not the case and that, in fact, ineffective, obsolete administrator preparation programs are a common problem faced by aspiring principals (Alvy, 1983; Bordeaux, 1994; Brock & Grady, 1996; Daresh & Playko, 1993; Goldman & Kempner, 1988; Little, 1988; Murinin, 1989; Niece, 1993; Spradling, 1988; Weindling, 1990; Word, 1995).

Academic preparation, particularly when it is defined primarily in terms of university coursework, has been found to be far from what is considered a comprehensive approach to the way future administrators are prepared for their first jobs (Daresh & Playko, 1992).

Perhaps the most fundamental problem found in administrator preparation programs is little demonstration of a concern for practical expertise and real-world application of research-based knowledge (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Most programs have consisted of courses that center on information and procedures as well as theoretical foundations for the administrative role (Bordeaux, 1994). Little has been provided to aide the future principal in applying that theory to solve problems, create visions, reform and restructure organizational culture or to gain community assistance in finding new ways to create more effective schools (Bordeaux).

For years, organizational psychologists have been concerned with the nature of learning and communicating abstract academic knowledge to individuals in a way that is helpful and meaningful (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1984). The experiential learning
model provides a framework for examining and strengthening the link between education, experience, work, and personal development (Kolb, 1984).

As defined by experiential learning theorists, learning is the process whereby experience creates knowledge (Kolb, 1984).

This definition emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process as viewed from the experiential perspective. First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second is that knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa. (p. 38)

Consistent with the premise of the experiential learning theory, beginning principals have expressed a need for more concrete experiences and active experimentation while in training (Brock & Grady, 1996). More training is desired in practical aspects of administration such as preparing budgets, conducting staff evaluations, organizing teacher inservice, managing conflict, and communicating effectively (Brock & Grady).

Internships and Field Experiences

The picture painted thus far may suggest that most university-based preparation programs for educational administrators are without merit. This, in fact, is not true. Many universities, organizations, and government bodies have been engaged in the
development of new approaches to the preparation of school leaders that emphasize very creative efforts to improve the quality of academic programs.

In recent years, the Danforth Foundation began a major initiative to support innovative principal preparation programs; the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) sponsored a review of the ways school administrators are being prepared across the nation; the National Policy Board for Educational Administration was created; and states across the nation have engaged in efforts to strengthen the standards designed to verify the quality of preservice preparation training received by aspiring administrators (Daresh, 1997). Both the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) have designed new programs to help identify, recruit, and prepare future principals (Daresh).

A contributing factor in the success of recent principal preparation programs is the inclusion of an internship/field experience (Hallinger & Anast, 1992; Keaster, 1990; Schmuck, 1992; Stakenas, 1994; Ward, 1994). This experience allows the learner to transfer theoretical knowledge to real-life experiences. It allows the learner to practice new skills and strategies with an expert's support and guidance (Hallinger & Anast, 1992). The coaching provided in the context of the internship/field experience provides the learner with the confidence to undertake new assignments as well as the technical assistance to do so successfully (Hallinger & Anast).

Internships/field experiences have been used to help the learner gain important insights into the ways in which schools are actually administered (Daresh & Playko,
1992). By design they assist the learner to acquire and develop some practical skills through participation in a wide range of daily administrative duties and to apply knowledge learned in the university to a real-life setting (Daresh & Playko). Various studies have confirmed the effectiveness of internships/field experiences for principal preparation (Goldman & Kempner, 1988; Jean & Evans, 1995; Roberts, 1993; Trump & Karasik, 1967; White & Crow, 1993). Yet, studies have also indicated that such programs are not without problems and may be quite costly to operate (Ackerman, 1989; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Pasquale, 1995; Schmuck, 1992). In research concerning the effectiveness of the internship/field experience, Ackerman (1989) concluded the following:

1. The study confirms that field experience provides interns with an experience in the real world of schools. The research revealed few opportunities for interns to become reflective about what they see and do, or develop their own theories of practice about the principalship.

2. There are endemic constraints within the prevailing conception of preparation which places an unrealistic burden not only on the intern, but on all parties involved in the practicum. The limited time available, variation in practices between sites, and inadequate supervision of interns are some of the factors which make the development of a full range of principals' competencies unlikely.

3. Interns view their situation as one of needing to meet the different criteria as determined by the school, state, and university.
4. The most unfortunate outcome is a conception of preparation which assumes the separation of theory and practice in the education of aspiring principals.

5. Studies have questioned the quality of the practicum experiences, the degree of structure or expert supervision they entail, and the extent to which interns are exposed to new or different approaches through these experiences.

6. Practicum life involves interns primarily in what they see, and to a much lesser extent what they do.

7. Interns are not encouraged to be active learners. (p. 200)

Schmuck (1992) found that most internships/field experiences have not been maximally effective for the following reasons:

1. The preparation does not occur over sufficient time.

2. The preparers (university professors and field supervisors) do not collaborate closely enough.

3. Deliberately planned efforts are not made to establish trainees' cognitive linkages between theory and practice.

4. Insufficient attention is given to the emotional development of the trainees and the social support they receive throughout the internship/field experience.

5. Although interns have received supervision from experienced administrators, they have not received much mentoring, that is, close and supportive help in an equalitarian and collegial relationship. (p. 3)

Thus, if principals have not been adequately prepared for their role by principal preparation programs, even those including structured internships/field experiences, the
assistance provided for the beginning principal during the induction period becomes highly critical.

**Mentor Programs**

Using mentoring relationships to provide assistance and to enhance professional development has recently surfaced as a possible solution to the challenges facing the novice. This concept of an experienced "teacher" guiding the development of the "student" is certainly not new. The source of the term "mentor" is found in Homer's epic *The Odyssey*. When Odysseus left on an adventurous journey to fight in the Trojan War, he gave the responsibility of caring for his son, Telemachus, to his loyal friend, Mentor. In Odysseus's absence, Mentor educated and guided Telemachus. Mentor instructed Telemachus by example. Mentor not only provided help and assistance to Telemachus, but he taught Telemachus to think and act for himself. This literary description, then, has provided a lasting image of the "mentor" as the wise and patient counselor serving to guide and shape the lives of younger, less experienced colleagues.

In contemporary society, despite more than two decades of research and writing, mentoring remains an ill-defined, elusive concept of a relationship that occurs in a variety of settings, between pairs of different types of individuals, for different reasons (Bruegman, 1995). Yet, despite a lack of understanding concerning mentoring, it is clear that a mentoring relationship is perceived by many as a positive relationship that enhances the life of the novice (Bruegman).

It is through interaction within a positive, working relationship that the novice is encouraged to achieve personal and professional goals (Playko, 1990). The mentor
recognizes the potential of the novice, provides opportunities for learning that help the novice develop skills and knowledge, and boosts self-esteem. Mentors are not only sponsors, advisors, role models, and teachers, but become actively involved in helping the novice develop and grow (Luebkemann & Clemens, 1994).

Mentoring is, in fact, a socialization strategy that helps individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values necessary to perform a specific role (Crow & Matthews, 1998). Mentoring has long been recognized as an important activity in the world of private business and industry. Here, younger members of an organization are shown the ropes and led toward greater success through the intervention of others who provide the direction necessary to achieve personal goals and ambitions. This type of mentor-novice relationship has traditionally been an informal one, where both parties gravitate toward one another on the basis of such things as common goals, interests, and other factors that cannot be arranged by others (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Private industries have recognized for some time that informal mentor-novice relationships exist and are valuable, and therefore warrant creation of more formalized, institutionally created and supported mentoring programs (Daresh & Playko).

Mentoring, especially in teacher education, has become more widespread due to the positive influence mentors have had on classroom teachers as they begin their induction into the teaching profession (Barnett, 1990; Sybouts & Wendel, 1994). Since mentoring systems have already been applied in the induction of beginning teachers for some time, there are those who believe they should also be applied in the induction of beginning school principals (Brock & Grady, 1996).
Research has indicated that there is a need for mentoring programs for practicing administrators (Brock & Grady, 1996; Christy, 1993; Cole, 1995; Daresh & Playko, 1990; Hallinger & Greenblatt, 1990; Murinin, 1989; Niece, 1993; Spradling, 1988). It is believed that a mentor program may help beginning principals who frequently state that they are overwhelmed by expectations and demands made more difficult by lack of assistance (Brock & Grady, 1996). In recent studies, novice principals have identified their primary source of help to be other school leaders (Crow & Matthews, 1998). For this reason it has been suggested that a formal mentor program would assure this assistance as opposed to relying on an informal relationship to develop. Also, since the isolation within which the school principal works seems to limit skill development, it is believed that mentoring systems would enhance the professional development of the beginning school principal (Westhuizen & Erasmus, 1994).

According to research studies, effective instructional leaders function within a network of other principals (Niece, 1993). Beginning principals, themselves, have stated that the identification of role models and mentors with expertise, as well as networking and intensive training would be beneficial (Christy, 1993). Daresh and Playko (1997) suggest that the single most powerful thing that a beginning principal can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness is to find at least one other experienced educational leader to share expertise related to doing the job more effectively and perhaps, more important, to help in making the personal transition into the principalship more complete.
Current mentor programs.

Within the past few years, the potential value of mentoring for new administrators has been appreciated and understood more completely. For this reason, the development of formal and institutionally supported mentoring programs is occurring with more regularity.

Formal mentoring programs for educational administrators have increased considerably, especially during the past two decades. The Danforth Foundation Program has been instrumental in implementing formal programs for principals since 1985 in a number of states, including Georgia, Ohio, and Alabama. Still, other states have elected to work with their state Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) programs to initiate administrative mentoring programs.

Some states, including California, North Carolina, and Ohio, have extended entry-year program requirements to school administrators. In the formal process of entry-year assistance, a committee is generally established with representation from both the employing district (in the form of an experienced administrator) and the preparatory institution. While such committees have been charged with jurisdiction over continued certification/licensure, their true value appears to be in the advisement and support that is provided to the beginning administrator from the mentor (Bass, 1990).

NASSP has developed two programs aimed at aspiring and beginning principals that include coaching, mentoring, and long-term skill development approaches. These two programs, Springfield and Leader 1-2-3, use a three-phase approach that includes a preparation phase, an individual practice phase, and an assisted practice phase in which
participants are teamed with a coach or mentor as they practice their newly-acquired skills in their schools (Buckner & Jones, 1990).

Formal mentor programs have also been established by a few private, Catholic school districts as well. In the Diocese of Orange, California, mentors who are appointed by the superintendent or assistant superintendent, attend all meetings with the beginning principal and meet with the beginning principal weekly to provide support and to work on specific goals (Brock & Grady, 1996). In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California, each beginning principal is assigned a "master principal" to meet with throughout the year and with whom to attend administrative inservices that are designed to provide information on practical issues (Brock & Grady). And, in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Indiana, veteran principals are invited to serve as mentors for beginning principals. Each semester, the mentor makes a site visit to the beginning principal's school providing an opportunity for the mentor to answer questions and respond to the concerns of the beginning principal (Brock & Grady, 1996).

Results.

The literature regarding administrator mentoring is rather limited, and there is little evidence concerning the long-range effectiveness of these mentoring programs. However, many of the studies conducted have indicated that mentoring is effective in meeting the immediate needs of the beginning principal (Bolam, 1995; Brock & Grady, 1996; Bruegman, 1995; Bush & Coleman, 1995; Cohn & Sweeney, 1992; Coleman, Low, Bush, & Chew, 1996; Grover, 1994; Lewis, 1990; Luebkemann & Clemens, 1994; Monsour, 1998; Mosrie, 1990; Wilmore, 1995).
Specifically, some new principals believe that mentors help close the gap between the theory and reality of administration (Brock & Grady, 1996). Mentoring has been found to provide emotional support and encouragement for the new principal and to help instill a greater sense of security and self-confidence (Bruegman, 1995; Bush & Coleman, 1995; Cohn & Sweeney, 1992; Lewis, 1990). Mentoring has helped to reduce the sense of isolation beginning administrators feel (Monsour, 1998). In many cases, mentors are viewed as positive role models and are said to help novice administrators in goal-setting and influence career development (Lewis, 1990; Luebkemann & Clemens, 1994).

The documented negative responses concerning participation in a formal mentor program are limited; however, some potential problems have been found (Coleman et al, 1996; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Shelton & Herman, 1993; Westhuizen & Erasmus, 1994). For one, the structure of the mentoring program and the capability of the mentor have been found to greatly influence the effectiveness of the program (Alvy, 1998; Grover, 1994). Daresh and Playko (1992) suggest that:

1. Mentors may become too protective and controlling.
2. Mentors may have personal agendas to fulfill, at the expense of proteges.
3. Beginning principals may get only a limited perspective from a single mentor.
4. Mentors may not acknowledge the limitations of their proteges.
5. Beginners may become too dependent on their mentors.
6. Beginners may idolize and idealize their mentors.
7. Beginners may try to become carbon copies of their mentors.
8. Formal mentoring arrangements may be too structured.

9. Mentors may try to hold all beginning principals to an ideal vision or standard of performance that may never be realized. (pp. 119-120)

There may also be difficulties for the organization in establishing the role the school system should play in selecting and training the mentor, scheduling time for the mentor and novice to interact, and ensuring close proximity so the mentor and novice can easily get together (Shelton & Herman, 1993).

Summary

Whether school administrators are prepared for their role as leader simply because they have acquired a degree and an administrative position appears to be a recurring question. As the beginning principal of a large, Catholic secondary school, I was sometimes surprised and delighted, but often disappointed by the job-related experiences I had. Although my university preparation program provided me with a very solid theoretical framework for the job, nothing prepared me for some of the unique responsibilities I was given as a Catholic school leader. Nothing prepared me for the challenges and isolation inherent in this administrative position.

Lacking any real practical experience, I have had no choice but to "sink or swim." Fortunately for me, in assuming this leadership role, I have been advised and supported by a number of "unassigned" mentors who have guided my journey through sometimes turbulent waters. Grateful for this assistance, I have often wondered whether preservice preparation should be viewed as only a first step toward becoming an effective leader and whether induction for beginners and ongoing inservice and support should be provided.
for the beginning principal and made a part of the development of an effective professional life.

As emphasis has been placed on efforts to find strategies for preparing school leaders that go beyond traditional university-based programs, there is a corresponding awareness that mentoring may be a valuable concept with implications for the ways administrators make a successful transition to the world of administering. However, until the challenges faced by beginning principals and their specific needs are clearly identified, effective support for future educational leadership cannot be provided. Therefore, this multi-case study sought to answer the following "grand tour" (Creswell, 1998) question:

What are the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

The following subquestions were also addressed:

1. What are the assigned and unassigned responsibilities of the beginning Catholic school principal?

2. How well prepared does the beginning Catholic school principal perceive himself/herself for the responsibilities of the job?

3. What are the job-related challenges of the beginning Catholic school principal?

4. What are the job-related needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

5. How does the beginning Catholic school principal meet the needs created by the responsibilities and challenges inherent in his/her position?
In keeping with the nature of a multi-case study, theories concerning the responsibilities, needs, and challenges of the beginning Catholic school principal were inductively developed during the data analysis process, and the literature was used for "supplemental validation" (Creswell, 1998). Additional literature and research has been included in the "discussion" found in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

"And what if the powers above do wreck me out on the wine-dark sea? I have a heart that is inured to suffering and I shall steel it to endure that too. For in my day I have had many bitter and shattering experiences in war and on the stormy seas. So let this new disaster come. It only makes one more."

(Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*)

Research Design

This qualitative research study was framed by the case study tradition of inquiry. For the purpose of this project, case study is best defined as an exploration of a bounded system (case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998). As in this particular case, when a researcher studies two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data the term "multi-case" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or "collective case" (Stake, 1995) study is used.

In a multi-case study, the researcher typically conducts a number of interviews based on visits "to the field" to collect interview data to saturate determined categories (Creswell, 1998). This particular study employed an emergent design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which multiple sources of data were gathered (documents, interviews, journal responses) from participants. Through the data collection, a detailed description of each case emerged and an analysis of themes or issues and interpretations or assertions about each case were made (Stake, 1995). This analysis was rich in the context of the case or setting in which the case presents itself (Merriam, 1988). The data collection process and the comparison of emerging categories was simultaneous and ongoing (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). This process allowed for important understandings to be discovered along the way and then pursued, if necessary, in additional data collection efforts.

**Researcher's Role**

In a qualitative study, the researcher's role is that of primary data collector. Assuming that role necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study. As previously indicated, I am currently a Catholic school principal. However, in this study, my role was strictly that of observer and not participant. Every effort was made to limit bias through triangulation of the collected data. Multiple data sources were gathered, coded and analyzed. Participants were allowed to reflect upon written narrative responses, and similar questions were asked repeatedly.

**Subjects**

For a multi-case study, the participants must be individuals who have taken action or participated in a process that is central to the study (Creswell, 1998). Utilizing this sampling approach allows the researcher to examine individuals who can contribute to the findings or results.

For the purpose of this study, selection for participation was voluntary and was drawn from a single, Midwestern, Catholic diocese. The six participants were determined on the basis of their position as "beginning Catholic school principal" for the 2002-2003 academic year. No distinctions were made on the basis of race, age or gender. Both elementary and secondary school principals were included from both rural and
urban settings. Those designated as "lead teachers" were not included in this study. No distinctions were made on the basis of race, age, gender, etc.

Relevant documents, namely job descriptions, were collected from all participants, if available, at the onset of the study. Semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with all participants three times during the course of the academic year. The same participants were asked to reflect upon and respond to guided journal questions four times during the academic year.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for the protection of human subjects include: (a) informed consent, (b) maintenance of existing social milieu, and (c) maintenance of human dignity consistent with recognized professional parameters (Moustakas, 1990). Efforts to ensure such protection in this research study included: (a) written permission from the superintendent of the Omaha Diocese to conduct the study, (b) written permission from the pastor/president of each school to conduct the study (c) written permission from each of the participants indicating agreement to participate in the study, (d) written release statements for presentation of permanent product data collected throughout the duration of the project while guaranteeing anonymity, (e) written permission to utilize the results of this study for publication and professional presentations, (f) signed verification from the participants ensuring participant access to the collected data prior to the final report verifying willing participation and accuracy of transcriptions (Husby, 1996), and (f) a research exemption form filed with the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A for IRB authorization letter).
Data Collection

Through triangulation, researchers working within the case study tradition make use of multiple and varied sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence of a theme or perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method was utilized in this study through the analysis of documents, interviews, and journal responses. Results of the data analysis, along with transcriptions of personal interviews, were available to participants prior to the final report in order to ensure accuracy of both the transcriptions and the interpretations. The literature was used for "supplemental validation" (Creswell, 1998) and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing theories.

Data Recording

This study employed an emergent design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which multiple sources of data were gathered from participants. These multiple sources of data included job descriptions, interviews, and journal responses (see Appendix B for semi-structured interview questions and Appendix C for guided journal questions).

Documents.

At the onset of the study, the principal's job description was requested from the diocese along with any independent job description developed by participating schools. These documents were used to identify the assigned responsibilities of the Catholic school principal and provided a framework for the interview and guided journal questions.
Interviews.

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview format. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, one in October/November, one in February/March, and one in May. All interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded for themes.

Guided journal responses.

All participants were asked to reflect upon and respond to guided journal questions four times during the academic year in October, January, March, and May. Journal responses were copied and coded.

Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis process was simultaneous and ongoing, contributing to a detailed description of each case. The data was coded utilizing the sub-questions for initial categories. The themes within each case were identified through a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across cases called a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1998). This analysis was rich in the context of each case (Merriam, 1988).

In the final interpretive phase, "lessons learned" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were identified from these cases. The significance of the outcomes were evaluated from three aspects: (a) defining the assigned and unassigned responsibilities of the beginning, Catholic school principal (b) identifying the challenges facing the beginning, Catholic school principal, and (c) examining the needs of the beginning, Catholic school principal.
Verification Steps

To ensure internal validity, three strategies were employed: (a) triangulation of data, (b) member checking, (c) use of an auditor.

To accomplish triangulation of data, data was collected through multiple data sources to include job descriptions, interviews, and journal responses.

To assure member checking, the participants were given access to the collected data prior to the final report to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions in articulating their impressions of their job-related experiences.

An auditor, Dr. Mary Smith, reviewed the collected documents, transcriptions, and journal responses to verify the data collection and analysis process. Dr. Smith's report has been included (see Appendix D for auditor's report).

Generalizability of the findings is not the intent of this multi-case study. Rather, this final qualitative project has resulted in the construction of a theoretical perspective based on the participants' experiences. External validity was addressed by providing rich, thick, detailed descriptions so that transferability may be possible through comparison. The literature was used for additional validation and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing theories for the purpose of contributing to the knowledge base concerning this subject.

Qualitative Narrative

The results of this study are presented in descriptive, narrative form rather than as a scientific report. Thick descriptions have been used to communicate a holistic picture of the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal.
The narrative provides a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases. In the final interpretive phase, "lessons learned" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were identified from the cases. The literature was used for additional validation and, based on results, comparisons were made with existing theories.

**Timeline**

This study began in the fall of 2002 and continued through May of 2003. Interviews were conducted and journal responses were collected at regular intervals throughout the academic year.

**Related Studies**

Two studies that I previously conducted tend to support this project. Both provided me with valuable information concerning the data collection and analysis process and served to validate the research questions and significance of this study.

First, I tested the semi-structured interview process while conducting a related study of a beginning Catholic school principal in June, 1999. In that study, questions were developed to help guide the interview, and additional questions were allowed to emerge as the interview progressed. This interview was transcribed by me and initial data analysis was completed. Initial categories of information were formed by segmenting information in the transcript.

This particular study revealed the benefits of the semi-structured interview approach. The predetermined questions worked well as a guide and prompted extensive responses from the participant. The participant appeared to feel more at ease as the
interview progressed and seemed willing to provide open, honest answers. Although the transcription process proved to be extremely time-consuming, I found it very beneficial as categories seemed to become more obvious as a result.

Data analysis, in general, although limited, seemed successful. The coding process revealed categories that included: relationships (parent, faculty/staff, pastor, superintendent, other principals, "mentors"), job-related experiences, emotional experiences (needs, frustrations, difficulties, rewards, isolation), and assistance (desired, provided).

This study confirmed that multiple interviews would provide rich material for analysis and that data analysis does uncover specific categories of information.

A second study was conducted as part of an internship project in the spring of 2000. The intent of this study was to provide a summary of the professional growth activities of Catholic school principals in a particular diocese. This study was intended to determine the perceived strengths, weaknesses, needs, and interests of school leaders, as well as their experience with professional development.

A survey was designed for this purpose and was distributed to current elementary and secondary Catholic school principals in the diocese.

Survey results provided valuable information concerning the needs and interests of both secondary and elementary level Catholic school principals. The results indicated the following:

♦ Needs and interests vary greatly among principals.
Only a small percentage of principals pursue further college coursework after attaining an administrative degree.

Current preparation practices for the role of principal were generally perceived as inadequate. Experience was perceived as a large contributor to preparation for the role.

Workshops and conferences were perceived as beneficial for professional development.

The greatest source of assistance for current principals was found in networking with other principals and the support received from the superintendent and the Catholic School Office.

There was a desire for more "networking" among principals.

Again, both of these previous studies contributed information to support the current data collection and analysis process and have helped to validate the research questions and significance of this study.
CHAPTER 4

Results

“For two nights and two days he was lost in the heavy seas. Time and again he saw his end at hand. But in the morning of the third day, which Dawn opened in all her beauty, the wind dropped, a breathless calm set in, and Odysseus, keeping a sharp lookout ahead as he was lifted by a mighty wave, could see the land close by.”

(Homer, Odyssey)

The following case studies were developed from the available job descriptions collected from the six participants, the responses to the guided journal questions completed four times during the academic year, and the interviews conducted with each participant three times during the academic year. Together, the collected data provides valuable insight into the “grand tour” question addressed in this study. Namely, what are the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal? The five sub-questions guide each of the “stories” or narratives and serve to focus the data on the following areas:

♦ What are the assigned and unassigned responsibilities of the beginning Catholic school principal?

♦ How well prepared does the beginning Catholic school principal perceive himself/herself for the responsibilities of the job?

♦ What are the job-related challenges of the beginning Catholic school principal?

♦ What are the job-related needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

♦ How does the beginning Catholic school principal meet the needs created by the responsibilities and challenges inherent in his/her position?
Here, then, are the stories of six beginning Catholic school principals as they journeyed through their first year on the job.

Participant #1: David


Prior to his administrative role, David was a classroom teacher and coach for eleven years. He received his administrative degree five years before accepting this position. It took him three years of coursework to complete it. He was currently still taking classes through “distance learning” in order to complete his K-6 endorsement.

