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An Exploration on Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools

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An Exploration on Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Educational Administration

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Abstract

"Though Many We Are One" is one of the mottos of a Catholic school system and is the foundational statement to what Catholic school stand for in the Diocese of the Midwest (pseudonym). My dissertation explores why parents choose alternative education in a Catholic schools. Catholic schools provide the student with the guidance and the ability to grow academically, spiritually, and emotionally. I analyzed the viewpoints of parents, administrators, and pastors within selected Catholic schools in the diocese to determine if there are similar foundational statements among multiple Catholic schools or if each school stands for something entirely different. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to understand parents' perspectives. This study expands on Vygotsky's theory that "the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about" (p. 2). Students placed in an environment where a family are present in a child's life, addressed by their name and their needs met, and the values and moral system taught in Catholic schools is an intricate part of the daily lessons taught. The overall themes include experiences of Catholic school parents, the importance of Catholic schools, and upholding the future of Catholic education.

Keywords: parents, Catholic school, religious schools, nonreligious schools, communication, leadership, school choice, vouchers, spiritual growth

Dedication

To Shane ~ thank you, for supporting all my dreams.

To Kennedy, Isabella, Lincoln, and Madison ~ you are my inspiration.

To My Mom and Dad ~ Thank you for always setting the bar high and never doubting my potential.

To Dr. William Boozang ~ thank you for your patience, guidance, wisdom, and wit. Most importantly, thank you for helping me realize my dream.

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To my parents: Thank you for your words of support and encouragement throughout the last four years. Thank you for always telling me that my dreams were always worth reaching and that I could do anything I set my mind to and achieve it.

To my teachers, whom I have never forgotten or know what kind of impact you have been on my life. Without your time, effort, and patience, you have set the bar in my education. You allowed it possible for me to reach my goal and educated me academically, spiritually, and emotionally throughout all the years of my educational career.

To Father William Felix: You are the reason that I believed in myself enough to take this last step in my educational career. Your willingness to trust, lead and motivate are key components that has begun to shape me into a true administrator. Thank you for your time in helping become a true administrator.

To my dissertation committee: Dr. William Boozang, Dr. Brianna Parsons, and Dr. Belle Booker. My sincerest thanks for pushing me to produce my best work. Your guidance brought me to this place, and I am so grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the number of private

elementary schools has increased from 5.3 million students enrolled in private schools in 2011 to

5.8 million students enrolled in 2015. Catholic Schools, as well as other private schools, were the

original educational institutions in the U.S. (Kennedy, 2018). Currently, private school

enrollment is approximately 10% of the total elementary and secondary school–age enrollment.

Catholic schools maintain one of the highest enrollments of private school students (Council for

American Private Education, 2016). Since the recession in 2009, Catholic schools seem to be a

growing population. Within the Catholic schools, the number of students have increased from

9.6% to 10.2% (NCES, 2018). Of the 5.8 million students enrolled in private schools, 31% of the

students enrolled are in Catholic schools (NCES, 2016). The increase in enrollment within any

private or parochial school contributes to the continued existence in the voucher program within

many states. According to state data, more than 200 registered schools were involved in the

voucher program (as reported in the state's 2018 data).

School choice and voucher programs have allowed private/parochial schools to increase

their enrollment throughout the state (as reported in the state's 2018 data). The diocese has three

voucher programs. Additionally, schools were expected to meet specific criteria such as

acquiring full accreditation within the first three years of participating in the choice program;

providing at least 1,050 hours of instruction for grades first grade through sixth grade and 1,173

hours of instruction for Grades 7 through 12. There are other regulations imposed on these

schools, such as the inability to charge tuition in addition to the voucher. Schools that enroll

more than 20 or more students in Grade 3 and up are required to administer the state test. The

current state test tests voucher students in the state for accountability of the program (National Conferences for State Legislatures, 2019).

The MProgram began in 1990 and those students participating in the program must reside in the city of M or within the city limits, as well as, meet the financial requirements that pertain to the family size, which is currently 300% of the poverty level. The RProgram, which started in 2011, has similar enrollment criteria into the choice program as the MProgram. These two programs began with specific criteria that only allowed a specific number of students into the program. However, these programs expanded over a period of time, which resulted in the expansion of the third–choice program, the SProgram. (National Conferences for State Legislatures, 2019).