David’s transition from teacher and coach to principal was not really planned, but rather the result of circumstances and what David describes as divine intervention.

Our team was pretty successful and that was a passion of mine. I absolutely loved it. And so, part of me believed, well, I’m not going to go into administration until I’m done coaching. I can’t imagine I’ll be done coaching for a lot, a lot of years. And that’s what most everybody --- family, friends of mine --- expected too.

They know that I had this yearning to make more of a difference than just in my classroom.

According to David, it was following an experience of working with teens in a youth group that he began to question his future:
What is next? So I asked God, “What would You have us do? What would You have us do?” And then the next week, [this school] was looking for a principal. And so I just said, “What the heck, let’s see what happens.” So I throw it out there and if His will be done, doors will open. And doors just opened wide.

David is currently the principal of a K-12 Catholic school in a small, rural town. The school is affiliated with the local Catholic parish and is located directly across the street from the public school. The grade school and the high school are maintained in separate buildings connected by 50 feet of sidewalk. The total school enrollment is 309. The school is co-educational and the vast majority of the student population (nearly 100%) is white and Catholic.

David is a devout Catholic but had not attended Catholic schools or worked in a Catholic school prior to taking this position.

David is responsible for 24 teachers. His support staff consists of a secretary that also serves as the Athletic Director for the school.

David’s responsibilities as a beginning Catholic school principal were reviewed with him by the pastor prior to taking the position (sub-question #1). A Principal’s Handbook from the diocese was provided to him and included a job description that listed some sample descriptors (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook). As stated in the Principal’s Handbook, “Administrators within the [diocese] should possess qualities and talents which enable them to be an educational, spiritual, and managerial leader within the individual school community, enabling the optimal growth and development of the total school community.”
The job description given to David was very similar to the job description developed for principals by the State Department of Education. In fact, the job description developed by the State Department of Education was also included in the diocesan Principal’s Handbook given to David. A significant difference between the two, however, was the inclusion of “Facilitation of Christian Uniqueness” by the diocese (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook). It was this responsibility that David took most seriously from the onset. As he put it, “We’ve got a much greater responsibility than the public school teachers. And you get less compensation. But we’re doing the Lord’s work. I mean, I just really believe in that. Maybe that sounds hokey, whatever, but . . . .” He also said, “I’m just more firm, much more firm in my belief, in my faith. That being here is the right thing to do and helping these kids. Helping these students to know, love, celebrate and defend their faith is a very, very holy task.”

His lack of personal experience with Catholic school education made David feel no less prepared for his position. As he said, “Having not been a product of a Catholic school doesn’t, to me, that didn’t make a difference. It made me all the more enthusiastic about coming and being a part of that. Because it was all going to be new for me.”

It was partly this responsibility that helped motivate David to become a Catholic school principal. As he said:

I don’t think you need to go to a Catholic school to love your faith, to be enthusiastic about your faith, to know your faith. And I prepared myself over the past several years. My wife and I were active in our church . . . in teaching and
working with kids there. I’ve always known, well, I’ve known since I started teaching, that some day I’d be a principal because it was just a goal, a career goal. Didn’t know when that would happen. And never really put the two together, that I might be a principal in a Catholic school. Didn’t really put that together until recently, maybe within the past couple years. Because I couldn’t really afford that. You know, if I’m going to be a principal and work that hard, I’m going to get paid for it. But then, I just realized just how awesome it would be to be able to live your faith every day and to work with kids that have the same goal or perceive to have the same goal. And to be able to make that kind of difference is infinitely more important than making an academic or athletic difference for kids. . . . But to help kids learn to grow up to love their faith, and to be leaders of their faith, and to be good Christian husbands and wives and parents is, you know, infinitely more important to me.

David acknowledged that preparing for the role of “spiritual leader” was something that came naturally, as opposed to something he learned. “It’s innate; you either have it or you don’t. I guess it’s just part of the Lord’s plan. But to me, it’s just honest.”

What David was not prepared for, however, was the difficulty he would experience as the leader of a Catholic school. As he stated, “I believe that we are here to help God make better Catholics. And that’s a greater struggle than I anticipated. I didn’t . . . I could not expect that there would be resistance to that. But there is. There’s
resistance to that.” He later said, “I don’t know if I expected that it was going to be as big of an uphill climb.”

It also did not take David long to feel as though he was inadequately prepared for many of the varied responsibilities of his position (sub-question #2). From the first journal response in October through subsequent responses and interviews, David expressed dissatisfaction with the preparation he received through his university coursework. As he stated:

College classes did not prepare me at all. My years in the classroom helped me to develop the personality to establish a positive rapport with students. My faith has helped me to build the character I need to lead others toward the mission of a Catholic school. For the most part, I am learning the nuts and bolts of administration as I go.

Toward the end of the school year David acknowledged, “I don’t really think I was prepared at all for the responsibilities that I faced this spring. I simply had to use a lot of common sense and think my way through most of it.”

It was what he referred to as “the management part of the position” for which David felt most ill-prepared. According to David:

Just like teaching, I am learning on the job how to manage a building, faculty, and staff. It seems that colleges and universities spend way too much time trying to mold candidates into leaders, that they overlook the many management responsibilities that the principal will need to be competent in. I feel that teachers go into administration because they already know that they have the leadership
qualities, so what they really need are the management skills. I do realize that no classroom or text, based on the latest research, can prepare you in the least for the real thing.

The value of experience was echoed throughout David’s responses to both journal and interview questions. As he stated, “I was ill-prepared but I recognize that nothing short of experience could prepare a person for this position.” And acknowledging the fact that experience takes time was something that David felt he needed to share with his staff early on. “I shared that with the teachers when I met with them in August. I said, ‘I’m gonna learn how to do this while I do it. And don’t expect me, you know, don’t expect anything different. Because you all know you learned how to teach in the classroom, so be patient with me.’”

That kind of acknowledgement was not comfortable for David but necessary as he struggled to establish himself with his staff. According to David in his final interview:

You know, I don’t know a lot of stuff, and so to stand in front of a staff and sometimes say, “I don’t know how we do this”, when they ask me a question. You know, “I don’t know.” Maybe that lends to the thought that they think I’m incompetent. But I also told them the first day, “I’m going to learn how to do this this year, gang. Just like you didn’t learn how to teach in college, I didn’t learn how to become an administrator in college. You know how that goes. So, be patient with me. But I’m here for you. I’m here to work for you. I’m here to serve you. But I’m also here to guide you. I’m here to lead you. And I do need you to trust me.”
Through all of the journal responses and interviews conducted during the year, David most often spoke of the challenges he was experiencing in his position (sub-question #3). There were many --- some personal, some professional, some stemming from his relationships with others --- and all contributing to a sense of frustration and discouragement that he seemed to battle quite often. When discussing the challenges that he faced most regularly, David mentioned such things as declining enrollment, funding issues, parent complaints, and student discipline.

However, one of the greatest challenges David experienced was simply balancing the number of responsibilities he had been given with the amount of time he could spend on them. As the school year began, David said, “I was not naïve about the massive responsibility but I must admit, it is more than I anticipated.” He continued, “As a K-12 principal, my responsibilities have had an immense variety! I cannot even begin to list the responsibilities I expected, in addition to those that I never could anticipate.”

One source of frustration for David was the amount of time he spent on “unanticipated” responsibilities as opposed to those he felt were most important. According to David, “The majority of my time is occupied by unanticipated teacher and student needs. One minute, I might be helping a primary student clean up spilled afternoon treats, and then the next moment I have to deal with senior girls wearing colored sports bras that are visible through their white uniform polo.”

In a mid-year journal response, David acknowledged:

What I believe my primary responsibilities are and what has taken most of my time do not match. My number one responsibility is to improve teaching and
learning. There are numerous specific necessities that must be accomplished to achieve this. I feel that I have not been able to focus on these due to having to tend to the priorities of others including students, parents, teachers, and superiors.

He continued, “Prioritizing and planning is my greatest challenge. There simply is not enough time each day to be the leader we must be for our building and still fulfill all the business requirements that are demanded daily. I struggle daily with not becoming too overwhelmed that I simply do not know what to do next, or first.”

Putting out what he termed as “little fires” occupied most of David’s time. By the end of the year he said, “I know that my primary responsibility is to be an instructional leader for our teachers and an academic motivator for our community. The problem is that so many other things have taken my time. I find that maintenance of teachers, parents, and students, in that order, has occupied most of my time.”

It was his relationship with the teachers in his building that, by far, provided David with the most challenges and frustrations. He spoke of this, throughout the year, at every opportunity. First, David felt little personal support from the current staff. As he said, “I was not coming into this position naïve. I knew it would be difficult, but I never imagined that there would be teachers that would actually want to see you fail. Some of them, I am convinced, have even tried to make my job more difficult than it really should be. It is much more difficult than I anticipated.”

Viewing himself as a successful former classroom teacher, David expressed dissatisfaction with the level of competence and professionalism of some of the staff. Speaking of his own classroom, David said, “We were structured. We had procedure.
We had routine. And it worked. . . . There's some things that some of our teachers do in their classrooms that drive me nuts in terms of management.”

Working with teachers to improve their management or instructional techniques was not easy for David, especially if teachers disagreed with his approach. As he said:

Oh, I don't think you can ever be prepared for teachers or staff who are uncomfortable with what you’re doing and don’t want to do what you want them to do. Or won’t do, or will challenge you. It’s easy to get after a student who’s being disobedient. It’s another thing to get after a teacher who isn’t doing something reasonable that you asked them to do.

Evaluating teacher performance provided a special challenge for David. In discussing this responsibility, David said:

One of my faults, I don’t know if this is a fault, it’s difficult for me to criticize. I hate hurting peoples’ feelings or knowing that I might have to do or say something that might hurt somebody’s feelings. . . . So, it’s a struggle for me. I’ll try to be as positive as I can and if there’s something that I really firmly disagree with, it’s difficult for me to come right out and say it. I’ll try to find a way to kind of go around. Or some things I’d rather do with a memo than face to face, which isn’t exactly the way it should be done.

Teacher attitude and morale presented its own unique set of problems. According to David:

The greatest challenge has been to keep the spirits of our teachers at a professional level. I feel that teachers have a responsibility to come to their
classroom each day in a delightful and positive attitude. They will treat their students how they feel and they will teach the same way. A true professional who loves their faith and this career should be able to do that. I’m afraid we have some teachers who are not the professionals that they should be and this has been a source of great anxiety for me.

Clearly David felt that his greatest challenge involving the staff, “Is to have the teachers be the spiritual leaders that we need in the building, and to put that first, and then athletics or, just, whatever. You know, I’m here, I’m bringing the paycheck. There’s all kinds of teachers out in the world like that. But it’s even more of a tragedy to have them here where mom and dad are paying tuition to send their kid here.” He went on to say, “A lot of our teachers, they’re good teachers, but they’re no different than public school teachers. No different. . . . They’re not spiritual leaders.” David felt strongly that:

If you’re a Catholic school teacher or a Catholic school principal, it should be different. You should be of different character, a different person, a different model. You should teach different things . . . . If I’m sending my student here and if I’m paying tuition, then I want them surrounded by their faith. I want them immersed in their faith . . . . and nobody will ever convince me that that’s not my role or that’s not also a responsibility of our classroom teachers.

A unique challenge David faced stemmed from the fact that his wife was part of the teaching staff. According to David, “She’s a grade school teacher here and some of our grade school teachers just didn’t think that would be a good arrangement.” As he described it, “There were some things that my wife and I knew could be a source of some
discomfort or some concern. Particularly with the grade school teachers. But we were too busy to really worry too much about it. And so we might have appeared insensitive to their thoughts about the traditions of how things are done here and what a Catholic school’s all about.” As David acknowledged:

I need to separate her being my wife and her being my third grade teacher. I can do that. But if I make any decisions that would be advantageous to my third grade teacher, you know, how’s that going to look? Or, if she’s mistreated, and she was, by one of her colleagues, if I call them on that, am I defending my wife or am I defending my third grade teacher? If she has a concern, can she come to me as her principal, or is she running to her husband?

Another difficult personnel challenge David faced resulted from moving a fulltime teacher to part-time status due to budget constraints. As he described it, “It’s been a P.R. hit. But it is what’s best for our school.” And although he did not have to let any teachers go due to poor job performance, David looked forward to the opportunity of filling some vacant teaching positions. As he said, “Last year there were five new teachers along with me, so I was their first principal. And now we’ve got four more, so that’ll be nine out of twenty-four. That’s something I kind of look forward to. . . . You know, it’s a better sense, for me, to know that they’re coming in, their loyalty is to me.”

Throughout the year, David acknowledged that there were a number of surprises that added to the overall challenges he faced. In the fall, David stated that he was most surprised by “the pace.” That sense continued as the school year progressed. In May, David stated, “The level of day to day fires that spark up kept me much busier than
anticipated. I came to simply plan on not getting much office work done while students were in the building. There is a constant struggle with maintaining the management part of the job so I could try and be an instructional leader and visible in the classrooms."

The unexpected pace and the number of responsibilities were both a surprise and a source of frustration. According to David, "The amount of tedious responsibilities that, frankly, a resourceful secretary could complete has been an eye-opener for me. I sometimes wish I could simply train her to complete all the paperwork and reports so that I can spend more time with teachers and students."

However, a greater source of surprise and also frustration came from David's relationship with the staff. As David stated:

I was a teacher who simply loved coming to work everyday. My morale never suffered. If there was something happening in the school that was discouraging, it was nonexistent when students entered my room. I thought most teachers were like me. I am surprised to find out they are not. Most are high maintenance people who believe it is my responsibility to keep their morale high.

That surprise quickly turned to frustration and anger when in March David stated, "You are responsible for your own morale! Why would anyone disempower themselves and let someone else decide what their attitude will be? As a teacher, I wanted to decide what type of day I was going to have. More teachers than I expected are willing to let their attitude go into the tank because of circumstances they disagree with and generally know little about." In May, David acknowledged, "Teachers were much more 'high maintenance' than I expected. I felt the need to keep them happy by responding quickly
and satisfactorily as soon as I sensed something was wrong. I will need to get over this in the future and just accept the fact that some teachers need to just get over and on with it. My job is not to keep them happy. Their morale is their own responsibility.”

When asked what surprised him most about himself, David stated he was pleasantly surprised by his own feelings regarding his job. “That after the long days, and some of them, 6:00 o’clock ‘til 10:00 o’clock, still the peace that I feel every night.” His sense of faith was also clearly evident as David stated:

I’m exhausted, but I feel a tremendous sense of joy and peace knowing that, you know, how important this is and the responsibility that God has given me. And the fact that He trusts me to be here, to do this. So no matter what happens --- kids are mad, parents are mad, teachers are mad at me --- I do have peace. That doesn’t mean that I put this job away and I never take it home with me. It’s always with me. But I feel at peace with myself when I go home at night, when I go to bed at night.

There were other positive aspects about his job that David was able to identify throughout the year. Most of these stemmed from some of the relationships he had developed with individuals or groups. For one, David viewed his relationship with students as both positive and easy. When asked to describe his relationship with students, David said, “I think it’s positive. I’ve always been able to develop a positive rapport with kids. I’ve always been able to do that... . I’m immensely comfortable with kids. Especially after I get to know them. It was uneasy at first, but I’m tremendously comfortable in front of a classroom with kids. You know, I think it’s pretty positive.”
Although he believed he was viewed as a strict disciplinarian, David felt that most students respected his approach. As he put it:

I’m pretty structured. Pretty strict. I mean, I don’t like kids to get by with stuff. Some people say, “Don’t sweat that small stuff. Don’t sweat that.” Well, I do kind of sweat a lot of the small stuff. Sometimes I’m trying to be as consistent as I can. But, sometimes it depends on, just like any human being, it depends on the day, depends on the kid, depends on your past experiences with them. . . . And I think some kids think, “Wow, he’s really kind of on top of things.” And others see that as, “Lighten up man! You’re running this place like a marine base!” But I’m a firm, firm believer in structured discipline and procedures and routines.

In addition to his relationship with students, David felt he had a very positive relationship with his pastor. As David said, “I have an outstanding working relationship. We see things and we communicate daily, and so it’s very positive. And we have the same vision, the same goals.”

The school board also provided a source of support for David. “They’re very, very good. Very good. Very supportive. Super people. So I’m just blessed with a fantastic board for the first year. A fantastic board. And a very supportive priest. And we do get along pretty well. You know, not so good so it’s kind of spooky, but it’s good to have differences so we have dialogue. And so this is, you know, a very good situation to gain that first experience.”

Finally, although his relationship with parents was not always smooth, David understood their interest and felt their support. As he stated, “But most people graduated
from here, so they have a vested interest in what goes on here. They also think they have a direct say in what goes on here. So, but, I'll take that. I'd rather have people care that much than not care at all. . . . Most people have said, 'We have discipline back here in our school.' And they like that."

Articulating specific job-related needs (sub-question #4) was not easy for David although a couple of ideas surfaced in both the journal responses and interviews. Clearly, David felt that he lacked some basic skills and knowledge that would assist him in the job. As he put it, "There's a lot of academic things I'm struggling with. For example, technologically, I believe, we're well behind where I know some other schools are, public or private." In addition David stated, "I wish I could have had more research-based data on effective instructional strategies. . . . I think also, that would have impressed our teachers. . . . To be able to incorporate that stuff as opposed to just, 'Well, I was a pretty good teacher in my classroom and this is what I did.' You know, that's not good enough." Finally David said, "I have such high expectations for myself and what my vision is for this school that I'm frequently disappointed though. Because I'm not a patient person. Plus, I don't have, and this is hard for me to admit, I don't have the knowledge and skills yet to be this effective instructional leader."

A need for more money for instructional materials was discussed by David during the initial interview. According to David, "You know, here in the rural area, you need the generosity of your parishioners. And that kind of comes in spurts. So, some of it is fiscal. You wish we could afford to automate our library. We've got a library card
catalog for crying out loud! So those are kind of frustrating because we want to be a school of academic excellence.”

When asked about “needs,” David’s responses tended to focus on personal characteristics he felt he needed to develop within himself in order to be more successful on the job. These needs continued to be identified by David throughout the year. In October, David stated, “My greatest need is the ability to make a decision that a veteran teacher will likely disagree with. I also need patience and money while working toward my vision for [the school].” In November, David stated, “I need patience. I need patience. . . But I’m an impatient person. I’m in a struggle with that.” In January, David stated, “I need patience, perseverance, wisdom, and fortitude to make tough decisions that will be unpopular with our professional staff.” And in May, David stated, “A ‘rookie’ administrator needs a tremendous amount of patience and tolerance. Energy and enthusiasm are also necessities.” At the end of the school year David acknowledged, “There are some things you just can’t prepare for. You just are or you’re not. You’re either hard-working or you’re not. High energy or you’re not. Patient or not.”

David realized that patience was especially needed when implementing his vision for the school. According to David, “I recognize, O.K., well, where my initial vision might have been skewed a little bit on . . ., O.K., it’s gonna take a little longer to get to this point or, you know, I just need to look at it a different way. Need to maybe, kind of, modify some of my thoughts and hopes for what I wanted [the school] to be all about.” As he recognized, “It’s going to take awhile, and I think you never reach your vision. I don’t know if you really do. You get there and then everything happens. But I know it’s
just the tip of the iceberg, this year, in terms of what I hope for the school — what I want to do.”

Finally, when discussing the job-related needs of his position, David stated, “I continue to need more time. At least I need to learn to prioritize my time better. I need to be better organized and prioritize tasks. I need experience! I do feel that this job has to get easier or at least less stressful in the future.”

Throughout the year, David was able to identify a number of sources of support and assistance (sub-question #5). David viewed his relationship with the central office, the Catholic School Office of the diocese, as very supportive. Early on, when asked to describe this relationship, David said, “I’m very comfortable. I’ve become more comfortable, every month, every week. I feel like I can call anybody there.” Later, David said:

Great relationship with the Catholic School Office, particularly with the Director of Human Resources who took a liking to me early on, and was part of my interview. She was a part of my interview, so she knew me from the first day I’ve been here. But she’s been very good and very knowledgeable and has great expertise and experience so, she’s made me feel real comfortable to just email her with just, “O.K., give me some advice. How about this . . .” She’s very good at responding back. So, and I can tell she likes to do that. She likes to help guys like me, people like me, who are inexperienced, just to give us some sound, logical ideas. . . . That’s what we should be as principals for teachers. If they
need help, if they have a question or concern, if I don’t know, I’ll find out for you.

So, the Catholic School Office has been very good.

David was not provided with a mentor by the central office and he did not feel very comfortable with the idea of working with one. As he said, “It’s difficult for me to ask people for help because I don’t want to seem incompetent. Or I might think that I should probably know that anyway and if I have to ask somebody for the answer, they might think, ‘What else doesn’t he know.’”

Although he did not have an assigned mentor, David found it useful to “network” with a small group of colleagues. He admitted to speaking regularly with a fellow “rookie” administrator from a neighboring town. And, as he said, “I spoke with teachers and colleagues on how certain things were done in the past and if people were generally pleased with that procedure.” He also stated, “The public school principal and I are very close. He’s a Catholic. A very good Catholic man. And so, I speak with him on occasion and am very comfortable speaking with him on stuff.”

In articulating some advice for new principals, David said:

The Catholic School Office was helpful quite a bit, but I found the greatest help and solace in a trusted colleague. Establish close relationships early in your career so you have someone to turn to for advice when necessary and also someone to simply bounce ideas off of and/or unload burdens. This was very helpful for me, to be able to express my feelings and frustrations candidly without worrying about my comments getting back to someone.
David’s family, specifically his wife, also provided him with an outlet of sorts. According to David, “I speak with my wife on occasion, simply to vent.” However, due to the fact that his wife is also a teacher in the school, David acknowledged, “We really don’t go home and talk about work. I can’t go home and complain to her; she’s on staff. And I don’t really want to.”

David did receive a great deal of help from his secretary whom he credited with maintaining many of the day-to-day responsibilities. As he said, “I have a fantastic secretary! She has taken care of many routines of the school that I simply would have no clue about.” He later acknowledged, “She manages everything. . . . I just know that I can be gone on a day and things will be taken care of. It worries me when she’s gone and I would definitely not want us both to be gone on the same day.”

David’s most immediate source of support and assistance came from his pastor with whom he believed he had a positive working relationship. David acknowledged that his pastor was visible in the school quite often and played an active role in decision-making. David asked him for advice regularly. When asked if he thought the relationship they shared was positive and supportive, David said:

Yes. I really do. Mainly because we have the same philosophy in terms of strict accountability and also modesty in terms of behavior and appearance for our kids. Just real conservative values, and also very high expectations in terms of academic, achievement. . . . And, I also am a strong believer in obedience as a Catholic. If you’re Catholic, you should be. And so, even though there are things he does that I disagree with, things that he says that I disagree with, I believe in
obedience. He’s the boss. And so I won’t bad-mouth him. I can tell him I disagree but, “Yes, sir, that’s what I’ll do.”

Through every journal response and interview, it became evident that David’s faith in God was his greatest source of assistance and support. Time and again David made reference to his faith when responding to questions about his job. According to David, “I pray every morning and I know that only by the grace of God do I have any chance at becoming an effective leader for our teachers and students.” “I turn to Christ every day for strength, wisdom, courage and perseverance. He is delivering!” “Mainly, I turn to Christ when the going gets tough because I know from Philippians 4:13 that, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’”

It is God whom David credits for providing him with the personal characteristics necessary to do his job. According to David, “Fortunately, I was blessed with a tremendous work ethic, and an abundance of energy. This has enabled me to work the hours necessary to be effective.” He continued, “The good Lord, He gives me a lot of energy. And He gives me everything. I mean energy, and wisdom, and a sense of humor, and some common sense.” He continued, “I know I’m working for Him. And I believe that He is guiding me and He’s helping me to make the right decisions. He’s giving me the wisdom that I need, the words that I need, the compassion that I need, the resolve that I need.”

At the end of the school year David said, “I would have to say that the Lord has prepared me quite a bit for this position. I feel it takes a certain personality to hold things together. Sometimes I felt that was the only thing that kept us from falling apart. The
care, compassion, and work ethic that I’ve been blessed with has served me well this year.”

Finally, when asked what additional assistance or advice he could provide to beginning Catholic school principals just coming into the position, David’s response was similar from the first interview to the last. In November, David said, “Be sincere and genuine in your prayer life and your relationship with God. Don’t manage as a secular principal would. Be a man, a person, of faith, above all, above everything, and demonstrate that and live that. And that will carry you through a lot of it.” He went on to say:

Keep that priority of your religious life and the modeling of that for these kids. Trying to greet them and find any way to make some type of faithful connection with them. Any way, any thing. And just those little seeds. Just keep planting those little seeds. And don’t let all those little fires overwhelm you and make you give up on planting those little seeds.

In May David said:

Just stay grounded in your faith. Because, you know, if I feel any sense of accomplishment, and I don’t necessarily, but if I feel, I make it through every day, and I think some good things are happening, and I think I made some good decisions, well, you know, I just give all that credit to the Lord. I can’t imagine if I was trying to just do this all by myself. But just be prepared to work very hard.

David was looking forward to “working hard” the following year when he returned to his position as principal. According to David, “I can’t wait. Honestly.”
Participant #2: Ted


Ted is the principal of a small, rural school in a very small Midwestern town. There are 213 students enrolled in grades 1-12. The student population is predominantly white, predominantly Catholic. Ted is responsible for fourteen full-time teachers, three part-time teachers, and one guidance counselor. There are no assistants. There is one secretary. One of the teachers also serves as Athletic Director.

Ted is originally from the Midwest and spent his childhood moving a great deal to accommodate his father’s work as a school administrator and superintendent. His mother was a school teacher.

Ted was an English teacher for approximately ten years prior to his move into the principalship. He had just completed his administrative degree in the fall of this school year and was currently taking classes to complete his K-6 endorsement requirements. Although he is Catholic, this was his first experience in Catholic education.

Ted’s move into administration occurred after experiencing some dissatisfaction as a classroom teacher in his previous position. According to Ted:

I was disappointed in our administrative leadership. It was a revolving door. A guy would come in and, of course, he spent his entire year saying, “Well, it’s just my first year. I don’t want to change anything. I want to see how everything works.” Fine. And the second year, he’d come up with an idea or two.
Invariably, then, as we would study that idea and look to implement it, he would
leave. And then, we’d get another guy who would come in and say, “I don’t want
to make any changes.” So, my last four years, we got a guy who was at the end of
his career and really did not provide anything. . . . And so I didn’t feel I was
growing.

Ted’s wife, who is currently employed as the resource teacher for the public
school located across the street, also was experiencing some difficulties at the time. As
Ted explained, “My wife was an elementary special education teacher and also had some,
not disagreements, but some questionable leadership.” Ultimately, Ted and his wife
decided, “It was time for a change.”

Ted’s responsibilities as principal were numerous and varied (sub-question #1).
These responsibilities were never reviewed with Ted prior to taking the position and he
was never provided with a job description until a diocesan principal’s meeting held well
after the school year had begun (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan
Principal’s Handbook). Regarding this, Ted said, “I would have liked a more detailed job
description --- something that includes the little responsibilities not covered in a graduate
school class.”

These “little responsibilities” seemed to take the majority of Ted’s time. As he
explained:

I build in “management by wandering around.” I try to make sure I walk through
the building at least twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon. And, at least
I’m in the hallways during passing periods. With the block schedule that helps
because we have fewer passing periods. But, I guess, the major part of my job feels like, right now, just day-to-day operations --- making sure the kids are in class. Making sure they get from class to class. Making sure we have transportation for our activities. Those kinds of things.

Throughout the year, Ted defined his primary responsibilities as “putting out fires.” In October, Ted said, “My primary responsibilities seem to be putting out fires. Teachers, parents, secretaries, students, cooks, paraprofessionals --- they all have small problems that they think are incredibly important. It happens every day. Today, was just another example.” In November, when asked to define his primary responsibilities, Ted said:

Unfortunately, I think right now, they are putting out fires. In my weaker moments, when I’m upset with my job or disappointed, I feel like I am a manager rather than an educational leader because I’m getting through each day. I have my little “to do” list, and I have about ten things, and I might get two or three of them done.

Finally, in responding to the same question in May, Ted said, “I think my responsibilities are primarily putting out small fires and finding the problems in the calendar and schedule for next year.”

In discussing his responsibilities as a Catholic school administrator, Ted felt that more was asked of him than of those in public education, and he was uncertain of his ability to fulfill that responsibility well. According to Ted, “When I was invited into the fourth grade room to celebrate Advent with them, that was a very special time. But, at
the same time, I don’t know if I have enough time. I’m so busy being a principal. I don’t know if I have enough time to be a Catholic school principal.” Ted went on to say:

At the board meetings, I try to give a spirituality report, what we’re doing in our classrooms to celebrate Christ. Obviously, I depend on the teachers to tell me what they’re doing because I don’t feel like I’m the spiritual hub. Because, I’m just getting my feet wet trying to get the educational part done. And, obviously, at [the university], there were no Catholic school administrator workshops or classes or anything. So, I feel a little bit behind the eight ball there as well.

In his final interview, while reflecting on his past year as a Catholic school principal, Ted said:

I don’t feel I’ve done as good a job on the spiritual side, and I don’t even know what my role is on the spiritual side. I attend mass with the kids and those kinds of things. . . . But, again, I worry that I haven’t done as good a job. I’ve done an average, maybe slightly above average, a C plus job, being a principal. Being a Catholic school principal, I think I’d go a little lower just because I’m not sure of where I fall as the spiritual director of our kids.

When specifically addressing his preparation for his role as principal (sub-question #2), Ted admitted, “I have felt a little overwhelmed, and not as well prepared as I’d hoped to be.” Of his many responsibilities, Ted felt he was least prepared for, “having to be an expert about everything.” According to Ted:

From the second grade reading series, to the amount of spray paint it takes to paint a football field, to where the paper towels for the boys’ bathroom are kept,
you’re just expected to know everything, and to do everything. Yesterday, I
didn’t get my teacher evaluation done, but I did fix a toilet, cover a class for a
teacher, help fix the heater in the gym, and took pictures for the yearbook. . . . I
did a lot of things. But is this the idea I had of what a principal should be? I
don’t think I really fulfilled any of my fantasies. I didn’t take us to the next step.
I didn’t look at any new textbooks that we could adopt. I didn’t supervise or
evaluate any teachers. We just got through the day, and that’s not a great feeling
of accomplishment.

Clearly, Ted did not feel that his university coursework adequately prepared him
for the responsibilities he now faced. As he said, “I am somewhat disappointed in my
graduate school experience. I don’t really feel that there was much in the coursework
that I completed that has helped me, so far, this year.” He acknowledged, however, “Of
course, now that I think about it, I am not sure how much of my undergraduate
coursework helped me when I walked into a classroom for the first time.” Still,
according to Ted, “I still don’t feel that I was given enough practical instruction to
succeed in this job. There should be a more practical approach given to new
administrators. A required job shadow would be a good idea, almost like student
teaching, but for an administrator.”

In discussing the practicum he completed as a part of his graduate program, Ted
said:

The practicum I completed did not, in any way, prepare me for the job. I
supervised a lot of ball games and a lot of the lunchroom. What I needed was a
sub in my room, for a week or two weeks, so that I could follow the principal or the assistant principal around --- even if it was just sitting in his office watching him do the piles and piles of paperwork that we're expected to do. And seeing exactly what the job entails, and listening to the phone calls, and making decisions, and just seeing how an office is run. We're teachers. We don't know how an office is run. We don't know anything about the phone system, or the computer, or the meetings.

During the course of the year, Ted discussed a number of challenges that he faced in his position (sub-question #3). Finances and enrollment were continuous challenges he faced. However, one of the earliest and unique challenges Ted faced was the result of a high turnover rate in administrators in the past. As the fourth principal in five years, Ted admitted, "I am still fighting the perception that I am merely the latest one to hold this position. I sometimes wonder if the staff will follow the direction I want to go, or if they will continue to do what they have been doing because they feel I won't last either."

Ted went on to say:

I think that my suggestions are just taken as kind of a "flavor of the month." You know, "[The principal] says I should try this in my classroom. You know, he'll probably be gone over the summer and I won't have to worry about it." Maybe in my second or third year they'll believe that maybe I know what I'm talking about. Ted believed that those feelings of uncertainty about his commitment and his expectations also carried over to the students. As he said:
I’m sure in the last six months, almost every kid in this building has been saying, "I wonder if [the principal] is going to care if I do this? I wonder if I can get away with this? I wonder if I can flick this pea at the kid across the table? If he sees it, what’s he going to do? Is he going to yell at me? Is he going to shake his head. Is he going to give me detentions? Let’s find out!"

Ted acknowledged that time will only help to establish him in his role. According to Ted:

It’s the third year in which you really define your principalship. The first year, you kind of inherit the problems, the good things and the bad things. You hit the ground running and you do your best. The second year, you get a couple of things implemented. You see how everything runs. You feel a little more comfortable. By the third year, it’s yours. So, if it’s still bad after three years, then that’s on you. I believe that. There are things that I’d like to see changed, that I will change, for next year. And, hopefully, make it feel a little more like it’s me.

Another challenge Ted experienced resulted from his relationship with the pastor. According to Ted, “[The pastor] is very laissez faire as far as administration. . . . I was overwhelmed, maybe a little bit, at the beginning simply because there’s no one for me to bounce ideas off of.” When asked how involved the pastor is in the day-to-day operations of the school, Ted admitted, “Zero. If he’s here visiting one class once a week, it’s news.” He continued, “In some of the literature I’ve seen, he’s listed as the superintendent of this place, and I didn’t even tell him when I suspended a kid for three days. At the same time, I don’t think he wants to know that.”
Along with the feelings of isolation that resulted from the distant relationship he experienced with his pastor, Ted also felt uncertainty about his job performance. In identifying what he believed would help him in his position, Ted said, "Feedback. I'd like someone to evaluate me. Tell me what I'm doing right, wrong, or simply not doing."

Perhaps the greatest challenge Ted experienced throughout the year stemmed from his relationship with the faculty. According to Ted, it was difficult, "simply going from being 'one of the guys' to 'the boss'." He acknowledged, "Yes, the faculty invites me over for a beer after the game, and we can visit informally after staff meetings, but I am quite aware that I'm not a teacher anymore."

Although, by and large, Ted felt his relationship with the teachers was "really, really good," he acknowledged, "I'm still battling... I'm still earning their trust. It's a little more difficult to know that you're one of 'them' now and not one of 'us' anymore."

In his role as principal, Ted was also disappointed in the fact that, "not every teacher is as good as I want them to be --- well, as good as I like to think I was." Dealing with ineffective teachers was not easy for Ted. As he admitted:

I am a pretty easy-going person. I never had a problem with classroom discipline in my classroom. I never really had to deal with it. Confrontation is probably not my strong point. So now, as I step into a situation, if I hear something that’s going on in a classroom that I don’t think should be going on, should I step in? Should I not? If I don’t step in, do I find the teacher after school and say, "This is what I heard. What are you going to do about it?" Or should I let the teachers teach? I find myself in that predicament, sometimes.
Ted assumed much of the responsibility for any dissatisfaction he had with the staff. As he said, “I think I need to do a better job of telling the teachers what my expectations are. It probably took me a semester to figure out what my expectations were.” He went on to say, “They’re my teachers, if you want to call it that. I’m supposed to be the instructional leader here. I’m supposed to lead them to the ‘Promised Land’ and make them ‘all they can be’.”

At the end of the school year, Ted admitted, “I don’t think I’ve done a great job of teaching the teachers. I haven’t given the teachers enough ideas and strategies to help them succeed. I haven’t been forceful enough to get a couple of my teachers to stop doing things they shouldn’t be doing. Conflict management is a skill I need to improve on.”

In addition to the number of challenges Ted faced, there were many things about his current position that surprised Ted. According to Ted, “I have always been surprised that nearly everyone seems to think I know everything — from what elementary reading series to use, to when Father’s camping trip starts, to when the 4-H is using the kitchen to bake rolls. Apparently, I’m supposed to know the answers to all of these questions.”

Another surprise for Ted involved, what he termed, “lack of communication.” Ted was surprised that, “If a parent has a problem with a teacher, he or she calls me! Shouldn’t the parent contact the teacher? Same with teacher-student and teacher-teacher conflicts.”

Ted was also surprised by the overall attitude of many of the teachers and students toward school. As he explained, “I was hoping that teachers and students would be a
little more enthusiastic about school. I am not totally naïve. I know school is not a favorite for some. However, I thought that here, at a private, Catholic school, there would be more enthusiasm for learning."

Most surprising to Ted, however, was, “the time commitment” required to fulfill his responsibilities. According to Ted, “I continue to be surprised at how busy I am. No lesson plans and no papers to grade, but I still can’t believe how much I am expected to do.” Early in the year, Ted acknowledged, “On numerous occasions, my secretary has told me she’s going to lunch. I look up and realize it’s noon and I only have two of my ten things ‘to do’ done!”

Not all of the surprises Ted experienced were negative. As he said, “It has been a happy surprise that a good administrator can effect positive change on an entire school. As a teacher, I felt I could make some change in my classroom. But now, I feel I can change ideas, in both teachers and students, policies, procedures, and perceptions.”

By and large, there were a number of positive aspects to the job that Ted identified throughout the year. First, Ted believed the school was located in a “caring community” that had a vested interest in the school. According to Ted, “It’s been very apparent that they’re happy with their school. They think their school’s important. They don’t want to lose their school.” In describing difficulties Ted was experiencing in balancing the budget, he acknowledged, “One good thing about a private school is that we have so many people willing to help.”

In discussing his relationship with parents, Ted said, “They’re supportive. They’re supportive of our entire program.” According to Ted, “We had a 98% or 99%
attendance at our parent-teacher conferences.” He went on to say, “It’s nice when they come up to you at conferences and say you’re doing a good job. . . . I’m just trying to be as visible as I can in the community. You can’t get four people together in this town without having a meal. So, we have, after every football game, we go to the town hall and have a potluck supper.” In his final interview, Ted said, “I think they want stability and I’m planning on giving them that.”

Ted also felt his relationship with students was fairly good, and he made a concerted effort to foster that relationship at every opportunity. According to Ted, “I had a number of them come to my house for trick-or-treating — even the high school ones. And, I enjoy seeing them. I’m trying to be as visible as I can, whether it’s in the hallways during passing periods, or at volleyball practice. I just stop in. . . . I realize the kids like to see you.”

Finally, Ted also felt good about a significant change he was able to implement concerning the student discipline policy. As he explained, “We were able to get rid of our demerit discipline system and we went to a thing called ‘performance improvement plan’. That was, pretty much, all my decision . . . and, I think, for the most part, it’s been successful.” Regarding the implementation of this change, Ted said:

I’m excited. This is my first chance to get one of my ideas working in my school. With this [change], plus working with next year’s schedule and budget, I am starting to feel more like a true administrator — someone who can truly make a difference in the lives of students, teachers, and the community, instead of a “manager” who is constantly putting out fires.
Early in the year, Ted began to identify a number of “needs” in order to more effectively perform his job as principal (sub-question #4). His ideas in this regard remained constant throughout the year. First, Ted readily admitted he simply needed more experience. In October, Ted said, “I’d like this first year to be over, just so I can know what needs to be improved and how things have been done in the past.” In November, Ted said, “I guess I just need more experience and that’s what I feel I’m getting every day.” In January, Ted said, “I still need more experience. Everything I accomplish this year will be so much easier next year, simply because I’ve been through it before.” When reflecting on the year in May, Ted admitted:

I probably need to do a better job, just like the teachers do, of setting the course of the school year in the first two weeks. I read somewhere that whatever you allow the students to get away with you better allow them to get away with it all year. You allow it to go on the first two weeks, then you better be prepared to allow it to go on for the rest of the year. You really set the course, the first two weeks. So, I need to do a better job the first day of school. The first week of school, I didn’t talk to the kids. . . . I did learn from that.

During the course of the year, Ted also recognized his need to develop better management skills in working with the faculty and staff. In October, Ted acknowledged, “I can see that I have a couple of staff members who can snap and gripe at each other. I know that’s not abnormal, but do I intervene? Do I tell them to work it out? Do I ignore it?” In March, Ted stated, “I need to be more direct with the teachers, the secretary, the cooks, the school board. I don’t have any major problems, but I need to correct behaviors
that I don’t like. This will be difficult for me. I’ve never been the ‘boss’ before.” In May, Ted admitted, “I need more help from the staff. I want their input, but I don’t get it. I need to, almost, force them to talk to me about issues.”

Although disappointed in the help he received from the faculty, Ted was able to identify of number of sources of support and assistance in performing his job (sub-question #5). First, the Catholic Schools Office provided Ted with advice and direction many times during the year. In December, Ted traveled to the office to visit with the assistant superintendent whom he described as “a real help.” He made the trip, “just to talk about all sorts of things --- from evaluations, to hiring new staff, to budgets. She’s been very supportive. [I’ve spoken to her] probably once a month, for sure.”

It was his colleagues in the profession that, perhaps, provided Ted with the greatest assistance. According to Ted, “I have a pretty good base of peers to network with. It seems to grow with each meeting I attend.” Ted acknowledged, “I have leaned on a number of administrators, everyone from the principal at the high school I graduated from, to classmates who have been principals for two or three years, to conference principals, to [other new administrators].”

Within his own building, Ted relied quite heavily on the school secretary who had been at the school for fifteen years. According to Ted, “The first few months, I really thought the secretary and I should have traded offices because I felt like I was running to her every time. Do we pay this bill or does the parish pay this bill? How did we do this in the past? Do we have a jean day every month or do you pick the jean day? And so, she was wonderful.” Concerning his relationship with the secretary, Ted admitted, “I
feel, at times, I’m on an island. I, perhaps, have shared too much with the secretary. I
don’t think I’m breaking confidentiality or anything, but she’s been here fifteen years,
and she’s done the books, and she knows the kids, and she knows how it’s been done in
the past.”

Ted recognized that his current position was different than his role as a classroom
teacher. According to Ted, “As a classroom teacher you do it. I had my little room. I
taught English. I coached football. And, as long as those two entities were O.K., I really
didn’t need anything else. And now, I need help and assistance and so, I need to do a
better job of delegating.”

For Ted, emotional support was often found by confiding in his wife. As he said,
“I can talk to her about nearly everything!” In addition, Ted acknowledged turning to his
faith for assistance. According to Ted, “I have noticed that during mass, I seem to be
asking God for extra patience and guidance.” Interestingly, Ted was also grateful for his
participation in this study. In his final journal response, Ted wrote, “I thank you for your
patience and wisdom during our sessions. I appreciated your honesty and candor.
Sometimes, I feel pretty isolated here with no one to visit with about discipline issues or
teacher issues. So, thank you!”

When asked what lessons he had learned during his first year as principal, Ted
admitted there were quite a few. According to Ted:

What have I learned? What haven’t I learned! I’ve learned that you don’t have to
be an expert in everything. I’d like to be, but I’m not going to be. You don’t
have to be an expert in everything as long as you have a good support system and
you know where to find the answers to your questions. I’ve learned that administration takes a lot more time during the day. There are no papers to check, usually. But, I’ve learned that my lists don’t work as well anymore. I’ve learned that every teacher that comes in has a concern that is the most important concern in the world at that time. And, it might be number twenty-five on your list, but you still need to listen with an attentive ear.

In advising someone entering the profession, Ted suggests, “You can’t make everyone happy. That’s an important lesson you need to learn as a principal. Everyone’s not going to agree with your decisions and you shouldn’t take things so personally.” He also suggests, “Get your feet wet and see if you can do a job shadowing --- not just supervising at a ballgame, and not just going down and sitting with the assistant principal for fifty minutes during your planning period.” Finally, Ted said, “If somebody’s coming in as I was going out, I would give him my new number, my phone number, my email address, and I would ask him, beg him, or offer any assistance I could.”

Ted did plan on returning to his job as principal the following year. According to Ted:

At times, I can not imagine going back into the classroom. At times, I’m ready to grab my gradebook and get right back in there. But I was just thinking about that and I don’t think I’d like to go back to that either. I’m pretty happy with what I’m doing. I hope the staff is happy. I hope the kids are enjoying themselves. I think they are. There’s things I could improve on, but this is my first year. But, I’m
quickly running out of time to use that as an excuse. When August comes around, I don’t know what I’m going to say!

Participant #3: Brad

Twenty-seven. Tall. Lanky. Piercing blue eyes. Married. No children. Neat, modern office. Relatively clear desk. Large windows looking out into a reception area. Chairs lined up outside the door for those waiting to see the principal.

Brad is the principal of a small, inner city, boys’ school made up entirely of a non-Catholic, minority population. The school has been in existence for seven years and currently serves 67 students in grades four through eight. The school is tuition based, with a large percent of the tuition provided by donors.

Brad is responsible for a teaching staff of eight. The administrative team consists of the pastor who serves as the school’s president, Brad as principal, and an assistant principal who also teaches physical education. The school employs a full-time development director. There is no secretary, but parents who volunteer to answer the phones. Brad is the second principal in the school’s history. The previous principal had been with the school since it opened seven years prior.

Brad was born and raised in this city, although he was not very familiar with this particular area. He is Catholic and attended Catholic grade school, public high school, and a Catholic university. He was an elementary classroom teacher for four years and had just recently completed his administrative degree.

Brad was encouraged to move into administration by his previous principal. According to Brad, “He kind of pushed me into administration. I originally went back [to
school] for the whole sake of getting more money. . . . I didn’t want to be a principal, necessarily, when I grew up. It just kind of came about.”

As principal, Brad was assigned a number of responsibilities (sub-question #1) that were clearly outlined for him in a detailed job description (see Appendix F for job description from participant #3). This job description was reviewed with Brad prior to taking the position. Brad also received a similar job description from the central office in September (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook).

During the course of the school year, Brad found his responsibilities to be numerous, varied, and often overwhelming and time-consuming. In October, Brad said:

My primary responsibilities have been managing the school in all aspects.

Discipline has taken most of my time. With me being a new principal and having many new staff, there have been many changes. This “changing of the guard” has brought about many obstacles that an experienced principal would not have to deal with.

Brad acknowledged:

I don’t have a lot of responsibilities at night, although, here and there, Father will throw some things at me that he’d like me to go to. Dinners and banquets and making appearances. . . . But I really enjoy meeting people so, for me, the social aspect is fun. But then I feel bad when I get home and my wife hasn’t seen me all night. That’s the hard part of taking on those responsibilities and being in this position.
By January, Brad admitted, “My primary responsibilities during the last couple of months have been numerous and crazy! My desk is a mess and I am embarrassed about it because I have not had time to get to it.”

In March, Brad identified his primary responsibilities as, “student discipline, planning for next year, the calendar, teacher hiring, planning school functions, and communicating with parents.” He went on to say, “The thing that has taken the most of my time is a combination of things. It is hard to pinpoint one thing. Everything takes up my time and I am constantly interrupted by students, teachers, and other demands.”

Finally in May, Brad said, “I feel my primary responsibility as principal has been making many important decisions for the school. Strategically planning for the future. I am always looking to improve our school. . . . The thing that has taken the most of my time is the constant interruptions to the day. The phone never stops ringing and people need time and effort.”

According to the job description he was provided by the pastor, the principal is responsible for the “spiritual development” of the school (see Appendix F for job description from participant #3). Because of his Catholic university experience, Brad felt he was adequately prepared for this role. As he explained, “I think [the university] did an awesome job. Some of the elective classes you could take, one of them, I think was Catholic foundations. They were always pretty good about separating the Catholic school from the public school and we always got both ends of the bargain. I appreciated that because I always aspired to stay in Catholic education.” Brad also acknowledged, “[The university] really formed me in a lot of different ways.”
Although only 12% of his student population was Catholic, Brad felt that his responsibility as a Catholic school principal was very important. According to Brad, “We’re not trying to convert them, but we do feel God is important and has to be a part of their life.” As a result, Brad implemented a regular mass and prayer service schedule, and planned to require his staff to begin each class with prayer. As he explained, “If you don’t have that Catholic identity, then we’re no different than a public school.”

When discussing, in general, his preparation for the role of principal (sub-question #2), Brad acknowledged that there is no better preparation than experience. In October, Brad admitted, “There are so many things that you learn along the way and, ultimately, through experience, you get better.” In March, Brad said, “Nothing can truly prepare you for the job, though. You have to dig in.” And in May, Brad recognized, “It is always hard starting a new position. You just need the experience of the actual job. There are some things a classroom cannot teach you.”