In 2013, the SProgram began. The state permitted the first 25 schools, which enrolled the most students with a voucher to enter the choice program, however, this program limited enrollment to 500 students within the SProgram. While many schools applied, only those in larger urban areas, outside MProgram and RProgram, secured acceptance into the SProgram. In 2014–2015, the SProgram expanded its enrollment to 1,000 students statewide. While the impact for the urban area schools was prevalent, families within small private and parochial schools in rural areas were frustrated because their inability to enter this program that would aid their families, as well as, parish communities. During the 2015–2016 school year, the SProgram increased its enrollment to 1% of the local public school districts with no cap on the number of schools that could enroll in the program. In 2014, rural private and parochial schools needed to decide whether the department of public instruction would allow current students to receive vouchers in any grade in scenarios where the students were financially qualified for the program. After the 2015–2016 school year, the state capped the entry points for the students who currently

enroll in a Catholic school. These entry points are 4-year-old kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and ninth grade for high school students. In contrast, a student from the public school could enroll at any time during the enrollment period in any grade (National Conferences for State Legislatures, 2019).

These state voucher programs have become more popular as families chose where to send their children. These programs, along with other grant programs, allow private schools to remain a viable source for alternative education in the state and the Diocese of the Midwest. Other grant programs may include anonymous donors that support parochial schools, donors of the community, as well as, grant opportunities that appear throughout the diocese and within the state.

Each of these voucher programs utilize a lottery system to select low-income minority students to fill the cap of the vouchers within the school district, the parochial school resides. The purpose of voucher programs is to assist low-income families receive the best education possible and to provide families the ability to choose where to send their children. This option provides the families with the same opportunities as other students and does not penalize those families who do not make enough money to send their children to private or parochial schools. These voucher programs were developed and expanded based on the need for an improvement in education as well as provide parents with a choice where to send their children to school, if they qualify for the program (Hassett, 2011).

Parents often consider multiple educational options for their children, including public and private schools. Parents may believe the outcome from Catholic school education provides their children an advantage that students in public schools do not have (Council for American Private Education, 2018). Many parents are generally satisfied with the level of education that

their child receives in the public school system; however, the parents also want other alternatives (Cheng & Peterson, 2017).

Public schools have some advantages that many Catholic schools cannot compete with, such as competitive sports, diverse alternative classes, and modern technology. Parochial and private schools also have many advantages to their programs, which include small class sizes, individualized learning, and faith formation throughout a child's education. As the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) posits, these factors continue to spark interest in families across the nation (2013). Through the investigation of Catholic schools, the researcher used the data from private and parochial school data—including interviews, focus groups, and observations—to determine why parents send their children to Catholic schools.

Background, Context, and Conceptual Framework

Background

The purpose of the study was to identify a pathway that determines what factors have led the parental decision to send their children to a Catholic school. The researcher used the background information from participating in the school voucher program to create discussion topics for the interviews and focus groups of parents who send their children to Catholic schools.

One method that increased the availability of Catholic schools to all families is that of the three voucher programs in the state, which targets low–income households who reside in economically disadvantaged and high minority school districts (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Voucher programs have become one of the reasons most schools in the Diocese of the Midwest (pseudonym) have observed an increase in their enrollment numbers. More families have a choice where their children can attend school. These voucher programs serve as an alternative for families who may not have had a choice to choose Catholic education due to their financial

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limitations. An alternative to the public school is essential for families who forfeited the right to have their child receive a faith-based education. The trend toward private education, however, began to preserve the religious values that are not present in the public school system (Archer, 2000). The leading the movement of faith-based education is the Roman Catholic Church, which decreed in November 1884 its members to seek a Catholic school education for its child members (Archer, 2000). Thus, religion has been one of the constants in private education. While other types of non–public schools, like charter schools, though funded with public funding are established by teachers, parents, or community groups, operate under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority. Similar to private schools, charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management, but also differ because they do receive state or national funding to use for operation (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). With estimates of more than six million children attending private schools, the U.S. Department of Education (2008) has deemed private schools necessary and treated as its own entity on the federal level. The debate on the success of private schools stems from the characteristics of the school or the characteristics of the enrolled students and their families continues (Ashley et al., 2014).