Brad did, however, feel that the coursework at his university was beneficial, and that his graduate classes prepared him fairly well for the job. According to Brad, attending a private, Catholic university, “prepared me in a lot of different ways in all the aspects of being a private school administrator.” As Brad said:

I fall back on that. I can call my professors and say, “What do you think of this?” Or, “Do you have any ideas?” I feel really good about that. I’ve even had some talks with [one of them in particular], and he’s given me some great ways to build the Catholicity in the building. It’s the kind of thing where taking a class with him, you get some good, concrete ideas.
Although Brad appreciated his university preparation, he acknowledged that his training lacked the experiential component that he felt would have better prepared him for the job. According to Brad:

If there would be some way where you could follow somebody. Really be in on some stuff. Be in on the meetings. Listen on the phone. Just to get a feel. I have great respect for principals, I’ll tell you that. Of course, there’s thousands and thousands of them across the nation. You just wonder, you think about [other principals], other people that have done it forever. How do they make it that long?

In May, when asked what suggestions he might have for university administration preparation programs, Brad said:

I would definitely try to work in more experience. . . . If you had a situation where, maybe, if I wanted to go into private school administration at the high school level, within that program, toward the end, I would spend a year, or a full semester or something, with, like you. Right underneath you as an assistant principal. You would pawn things off on me. I would watch your every move. You’d be a mentor to me. I really think that would be a neat environment because you would really get a great sense of the job, same as a student teacher. You would really gain an idea of what it’s like.

Brad faced with a number of challenges in performing his duties as principal (sub-question #3). One of the most difficult challenges he faced was dealing with student discipline. According to Brad:
I don’t come to work just to be negative and yell at these kids. It’s not my style. Not my personality. I didn’t do it as a teacher, and I’m not going to do it as an administrator. I’m not going to yell at kids. But, I’m wondering if my style doesn’t fit being an administrator. Maybe I’m not cut out for it. I don’t know.

After recently expelling four students and asking some students not to return for the following year, Brad said, “That was pretty nerve-racking. You’re making huge decisions about kids’ lives, basically. That was really trying for me. Very stressful. I’ve lost about ten pounds and I had trouble eating back in the beginning. It’s getting better.” Brad went on to say, “There’s days when you feel like you’re all alone and it’s you against the world. . . . Eventually, you have to be the one who makes the hard decisions people don’t like. And, that can be tough.”

Brad felt that some of the difficulties he faced with student discipline were caused by the faculty with whom they worked. According to Brad, “A lot of times, when the kids are sent down [to the principal’s office], they probably shouldn’t have been. If you knew that the teacher was making some better decisions . . . “ According to Brad, “Managing teachers has been my greatest challenge.” As he explained, “Maybe I’m foolish, but I take the responsibility of having a building where you have solid people. . . . Maybe I’m a dreamer.”

Brad had difficulty understanding the ineffectiveness of some teachers since, according to Brad, “I always considered myself a pretty successful teacher.” He also said, “It was so easy to me. So natural. At times I think I could just be teaching and not have to worry about these teachers that struggle with this.” He went on to say, “I’ve
struggled to try to help them because, how hard is this? This isn’t hard. I found it so
easy.

Brad found his youth and inexperience made it exceptionally difficult to deal with
veteran teachers. As he explained, “Here I am. There’s teachers here that have taught
longer than I am old. I’m telling them what to do. That’s been a challenge. . . . I’m
saying to myself, ‘Here’s a teacher who should know better. Who has all kinds of
experience.’ That’s a challenge for me because I’m wondering what to do.”

In addition to causing some difficulties with the students, Brad felt that the
teachers caused him to have some difficulties with parents as well. According to Brad:

I have had to face challenges like teachers using inappropriate words toward the
students. One parent had her son document what the teacher was saying and
doing, and they brought it in to me. I was praying that what was written was not
true. So, monitoring this teacher and working with him has been difficult.

A unique challenge Brad experienced in his position stemmed from the fact that
he is Caucasian working in a predominantly Black school community. In an early
interview, Brad said, “That’s always, kind of, in the back of my mind. In a small
environment like this you get to know people pretty well. I don’t know about acceptance.
I struggle with that. I wonder if they accept me and if they feel like I’m leading in a
positive way. In a good way. I hope they do. But you don’t always get that feedback.”

In a later interview, Brad described his feelings following a particularly difficult
parent meeting. He said, “I think race plays a huge role in it because [the previous
administrator] was an African-American. If you truly believe that a white can’t lead an
African American school for boys, then I'm thinking, pull your kid. If that truly was your thought. . . . or the fact that I'm twenty-seven or had no experience as a principal.”

At times, the greatest challenge Brad faced was simply balancing the responsibilities of his job. At various times throughout the year he discussed responsibilities such as teacher supervision, hiring, student enrollment, planning meetings, planning assemblies, and filling in for a teacher that resigned mid-year. According to Brad, “I feel I was well prepared for the job. The problem is getting to all aspects of the job. I feel like I can't keep up unless I lived here, which I refuse to do.”

The end result was that, at times, Brad thought of returning to the classroom again. As he said:

I'd be lying if I said that the last two weeks I haven't thought about going back to teaching. . . . There's been a lot of days lately. . . . Couple times last week, I really gave thought to the idea of where would I go? Where would I like to go? I don't know. And then you get to thinking, are people going to look at me as a failure? Couldn't handle it. Couldn't hack it. That sort of thing.

At times, the challenges of the job became too much for Brad. As he explained, “I broke down. I broke down crying. I'm not afraid to admit it. I was so emotional. Right now, I'm emotional just talking to you.”

Along with the challenges Brad found in his position, there were a number of things that surprised him about the job and about himself. First, Brad said, “I was surprised that I have been able to handle the pressures and demands and do it pretty well. Being principal is glamorous to the outsider looking in, but it's not all that glamorous to
me. It is not an easy position. I thought being a teacher was easy, but being principal is
different and harder.”

One of the “hardest” aspects of the job, and also one of the surprises, was the
work load. As Brad explained, “I often feel like I have not gotten anything done because
I am ‘putting out fires all day’.” According to Brad, “There are days when I just cannot
get out of the office and that surprised me. I looked up and it was noon. Look up again,
and it was 3:30 or 4:00 o’clock. I kind of vowed to myself that I won’t stay past 5:00 . . .
but I just leave stuff sitting here on my desk and I walk out.” As Brad acknowledged,
“This past couple of months, it seems like the work load has increased to almost double,
and I don’t seem to have the same amount of time as I used to have. This has been a
surprise.”

There were, however, a number of positive aspects to the job that Brad was able
to identify throughout the year. First, Brad did feel his relationship with the students was
very positive and mutually rewarding. According to Brad, “Getting in with the kids and
working with the kids, that’s where I start to enjoy myself. These kids are no different
than any other I’ve worked with. I just connect with kids. . . . I fit in with these kids.
That’s where I feel truly blessed because I feel like it’s helping me.”

As both the principal and a basketball coach for the school, Brad felt that he had
much to offer the students. As he said:

I feel being younger helps me. And, being male helps me. . . . It’s fun for me to
interact with them on a brother level, a dad level, a mentor level, a coach level.
To be that male role model. That’s why I got into this game in the first place ---
to be a male role model. That, for me, is really, probably, what I'm most proud of.

Brad was also proud of the number of changes he was able to implement in the school. According to Brad, "All the things we've changed from discipline to scheduling. The changes in teaching. All the kids we brought in with us. The list goes on and on and on. I feel like I started a brand new school!"

Those changes, along with Brad's interactions with students, elicited a positive response from some parents. As Brad said, "I think the parents -- I think we're doing a good job. I think more parents here wanted change than what I heard. I don't know... I think most of them are pretty happy about the changes and happy about the discipline system and the way things are being run." Brad also said, "What surprised me the most was when a parent... told me over the phone that I was doing a wonderful job and that I had impressed her because she didn't think I would do well. And, that I work well with the students. Another parent told Brad, "There's a lot of people saying good things about you."

Brad did acknowledge, however, "Most of my interactions with parents are good. They're supportive... I don't run into a lot of opposition, so that's been kind of nice. But, then again, the critics speak the loudest, sometimes, and you're not going to hear the positive."

Brad also felt his relationship with the staff, although difficult at times, was positive. According to Brad, "I think the staff is great. I do enjoy all of them. Even the
ones I have trouble with.” He went on to say, “We get along, you know what I mean? I think, overall, staff morale is good. I really do. I think the way we interact is good.”

Perhaps the most positive relationship Brad experienced in his job was with the pastor who served as the head of school. According to Brad, “I think our relationship is really good. He’s a big reason I’m here.” As he explained, “I think, in a Catholic school, the pastor definitely makes or breaks the job because everything goes through them. I look at him as a father figure. Someone that I can go to and just say, ‘This is happening with this teacher.’”

Brad very much appreciated his pastor’s active involvement in the school and also his support. In identifying one of the most positive aspects of his job, Brad said, “Meeting Father and having him as a support and just knowing that when I walk away from here, I’m going to have another person to call upon. That’s definitely one thing. I mean, he’s been great.”

Throughout the year, Brad identified various “needs” that, he believed, would allow him to do his job better (sub-question #4). In October, Brad said, “Having guidance from a superior is what I need right now, along with some direction.” In January, Brad said, “I need time! I need to prioritize my time better, but I do think it is just difficult when you get pulled in so many directions.” Brad identified the same need in March, when he said, “One need I have is time. I do not have enough time to implement and map out all of the ideas I have. There isn’t enough time in the day, or week, or month for me to do it all, and golf, or spend time with my wife. I probably need better organization of my time though. Prioritizing better.” Finally in May, Brad
admitted, “Faith in God and support from family and friends; that is all that matters to me.”

As the year progressed, there were many times that Brad acknowledged the need for support and assistance and he found such help in a number of places (sub-question #5). His family, namely, his wife and parents, had been extremely supportive when Brad was a classroom teacher. Now as principal, Brad found himself turning to them quite often. According to Brad, “I talk to my parents a lot. . . . It’s just always good to hear your mom and dad say, ‘You’re doing a good job. Keep it up.’ Those are the moments that keep me motivated.” Although Brad acknowledged “bouncing ideas” off of his wife, he admitted, “My wife, I try not to get too crazy with, because I think it might get a little lonely for her sometimes.”

Outside of his family, Brad also felt he could periodically turn to the central office for advice and support. He described his relationship with that office as “good” and, as he said, “I just talked to [the assistant superintendent] today. She called. And [the superintendent] was down to visit the other day.” Brad went on to say, “I feel like I can call them if I have questions or if I need backup.”

In addition, Brad found a great deal of support and assistance in networking with fellow administrators. In discussing regular meetings he had with them, Brad said, “It’s always nice. You can just vent your frustrations with another person who’s in a similar role. Because they know.”

Although he acknowledged that contacting his fellow administrators for advice was very helpful to him, Brad also admitted that asking for help was not easy for him. As
he said, "Maybe I should do more of that, but I don’t feel like, I don’t want to be the guy who’s calling with problems all the time. I know that’s not how other people feel, but..." In addition, Brad said, "I know the diocese offered having a mentor and I shied away from that. I wanted to prove to people I could do this. I know I could call people if I wanted to ask questions, but I guess it would be nice, sometimes, if people checked in with me." Brad also admitted, "I don’t trust anybody. That’s my biggest thing."

Occasionally, Brad found himself turning to his college professors and one of his faculty members for advice. However, perhaps his greatest source of support came from his relationship with his pastor and the assistant principal. According to Brad, "We kind of dubbed ourselves the ‘leadership team’, and we meet weekly." Brad went on to say, "We get along pretty well and our decisions are, usually, pretty similar. So, again, I feel pretty good about the team atmosphere."

Of his relationship with the pastor, Brad said, "He is great and very supportive of me and my decisions." During a particularly difficult time Brad said, "I was feeling some pressure and stress and everything was coming to a head. Father got me through some of that stuff and just helped me so much. Spiritually, too, I think." Brad acknowledged that throughout the year, he and his wife met regularly with the pastor for prayer and spiritual direction. As a result, Brad recognized, "I’ve really grown spiritually." He went on to say, "My faith is a lot stronger than it was even last year, and I feel a lot more comfortable praying and reflecting on things --- where does God lead me? And, is this the place to stay?"
Finally, Brad seemed to gain some support and assistance from his participation in this research study. According to Brad, “I feel good about the sessions I’ve had with you. It kind of makes you sit back, take the time, and think about it. You don’t always just sit back and think about it.” At the end of the school year, Brad acknowledged, “I think, at times, it helped to have you come and listen to all the things going on here. It was somewhat like therapy for me. What do I owe you for your services, counselor?”

As the year progressed, Brad learned many things about himself, especially, “That I have to make myself a little thicker-skinned!” Brad also learned a number of things about the principalship that, he believed, would be helpful to someone new to the profession. Brad suggested that keeping an “open mind” was critical when dealing with students, parents, and staff. He cautioned about listening to “gossip” or “warnings” about those with whom you work. He suggested, “getting away from your desk.” And finally, “Communicate, communicate, communicate!”

In reflecting on his experiences as a beginning Catholic school principal, Brad said, “I am feeling more and more comfortable as time goes on. The experience of living through my first year as principal has been a roller-coaster ride, but it sure will be nice to have a year of experience under my belt, which will help me understand what to expect next year.” According to Brad, “I cannot wait until next year because I think I will be ten times better. I will know all of the tricks of the trade, and have a year under my belt, and know what to expect, and where to correct all my dumb mistakes.”
Participant #4: Linda

Thirty-five. Youthful. Petite. Conscientious. Married. Mother of two; daughter, sixteen and son, fourteen. Narrow office with old-world charm. Desk hidden by papers, files, folders, and books:

Linda is the principal of a prestigious, private girls school located in the midst of a declining inner-city neighborhood. The school has been in existence for over 100 years and is housed in an expansive, brick, ivy-covered building. The grounds are impeccably maintained and surrounded by a large, iron fence. The school currently serves 272 girls in grades 9-12, the majority of whom are white and Catholic. The curriculum is college preparatory. The administrative team consists of the school’s president or “Head of School”, the principal, and a Dean of Students who is also the Activities Director. There is a pre-school on the campus that is run separately from the high school.

As a child, Linda lived in many places due to her father’s military career. Now, interestingly, Linda found herself in the unique position of being the principal of the high school that she attended. According to Linda:

I came here for their Open House in the fall of my eighth grade year and walked into those front doors on a Friday evening and it was just the most beautiful building I had ever seen in my life. My family is actually military so we have moved a lot. My father was a retired colonel. So we did a lot of moving. And I started here. I had to convince them. They had never heard of [the school]. They’d never heard of really any of the private schools. I’d gone to public schools my whole life. Many of them. And, so, I had to convince my parents.
Linda had also been a teacher at the school, teaching social studies for eleven years prior to becoming principal. It was her first teaching experience. Her sister was one of her students, and currently her daughter is enrolled in the school as a junior.

Linda’s move into the principalship was not one that she anticipated or planned. In fact, according to Linda, “I was on the search committee looking for a new principal. And we interviewed, in fact offered the job, to four different people, and for various reasons . . . everybody declined.” As a result, the Head of School formed a “leadership team” consisting of six teachers, each of whom was assigned a portion of the principal’s responsibilities. For Linda, “I was the teacher leader. My job was leading the faculty in reviewing curriculum, instruction, those kinds of things. But I also remained in the classroom. So, it was a very hectic year. It was also my first experience with administration.”

Following that year, and with the encouragement of the Head of School, Linda assumed the role of the principalship. According to Linda:

[The Head of School] and I began dialoguing about the possibility of me moving into that position around October. And, really, I had to do some serious prayer. . . I knew that if I moved, it was going to be a huge time commitment away from my family. And, so, that was the hard part --- and leaving the classroom. I love being in the classroom. I love having that relationship with the kids. And I think I will mourn that loss for a long time. Maybe forever. I also hope to go back into the classroom here and there. Just to have a class or something. I don’t know. I
don't know. I keep thinking it will be a possibility, but then the reality is a little different.

Linda believed that her decision was ultimately the result of divine intervention.

As Linda said:

God threw open a big door and said, “You’re going this way instead.” I never would have pictured myself in this position. It has forced me to grow in ways, like I said, I’m an introvert. I always pictured myself in a basement moving books and instead I have to deal with people everyday. And I have to deal with human problems everyday. And that’s not something I’ve really been comfortable with or ever wanted to pursue because I’m not comfortable with it. But, I think I do a pretty good job at it. And I think people trust me. I think they see me as honest and fair. And that’s exactly what we needed. We needed it so badly in this building right now. We needed somebody who would stay in this job for a long time and bring some stability to this office. And God said, “You’re the one.” And I said, “O.K.”

At this point, Linda had a provisional certificate and was in the process of completing the necessary coursework for an administrative endorsement. In fact, since she originally had no hours toward her administrative degree, she was relieved of some of her teaching responsibilities during the semester prior to assuming the principalship in order to take classes. According to Linda. “She [the Head of School] offered to give me, basically, a sabbatical. And I was in a kind of cosmic position because I had a student teacher and he was graduating at Christmas and would be looking for a job. And, so we
had somebody who the kids already knew.” Linda completed nine credit hours during that semester and twelve credit hours during the summer in order to qualify for the provisional certificate.

Linda’s responsibilities as principal were numerous and varied (sub-question #1). She was provided a fairly detailed job description prior to taking the position and this job description was reviewed with her by the Head of School (see Appendix G for job description from participant #4). Although similar to the one she was given, the job description from the diocese was not given to Linda until she attended a September meeting (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook).

Among her many duties, Linda felt that:

My primary responsibility has been to ensure the academic atmosphere of the school. Under that task, I would include curriculum writing and review, supervision of teaching and support staff, chairing the Admissions Committee and Exchange Committee, overseeing student placement and registration, as well as scheduling, maintaining all state department records, implementing the school improvement process, and a billion other small, daily details.

When asked what responsibilities took up most of her time, Linda quickly responded:

Problems. Kids who are unhappy with their class or with their teacher. Parents who are unhappy with their class or with their teacher. Students who are failing. Students who are not handing in homework. . . I’m incredibly lucky because we
don’t have the kind of discipline problems that a lot of principals have to deal with. . . . It’s just not tolerated in the climate of the school, which is nice.

Linda believed that the climate of the school was, in large part, established by the spiritual dimension found in a Catholic school setting. As the “spiritual leader” of the school (see Appendix G for job description from participant #4), Linda felt that the role of the Catholic school principal is very different than the role of a public school principal and that the expectations placed upon her were much greater. According to Linda:

There’s a whole new level of expectations. Certainly public school teachers and public school administrators have moral turpitude clauses in their contracts. But if you want to be a Catholic school teacher, I think you’re on a whole other level in terms of the life that you live and the standard that you set for what it means to be a Catholic and what it means to be a person of God. . . . It’s a completely different set of rules in terms of how you behave and how you live and what you can say and what you can do.

When asked if she felt prepared to provide spiritual leadership as a Catholic school administrator after attending a Catholic university, Linda replied:

Some of my classes at [the university] have been very, very helpful in that regard. Certainly, I’m the product of Catholic education. . . . I think that’s why I teach here. Why I haven’t gone for the big bucks in public schools. The mission of what we do here keeps me here. It’s what keeps me going and makes me happy. So that the foundation is certainly already there. In terms of being a spiritual leader, certain faculty at [the university] and certain classes at [the university]
have really addressed that in a very meaningful way and provided an opportunity
to explore that side of the job. On the other hand, I wish that in some of the more
mechanical types of classes, there was more attention to the fact that we are
private or archdiocesan. That we’re not a public school.

Although Linda felt that attending a Catholic university better prepared her for her
role as a Catholic school administrator, she acknowledged that her best preparation for
the principalship came from the practical experience she gained as part of the “leadership
team” (sub-question #2). According to Linda:

The best preparation for this job is doing it. It’s like discussing the Grand Canyon
versus climbing it. You just can’t capture the true essence of the job by a
theoretical discussion. My six month transition and full year on the Academic
Leadership Team was, by far, the most valuable preparation. The classes and
readings were helpful, primarily for creating a network of colleagues I can call on
for support and for forcing me to really think about my core values.

Linda felt she was most inadequately prepared for completing the numerous state
reports required in her position. According to Linda, “The largest failure in my job
preparation has been in maintaining paperwork for accreditation. I had to train myself on
a very complex system of rules for the curriculum.”

Linda did feel, however, that her university coursework best prepared her for
working with others. As she explained:

By my classes at [the university], I would say I am best prepared by them for the
interpersonal, managerial, human resources part of the job which I have a
tendency to be least sure of myself in. I'm introverted. I'd rather go home and read a good book than go out and see people. So that part of my job --- I always felt like I really had to put a lot of thought into how I would present a problem to someone and make sure that I was presenting it so I would get the right reaction. And that's a lot of what the Education Department at [the university] has focused on, helping people to understand that including people in decision-making and building that efficacy within the faculty is important. . . . But it's a little different once you're in the office and having to make the decisions. To remember who needs to be involved in this. And it's a lot of time, and you have fifteen other things to do. It's a lot easier to just say yes or no and to move forward.

Although in some ways, Linda felt adequately prepared for the role of principal, she still faced a number of challenges during the year (sub-question #3). One difficulty stemmed from the fact that Linda had moved from faculty member to principal in the same school. According to Linda, “I've been a member of the faculty for eleven years. So, moving from a position of being a colleague to a boss is, depending on the faculty member, sometimes been very, very easy and other times it's been downright weird.”

Given her unique situation, teacher supervision and evaluation was especially difficult for Linda. As she explained, “I think the hardest part for me was reprimanding people who I deeply respect and enjoy working with. Wonderful colleagues. And the first couple of times I had to take complaints to them was sleepless nights. I just had a really hard time with that part of it. But, by October, I was beginning to see things differently.”
Her relationship with her colleagues became especially strained when Linda opted not to renew the teaching contract of one of the faculty members. According to Linda:

So, it was really bad. And it’s been very tense the last couple of months. She’s very cold. And I gave her the option of not letting people know that she was not returning by someone else’s choice. And she chose, instead, to make it very public and share it with all of her students. And, of course, giving everyone her perspective. And I’m kind of powerless to fix anything like that.

Concerning that situation, Linda went on to say, “In terms of personal time, my friendships have changed because of it. Because all of my friendships were among colleagues and I had to fire one of them this year. And, so, that was bad.”

As the school year progressed, Linda often felt challenged and frustrated in her dealings with parents. In January Linda said, “I’m considering a parents’ guide on how to share concerns in a constructive and respectful manner. While it would never be a best seller, I’d get a lot off my chest!” In March Linda acknowledged, “I guess I’m a little disappointed by the number of parents who see the school as an adversary and believe they must be an advocate for their child against school rules and teacher decisions.” And in May Linda said, “A lot of times you’re just damned if you do and damned if you don’t. Because you’re never going to please everybody.”

A unique challenge that Linda experienced was due to the fact that her daughter was also a student in the school. According to Linda, “My daughter is a junior [in the school]. I need to be very careful distinguishing to her teachers my ‘mom hat’ and my ‘principal’s hat’. I rarely wear my mom hat at school. My job at [this school] has made
life very difficult for my daughter at times.” It was in describing an awards ceremony at the school where she was officiating that Linda said:

And up comes [my daughter] to get her prize and flowers. And no one’s there to take her picture because her mom is up on stage running the ceremony instead of on the sidelines. So, she’s missed out on the mom part, I guess, was my thought at the time. No one is there to jump up and take her picture because she doesn’t have her parent there. She has her principal there and not her parent.

In some ways, Linda also felt her relationship with other students was negatively affected by her role. As she said, “I miss my relationship with the girls. It’s very clear that sitting in that chair and in this office means that girls that I might have had a little bit closer relationship to, suddenly see me as the authority figure and are quite frightened of me.”

In addition to her personal relationships, there were certain duties of the job that Linda found especially challenging. She often spoke of countless meetings, registering students, mentoring new hires, creating committees, disciplining students, and completing state reports. These duties, in addition to the classes she was enrolled in at the university led Linda to admit, “My biggest problem, right now as a new principal, is time management.” When asked what has most disappointed her about the job, Linda said:

The length of the day. And I don’t mean the length of the time that I spend here. I mean, there is so much more that I see that I would like to do and I simply can
not. I am packed from the beginning of the day to the end of the day, and there are so many more things I wish we could do.

Given her experience on the leadership team prior to becoming principal, few things really surprised Linda about the position and she was well aware of the difficulties. According to Linda:

I knew what it was going to be very difficult. I knew that this year was going to be hard. . . . I never aspired to this job. I never dreamed of being principal one day. And, in fact, the first couple times that [the Head of School] mentioned it as a possibility last year, I said, my exact words were, “When hell freezes over.” So I knew the hard parts of the job. I knew what was going to be difficult. . . . I’d always known as a teacher, that all the junk that I dealt with in terms of the really misbehaving students, parents who were just being a complete thorn in my side, that was always the stuff I sent to the principal. So, I knew the junk that landed on the principal’s desk. Which is why, as a teacher, I looked at the job and thought, “No, thank you. I don’t want this.” And I knew the talk among the faculty, and every time there’s a decision made there was everybody second-guessing and tearing apart the decision. And it’s not just an atmosphere of huge support and we will trust our leaders. It tends to be very critical.