Context

The reasons for choosing to enroll in a Catholic school vary as the number of private schools that are available may quantify the final decision of where to enroll their children. Parents may chose Catholic schools because the student has gifted learning abilities, a learning disability, physical handicap, or behavior problems (NPSAA, 2008). Some private schools have enhanced students' creativity in the arts, while others prepare the students for Ivy League college (Archer, 2000). Parents who are concerned about incorporating religion may a school that

teaches religious lessons with the academic subjects to instill the beliefs and traditions of their faith (Archer, 2000). According to the Council for American Private Education (2013):

> Private schools teach the lessons that count most in life; instill enduring traits of character; develop the mind and imagination, but also the heart and soul. Their extraordinary record of preparing students for success in life is indeed well worth telling. (p. 3)

Parents may be attracted to the smaller class sizes, and that educators acknowledge the importance that smaller classes foster close working relationships between teachers and students, thereby enhancing learning (Murphy, 2018).

In a survey distributed in a Georgia private school, the questions tried to understand how these parents rate education and why they choose private schools (Pudelski & Davis, 2017). According to the report, more than 85% of parents explained that they chose the private school setting because it offered a better learning environment, whereas 81.3% wanted their children to obtain a better education. The next two most common responses were smaller class sizes at 80.3% and more individualized classroom attention at 76.4%. Other reasons cited by most parents were religious education at 64.1%, better preparation for college at 62.9%, better student discipline at 61.7%, more responsive teachers and administrators at 60.3%, and improved student safety 52.9% (CAPE, 2013, p. 1).

According to Muller (2018), parental involvement plays a critical role in choosing a private school. Some private schools require both student and the parent to undergo a battery of interviews and tests as part of their admission process. These schools embrace the concept that education becomes a partnership consisting of the parent, child, and school (Spring, 2017). Muller (2018) reported that parents were satisfied with their children's education and believed

that their involvement and communication contribute to how they value the private school setting.

While some people might apply an elitist stereotype to private and parochial schools, many private and parochial school administrators and governing boards have made student diversity a priority. National Association for Independent Schools (2018) entrusted private school administrators and the boards of trustees to respect the independence of independent schools to teach and prepare their students in a manner that matches the school mission and meets the overall needs of its students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau Report, 15 years ago, 23% of private school students were students of color, and 28% were from families with annual incomes less than $50,000. These statistics have nearly doubled in the current year, 2019 (2004).

The research on school choice, as an alternative to public schools, contains educational literature to parents in every state that accepts vouchers as an alternative way to allow families to choose the right educational path for their students (Coleman, 2018). CAPE (2013) states religious values as a reason for choosing a private school because that is the one difference Catholic and other parochial schools have over public schools. Fewer studies have examined whether the characteristics of the student and family structure relates to choices to enroll in private schools (CAPE, 2018).

Private school enrollment continues to remain stable, accounting for 10% of elementary and secondary schools nationwide (Council for American Private Education, 2018). The average school size is approximately 175 students. Although the majority of the students who attend private schools are predominantly White or non-Hispanic (NCES, 2008), the minority population has progressively increased. Private school enrollments are 9.5% Black, 9.2% Hispanic, and

5.1% Asian/Pacific Islander (NCES, 2008). The 2005 graduation rate among private high schools was 98.3%, with 57.6% of the graduates attending college (NCES, 2018).

Parents cite religious/moral reasons and a better academic environment for enrolling their children in Catholic schools (Bensen, 2018). Catt and Rhinesmith (2016) explained that religious instruction throughout the day or week in a public school was one of the primary reasons for switching to a Catholic school. Faith formation also coincides with the rationale of why parents choose to attend a parochial school. The parents have made the choice to send their children to Catholic schools because they are able to perceive the value of wanting a religious education for their student. Further, the study has identified what specific factors have led to the ultimate decision on the part of the parent to enroll their child in this educational system.

Conceptual Framework

This study identified a pathway that determined what factors parents highlight for sending the children to Catholic school. Catholic school teachers successfully provide instruction and rely upon the information to parents to ensure they made the correct decision to put their children into Catholic schools. In order to successfully teach and show competency in terms of what Catholic schools teach, they must accredit themselves through an accrediting religious board.

Many Catholic schools in the state where the research took place are accredited within each of their respected dioceses. The accreditation process consists of a 7-year cycle in which educators must prove how the mission, vision, and core values align with the curriculum. Each school, unique in its way, relies on a set of standards that forces the evaluation model to be a cohesive plan under the guidance of the state's accrediting agency. Throughout the 7 years of the

process, schools thoroughly need to demonstrate educational growth shown through evaluation and improvement of 11 standards Midwest accrediting association (WRISA) (2016):

1. The intellectual and moral climate of the school.

2. Condition of the school facility and grounds.

3. Adequacy of equipment and supplies.

4. Quality of instructional materials.

5. Preservation of student records.

6. Existence of school policies.

7. Proof of a stable financial condition.

8. Evidence of a comprehensive educational program.

9. Evidence of long/short–range planning.

10. Evidence of ongoing professional development of staff.

11. Evidence of qualified leadership and instructional staff. (p. 1)

These 11 standards may contribute to prove that quality education, accredited schools construct the complete representation of what and how they teach. A theory that aligns with this case study includes constructivism (Creswell, 2013). This theory can be used to understand how parents to perceive their options and how it influences the family dynamics but the student directly in their academic journey.

"Constructivism is an interpretive framework whereby individuals seek to understand their world and develop their particular meanings that correspond to their experience" (Creswell, 2013). There are three leading theorists in which constructivism blends with education: Dewey, Piaget, and Brunner. Vygotsky founded a theory called constructivism. It asserts three major themes regarding social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal

development. Discovery learning is an inquiry-based, constructivist learning theory that takes place in problem-solving situations where the learner draws on his or her own experience and existing knowledge to discover facts and relationships and new truths to be taught (David, 2017). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development ties together with discovery learning. The development of a child is based on the knowledge that a person learns through personal experience. Through growth and development, these skills learned over time through experience lead to the scaffolding of higher order thinking in more complex situations.

Bruner (1990) builds on the Socratic tradition of learning through dialogue, encouraging the learner to come to enlighten themselves through reflection (UCD Dublin, 2018). According to Bruner (2017), "important outcomes of learning include not just the concepts, categories, and problem–solving procedures invented previously by the culture, but also the ability to 'invent' these things for oneself" (p. 1). The same ideal reflects in all Catholic schools. Catholic schools teach more than the concepts, categories, or problem-solving procedures, but rather teach values, morals, faith, and stewardship. In other words, cognitive growth involves interactions of what people know and want, but it also combines with the environmental stimuli that magnify those interactions.

According to constructivist theory, people make sense of their circumstances by describing the real–life experiences they encounter. In the past, these technological advances depended on increasing language facility and exposure to systematic instruction (Bruner, 1966). The cognitive processes that our thoughts and beliefs from what we get from outside stimuli often give us a sense of balance (Jhangiani, Tarry, & Stangor, 2015). The knowledge and meanings constructed in individuals take place through the following: interaction with people, how they view their circumstances, and assessing what things have a direct and immediate

impact on their life. (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). In Catholic and other parochial schools'

students can participate, collaborate and foster relationships with peers, families and stakeholders

of the school and parish community. Because of the class sizes being smaller than most public

schools, students and families get the opportunity to learn and grow with each other. Families are

present in the school often because of the vested financial interest within the school. They get to

know other parents and the students across all grade levels. Students can work with different

people and learn from a variety of sources, which confirms how constructivism is imperative in

this study. This collaboration among students, teachers and parents confirms Vygotsky's (1978)

framework for social interaction, "every function appears twice in a child's development, first on

the social level or between people and later individually or inside the child."

    While Bruner (19947) discovered that learning contributes to significant concentration on

inquiry–based learning, which "is a way to problem solving situations where the learner draws

on his or her own experience and existing knowledge to discover facts and relationships and new

truths to be learned" (David, 2017, para. 1). Claybaugh (2010) declares the desired function and

education to all human beings when he quotes Bruner (1997):

> It is unquestionably the function of education to enable people, individual human beings,
>
> to operate at their fullest potential, to equip them with the tools and the sense of
>
> opportunity to use their wits, skills, and passions to the fullest. School provides a
>
> compelling opportunity for exploring the implication of precepts for practice. (p. 78)

Catholic schools provide an environment to educate a student to learn math and science, but to

educate a student emotionally, socially, and spiritually through the guidance of the teachers and

pastors with the school (Diocese, 2016).