What was a surprise to Linda was the very fact that she did choose to become principal. As Linda said:

This summer, my husband and I went to a baseball game, and we were sitting there on a beautiful, beautiful summer night watching the game. And I turned to
him and I said, "You know, why does anyone become an umpire? Nobody likes
them. They’re out on the field yelling at the umpire and the crowd’s booing at the
umpire." And I started laughing and I said, "Oh my God, and I became a
principal!"

Linda went on to say, "I never, never aspired to an administrative position. It was
not something that I envisioned myself going into. I loved the classroom. I love
academia. I love teaching kids."

One aspect concerning the students especially surprised Linda. As she
acknowledged:

As a classroom teacher, I knew occasionally when there was a student in one of
my classes who was having emotional difficulties. But as principal, I tend to
know everybody that’s having emotional difficulties. This kid’s on suicide watch.
Girls who are cutting themselves. Who’s on anti-depressants, trying to get their
meds straightened out. All those kinds of issues that I never would have thought
were as widespread as they are. I think that has been most surprising to me."

Linda did find some pleasant surprises associated with her role as principal.
According to Linda, "What I found surprising last year, when I was a part of the
academic leadership team, and what kind of drew me to the job, was the joys of being a
leader and the sense of empowerment to bring some of my ideas to the stage, to make
those changes." In a journal response in May, Linda said, "I have seen effective and
beneficial change come from things I’ve done. As a faculty member, change always
seemed to require twenty people and ten years."
There were a number of other things that “pleasantly surprised” Linda. For one, “the hours, love, and work that so many teachers are willing to expend on a single student who is suffering or struggling.” For another, Linda also appreciated, “the students’ hard work, diligence, and vision of their future.”

In October, Linda said she was pleasantly surprised by that fact that even though she was the principal, she “still had a life.” According to Linda, “I expected the job to consume me, but I find that the hours are no worse than teaching, particularly because I no longer have to grade papers and essays!” In January, however, Linda acknowledged that her biggest surprise was, “The incredible number of hours and days I am working. I’ve had one day off in three weeks and the busy time is just beginning. I work an average of twelve-hour days. I don’t even want to calculate the per week commitment.”

Throughout the year, Linda found that there were a number of positive aspects to her role as principal. First, Linda felt that she was, in a sense, fulfilling God’s will. As she said, “I know I am where God wants me to be. I know the work I’m doing is a mission. This sense is incredibly fulfilling on a personal level and a very good reason for staying with a job that is frequently frustrating and overwhelming.”

In addition, Linda felt that the job allowed her to learn and grow in a number of ways. According to Linda:

I’m learning so much. I’m really feeling there’s so much more to learn. I never really had that whole institution vision and I’m gaining that, and I’m learning so much more about teaching. I really feel like, why didn’t I do that? Why didn’t I think of that when I was in the classroom? And so, that’s been exciting.
Aside from some specific situations, Linda did seem to enjoy her relationship with the students, the parents, and with most of the staff. Because of her long association with the school and the fact that she, too, was the parent of a student, Linda felt she was accepted and supported. According to Linda, the students, "... feel more comfortable bringing concerns to me, opening up and telling me things." The parents, "... are worried about the same kinds of things. I think I get along very well with the parents. When they bring concerns to me, I’m able to address them or share with them why I don’t think it ought to be addressed." And most of the faculty, "... feel like they have an ally in the principal’s office. I’m not that new principal that they have to figure out. They know me inside and out. They know my strengths. They know my weaknesses. They know and feel like I support them. I’ve been in the trenches with them and I know."

Another positive aspect to the job that also motivated Linda in making the transition involved the financial gain. According to Linda:

Part of the reason, to be very honest, part of the reason I made this move at this time was financial. I have two children in Catholic schools and that’s about a thousand dollars a month in tuition. I can’t do that on a teacher’s salary. It is impossible to do that on a teacher’s salary. So, when I was looking for something else, that was a big piece of what I was looking for --- to be able to offer my children the same thing that I was handing out to other people’s children. And, to me, it was a justice issue that I should be able to give my kids that kind of
education. And I’m doing it. And I’m not going to take it away from them because this year’s been hard.

Acknowledging that the year was difficult, Linda identified two primary “needs” she experienced in order to more successfully perform her job (sub-question #4). First, Linda often spoke of the need for more time to spend on the job and with family. In November, Linda said, “I would love to be able to walk through the classrooms and sit down and be more involved in what’s happening in the classrooms on a daily basis. Instead, I seem to be sitting in my office.” In January, Linda said:

I need a day off and plan to take one on Friday. . . . I need family time with my children and a date with my husband. I will need to go to Arizona in the near future to be with my mother-in-law in her last moments of life. And I need to visit my 94-year-old grandfather before he is gone.

In March, Linda said, “A few more hours every day could, perhaps, be achieved by slowing the earth’s rotation. Through January and February, I was easily working seventy hours per week.” It wasn’t until May that Linda said, “I’m going to take a nice Memorial weekend. Going down to our farm. Kicking back. Memorial Day with the whole family. Shouldn’t say it’s relaxing, but it will be fun.”

Linda also identified the need for a “support network,” not only for herself, but for all Catholic school principals. According to Linda:

An important need for a Catholic school principal is an extensive support network. Catholic schools tend to be very independent institutions. While that is one of the benefits to my job, it also means I do everything — hiring and firing,
writing curriculum, supervising teaching and support staff, filing reports, etc. I
don’t have a central office doing research on best methods or offering lists of
inservice opportunities. I need a support network of other Catholic school
principals, colleagues in the building, and an understanding family who will see
very little of me from August 1 to Memorial Day.

Throughout the year, Linda was able to identify many sources of support she had
experienced including her family (sub-question #5). According to Linda, “My biggest
support is my husband. When I’m at my limit, he builds me back up. She went on to
say, “My husband is a great sounding-board. He’s not afraid to tell me I’m, wrong and
he’s removed from the extraneous information that might influence me.”

Linda also found that the people she met in the classes she took at the university
served as a supportive network. As she said, “It was actually a great group of people that
I was in class with. It was really more like a weekly support group!”

In addition, Linda found many of the faculty members to be both supportive and
accepting. According to Linda, “I feel like I work with incredibly supportive, wonderful
people who have been accepting of the fact that this is my first year and I’m going to
forget that this had to be done by that date.”

Linda felt she had an extremely positive working relationship with both the Head
of School and the Dean of Students. Of the Administrative Team, Linda said, “I don’t
know how anybody could do this job without having sounding boards and people who
can see things from a little bit different perspective. But, we can also share the same
values, and the same goals, and the same concerns about where we’re going as an
administration and as a school.” In terms of the administrative responsibilities, Linda said, “I think things are nicely parceled out . . . And we work together and we’re a team, because none of us could function properly if one of us wasn’t being a team member. . . . We compliment each other and we get to focus on what we’re good at.”

Concerning her specific relationship with the Head of School, Linda acknowledged, “I don’t feel comfortable taking my problems, on a daily basis, to [the Head of School]. She’s a busy lady and I don’t want to dump those on her. I guess, maybe, I’m also a little worried about looking incompetent. It is my job.” However, Linda also said, “On the other hand, she’s my mentor. She’s a wonderful, wonderful boss. I respect her very much. She’s been incredibly supportive of me through all of this and she’s been great.”

The Catholic School Office had been helpful to Linda during the course of the year, although her relationship with them was somewhat detached. Because her school is private as opposed to archdiocesan, Linda admitted:

Not really much of a relationship and really still trying to feel my way about where that relationship ought to be and how it ought to be. They [the archdiocese] don’t pay any of our operating costs. They don’t provide us insurance. There’s no real financial responsibility towards us in any respect. So, what kind of control ought there to be. Obviously, we’re a Catholic school and therefore what the bishop says goes and that’s very, very clear. I guess I’d have to say we just don’t have a lot of relationship.
Linda did admit that the superintendent does come into the school, “and tours the school and looks at our test scores and comments on things.” However, the visit scheduled for this particular year had been rescheduled and then cancelled.

Linda acknowledged that the Catholic School Office was, in fact, helpful at times. As she said:

I had very little contact with the Catholic Schools Office. I think I’m O.K. with that. When I have asked for support or had questions on certain things, they have gotten back to me and, granted, that’s only been three or four times this year. On nursing students, No Child Left Behind, recruitment questions, and that’s about it. So, really, my only contact with the Catholic Schools Office is getting my assurance statement signed and that’s never been an issue. So, that’s it.

Finally, when all else failed, Linda admitted that she turned to her faith to sustain her. According to Linda, “When I’m really worried or upset, one “Our Father” and ten “Hail Mary’s” can be very calming.”

During the course of the year, when asked what lessons she had learned and what advice she could offer to beginning Catholic school principals, Linda suggested, “Know the culture of the place . . . because the mission [of the school] is so distinct and so much a part of everything that happens, that if you don’t get that, you’re never going to blend in.” Linda also suggested:

Keep the job in perspective. Don’t stay here until eight o’clock at night. Look for a position with people you can work with. . . . Spend time with the kids. I think they’ll tell you more about what’s going on in the school than anybody will. And
take it with a huge chunk of salt. Because there’s always two or three
perspectives to the whole thing.

In May, when summing up the lessons she had learned from her own experiences,
Linda said:

I have learned to put the hold button on my phone. I have learned not to
necessarily deal with all the paperwork on my desk before I leave my office and
go out and interact with people. I have learned it’s [the principalship] not that
different from teaching. That the way you treat students and the expectations you
have from students you ought to have from your faculty. I’ve learned to close my
door and shut off my cell phone when I can’t take it. I’ve learned it doesn’t have
to consume my life. That I can put my life in perspective. That I can share my
burdens with my colleagues. I’ve learned to communicate my concerns more
effectively. I find that I am able to manage people and to do that --- it’s not what
I ever thought I could do.

In a final interview, Linda expressed no regrets in her decision to move into the
principalship, fulfilling what she felt was God’s plan. As she said:

I feel like this is where I’m supposed to be right now. I feel the coincidences that
made this change happen are so incredible that truly, God led me here. This is
where I’m supposed to be. So, I’m here, and coming back, and plan to be here for
many, many years.
Participant #5: Michael


Michael is originally from Minnesota. He attended junior college in Iowa and received his teaching degree from the University of South Dakota. His first job in education was teaching seventh-grade social studies for three years in a middle school in Kansas. He moved to Nebraska because of his wife's job and continued to teach middle school social studies for three more years. Michael completed his administrative degree six months prior to taking this position. He was encouraged to apply for the principalship by his university professor.

Michael is the principal of a K-8 building with a staff of ten and an enrollment of 138 students. The student population is predominantly African-American and non-Catholic. The building is 100 years-old. The school is “tuition-based,” however no student is turned away for financial reasons. The enrollment appears to be growing and there is currently a “waiting list” for admissions. Because they lack adequate personnel, there are some “combination classrooms” with one teacher for two grades. As the enrollment continues to grow, Michael hopes that more staff will be added.

Michael found himself in the unique position of running a Catholic school as a non-Catholic with a predominantly non-Catholic student population. When asked if he saw himself as a “Catholic school principal,” Michael replied, “Probably not compared to [other schools]. But we try. Our religion and all that is based on the Catholic faith, but
this school is unique in that, yes, religion is important, but the students come to us with
different needs. . . . The kids here are extra special and just need, some of them just need
that extra love they don't get at home, for whatever reason.”

When asked if he saw himself as a “spiritual leader” at all, Michael responded:
I see myself as a role model. A lot of the students that come here, they just need
love and attention. Some of them are from single parent homes where both, either
one or both, of the parents are working. And so, a lot of them, they just need
somebody to let them know that they exist and to say, “Hello” to them and things
like that.

In some cases, “modeling” the faith for students presented its own set of
difficulties for Michael. In recounting one of his early experiences, Michael said:

Modeling for students in terms of the Catholic faith, I just made a point to make
the sign of the cross. It’s kind of a learning experience early on. When I first
started in the fall, I went through the motions real quickly and one of the teachers
said, “You know, you do it so quick that I’m just afraid the students are watching
that and picking up that you’re going through rather quickly in terms of making
the sign of the cross. You know, could you, maybe, slow down?” So I made a
point of making sure I went from my head, all the way down to my belt, and then
from shoulder to shoulder.

Although his situation is somewhat unique for a Catholic school, Michael
acknowledged that the spiritual dimension of the school still exists and is very important.
As he put it, “No matter if it’s Catholic or Baptist, or Lutheran, or whatever it is, just that
underlying thing is Christ and it’s just, kind of, the solid foundation.” For this school, Catholic theology is a daily part of the curriculum. Students pray daily and attend mass regularly and seem to enjoy their participation. According to Michael, “They like it. They’re very accepting of it. Many of them really like to be a part of it, whether it’s as a giftbearer, whether it’s as a reader, or a server, for that matter. Anyway that they can be, other than just sitting in the pews, but taking part, they enjoy that.”

From a personal perspective, the spiritual dimension of the school did not seem to influence Michael’s attitude toward his position. As he said:

Do I ever see myself leaving the Catholic schools to go to the public schools? I don’t know. I taught, my first three years of teaching were in the public schools. Then I moved and my last three were at private schools. So, it’s kind of helped me see both sides of things in terms of, you know, the public side of things and then the private side of things. And so, to say what I like better or worse from the two. You know, currently, I like where I’m at and I like where I work.

The responsibilities of the job were never clearly outlined for Michael prior to his accepting the position (sub-question #1). Michael was never provided with a job description by the pastor although he found an old one while moving into his office. The job description from the diocese contained within the Principal’s Handbook was given to him in September (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook). It did not take long, however, for Michael to gain an understanding of his duties. In October, when responding to a journal question, Michael said:
Being a first-year principal, this year has been a period of adjustment. The following are my primary responsibilities:

- Attending meetings
- Disciplining students
- Accommodating staff
- Assisting with lunch service
- Performing janitorial duties (between lunch sessions)
- Listening to teacher and parental concerns
- Facilitating staff meetings
- Managing vendor expectations
- Scheduling classroom and extra-curricular activities
- Observing and evaluating staff
- Attending fund-raising and public relations events

Although not directly responsible for the financial matters of the school, Michael did spend a great deal of time at public relations events to help promote the school. Much of his time was spent attending functions, “shaking hands”, and giving tours. It was the area of student discipline, however, that seemed to take most of Michael’s time, especially as the school year began, and that situation continued for the remainder of the year. According to Michael, “The majority of my time over the past three months has been spent on student discipline. Day-to-day it varies; one day there may not be any students in the office, whereas, the next day there may be a continuous flow of students in and out of the office.”
On more than one occasion, Michael indicated that he felt inadequately prepared for his position by his university coursework (sub-question #2). As he stated, “Attending graduate classes did not prepare me for the day-to-day responsibilities associated with being a principal.” He acknowledged that his coursework provided him with a fundamental understanding of educational theories. However, the practical application was missing. According to Michael:

[The university] did a great job in terms of preparing philosophically, in terms of methods and the methodology and things like that. But to say that I was prepared for the day to day routine of what actually goes on, I mean, I wasn’t very well prepared. . . . But, you know, if it was a perfect world where we could use the methodology, that would be wonderful because some of the professors there are great in terms of methodology. You know, Piaget, and things like that. Maslow. Things like that. But, you know, the world isn’t that. It’s a lot more complex. Michael felt that little can, in fact, prepare you for the job other than experience. As he put it, “I don’t know if that’s just an area --- unless you get into the meat and potatoes and you’re actually there seeing what’s going on and actually doing it. I don’t know if schools can really teach that.” He went on to say, “Fortunately, in my previous job, I was able to assist the principal with student discipline which helped me prepare for some of the responsibilities I now have.”

In his last interview, Michael stated:

Being a principal, I think, like any job, the most you learn is from the day-to-day getting ready for the nitty gritty. Being around the situations and dealing with
them when they arise. . . . A lot of it has to do with your gut feeling and your instinct and understanding that, you know, you do have policies and things like that you have to follow. But to say was I really prepared for this, probably not. Probably not.

As a new administrator, Michael faced a number of challenges (sub-question #3). During the course of the year, Michael spoke of difficulties he had in monitoring academic improvements, budgeting, planning for the next school year, preparing teacher contracts, and hiring new staff. However, quite simply, the numerous responsibilities inherent in his new position created a challenge in itself. According to Michael:

One of the first challenges that I faced was getting used to being a principal and not a teacher. I was used to being in a classroom where the focus was on teaching the students and not having interruptions. However, being the principal, I was constantly faced with interruptions throughout the day. Another challenge that I faced was what exactly were my responsibilities being principal. Some days I felt like I was not doing everything that should be done.

He went on to say, “You know, I’ve just been looking at my desk. I’m a person that likes to have things completed. And to leave here with things uncompleted, it’s an adjustment. I’m kind of feeling, you know, I’m just trying to stay above water.”

When asked to identify the responsibility or challenge for which he was least prepared, Michael was quick to respond, “Least prepared for probably trying to make everybody happy. Staff. Staff.”
It was, in fact, staff relations that proved to be the greatest challenge for Michael. According to Michael, “I found that staff are more challenging, in some aspects, than the kids are.” Some of that difficulty Michael attributed to both his age and his inexperience. In November, Michael acknowledged, “I think for some [staff] it’s tough. For a first-year administrator, just out of college with a master’s, and now this young guy is going to try and tell me what to do?”

In a March interview, Michael said:

I don’t know if it’s the hardest lesson, but one of the things that’s taken some adjusting to is being the youngest, close to the youngest, in terms of being an administrator of a building where the majority of my teachers are older than I am. And so, it’s one of those things where, you know, yes, I am the boss, and do have the final say, but you don’t want to take advantage of that. . . . I really want to work with the people. And I think in that respect, getting the support and things like that, for some it’s a little more difficult, maybe for a younger administrator, to support type thing.

Finally in May, when reflecting on the school year, Michael said:

You know, probably the most challenging thing was being a thirty-year-old administrator and being one of the youngest on staff. For many people, change is difficult. And to have a new person, a first-year person, coming in as principal, there are many teachers who, not only [at this school] but at many schools, who are set in their ways. . . . So probably one of the biggest challenges was trying to get through, and trying to work with teachers that have been here for such an
extended period of time, to try and get out of their comfort zone and try different things.

The area that seemed to cause the most friction between Michael and his teaching staff was the handling of student discipline --- an area that took up most of Michael’s time. According to Michael, “Some people are better disciplinarians than others. And sometimes it crosses your mind whether or not you shouldn’t just be the one in the classroom doing the discipline. Because that’s what it seems like. Kids are constantly, for whatever reason, coming to your office.” Michael also acknowledged:

As the spring approached, it seemed that I was getting more and more students sent to the office. The conclusion I drew was that the teacher’s patience level was becoming less and less, and likewise, the students’ was too. Teachers who send students to the office for disciplinary reasons have a difficult time establishing credibility in their classroom as well as respect from the student. After dealing with the situation, I would reflect on the event and determine that the student and the teacher could have dealt with a majority of the incidences in the classroom. Not having the principal involved.

Michael also said, “I am a proponent for assisting a teacher when needed. However, if a teacher relies heavily on the principal to handle discipline that should/could have been handled in the classroom, the credibility of that teacher is diminished in the eyes of the students.”

How Michael chose to handle discipline issues became a source of conflict with some staff members. As he said:
One of the challenges I have faced is gaining the support of some faculty members once a decision has been made. By sending a student to the principal’s office, the teacher gives up his/her authority for disciplining the student for that incident, and I believe it is my discretion as to what discipline will be enforced. In some situations, I have found that teachers are not supportive of my decision regarding the discipline of a student even though he/she sent the student to me to handle the situation. I believe that if a teacher wants to give up his/her authority, then I should have the support of that teacher after administering the consequence.

Working through this challenge brought Michael to a difficult realization. He acknowledged, “Probably one of the other things that was challenging for me was you’re not going to make everybody happy. And, for whatever reason, whatever the issue or the situation is, somebody’s going to get upset somewhere.” Michael also said, “When I finish being an administrator, or move on to another job, or retire, or whatever, I’d like to be known as that administrator that, as a staff, maybe they didn’t agree with me, but you know, they respected me. They respected me and respected what I did.”

Despite the number of challenges Michael faced, he still was optimistic about the future. As he put it, “I’d like to think that next year, as I return, things that I’ve done this year are going to seem or appear to be simpler than what they were this year. As the years go on, things will become more and more easy.” He also said, “Just with experience, decision-making will become a lot easier, I think. Not as challenging --- I shouldn’t say easier.”
When asked if his difficult relationship with the staff was a surprise to him as a new principal, Michael said, "No, not really. You know, everybody says that being an administrator, as you continually go up on the ladder, you know, the higher up you get, the lonlier it gets. And that doesn’t bother me. I mean, in terms of doing things or having friends or companions."

A number of things, however, did surprise Michael. First, the very fact that he was in this position at such a young age. According to Michael, "A personal goal of mine was to become a principal by age thirty. And so, you know, I achieved that goal... I was a principal at twenty-nine." It was, however, realizing the extent of the responsibilities of the position that may have surprised Michael most. As he said, "Being a principal, I feel that I am never caught up and there is always something else that needs to be completed. It is more difficult to leave the work at work and not think about it during the off-hours. Whereas, being a teacher, it was easier to leave work at work.” As Michael explained:

Maybe that was just because as a teacher, I became so comfortable after teaching for six years. You know, to be able to teach one day and leave everything at school and come back the next day and look at a book and say, “O.K., this is what I’m going to teach.” And not worry about it, not be stressed or concerned about it. Whereas, as a principal, leaving here, it’s just tough to leave things here. Not that I take it home and tell my wife, you know, this happened, this happened. But it’s just always going, there’s always things going on, you know, of what you
have to get ready for, what I have to do the next day. But again, with time and experience, I’m hoping that will become a lot easier.

Despite the many challenges of his position, Michael found a number of positive aspects to his job. First, Michael felt his relationship with the students in the school was very positive. According to Michael, “I think we have a good rapport. I have a good rapport with the students.” He explained, “I think a lot of them, for the most part, look up to me. Knock on wood. I only need to say something to a student, to correct them, once or twice. And whether they agree with it, and the second I walk away it happens again because I’m not there . . . but, when I call them into the office or when I talk to them in a one-on-one basis, they’re very respectful towards me.”

Michael acknowledged that in terms of student discipline, “There have been some incidents here that, I think, if we, quote unquote, didn’t ‘nip in the bud’ right away. That they know where I stand and where the school stands on certain situations and that some things we just don’t tolerate.” Still, Michael believed, “There’s just the kind of warm, fuzzy things that happen down here that you don’t get at other places, I guess.”

Michael also felt his relationship with parents was, for the most part, positive, although certain cultural conditions caused him initial concern. As Michael said, This was something new for me, coming to this area. Predominantly African-American, and coming in as a Caucasian. It was something that, you know, I wasn’t sure what to expect — what to look for. Again, knock on wood, everything is going well. The parents have been supportive. Every time I’ve
needed to call a parent and tell them a situation, they’ve been supportive towards me. So, I haven’t really had any disgruntled parents.

According to Michael:

I don’t want to sound stereotypical, but with the African-American culture, you have to have broad shoulders. The students that are attending here or the families who are bringing their children here have been through a lot. And they’ve probably seen more in the world than what you or I may have seen. For them to understand and to see that you care for them in terms of respecting them... I’ve just noticed as a Caucasian, being in a predominantly African-American culture, respect issues are tremendous. It’s tremendous.

For that reason, Michael said, “Parents have come in and they’ve had concerns and I welcome them coming in. And they feel comfortable coming in and talking and sharing their concerns and things like that. However, he acknowledged, “Like every school, you have those [parents] that are up here everyday, every event, every moment that they can be, and there are those that are here only when there’s a problem. And then you have those that you never see... I wish we had better parent involvement.”

Finally, Michael identified the outside community support he received as one of the best things he experienced. Regarding the various community members and organizations with which he established relationships, Michael said, “Just being able to meet those individuals, to just see how much good there is out there. Those individuals, they could be supporting someone else or supporting another organization, but instead, they’ve chosen to support the inner city schools and the inner city kids.”
It was difficult for Michael to actually identify what he might need in order to be more successful in his position (sub-question #4). As Michael said, “You know, to actually say I need something, you know, I really don’t know. I mean, to go back and say would I have done something differently had I had a specific tool or knowing about the outcome, you know, again, knock on wood, things have gone, I feel, smoothly.”

However, Michael acknowledged that he needed both more time and more experience in performing his job. According to Michael, “Currently, I feel that I am behind on my work and not making any progress on my current projects. It seems that I continually seem to be getting farther and farther behind.” He also said, “One of my needs is more experience in dealing with the faculty and staff. When issues arise, I want the faculty to be able to come to me and tell me their issues. Being a first-year principal, and younger than most of the faculty, it seems some faculty members would rather talk amongst themselves rather than approach me.”

During the course of the year, Michael found himself relying on various sources of support and assistance (sub-question #5). First, Michael credited the previous principal, whom he replaced, with providing him with much assistance. According to Michael, “My predecessor did a lot of work prior to her retiring to making sure the transition would not be overwhelming. I am very grateful for all she did for me and continues to do in support of my ‘learning the ropes’ as an administrator.” Throughout the year, Michael acknowledged, “There was numerous times that I’d contact her and ask her about, maybe there was a field day where they went to this place or that place, or, some individuals, do you know anything about this individual or do you know anything
about this program . . . She stayed in contact with [the school], and likewise, I stayed in contact with her.”

The school secretary also provided Michael with a great deal of assistance in understanding the day-to-day operations of the school. As he put it, “She’s really helped me out.” According to Michael, “It’s helpful to have somebody around who knows what’s been going on around here.”

Another important internal support for Michael came from his pastor. According to Michael, “[He] is one who is very supportive. We do work together. But he’s also one who’s not a micromanager. He wants to know what’s going on and the things that are happening but, in the same sense, he’s put faith in me and trust in me to allow me to make certain decisions without having to always go to him.” That sense of trust seemed to be important to Michael as he said, “This is kind of a unique place. Some managers of the principals, they want to know everything. They want to be the final say and sign it. Whereas, [he] is very supportive and like I said, he’s put his trust in me.”

The Catholic Schools Office seemed to provide Michael with an external source of support that he appreciated. According to Michael, “Anytime that I’ve had a situation come up where I’ve needed to call them, I’ve called them and they’ve been very supportive. Or, likewise, if they’ve ever had a particular situation where they’ve called, it’s been O.K.”

But, perhaps his greatest source of assistance came from two of his colleagues, one an assigned mentor and former professor, and one his former principal when he was a classroom teacher. Regarding both of these individuals, Michael acknowledged, “I use
them both. Good people.” Throughout the year Michael turned to these two colleagues for advice and support and according to him, “Had it not been for the assistance and confidence from [my mentor], I would not be where I am today.”

However, as much as he appreciated the relationship he had with his mentor and former principal, Michael did not call on them as often as he may have felt he needed to. According to Michael:

They have their own issues and incidents to deal with, and the last thing I want to do is burden them with things here. But part of it also is part of a selfishness. I think I can do it on my own or I want to get that personal gratitude in dealing with things. And if I’m not going to deal with them from the get-go, I surely won’t be able to down the road.

Likewise, although he sometimes turned to other principals within his local region or “deanery” for some assistance, Michael acknowledged that networking with colleagues was not easy for him. In an early interview Michael said, “To say that I’ve actually networked around [the city], I really haven’t.” He went on to say, “There’s principals out there that are more than willing to help me. One of my downfalls is saying I need the help. I’d rather try and do it myself.”

Later, when responding to a journal question on the same topic Michael said, “I may ask other administrators what they would do in a similar situation, however, this is a last resort. I feel many administrators have their own situations to deal with and the last thing that I want to do is burden them with some of my incidents, situations, and problems.”
Because of his experiences as a new principal, Michael was able to provide some advice for others entering the profession. According to Michael:

No matter the situation, I mean, the thing I keep in the back of my mind is that it could be a lot worse. You know, no matter the situation, no matter the predicament, no matter the messy desk, I mean, you could have seventeen piles compared to five piles... And you have to be willing to work, whether it’s coming in early, or staying late, or working at home... Work first, play later.

Michael also suggested:

Just take each day as it comes and, it’s a situation where, you know, no day is the same as the previous day. You make a decision, and whether ninety-nine of the hundred people disagree with it, you go on with it. And you’re not, I found this out, it’s tough to please everybody. And it’s a challenge. It’s one of those things that you just take each day, day-to-day, and make the best of it.

It appeared Michael was doing just that and had few regrets when, in one of his last journal responses, he said, “I am glad I took the next step in my educational career and applied for the position.”

Participant #6: Ann

Ann was born and raised in the Midwest and had been living with her husband in this particular area for over three years. She attended college at a Midwestern university and received her teaching degree many years prior. She worked as a teacher, daycare provider, and paraprofessional while her children were young. She worked for over three years as a matron and a jailer. Most recently, Ann was the head teacher of a small, Midwestern school for six years and had taught for one year in a Catholic school in a small, nearby town. Ann earned her administrative degree shortly before accepting this position.

Ann was offered the job of principal only days before the school year began. The school had originally been led by a beloved principal for decades. Ann’s immediate predecessor, who had held the position for only a couple of years, resigned during the summer without warning or explanation. The school is well-maintained and is located in a middle-class neighborhood surrounded by well-kept homes. The school serves a predominantly white, Catholic population. The enrollment has been steadily declining, and the school now serves a total of 253 students, kindergarten through eighth grade. In an effort to bolster enrollment, a preschool was scheduled to open in February.

The responsibilities of the principalship were not reviewed with Ann prior to her taking the position (sub-question #1). No job description was provided until well after the school year began. It was in September that Ann received the Principal’s Handbook from the diocese that contained a complete job description (see Appendix E for job description from diocesan Principal’s Handbook). According to Ann, when she was hired, “They asked me to have discipline and be a Catholic.”
During the course of the school year, Ann identified a number of responsibilities that she learned were a part of the position including curriculum development, public relations, and fund-raising. When asked to define her primary responsibilities, Ann stated, “Safety of the kids. And to make sure that the school runs smoothly. That my professional people are teaching to the curriculum and they’re meeting all the needs of the students. I guess my number one goal is to provide a good, Catholic education for all kids who come here. Some kids you can’t serve. But that’s O.K.”

In her first interview early in the school year, Ann did not view Catholic school education as substantially different than education in the public school setting. According to Ann, “I don’t see why Catholic schools need to be different than the public. You know, we expect people to demonstrate their Catholic faith in a positive manner here. But still, there’s academics and the curriculum. I think it’s basically all the same.”

In her last interview of the school year, Ann’s position seemed to change. According to Ann, “I think, once being in the public system and the parochial system, they’re two different worlds.” When asked to explain the differences, Ann said, “Number one, I think the Christ-centeredness. And I think there’s excellent teachers in the public school, don’t get me wrong, but I think their hands are tied.”

Ann felt there were a number of other benefits in working in a Catholic school versus a public school setting. According to Ann, “I can’t imagine going to work and not be able to mention God, or to freely talk about, you know, wish God’s blessing to someone, or let’s pray about that.” She continued, “My husband said, ‘Would you consider looking at a public school?’ And I said, ‘No.’ There’s something about, no
matter how bad your week is, how you feel in the sense of God is just awesome. I can’t see myself in a public school.”

Ann felt that her preparation for the role of Catholic school administrator came from her life experiences. As she explained, “I feel I was prepared because of my own faith. And because I went to elementary school, I was a product of Catholic school. My mom and dad were a mixed marriage, but my mom was very active in the church. She served as the housekeeper for the priests for several years. And God has always been a big part of my life.” According to Ann, “I think I have a lot of faith in God . . . and I think, spiritually, I have the ability to help people if they would allow me to.” Ann also said, “I really believe that God puts you some place for a reason. And what reason I was put here, I have no idea.”

Ann felt as though her university coursework prepared her well for her secular responsibilities as principal (sub-question #2). According to Ann, “[The university] prepared me very well for the responsibilities that I have in the position that I have. Every area of school business was covered in at least one of my classes if not more.” She was especially grateful for what she had learned concerning working with formal and informal groups. She wished she would have taken a course that was available in private school administration. She felt best prepared for handling student discipline, but acknowledged that her experiences as a lead teacher, a jailer, a parent, and a foster parent --- what she defined as “life experiences, just working with people” --- may have prepared her best for that responsibility.
Although Ann felt fairly well prepared for the overall administration of a school, she did, however, feel that her situation was somewhat unique given the resignation of her predecessor and her hiring just prior to the start of the school year. As she put it, “I don’t feel my first year as a principal was a ‘normal’ year for a first-year principal.” When asked if anything would have better prepared her for her role or what she wished she would have known before she began, Ann replied, “I think, probably, if I would have known the authority that the teachers have, that would have helped me a lot.” She later acknowledged, “I knew informal groups could cause problems, but never thought this many.”

There were a number of challenges that Ann faced in her role as principal (sub-question #3). During the course of the year, she briefly spoke of some discipline issues, the declining enrollment, the difficulties associated with beginning the new preschool, and simply the challenge of “providing a Christian atmosphere for the students.”

The fiscal responsibilities of her job seemed to provide a bit more of a challenge. According to Ann, the high turnover rate of faculty members could be attributed to the fact that, “We’re the lowest paying Catholic school.” In addition, Ann found herself soliciting funds from donors in order to purchase items for the school. As Ann put it, “We’re always looking for ways to make money.” And she took much of the responsibility on herself since, “People give when they know exactly where it’s going.” She had been fairly successful in her efforts, funding new blinds for the office and paint for the school. And according to Ann, “We need to get white erase boards in every classroom instead of the chalk.”
Ann’s unique situation in following her particular predecessors caused her an unanticipated challenge. To begin, she was the first “lay” principal in the history of the school. According to Ann, “To follow the footsteps of religious is difficult. Also, the unexplained resignation of the last principal was a difficult issue to overcome and, in Ann’s estimation, was the source of other difficulties. As Ann explained:

I’m not really aware of what happened here, but I know it wasn’t good. I knew some of the things. But because there was no closure with the last principal here, that’s where the problem lies. We as human beings need to put closure on things. And when someone else comes in and takes over a responsibility that has no closure, our human nature tells us to resist.

It was, without question, this “resistance” and her relationship with the teaching staff that provided Ann with the greatest challenge throughout the entire year. In every journal response and in every interview, Ann focused the majority of her comments on her problems with the staff. In October Ann said, “The main challenge that I am facing at this moment is to bring together the entire staff and to help them deal with the past in a positive manner.” In January, Ann said, “They have done it their own way for so long, that they don’t want to follow rules and they don’t approve of the way I discipline.” She went on to say:

I know that I can not continue to work with a staff who constantly works against you. If you say we need to do this or that, they either refuse or question the situation to the max. It is a difficult school as far as staff, and I feel bad that they
have taken so much of my time on petty issues that it does not allow me to give necessary guidance to other staff members.

In March, Ann said, “There have been several challenges that I have faced. I came into a difficult situation and I was not accepted by some teachers and have not been the entire year.” She went on to say, “I have more discipline problems with teachers then I ever have with the kids.” Finally in May, Ann said, “My primary responsibilities this past year were with staff and dealing with unprofessional, un-Christian attitudes. That took a vast majority of my time.” She concluded the year by saying, “It was a tough year. Spiritually number one and professionally. I had no idea people could act this way.”

Ann believed some of the difficulty with the teaching staff stemmed from, what she felt were, the low expectations put on them by the previous administration. According to Ann, “I think Sister just let them do what they wanted to do last year. They didn’t have to be held accountable for anything. Time of arrival. Time of departure. Lesson plans. Nothing like that was expected.” Ann went on to say, “I don’t ask for that much from them. I ask that they do lesson plans. I go around and check and they don’t have them. How can you teach kids without a plan? We have an obligation. People didn’t have any lesson plans. ‘I have too many papers.’ That was their response. I can’t have people like that in charge of my kids.”

Ann found that the staff was very resistant to any kind of change when she attempted to revise some policies and practices. According to Ann, their response was, “We’ve done it this way for a hundred years, now why do we need to change it now?”

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
As Ann said, "I truly understand their feelings. But, I also know as a professional, we’re taught those duties are assigned to me, no questions asked."

Things finally deteriorated to such a point that Ann brought in mediators from a local counseling center to “deal with baggage from last year and trying to come to a happy medium with the staff.” Ann felt compelled to take that somewhat drastic step, “To get our staff on track. That’s the kind of help I need. You know, I’ve heard of informal groups. I wrote a paper on informal groups and I know what that is. And I know the strategies you use to transfer informal groups . . . but we just need to put out the fire.”

After a number of sessions with the mediator, Ann acknowledged her efforts did little, if any, good and she resigned herself to that fact. As she said, “We have one more visit left. We aren’t a counseling center. We are a school. We’re here for the kids. We’re here for the kids to have a first rate education. We’re not in the counseling business. So if they [the staff] need counseling other than this, let them go outside of it.”

When asked if more preparation in the area of conflict management would have better prepared her to handle the difficult situation with the staff, Ann responded:

No, because I was employed in a jail for three and a half years and worked with all types of people. And they’re disrespectful. Usually those that are incarcerated are. I was surprised at the Jekyll and Hydes. I think it was just something that I had to learn. You know, the [experienced teachers] I thought would help me when I was first hired on --- I knew they didn’t like me, but you’re supposed to
pull in different expertise and let them co-manage. And to find out that that did not work, I learned a big lesson from that.

The end result was that some of the teaching staff resigned at the end of the year and Ann made a decision to terminate two or three. According to Ann, “I am concerned about letting teachers go because it’s going to have a ripple effect on the faculty. But, I also know that we have to do what’s best for these kids.”

In every journal response, Ann acknowledged that the difficulties she experienced with the staff came as a surprise to her. In October, Ann said, “The thing that surprised me the most is the disrespect that some teachers have for authority.” In January she said, “My biggest surprise has been the lack of respect for Father and myself.” In March, Ann admitted to being most surprised by, “the attitude and negative cooperation of the staff.” And in May, Ann said, “The way some Christians respond to authority surprised me the most.”

However, during interviews at both the beginning of the year and then toward the end, Ann admitted that her own reaction to staff difficulties surprised her a great deal. In her estimation, she remained “calm” and “tolerant”. This surprised Ann since, as she explained, “I like to be right.”

Although the challenges Ann faced throughout the year were significant, she was able to clearly identify some positive aspects to her role as principal. First, Ann stated that her most positive experiences centered on her relationship with the students. According to Ann, “If you’re really having a bad day, that’s all you have to do is go into the kindergarten. You know, and there’s some days I do a daily sweep, two times a day,
and just stop and look into the classrooms and see that they’re doing.” Ann was most pleased about the personal and academic growth she witnessed in the students and she stated, “The kids are good. They’re good kids. Some started out at the beginning of the year thinking they were going to get by with some things and it ended quickly. I seldom have kids in here.”

Ann also felt her relationship with the parents was very positive. According to Ann, “I think I’m very well liked. I think they feel they can come and talk to me. Of course, you know, there are always some that don’t feel that they can. But I do have an open-door policy. You know the parents are always welcome . . . I think they feel that I can be trusted. And they do have confidence in me.” From Ann’s perspective, “They’re very appreciative. They appreciate what’s going on. They knew we needed a change here, and they wanted a change.”

Ann felt that the “Home-and-School Association” was especially supportive as demonstrated by their volunteerism and generosity in raising funds for the school. When describing a recent school project, Ann said, “People have been so giving and so loving. We had forty-some people here Saturday. They cleaned every nook and cranny of this building. I mean, people are just so supportive.”

Even though her dealings with the teachers were very difficult most of the time, Ann found some positive aspects to those relationships as well. According to Ann, “I have some staff that are grateful that I’m here. They have been very positive and I get flowers.” She continued, “I’ve always felt welcomed here, though. Even though there’s that division. I can talk to those teachers on a one-to-one basis. It’s just in a group they
get carried away. So, that tells me that there's a lot of good in them. They just get
captured up in the moment and I have to realize that.”

Ann also felt very positive about the progress the school had made during the
course of the year. As she stated, “There's a lot of good improvements going on
academically and the physical plant. . . . So, we're moving along.”

As the school year progressed, Ann had difficulty clearly articulating specific
“needs” she experienced in her role as principal (sub-question #4). Her responses tended
to focus primarily on her relationships with others. In responding to a journal question
addressing this issue in October, Ann said, “At this point in my career, in this position, I
need to have positive feedback from my mentor, parish priest, and parents --- a pat on the
back!” In January, Ann said, “My needs at this point are to hire a staff for next year who
want to work as a team.” In March, Ann admitted, “My needs at this point are just to
finish the school year on a positive note.” And finally in May, Ann said, “I feel a
beginning Catholic school principal needs the support of staff, parents, students,
parishioners, and especially the pastor to be successful.”

It was, in fact, in her relationship with her pastor that Ann felt the most support
and assistance (sub-question #5). According to Ann, “I respect him and he respects me.
And we have a lot of the same thoughts and ideas which surprised me. . . . We know that
what we talk about is private.” She went on to say:

Father is wonderful. . . . He's a very important part of this church community and
that's why, if we can't work together, it's not going to work. Because we both
have to be, as we always say, “on the same page”. But I'm surprised, you know,
him being a Catholic priest and myself as a married woman, how our morals and values are so much alike. And I don’t think sometimes that happens. You know, I’ve heard people say they don’t get along with their priest. But he’s very helpful, very encouraging. Calls me at home to make sure I’m O.K. if things are rough.

Ann found other sources of support from her family, some of the parents, a few of the teachers, and “two of the best secretaries in the world.” Ann also received support from the small group of nuns who lived across the street. As Ann explained, “The sisters over here have been awesome. Even though they’re basically out of education, they still try.”

Ann considered her relationship with the school board to be positive and supportive since, “They feel that they are an advisory board which is really nice.” She continued, “The decisions that are made are made by Father and I, basically. So we get along really well.”

The Catholic Schools Office played a more significant role in supporting Ann. As she said, “[The superintendent] has been very supportive. She knows the situation. She’s been very supportive.” She also said, “Every time I’ve asked [the superintendent] to come out and be a part of something, she’s here.”

Interestingly, Ann was assigned a mentor by the parish when she was hired. According to Ann, “When they interviewed me they just told me that she would be my mentor.” That relationship seemed to help Ann a great deal. As Ann said, “I have a mentor who is awesome. She has helped me so much . . . She’s spent a lot of time with me.”
Ann also took advantage of opportunities to network with other administrators for advice and support. As Ann explained, “I think when you get in the capacity as a superintendent or principal, there’s a lot of help out there but you have to reach out to it. And I’m not afraid to call those people and say, ‘This is what’s going on. Did I make the right decision?’”

Finally, Ann acknowledged that she received both support and comfort from her faith. Ann said, “At the beginning of the year, when it was really, really bad, I went home and found I needed to vent. Then after a while, I could see it was wearing on my husband and I decided, no. So, Blessed Mother has helped me a lot. She went on to explain, “If things get tough go over to church. I mean, the church is always there. God is always there.”

When asked what advice Ann could offer new Catholic school principals just coming into the profession, Ann laughed when she suggested, “Don’t take a job a week before school starts!” She did, however, have several other suggestions. According to Ann:

When you’re broached with a question that you don’t know for sure how you’re going to answer it, just don’t give an answer to satisfy people. Say, “I need to think about that awhile.” Know your staff really well. Know who you can trust and who you can’t trust. Those informal groups can rip you apart. But also, I think the best advice is, what happens today at school, try not to take it home and don’t bring it back tomorrow.

It was with an optimistic outlook that Ann came to the end of the school year.
her final journal response in May, Ann said, “It has been a very trying year, and by the grace of God and the wonderful people He put into my life this past year, I feel successful, and I’m looking forward to continuing my profession as a Catholic school administrator.”
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

"'My dear,' he said, 'we have not yet come to the end of our trials. There lies before me still a great and hazardous adventure, which I must see through to the very end however far that end may be.'"

(Odysseus in Homer’s Odyssey)

As emphasis has been placed on efforts to find strategies for preparing school leaders, there is a corresponding awareness that the entire scope of the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal has yet to be identified, and the effectiveness of current efforts to provide assistance for these school leaders is uncertain. Therefore, this multi-case study sought to answer the following “grand tour” (Creswell, 1998) question: What are the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

This qualitative study employed an “emergent design” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which multiple sources of data were gathered (job descriptions, interviews, journal responses) from participants. Through the data collection, a detailed description of each case emerged and an analysis of themes or issues and interpretations or assertions about each case was made (Stake, 1995). The data collection process and the comparison of emerging categories was simultaneous and ongoing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For the purpose of this study, selection for participation was voluntary and was drawn from a single, Midwestern, Catholic diocese. The six participants were determined on the basis of their position as “beginning Catholic school principal” for the 2002-2003 academic year. No distinctions were made on the basis of race, age, or
gender. Both elementary and secondary school principals were included from both rural and urban settings. Those designated as “lead teachers” were not included in this study.

Relevant documents, namely job descriptions, were collected from all participants, if available, at the onset of the study. Semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with all participants three times during the course of the academic year. The same participants were asked to reflect upon and respond to guided journal questions four times during the academic year.

As a result of the data collection and analysis process, a clear picture of the participants and their specific situation surfaced. In a final interpretive phase, “lessons learned” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were identified from these cases and, combined, formulate a response to the specific sub-questions addressed in this study (see Appendix H for cross-case analysis guide).

The Participants and Their Jobs

The six participants in this study came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Their ages ranged from 27-48. All were married. Four had children. One was expecting his first child. Two were raised in this particular diocese. The others came from various places in the Midwest. Five of the participants were Catholic; one was not. Three had, at some point, attended a Catholic school; three had not. Two received their university training at private, Catholic institutions.

All of the participants began their educational careers as teachers; one for as little as four years, two for as many as eleven. Four of the participants had some experience teaching in a Catholic school. Five had completed their administrative degrees; one
currently had a provisional certificate. Three of the participants were continuing to take
classes.

The participants moved from classroom teaching to administration for similar
reasons. All viewed themselves as very successful, “good” teachers, yet most were
“ready for a change.” All of the participants were encouraged and supported in their
decision by family members, college professors, or other administrators. Some of the
participants described their move into administration as generally unintended and rather,
“the result of divine intervention” or the fulfillment of “God’s plan.”

The job situation in which the participants found themselves was equally diverse.
Two of the schools served grades K-8; one was K-12; one was 1-12; one was 4-8; one
was 9-12. Two of the schools were located in the rural area; two were defined as “inner-
city” with one of these serving an “all-boys” population; one was a “middle-class
neighborhood school”; one was a private girls’ school. Student enrollments ranged from
67-309. Four of the schools served a predominantly white, Catholic population, while
two were predominantly black and non-Catholic. The faculty and support staff varied in
number and all but one of the participants had a full-time secretary who assisted them
with administrative duties.

All of the participants were “beginning” school principals. Each was the principal
of a “Catholic” school. All worked for, and with, a pastor or president identified as the
“head of school”; five with a pastor, one with a lay president. All were part of the same
diocese under the direction of the same central office with the same superintendent. All
freely volunteered to participate in this study and, as a result, provided job descriptions, interviews and journal responses during their first-year on the job.

Sub-Question #1

What are the assigned and unassigned responsibilities of the beginning Catholic school principal?

The assigned responsibilities of the Catholic school principal were clearly outlined in a job description provided by the central office. However, this job description was reviewed with only one of the participants (David) prior to accepting the position. The others received a copy of the job description well after the school year began. Two of the participants (Brad, Linda) were provided with a different job description specifically developed by the head of school and/or their boards. These job descriptions were reviewed with each of these two participants prior to accepting the position. For three of the participants (Ted, Michael, Ann), a job description was never provided or reviewed prior to beginning their role as principal.

The assigned responsibilities of the principal, as articulated in the various job descriptions, fell under the broad categories of curriculum development, staff evaluation and supervision, student enrollment and discipline, administrative management and record-keeping, public relations, and finances. As described by the participants in the study, these responsibilities were “numerous and varied”, were both “anticipated and unanticipated”, and were “overwhelming and time-consuming.” Most of the participants made references to the “constant interruptions” they experienced, their inability to get everything done, and their attempts to “keep their head above water.” All of the
participants, at one point or another, described their primary responsibility as “putting out little fires.”

All of the job descriptions included the unique responsibilities of the “Catholic school” principal, which fell under such general headings as “Spiritual Development” and “Facilitation of Christian Uniqueness.” All of the participants felt this aspect of their role was extremely important and they took this responsibility very seriously. Many expressed the opinion that the expectations placed on the Catholic school administrator were much greater than those in public education since they were responsible for the spiritual development of the students, the staff, and the school. Most viewed themselves as the “spiritual leader” of the school. Michael, who was non-Catholic, saw himself as a “role model” more than a spiritual leader. However, he admitted that the spiritual dimension was a very important, “foundational”, aspect of the school. Ann, who initially felt that public and Catholic education were very similar, changed her opinion as the school year progressed and ultimately concluded they are “two different worlds.”