Vygotsky is another e contributor to this case study, as well as, one of the founders of constructivism. The researcher used the concept of social interaction to link the overarching theory of constructivism with a case study. Social interactions, according to Vygotsky (1978), are interactions that lead to development. When a child exposes themselves to children or others in society, it allows them to notice the culture in which they immerse themselves. Vygotsky (1978) goes on to say that "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people and then inside the child" (p. 57). Children, as well as adults, copy what others do to fit into the culture. When parents decide for their children, the decision primarily is based on what they have heard or seen in a public setting. As a relationship develops between parents and children, children begin to adopt the habits of their parents.

At the time of this study, the researcher served her fifth year as principal of Catholic schools. The researcher has served a total of 13 years serving in the Catholic school system. Because the researcher has been instrumental in the Catholic school system, she can utilize her experience and background as a foundation for understanding the participant experience.

Statement of the Problem

Since the late 1990s, Catholic school enrollment has decreased (Murnane, Reardon, Mbekeani, & Lamb, 2018). "Really, what parents are looking for is a quality education and what the Catholic school has the ability to provide is that quality education with a faith-based foundation that is integrated throughout the curriculum" (Mathewson, 2017). These school choice vouchers provided through the state provided funding to families in need of financial support for tuition and other school expenses (EdChoice, 2018). An increase in resources has enabled the school to display its offerings due to the voucher program

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(Johnson, 2018). These schools have observed an increase in enrollment since the beginning of their participation in the voucher program (as reported by the superintendent of the diocese, 2018). Twitter, Facebook, and other resources have provided instant information on what happens in each of the schools (as reported by the high school president, 2018). However, the schools are concerned about what motivates families to attend Catholic schools lies in the mind of every administrator within the diocese (as reported on the diocesan website, 2018).

Each diocese recognizes the work of the administrators and priests who evangelize for Catholic education and are willing to make the necessary sacrifices and improvements to ensure that each student is receiving a quality education. With many changes to education, the more difficult it becomes for parishes and school systems to attract new families and sustain the current students. It is necessary to continue collaborating as schools in the diocese continue to share resources that make their schools grow, and their missions are carried out.

As with any school system, enrollment impacts budgets, staffing, and overall atmosphere of the school. Factors that can directly affect how parents decide on enrolling their children in the Catholic school may include the following: media attention, teacher retention, data analysis, and the amount of technology available.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the motivators that aid parent's determination to attend Catholic schools. Additionally, what specifically motivates parents to make that final decision. As previously, stated, Catholic schools, especially in the diocese where the study was conducted began to gain practical knowledge about the voucher program. How does the school become more financially independent of themselves rather than staying

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dependent on the parishes in which they reside. The schools aggressively recruit new students mainly through social media such as Facebook and Twitter to promote Catholic schools in the diocese. The Catholic school also distributes materials throughout the school year to market what they can offer students. The voucher program targets families in financial need to attend Catholic schools. The voucher program motivates and assists parents in deciding to send their children to Catholic schools because the program provides some form of financial relief. Many schools use data analysis and the same standardized testing results as a method to compare to the public school system and how they differ as another marketing tool to attract more students. The study identified factors that parents chose to send their children to Catholic schools and how these decisions have impacted the faith and academic approach to their child's future learning and growth.

In some cases, parents can make an instant decision on switching their child to enroll in a Catholic school. However, some parents inquire about the school, tour the school, and request to have their child experience a day in the school, before they finalize the transfer. The idea of attending Catholic schools' correlates with the social construct of the financial burden or stimuli within the community that decides for the family. Once the child steps into the classroom and the parents begin to communicate with the teachers and the administrator, the conversations about attending Catholic school seems to take a turn. The turn essentially becomes about the child's experience and not about the lack of conceptual understanding of what Catholic schools can offer from the perception of the community. Furthermore, this study aided other schools in the Diocese of the Midwest, as well as, other dioceses to understand better the motivators parents have for sending their children to Catholic schools and the impact that Catholic schools play on a child's growth and development.

Research Questions

The questions also examined what marketing tool or concept convinced the parents that Catholic education was the right fit for the families.

RQ 1: What factors do parents highlight for sending the children to Catholic school?

RQ 2: How has the decision to send their children to Catholic schools impacted the faith

and academic approach to their child's learning and growth development?