Participant responses to this sub-question support previous research that indicates many beginning principals receive job descriptions that are unclear and offer little direction about specific expectations held by the district (Hart & Brederson, 1996). Others may receive no job description but rather a list of rules and regulations or a school calendar of activities (Hart & Brederson, 1996). Also, Bryk, Lee, & Holland (1993), Carr (2000), Ristau (1998), and Wallace (1998) discuss at length the considerable expertise expected of Catholic school principals in a variety of areas including spiritual leadership.
Sub-Question #2

How well prepared does the beginning Catholic school principal perceive himself/herself for the responsibilities of the job?

Generally speaking, the participants felt inadequately prepared for some, if not all, aspects of the job. Three of the participants (David, Ted, Michael) expressed dissatisfaction with their university coursework. All three attended a public university and, as a result, received no training for the role of “Catholic school” administrator. Ted specifically stated he felt inadequate in this area and did not really understand this role. He felt he lacked both the preparation and the time to do a good job. Michael did not really view himself as a “Catholic school” administrator, but said he “tried.” And David said his role of spiritual leader, “came naturally as opposed to being learned,” however he felt that he was not at all prepared for the difficulty of this responsibility.

In addition, Michael specifically stated he felt ill-prepared for the day-to-day operations of the school and felt his own education provided educational theories, but no practical applications. Ted acknowledged that the practicum that was part of his university preparation involved a good deal of student supervision, but did little to prepare him for the realities of the job.

On the other hand, Ann felt her university coursework prepared her fairly well for the secular aspects of the job. She felt prepared to handle student discipline, and she learned much about working with formal and informal groups. She acknowledged, however, that she was best prepared for her role as Catholic school administrator by her
own life experiences and her faith, and she expressed a desire for a formal class in private school administration.

Likewise, Linda and Brad felt that their coursework, completed at a private, Catholic university, prepared them fairly well for the role of Catholic school administrator although Linda “would have liked more.” Linda specifically felt prepared for her workings with others in the areas of management, supervision, conflict resolution, and collaboration. Brad learned much from his coursework, but admitted that his university training lacked the “experiential component” that would have enhanced his preparation.

All participants, in fact, stated time and time again, that experience is the best preparation for the job and expressed a desire for more real-life experiences incorporated into their university training program. Two of the participants (Ted, Brad) specifically suggested a “job-shadowing” experience. Linda, Michael, and Ann believed the practical experiences they had, prior to assuming the principalship, best prepared them for the role. David acknowledged that he simply had to “learn on the job.” For these participants, lack of experience often left them feeling “ill-prepared”, “over-whelmed”, and “inadequate”, and added to the multiple challenges they faced in their role.

Participant responses to this sub-question support a number of studies that confirm dissatisfaction with some university principal preparation programs (Alvy, 1983; Bordeaux, 1994; Daresh & Playko, 1993; Goldman & Kempner, 1988; Little, 1998; Marinin, 1989; Niece, 1993; Spradling, 1988; Weindling, 1990; Word, 1995). In addition, participants who believed they had inadequate preparation for the role of
Catholic school administrator confirm Wallace’s (1998) findings in which 70% of surveyed lay Catholic school principals indicated they had no formal training preparing them to be faith leaders. Research also suggests a number of technical problems experienced by beginning principals due to inadequate training (Elsberry & Bishop, 1996).

The participants’ acknowledgment of the importance of experience in the learning process supports Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, and the desire for more real-life applications in administrator training programs is also supported in related studies (Brock & Grady, 1996; Daresh & Playko, 1992).

Sub-Question #3

What are the job-related challenges of the beginning Catholic school principal?

The number of responsibilities, the pace of the job, and the time-commitment involved constitute some of the greatest challenges and surprises experienced by the participants in this study. Time and time again, participants referred to their inability to “keep up”, “get things done”, “get out of the office”, “balance the responsibilities”, and “prioritize and plan.” Due to the extent of their responsibilities, the challenges of time management, and the constant interruptions they faced each day, many felt ineffective as “instructional leaders.” As David explained, there exists a conflict between, “time spent on unanticipated responsibilities and those things that are important.” As he said, “Primary responsibilities and what takes most time, does not match.”

What took most time was “putting out little fires” involving student discipline, student problems, and parent complaints. A great deal of time was also spent on
managing finances, soliciting funds, and recruiting and enrolling new students. In some cases, much time was spent on clerical duties, state reports, and maintaining school facilities and grounds.

The challenges faced by each of the participants were, in large part, determined by the unique set of circumstances in which they found themselves. In some cases, race relations became an issue (Brad, Michael). In one case, the pastor was perceived to be too involved at times in the day-to-day operations of the school (David), while in another, the pastor was hardly present (Ted). In one case, a family member was also a faculty member (David). In another case, the principal’s child was a current student (Linda). In one case, the principal was the fourth principal in five years (Ted). In another case, the principal followed a beloved, long-time administrator (Michael). And in still another, the principal was the first “lay” principal in the history of the school (Ann).

However, the greatest challenge, by far, faced by all of the participants in this study involved staff relations. Each faced his or her own hardships with the staff and chose to respond to the challenge in different ways.

David felt little, if any, support from the staff. He felt they exhibited a “lack of competence and professionalism.” According to David they had a “poor attitude”, “low morale”, and “did not adequately model the faith for students.” Teacher supervision and evaluation was a challenge for David since he found it difficult to constructively criticize others. He was looking forward to hiring new staff that he hoped would appreciate his leadership style and would share his vision for the school.
Due to the high turnover rate of previous administrators, Ted felt that the staff was unsure of his commitment to the school and were, in some ways, “waiting him out.” He found it difficult to earn their trust and to accept the fact that he was no longer “one of them.” He witnessed some unprofessional behaviors but had a difficult time with staff supervision and evaluation. According to Ted, he needed “to improve on conflict management.”

Brad felt that the faculty caused many of the discipline problems with students and that the unprofessional behavior of some of the staff was the source of many parent complaints. Still, he too, had difficulty providing the staff with constructive criticism and felt his “youth and inexperience made it difficult to work with veteran teachers.”

Michael also felt that his age and inexperience presented some challenges in working with veteran teachers. He felt it was “hard to gain their respect and support” and it was “hard to implement change.” He also felt it was the staff that contributed to problems with student discipline since he felt many situations could have easily been handled by the teacher as opposed to involving the principal. He indicated that he was not surprised by the hardships he faced with the faculty since he “knew it would be hard and lonely.”

Linda’s move from classroom teacher to principal, within the same school, caused some unanticipated tensions. Teacher supervision and evaluation of former teaching colleagues presented a unique challenge and “caused some strain.” Some of the faculty members were critical of Linda, and her personal friendships changed as a result.
Perhaps it was Ann who experienced the most difficulty with the staff who she defined at various points as “unprofessional”, “unaccountable”, “un-Christian”, and “disrespectful.” She believed they were “working against her”, had “low morale”, and were “completely resistant to change.” As a result, she unsuccessfully brought in professional mediators to assist with conflict resolution and, ultimately, was forced to let some teachers go while others resigned.

Participant responses to sub-question #3 reflecting frustration with the quantity and variety of responsibilities as well as dissatisfaction with their instructional leadership support previous research (Daresh & Playko, 1993; Elsberry & Bishop, 1996). Previous research also suggests common difficulties experienced with organization and time management (Spradling, 1988; Elsberry & Bishop, 1996). Participant difficulties attributed to staff relations reflect, in large part, the process described in Louis’ (1980) stages of organizational entry and socialization defined by change, contrast, surprise, and sense-making.

Sub-Question #4

What are the job-related needs of the beginning Catholic school principal?

It was difficult for the participants to clearly articulate concrete needs that would enable them to better perform their job. One participant (David) identified the need for more technical skills and knowledge in the areas of technology and instructional strategies. He also expressed a need for more money in order to provide greater opportunities for the students and faculty. Another participant (Ted) acknowledged that he simply needed better management skills in working with faculty and staff.
Three areas surfaced as a job-related “need” for all participants. First, participants expressed a need for more time – time for work and time for family. Given the reality of the situation, participants recognized that better organizational skills or the ability to prioritize better may, in fact, help this situation.

Second, participants clearly expressed a desire for more experience. Acknowledging that there may be few experiences that duplicate the realities of the job, participants felt that more direct experiences should be integrated into university training programs. They also believed that simply experiencing the first year on the job would make the following year much easier.

Finally, all participants expressed a need for support, assistance, guidance, direction, and, in some cases, “a pat on the back.” Such support could take the form of advice and counsel, coping strategies, suggestions and constructive criticism, or positive feedback. In whatever form, and from whatever direction, participants expressed a need for direct input, assistance, and support for their job performance.

The expressed desire of these participants for assistance and feedback concerning the extent to which they are performing jobs effectively supports the findings of previous research in this area (Bohlman & Deal, 1993; Brock & Grady, 1996; Daresh, 1990; Grover, 1994).

Sub-Question #5

How does the beginning Catholic school principal meet the needs created by the responsibilities and challenges inherent in his/her position?
The need for more time and experience could not really be adequately addressed by the participants in this study. However, all found sources of assistance and support in a number of places. Throughout the year, participants turned to college professors, assistant principals or deans, colleagues in university classes, some faculty members, previous administrators, some parents, and school board members for advice and counsel. In addition, there were several sources of support that the participants shared in common.

First, family members were extremely helpful to all of the participants in providing positive feedback, encouragement, and advice. Some of the participants were somewhat guarded in the involvement of family members for fear of burdening them with problems or taking the job home.

In addition, all of the participants commented on the support and assistance made available by the central school office. Although the extent of the interactions varied, all believed that assistance was readily available from the superintendent and her assistants if requested.

School secretaries were viewed by all as essential partners in school administration. The five participants who worked with a secretary indicated that they “manage everything”, “know everything”, “understand the operations of the school”, and are “the best in the world.” Brad was the only participant who did not have a fulltime secretary employed by the school, and rather worked with parent volunteers. He discussed his desire for a secretary many times throughout the year and indicated that he had become responsible for answering the phones and much of the clerical work since oftentimes there was no one in the office to fulfill that responsibility.
For the five participants whose pastor/president played an active role in the school, that relationship was identified as extremely positive and supportive. Those participants shared a philosophy and vision with the head of school, felt part of a team, and developed a sense of mutual respect and trust. Participants could turn to the head of school for advice and as a “sounding board”, however, as Linda admitted, she was “careful not to share too many problems for fear of appearing incompetent.”

That fear of appearing incompetent kept many of the participants from seeking assistance from colleagues in the profession and mentors assigned by their parishes. Although acknowledging that both of these provided the greatest source of help and support, most of the participants admitted feeling uncomfortable asking for help, did not want to appear “inept”, and also did not want to burden others who had their own set of problems with which to contend. As Ann said, “There’s a lot of help, but you have to ask for it.”

At times, then, all of the participants relied on their own faith in God to get them through difficult times. Linda admitted her faith “had a calming effect.” And Brad felt he had “grown spiritually” as a result of his job.

Finally, two of the participants specifically acknowledged that participation in this study provided a great deal of assistance. Ted admitted that, at times, he felt “pretty isolated”, and that this study “gave him somebody to talk to.” Likewise, Brad said this study gave him “time for reflection” and “someone to listen.”

Participant responses to sub-question #5 concerning the effectiveness of networking with colleagues and establishing relationships with mentors support much
research in this area (Christy, 1993; Crow & Mathews, 1998; Daresh & Playko, 1997; Niece, 1993). There is, however, little available research on the significance of other relationships in the support and assistance of beginning Catholic school principals.

Positive Aspects and Advice

Given the challenges of their position, the participants in this study were still able to clearly articulate many positive aspects to their job. First, all of the participants felt their relationship with the students was very positive. They enjoyed working with them, felt comfortable in their relationship, and very much enjoyed watching them grow both personally and academically.

In addition, all of the participants felt that parents had, for the most part, been supportive and appreciative. They discussed being a part of a “caring” community that had “a vested interest” in the school and the students, and were often “willing to help”. Many of the principals had received positive feedback from parents and they felt as though they were well-liked.

Other relationships the principals experienced were also positive in many ways. Most relationships with the pastor or the head of school were viewed as positive and supportive. Although working with the staff could be extremely difficult, many of the relationships that developed with certain staff members were viewed as quite good. And school boards provided sound advice and were very accepting of change.

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the job identified by participants was the ability to implement change. All of the participants discussed some positive improvements they were able to initiate and the sense of “empowerment” they felt as
school leaders. As a result, the participants felt a great sense of fulfillment in their work and, as David expressed, “peace and joy at night.”

In addressing those considering going into the profession, all of the participants had strong words of advice. David suggested, “Keep your faith” and, “Don’t let the ‘little fires’ overwhelm you!” Ted reminded novice administrators, “You don’t have to be an expert in everything.” “Get a good support system.” And remember, “You can’t make everyone happy.” Brad said, “Keep an open mind” and, “Get away from your desk!” Linda advised, “Understand the mission of the school”, “Learn to manage people”, “Share burdens with colleagues”, and “Keep the job in perspective so you have a life!” Michael simply suggested, “Be willing to work hard”, and echoed Ted’s sentiments when he said, “You’re not going to please everyone.” Finally, Ann suggested, “Take time to think about answers to questions”, “Know your staff”, “Don’t take problems home with you”, and “Don’t take a job at the last minute!”

Interestingly, all of the participants ended the school year with a sense of optimism and no regrets. All planned to return to their positions and were looking forward to a new opportunity to lead.

Recommendations

This study is intended to contribute to the general knowledge base concerning the responsibilities, challenges and needs of the beginning Catholic school principal. In addition, the information gained from this study supports the following recommendations to better prepare and assist beginning Catholic school principals:
University principal preparation programs should incorporate additional training in areas specifically addressing beginning principal needs such as organization, time management, conflict management, and teacher supervision and evaluation. Additional coursework should be provided in private and Catholic school administration and include areas such as public relations, fund-raising, and spiritual leadership. Most importantly, preparation programs should include more “real-life” experiences or a job-shadowing component.

The central office of Catholic school districts/dioceses should develop and support an internship program to identify and prepare future Catholic school principals. The central office should provide additional training to beginning Catholic school principals in the area of spiritual leadership. Training should also be provided to pastors and presidents in defining their role in school management and assisting and supporting school principals. The central office of Catholic schools districts/dioceses should initiate a mentor program to provide beginning Catholic school principals with continuing assistance and support. Finally, the central office should provide greater opportunities for networking with colleagues in the profession.

Pastors and presidents in the role of “head of school” should develop a comprehensive job description for the Catholic school principal that clearly defines the role. Job descriptions should be reviewed and discussed with beginning principals prior to assuming the position. Pastors and presidents should provide the principal with adequate support staff so the principal may focus on primary responsibilities. Pastors
and presidents should develop a collaborative relationship with the principal and provide continuous assistance and support, as well as positive feedback.

- Beginning Catholic school principals must do whatever they can to fully understand and prepare for their role. They must identify and accept their strengths and limitations. They must be able to recognize available sources of support and be willing to seek assistance when needed. Most importantly, beginning Catholic school principals must engage in what Sergiovanni (1995) identifies as “reflective practice.” They must take the time to think, to analyze, to self-assess, and to develop goals for the future.

**Implications for Further Research**

Generalizability of the findings is not the intent of this multi-case study. Rather, this final qualitative project has resulted in the construction of a theoretical perspective based on the experiences of these participants. However, it is suggested that further research be conducted in the following areas and that the results of this research may add to the validity of the findings of this study and to the general knowledge base of this subject. It is suggested that additional research investigate:

- The effectiveness of current university principal preparation programs and internships.
- The impact of both personal and professional relationships on the job performance and job satisfaction of beginning principals.
- The similarities and differences in the responsibilities, challenges, and needs of beginning public and Catholic school principals.
Conclusion

In the conclusion to Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Odysseus returns from his tumultuous journey intent on avenging himself on his enemies. It is Athene, daughter of Zeus, who disguises herself as Odysseus’ friend, “Mentor”, and steps in to save the day. She advises Odysseus to lay down his arms and bring the civil strife to an end. Odysseus obeys her, “with a happy heart”, and thus Athene, disguised as “Mentor”, surprisingly “established peace between the two contending forces.”

Perhaps one of the greatest surprises and discoveries at the conclusion of this study was the fact that six “stories”, set in six different places, with six different main characters should, in so many ways, tell a similar tale and reflect such similar experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Equally surprising was the fact that each of these stories concludes with a sense of optimism --- a hope for a future better than the past and a determination, a will, to continue the journey.

Today, three years after embarking on their adventure, David, Linda, and Michael have concluded another year as principal in the same school and look forward, once again, to next year. At the end of his third year, Ted decided to make a change and will become the principal of a new school in the fall. Likewise, Brad opted for a change at the end of his second year and became the principal of his old elementary school. He will begin his second year there in the fall. Ann resigned her position as principal in February of her third year following a number of personal and professional difficulties.

Much like Homer’s tale of Odysseus, it appears that the beginning Catholic school principal is sometimes left to wander aimlessly and alone in search of safe passage
through potentially dangerous obstacles. Their ability and desire to continue may be largely influenced by a number of factors. Whether assisted through their journey by a friend or “mentor”, surviving by a matter of personal will, or simply choosing a different path to travel, the story of the beginning Catholic school principal continues and “happily ever after” remains a shared, yet elusive, goal.
References


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Appendix A:

IRB Authorization Letter

August 22, 2002

dorothy Ostrowski

IRB#: 282-02-EX

Title of Protocol: Private Odyssey: Responsibilities, Challenges, and Needs of the Beginning Catholic School Principal

Dear Ms. Ostrowski:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2 and 4. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/DO

Service Building 3000 / 987830 Nebraska Medical Center / Omaha, NE 68198-7630 / 402-559-6483 / FAX: 402-559-3300
Email: irbora@umc.edu / http://www.unmc.edu/IRB

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Appendix B:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are your primary responsibilities?
2. What has taken most of your time?
3. What do you believe are your most important responsibilities?
4. For what responsibilities do you feel most prepared?
5. For what responsibilities do you feel least prepared?
6. What have been some of the most positive experiences you've had as principal?
7. What are the greatest challenges you have faced?
8. What has surprised you most about the job?
9. Has anything surprised you about yourself?
10. How would you describe your relationship with the Catholic School Office?
11. How would you describe your relationship with your pastor/president?
12. How would you describe your relationship with teachers in your building?
13. How would you describe your relationship with the staff?
14. How would you describe your relationship with the students?
15. How would you describe your relationship with the parents?
16. How would you describe your relationship with community members?
17. What are your needs?
18. How often do you feel you need help?
19. How often do you need advice?
20. Where or to whom do you turn to for help?
21. Where do you turn for advice?
22. Where do you turn for support?
23. How do you believe others perceive you as a principal?
24. What lessons have you learned so far?
25. What advice would you give a beginning Catholic school principal?
26. Anything else?
Appendix C:

Guided Journal Questions

Reflect on your experiences as a beginning Catholic school principal and record your impressions on these pages (feel free to use the backside or to attach additional pages if needed). Include in your narrative your thoughts on the following:

1. What have been your primary responsibilities during these last couple of months? What has taken most of your time?

2. How well prepared were you for the responsibilities of your job?

3. What are the greatest challenges you have faced?

4. What has surprised you most?

5. What can you identify as your needs at this point?

6. Where or to whom do you turn for help or support?

7. Anything else you would like to include?
Appendix D:
Auditor’s Report

Letter of Attestation
for Qualitative Research Done by Dorothy Ostrowski

Dorothy Ostrowski requested that I conduct an educational audit of her qualitative dissertation entitled: *Private Odyssey: Responsibilities, Challenges, and Needs of the Beginning Catholic School Principal*. The audit began in June, 2005, with initial review of materials, and was concluded in June, 2005. The purpose of the audit was to ascertain the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

The researcher maintained and provided concrete and clear evidence of a detailed and complete audit trail. The auditor was provided with a copy of the proposal, all materials related to the proposal, IRB forms, evidence of permission for the study, participant consent forms, various stage copies of the dissertation, 18 audio tapes, transcriptions of all the tapes, reflections from the participants, available job descriptions of the participants, and detailed notes from all related research. The auditor was further provided with a comprehensive color-coded collection of cards, as well as a chart, that provided evidence of constant comparative analysis of the data by the researcher, using a variety of coding systems. This analysis was individual and cross-case.

The task of the auditor was to determine whether it was possible to follow the researcher’s trail from conception, through implementation, to conclusions; and whether those conclusions were warranted by that process.

Initial credibility was established by the adequacy of the study design. It was well done, thorough, and consistent.

Reliability was established by determining that confirmable strategies were used such that the coding was grounded in the data, the patterns were grounded in the coding, and the themes were grounded in the patterns. This confirms that the conclusions bear close relationship to the data; and establish design and procedural evidence of credibility.

I conclude that the focus of the study and the research methods described in the dissertation are in evidence through the analysis of the data provided. Trustworthiness of the study can be established. Findings are grounded in the extensive and triangulated data.

Auditor:

Mary K. Smith, Ed.D.

Westside Community Schools
### Appendix E:

**Job Description from Diocesan Principal's Handbook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL AREAS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Facilitation of Christian Uniqueness | ♦ Model Christian values based on “To Teach as Jesus Did”  
♦ Provide spiritual growth opportunities for faculty/staff and students  
♦ Give priority to the development of a strong religious education program  
♦ Review school philosophy and goals in relation to Church documents, Archdiocesan directives, etc.  
♦ Foster a positive learning/working environment |
| Instructional Leadership: Program | ♦ Fulfill all state requirements  
♦ Develop broad curriculum goals in each teaching area  
♦ Assess student needs  
♦ Provide achievement testing and ability testing as appropriate  
♦ Utilize test results to improve curriculum and instruction  
♦ Update texts and materials regularly  
♦ Supervise instruction by classroom observation, teacher conferences, review of test results, etc. |
| Instructional Leadership: Professional Staff | ♦ Interview and select new teachers for recommendation to pastor/board  
♦ Provide orientation for new teachers  
♦ Provide professional growth opportunities for all teachers  
♦ Develop and implement a teacher supervision/evaluation program  
♦ Evaluate the performance of teachers/staff subordinate administrators  
♦ Recommend renewal, non-renewal, or termination of contracts |
| Instructional Leadership: Students | ♦ Foster student responsibility for learning and behavior  
♦ Provide special educational opportunities for students  
♦ Coordinate student activities  
♦ Maintain official records for all students as required by the State and/or Archdiocesan Office and maintain the rights of privacy regarding records |
| Administrative Management | ♦ Implement Archdiocesan and local policies relative to the school  
|                           | ♦ Prepare and present a budget for the school in conjunction with the board/pastor  
|                           | ♦ Complete state, diocesan, and local reports on time  
|                           | ♦ Report as requested on special personnel and non-teaching staff  
|                           | ♦ Adhere to individual contractual stipulations |
| Public Relations          | ♦ Create and foster trust and openness among faculty/staff  
|                           | ♦ Establish and maintain open communication with the various publics  
|                           | ♦ Encourage parent/student/teacher interaction  
|                           | ♦ Collaborate with local groups in school-related programs and activities |
| Development               | ♦ Attend development workshops as needed/provided  
|                           | ♦ Attract volunteers to assist in promoting an understanding and direction of: foundation grants, endowments, alumni, major corporate gift giving, major private gifts, scholarships, estate planning, fund raising |
| Board of Education/Education Committee | ♦ Provide for professional guidance in effective boardmanship  
|                           | ♦ Provide options for good decision-making  
|                           | ♦ Cooperate with the pastor/president in preparing the agenda  
|                           | ♦ Make arrangements for the meetings  
|                           | ♦ Prepare minutes, records, mailings |
Appendix F:

Job Description from Participant #3

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

General Description

♦ With the goal of a positive, Christian impact on each employee, student, and family, the principal manages seven areas of internal school responsibility.
♦ The principal has ordinary authority over all aspects of the internal school program.
♦ The principal is a key public relations figure who represents the good name and mission of the school at all times, in every action and in each conversation.
♦ The president with the approval of the board hires the principal.
♦ The principal reports to the president who as head of the school and its chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the school’s mission and for the total operation of the school and all its programs.

Responsibilities

**Spiritual Development**

♦ Maintains the Catholic mission and characteristics of all the school programs
♦ Sees to it that daily prayer is a part of the rhythm of the school day
♦ Works at keeping a good student-staff-administration morale
♦ Makes time in the school schedule for spiritual growth opportunities for students and staff

**Academic, Co-curricular and Extracurricular Activities**

♦ Works with the president to give priority to the development of a strong religious education program which is both Catholic and ecumenical
♦ Develops and implements with the teachers the curriculum, classroom goals and other programs
♦ Updates tests and materials on a regular basis
♦ Does not forget the importance of the arts in educations and finds ways to integrate them into the school program as well as on an extracurricular basis
♦ Assesses, provides and encourages teachers to use methods and programs suited to different learning styles and individual student needs
♦ Provides special educational opportunities such as field trips and speakers
♦ Schedules himself/herself for some teaching if at all possible
♦ Administers the testing program
♦ Provides the opportunity for athletic teams and other extracurricular activities
♦ Has in place and on-going curriculum evaluation and revision process
♦ Provides the following: a school year calendar with all school-related events; an academic master schedule and assignments; co-curricular and after school programs and assignments
♦ Oversees the continual updating and ordering of books for the library
♦ Establishes and enforces academic probation/dismissal policy
♦ Works with the president to establish line budget items for the school
♦ Ensures that the environment is aesthetic and conducive to learning and human growth
♦ Provides regular in-service programs for the staff
♦ Encourages teachers to have good communications with parents
♦ Helps parents to get students in summer school

**Enrollment Management**
♦ Works with the president in the selection of students who will attend
♦ Follows the recruitment guidelines and selection procedures, reviews both each year with the president and seeks ways to attract a bigger pool of students; final selection decisions will be the responsibility of the president
♦ Assesses and provides for individual student needs
♦ Insures students their rights, including privacy of student records
♦ Conducts staffing meetings for each grade twice a year to review the academic and discipline standing of each student
♦ Makes sure that professional counseling services are available to the students and facilitates communication between counselor, teachers, and families
♦ Keeps accurate and up-to-date records
♦ Communicates with families about tardiness and absences and consistently administers the consequences when limits have been reached
♦ Keeps a waiting list of students for each grade and accurate records of each serious inquiry from parents who want their child to attend

**Discipline**
♦ Develops, implements, and evaluates a solid system of discipline which includes rewards, detentions, in school and house suspensions and expulsions
♦ Delegates the ordinary day-to-day handling of students sent out of the classroom
♦ Makes sure that the staff uses the discipline system consistently
♦ Sees to it that parents are informed about serious and/or frequent breaking of school rules
♦ Makes decisions about expulsions in consultation with the child’s teacher, informs the president before the family, and reminds the family that they have the right to appeal to the president

**Personnel**
♦ Supervises selection, assignment and professional evaluation/growth processes for teachers, paraprofessionals and all other staff members directly under the principal
♦ Forwards all personnel decisions and recommendations to the president for approval
♦ Provides a detailed orientation for each new employee
♦ Makes sure that each regular volunteer who does not work for the president is screened, welcomed, given an orientation and provided with some type of evaluation/feedback session at least once a semester
♦ Takes the time to visit each classroom informally at least once a quarter

**Communications**
Supervises the content, quality, flow, and timing of school office information

**Internal**
♦ Daily assembly
♦ Faculty handbook
♦ Regular bulletin to all personnel
♦ Weekly meeting with the president
♦ Monthly meeting with the staff

**External**
♦ Student/Parent Handbook
♦ Parent/Teacher conferences
♦ Parents Club
♦ Parent newsletter and monthly calendar
♦ Principal’s report to the board
♦ Status of tuition and breakfast/lunch payments
♦ Monthly visits to business partners

**Administrative Management & Public Relations**
♦ Maintains appropriate academic, demographic and financial record keeping systems
♦ Works with the president and the director of development to inform the community about the total school program and looks for media exposure opportunities
♦ Reviews and reports school’s compliance with federal, state, diocesan and other local laws and regulations to assure good standing and accreditation
♦ Actively seeks ways to involve more of the local community with the school and the school with the local community
♦ Helps the director of development in fund raising and manages the PTA fund
♦ Participates actively in various professional associations that keep the school updated and connected to other educational programs
♦ Keeps the necessary connections and records for the breakfast/lunch program with the public school system
♦ Keeps connected with the network of inner city middle schools which are based on a similar model
Appendix G:

Job Description from Participant #4

The Principal:
♦ Models the [school's] goals and criteria
♦ Is a member of the Administrative Team
♦ Shares with the Head of School the educational and spiritual leadership of the school by initiating long-range planning, particularly as it concerns the development of curriculum and academic innovation and evaluation
♦ Chairs the Admissions Committee
♦ Recommends the retention of teaching personnel and recommends academic and other school assignments
♦ Does initial screening and interviewing of teacher applications
♦ Promotes the professional growth of teachers, including new teachers through inservice experiences, programs for individual development, evaluation, sharing of ideas and visits to classes
♦ Follows the academic progress of the students through teachers, advisors, the counselor, and through direct contact with students and parents
♦ Works with academic departments in evaluating and planning curriculum through department meetings, visits to classes, conferences with teachers
♦ Reviews teachers’ yearly and semester course objectives and plans
♦ Plans the yearly and semester schedule of classes and examinations; arranges course registration
♦ Keeps accurate records and supervises communication with parents and other institutions
♦ Proctors entrance examinations for incoming students and recommends their acceptance to the Head of School
♦ Assists the college counselor with the standardized test program
♦ Participates in the yearly formulation of the department budgets
♦ Organizes and conducts faculty meetings
♦ Is responsible for daily accountability of teachers
♦ Responsible for administering the school in the absence of the Head of School
♦ Responsible for teacher observation and evaluation
♦ Coordinates with the counselor student academic difficulties
♦ Works with the Dean of Students in matters of student discipline
♦ Is staff member on Education Committee of Board of Trustees
♦ Hires substitutes when needed
♦ Approves field trips
♦ Represents [the school] at Archdiocesan principal meetings
♦ Attends monthly Parent Board meetings
♦ Writes a monthly column for the Parent Newsletter

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
## INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bio</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Cross-case Analysis Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DAVID</strong></td>
<td><strong>TED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 35</td>
<td>♦ Married</td>
<td>♦ Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Married</td>
<td>2 children</td>
<td>♦ Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Teacher for 11 years</td>
<td>♦ Father administrator, mother teacher</td>
<td>♦ Born and raised in this city, but not this part of town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Received administrative degree 5 years prior</td>
<td>♦ Teacher for 10 years</td>
<td>♦ Second principal in the school’s history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Currently taking classes for K-6 endorsement</td>
<td>♦ Recently completed administrative degree</td>
<td>♦ Catholic elementary school and university, public high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Led to administration by God - time for a change</td>
<td>♦ Currently taking classes for K-6 endorsement</td>
<td>♦ Elementary teacher for four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Catholic</td>
<td>♦ Catholic</td>
<td>♦ Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Did not attend Catholic schools</td>
<td>♦ Moving into administration out of dissatisfaction with the administrators he worked under – ready for a change</td>
<td>♦ Did not attend Catholic schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Never worked in a Catholic school</td>
<td>♦ Felt he was a very good teacher – no discipline issues</td>
<td>♦ Wife teaches for him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Felt he was a very good teacher</td>
<td>♦ Did not attend Catholic schools</td>
<td>♦ Wife teaches across the street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Wife teaches for him</td>
<td>♦ Wife teaches across the street</td>
<td>♦ Viewed herself as a good classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Job</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rural town</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rural town</strong></th>
<th><strong>Inner city boys school</strong></th>
<th><strong>Urban, private girls school</strong></th>
<th><strong>Inner city school school</strong></th>
<th><strong>Middle-class neighborhood school</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Rural town</td>
<td>♦ K-12 school</td>
<td>♦ 1-12 school</td>
<td>♦ School began 7 years prior</td>
<td>♦ 9-12</td>
<td>♦ K-8</td>
<td>♦ K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 309 students</td>
<td>♦ 213 students</td>
<td>♦ Predominantly white, Catholic</td>
<td>♦ Grades 4-8</td>
<td>♦ 272 students</td>
<td>♦ 138 students</td>
<td>♦ 253 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Nearly 100% white and Catholic</td>
<td>♦ 17 teachers</td>
<td>♦ College preparatory school</td>
<td>♦ College preparatory school</td>
<td>♦ 26 students</td>
<td>♦ Primarily black, non-Catholic</td>
<td>♦ Steadily declining enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 24 teachers</td>
<td>♦ 1 guidance counselor</td>
<td>♦ President</td>
<td>♦ President</td>
<td>♦ Tuition largely</td>
<td>♦ Tuition based, but largely supported by donors</td>
<td>♦ Preschool scheduled to open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Pastor</td>
<td>♦ 1 of the teachers is also the AD</td>
<td>♦ Dean of Students</td>
<td>♦ Dean of Students</td>
<td>♦ Waiting list</td>
<td>♦ Waiting list</td>
<td>♦ Waiting list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Block schedule</td>
<td>provided by donors</td>
<td>8 teachers</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Assistant Principal who also teaches PE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUB-QUESTION #1: WHAT ARE THE ASSIGNED AND UNASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BEGINNING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Diocesan job description provided and reviewed by pastor prior to taking the position</td>
<td>♦ Job description never reviewed with him</td>
<td>♦ Job description developed specifically for his school provided and reviewed prior to taking the position</td>
<td>♦ Detailed job description provided and reviewed prior to taking the position</td>
<td>♦ Job description never reviewed with him prior to taking the position</td>
<td>♦ No job description provided or reviewed prior to taking the position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Immense variety - anticipated &amp; unanticipated</td>
<td>♦ Received diocesan job description in the fall</td>
<td>♦ Diocesan job description provided in the fall</td>
<td>♦ Received diocesan job description in the fall</td>
<td>♦ Received diocesan job description in the fall</td>
<td>♦ Received diocesan job description in the fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Job description includes &quot;Facilitation of Christian Uniqueness&quot;</td>
<td>♦ Primary responsibilities - &quot;putting out fires&quot;</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelming &amp; time-consuming - constant interruptions</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelming responsibilities - state reports, academic problems with kids, parents</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelming responsibilities - can’t get everything done, keeping head above water</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelming responsibilities - safety and good Catholic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Job description included &quot;Facilitation of Christian Uniqueness&quot;</td>
<td>♦ Greater responsibility than public school administrator</td>
<td>♦ Discipline, implementing changes, night activities, coaching</td>
<td>♦ Curriculum development, fundraising, public relations</td>
<td>♦ Curriculum development, fundraising, public relations</td>
<td>♦ Curriculum development, fundraising, public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Took this very seriously - greater responsibility than public school administrator</td>
<td>♦ Uncertain how to do this - not enough time - felt inadequate in this area - does not understand this role</td>
<td>♦ Expectations were much greater than for public school principal - spiritual leader</td>
<td>♦ Public relations, student discipline</td>
<td>♦ Public relations, student discipline</td>
<td>♦ Public relations, student discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Doing the Lord’s work</td>
<td>♦ Very important responsibility</td>
<td>♦ Responsible for the spiritual development of the school</td>
<td>♦ Felt overwhelmed - can’t get everything done, keeping head above water</td>
<td>♦ Felt overwhelmed - can’t get everything done, keeping head above water</td>
<td>♦ Felt overwhelmed - can’t get everything done, keeping head above water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Felt prepared for this role although no previous Catholic school experience</td>
<td>♦ Catholic university prepared him for this role - covered both public &amp; private aspects of education</td>
<td>♦ Her Catholic education and Catholic university helped to prepare her for this role - still wanted more</td>
<td>♦过度期望自己作为一位天主教学校的校长，但他们尝试</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelmed and decided to model the Catholic faith</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelmed and decided to model the Catholic faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Role of &quot;Spiritual&quot;</td>
<td>♦ Catholic university prepared him for this role - covered both public &amp; private aspects of education</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Catholic School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Initial felt public and Catholic education very similar - position changed by end of year - two different worlds, Christ-centeredness, autonomy, including God in the curriculum</td>
<td>♦ Expectations were much greater than for public school principal - spiritual leader</td>
<td>♦ Her Catholic education and Catholic university helped to prepare her for this role - still wanted more</td>
<td>♦ Doesn’t really view himself as a Catholic school principal, but they try</td>
<td>♦ Initial felt public and Catholic education very similar - position changed by end of year - two different worlds, Christ-centeredness, autonomy, including God in the curriculum</td>
<td>♦ Initial felt public and Catholic education very similar - position changed by end of year - two different worlds, Christ-centeredness, autonomy, including God in the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Doesn’t really view himself as a Catholic school principal, but they try</td>
<td>♦ Her Catholic education and Catholic university helped to prepare her for this role - still wanted more</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Initially felt public and Catholic education very similar - position changed by end of year - two different worlds, Christ-centeredness, autonomy, including God in the curriculum</td>
<td>♦ Overwhelmed and decided to model the Catholic faith</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
<td>♦ Students need love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| leader's name naturally as opposed to being learned |  |  | and attention
| Was not prepared for the difficulty of the role |  |  | Faith dimension did not really influence his attitude towards his job |
### Sub-question #2:

**How well prepared does the beginning Catholic school principal perceive himself/herself for the responsibilities of the job?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>David</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ted</strong></th>
<th><strong>Brad</strong></th>
<th><strong>Linda</strong></th>
<th><strong>Michael</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ann</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Public university</td>
<td>- Public university - no preparation for Catholic school administration</td>
<td>- Catholic university - prepared him for role of Catholic school administrator</td>
<td>- Catholic university - prepared her fairly well for Catholic school administration</td>
<td>- Felt inadequately prepared by university coursework - educational theories provided, but no practical application</td>
<td>- Prepared for role of Catholic school administrator by life experiences and her own faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dissatisfied with university coursework</td>
<td>- Felt overwhelmed and ill-prepared</td>
<td>- No better preparation than experience</td>
<td>- Prepared for role of university administrator</td>
<td>- University coursework prepared her well for the secular aspects of the job - wanted a course in private school administration</td>
<td>- Needed more experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning on the job</td>
<td>- Dissatisfied with university coursework</td>
<td>- Classes prepared him fairly well - lacked the experiential component</td>
<td>- Best preparation - experience on the leadership team the year prior - practical experience</td>
<td>- Felt more for the day-to-day</td>
<td>- Learned much about working with formal and informal groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Needed time and experience</td>
<td>- Needed more practical experiences - suggested a job shadow</td>
<td>- Felt university coursework prepared her for working with others, management, supervision, conflict resolution, collaboration</td>
<td>- Felt university coursework prepared her for discipline work he did with previous principal</td>
<td>- Needed more experience</td>
<td>- Felt prepared to handle student discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feelings of inadequacy</td>
<td>- Practicum did not help - only student supervision</td>
<td>- Practicum did not help - only student supervision</td>
<td>- Practicum did not help - only student supervision</td>
<td>- Practicum did not help - only student supervision</td>
<td>- Practicum did not help - only student supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Life experiences prepared him best for the job - more training in conflict management would not have helped, simply had to learn how to deal with it.
### SUB-QUESTION #3:
WHAT ARE THE JOB-RELATED CHALLENGES OF THE BEGINNING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Contributed to frustration and discouragement</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Student discipline</td>
<td>Moving from faculty member to principal in the same school</td>
<td>Greatest challenge and least prepared for working with the staff - age &amp; inexperience may be a factor in dealing with veteran teachers, hard to gain respect and support, hard to implement change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Big challenge - balancing the number of responsibilities</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Expelling kids is principal for working with was the first lay principal &amp; biggest challenge - relationship with parents caused strain, hard to gain respect providing a Christian atmosphere</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Time spent on unanticipated responsibilities versus those things that are important</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Staff created problems with student discipline - sending kids to the office, teacher should have handled situation, want principal to handle, then questioned how he did this</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Primary responsibilities and what takes most time does not match</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Student discipline - suspending &amp; expelling kids is hard</td>
<td>Greatest challenge with staff - not involved</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Prioritizing and planning in a great challenge</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>High turnover rate in administrators in the past - students &amp; staff were waiting him out, unsure of his commitment</td>
<td>Faculty caused some of the discipline problems &amp; problems with parents</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Putting out “little fires”</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Relationship with pastor - not involved or visible - no one to bounce ideas off of</td>
<td>Managing teachers is the greatest challenge - ineffective</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Can’t be instructional leader</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Uncertain of job performance - received no feedback</td>
<td>His youth &amp; inexperience made it hard to work with veteran teachers</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Relationship with teachers most challenging - no support, lack of competence and professionalism</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Biggest challenge - staff - earning their trust, no longer one of them, supervision &amp; evaluation, lack of professionalism</td>
<td>Race provided a unique challenge (not principal &amp; principal)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Ensuing conflict</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Hasn’t been an instructional leader</td>
<td>Relationship with students changed when she became principal</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Needs to improve on conflict management</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Biggest challenge - time management, not enough time</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes:
- Difficulty to accept you’re not going to make everyone happy
- Number of responsibilities - constantly interrupted
- Cultural conditions caused him some concern - hard to gain respect of the parents, have to have broad
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surprises</th>
<th>poor attitude &amp; morale, do not model the faith</th>
<th>Teacher supervision &amp; evaluation difficult</th>
<th>Cutting teacher from full to part time</th>
<th>Wife was part of the teaching staff - difficult</th>
<th>Looking forward to hiring new staff</th>
<th>shoulders, lacked parent involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The pace - not able to get things done</td>
<td>Time commitment - busy</td>
<td>That he handled the pressure as well as he did</td>
<td>Work load - putting out fires all day, can't get out of the office</td>
<td>Few surprises because of experiences on the leadership team - knew it would be difficult</td>
<td>Surprised she handled the pressure as well as he did</td>
<td>Not really surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responsibilities</td>
<td>Expectation that he knows everything</td>
<td>Work load - putting out fires all day, can't get out of the office</td>
<td>Few surprises because of experiences on the leadership team - knew it would be difficult</td>
<td>Surprise to find himself in this position at such a young age - personal goal</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the responsibilities - never caught up</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with the staff - can't keep them happy</td>
<td>Lack of communication between parent and teacher</td>
<td>Few surprises because of experiences on the leadership team - knew it would be difficult</td>
<td>Surprise to find himself in this position at such a young age - personal goal</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the responsibilities - never caught up</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of enthusiasm for school by teachers and students</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the responsibilities - never caught up</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good administrator can effect positive change</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the responsibilities - never caught up</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the responsibilities - never caught up</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
<td>Surprised by the extent of the problems caused by formal and informal groups (the staff)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 4
**SUB-QUESTION #4:**
WHAT ARE THE JOB-RELATED NEEDS OF THE BEGINNING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ♦ Technical skills & knowledge — technology, research-based data on instructional strategies  
♦ More money  
♦ Personal needs — patience, perseverance, tolerance  
♦ More time  
♦ Experience | ♦ More experience  
♦ Better management skills in working with faculty & staff to correct unprofessional behaviors and gather input | ♦ Guidance & direction  
♦ Time — prioritize better, organization  
♦ Support & assistance | ♦ More time — for work and family  
♦ Support network — for all principals | ♦ Difficult to identify needs  
♦ More time  
♦ More experience — especially in dealing with staff | ♦ Needed positive feedback from mentor, pastor, parents — a pat on the back  
♦ Support  
♦ Teamwork |
**SUB-QUESTION #5:**

**HOW DOES THE BEGINNING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL MEET THE NEEDS CREATED BY THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES INHERENT IN HIS/HER POSITION?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ CSO</td>
<td>♦ CSO</td>
<td>♦ CSO - periodically, doesn't know who to trust, shied away from a mentor</td>
<td>♦ CSO - somewhat</td>
<td>♦ CSO</td>
<td>♦ CSO - very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Did not have a mentor and didn't really want one - discomfort in asking for help, feelings of incompetence</td>
<td>♦ Greatest assistance - colleagues in the profession</td>
<td>♦ Networking with colleagues - not easy though, doesn't want to appear incompetent</td>
<td>♦ Family - husband</td>
<td>♦ Previous principal - left things in good shape, remained in contact</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - great source of support, respect, share thoughts and ideas, values, helpful and encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Network with colleagues</td>
<td>♦ Secretary knows everything</td>
<td>♦ Some faculty members</td>
<td>♦ College professors</td>
<td>♦ Family - wife (limited), parents</td>
<td>♦ Family - husband, but began to wear on him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Pastor - actively involved in the school, share philosophy &amp; vision</td>
<td>♦ Family - wife</td>
<td>♦ President - extremely positive relationship, share values and goals, great sounding board, team, mentor</td>
<td>♦ College professors</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith - very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Family - wife</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - greatest source of support and assistance - leadership team concept</td>
<td>♦ Faith - had grown spiritually</td>
<td>♦ Careful not to share too many problems for fear of appearing incompetent</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - very greatest source of support - assigned mentor &amp; former principal - however, did not call on them as much as he needed for fear of burdening them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Secretary - manages everything</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - active in study (limited)</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Greatest source of support - assigned mentor &amp; former principal - however, did not call on them as much as he needed for fear of burdening them</td>
<td>♦ Pastor-greatest source of support - assigned mentor &amp; former principal - however, did not call on them as much as he needed for fear of burdening them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Faith in God</td>
<td>♦ Participation in this study - feels pretty isolated, the study gave him someone to talk to</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - great</td>
<td>♦ Faith-very</td>
<td>♦ Faith-prayer, God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Secretary - best network with colleagues</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Pastor - very</td>
<td>♦ Careful not to share too many problems for fear of appearing incompetent</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Family - wife and assistance - problems for fear mentor &amp; former principal</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith-very</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Family - wife thought of</td>
<td>♦ Secretary - concept incompetent however, did not across the street -</td>
<td>♦ Faith in God</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Secretary - concept</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Secretary</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Pastor</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
<td>♦ Faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The table above contains a list of strategies and support systems used by different individuals to meet the needs created by their positions as beginning Catholic school principals. The strategies include seeking help from colleagues, understanding the operations of the school, and maintaining a strong faith. The table also highlights the importance of having a supportive mentor and the role of the school board in providing encouragement.*
### OTHER THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAVID</th>
<th>TED</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>LINDA</th>
<th>MICHAEL</th>
<th>ANN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Aspects of the Job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Still feels peace &amp; joy at night</td>
<td>♦ Caring community — vested interest in the school, willing to help</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with the students</td>
<td>♦ Joys of being leader — sense of empowerment, ability to make changes</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with the students — good rapport</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with the students — watch children grow personally and academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Relationship with students was positive &amp; easy — feels comfortable with kids</td>
<td>♦ Supportive parents</td>
<td>♦ Ability to implement changes</td>
<td>♦ Teachers were willing to give of themselves</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with most parents — supportive</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with the parent — positive, feels well-liked, they are appreciative, Home-and-School volunteered and provided financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Positive relationship with pastor</td>
<td>♦ Relationship with students</td>
<td>♦ Some parent relationships — positive feedback from them, supportive</td>
<td>♦ Students worked hard</td>
<td>♦ Outside community support was very good</td>
<td>♦ Good improvements have occurred in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Positive relationship with school board</td>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Some of the staff — enjoys them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Fairly positive relationship with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Relationship with the pastor very positive — father figure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice &amp; Lessons Learned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Keep your faith</td>
<td>♦ You don’t have to be an expert in everything</td>
<td>♦ Keep an open mind</td>
<td>♦ Be willing to work hard</td>
<td>♦ Don’t take a job at the last minute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Don’t let the “little fires” overwhelm you</td>
<td>♦ Get a good support system</td>
<td>♦ Get away from your desk</td>
<td>♦ You’re not going to please everyone</td>
<td>♦ Take the time to think about answers to questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Administration takes time</td>
<td>♦ Communicate</td>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Know your staff — who you can trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- DAVID
- TED
- BRAD
- LINDA
- MICHAEL
- ANN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>♦ Looking forward to the next year — optimistic about the future</th>
<th>♦ Pretty happy about what he’s doing — planning on returning</th>
<th>♦ Optimistic about the following year — learned much</th>
<th>♦ Don’t take the problems home with you</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ You can’t make everyone happy ♦ Get as much real experience as you can</td>
<td>♦ doesn’t have to consume your life ♦ Share burdens with colleagues ♦ Communicate concerns ♦ Learn to manage people</td>
<td>♦ No regrets, fulfilling God’s plan, feels this is where she belongs, plans to be in this position for many years to come</td>
<td>♦ No regrets ♦ Optimistic about the future — experience will help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Other | ♦ Optimistic about the future — felt successful, looking forward to the next year |