RQ 3: What roles do the parochial schools play in the lives of children in society?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The need for an increase in enrollment is a concern for many administrators, system presidents, and enrollment coordinators throughout the diocese (as reported on the diocesan website, 2018). Budgeting plays a critical role in determining the balance of new student entrants and those exiting. Parish schools work extra hard to maintain relationships with community members to promote the school in the most positive manner possible. Nevertheless, the concern and work that it takes to register a student for Catholic school can be cumbersome, especially in working with the financial aspects of enrollment. Administrators and other members of the administration have become experts in marketing Catholic schools to the families in the regional area. Meetings, new marketing techniques, and being a positive role model in the community have shown to be a favorable contender in raising enrollment (as reported on the diocesan website, 2018).

The relevance and significance of this study, within the Diocese of the Midwest, are cohesive with marketing and determination of enrollment, which takes place yearly within the diocese. Making the school vulnerable to show what it can offer children or future children of the school. The school setting is continuously changing which means, historically, the population of

students in each Catholic school building was comprised entirely of Catholics. As education has evolved, so has the characteristics within each building. The population of the students has changed, including, but not limited to: race, class sizes, affordability, religious denomination, and family structure. Small schools must attract families by focusing on how they meet the educational needs of the student.

As the shift begins to transpire, more children become enrolled in Catholic schools, however, there needs to be a shift by making considerations such as school budgets, class offerings and the teachers. For example, in School X, the budget for the school in 2014 was 90% parish supported, leaving minimal funding for parish related expenses resulting in a deficit in their financial standing. Since the start of the voucher program during the 2015–2016 school year, the parish numbers have completely turned around. School A''s budget, supported by 30% of the parish, and the rest of the budget's income is comprised of voucher money, tuition, and fundraising. The one constant that remains is the faith formation of the students and how it intertwined within the curriculum. This case study may also provide information for future administrators in the Diocese of the Midwest.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions provided below apply to the purposes of this study:

SProgram: Statewide Voucher Program: Students in Grades PK–12 residing in a state's school district, other than in the city of the other two programs MProgram and RProgram, may apply for the SProgram between February 1 and April 20. To qualify for the program, a new student must have a family income equal to or less than 220% of the federal poverty level income limits (as reported in the state's guidelines).

School voucher: a government-funded voucher redeemable for tuition fees at a school other than the public school that a student could attend free (EdChoice, 2019).

Parochial education: a private school maintained by a religious body usually for elementary and secondary instruction (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

<center>**Assumptions and Limitations**</center>

As is the case with any scholarly research, researchers must take into consideration any assumptions and limitations when conducting their research (Clark, 2017). The researcher was able to recognize and accurately describe any assumptions or limitations. Concerns with truthful responding, access to participants, and survey instruments are just a few examples of how there may be some limitations in regards to the scope of the research and how the researcher focuses on managing the study in a comprehensive manner by setting boundaries.

Assumptions

This research utilized several assumptions. Because of the researcher''s shared interest in School A, as well as other Catholic schools in the diocese, the researcher assumes the 'participants' convey what motivated them to send their children to Catholic schools in the most honest response. Information families provided to the researcher about their school experiences were protected by the researcher. To ensure their answers proclaim honesty, the researcher assured the participants that their identity would remain confidential.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, distance, and available resources, limitations were implemented in this study. The researcher limited the research to one system school and five parish schools within the diocese. Because all schools remain independent from one another in terms of their leadership and style throughout the school year, a general statement made from the information

received by the parents, and no specific statements trace back to the parent or family. One additional limitation of the study is that the participants remain truthful when answering the interview questions. These limitations include inadequate or incomplete documentation, facts specified by the participants, and time. Participants may have a difficult time sharing information about their school knowing that an administrator of the diocese is asking lingering questions about their school. The participants in turn might give the information that the researcher wants to hear rather than the truth. Time becomes a constraint on any interview or focus group session. Time could mean the length of the session, or the time a participant gets to answer a question. The researcher has gained an in-depth understanding of what factors have motivated parents in sending their children to Catholic schools. There is more to learn about the family dynamics in each Catholic school in the Diocese of the Midwest. By recognizing the various research assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, the researcher was aware that bias might occur during the research process. To alleviate potential bias, the researcher ensured the participants that their personal information would remain confidential and the researcher was transparent throughout the research process as well as separate the researchers' view of the Catholic school system.

Summary

Catholic schools are focused on preparing a concrete marketing campaign that increases their marketability to perspective parents. Studies that were performed by Bania, Eberts, and Stone (1986), and Lacireno–Paquet and Brantley (2008) revealed why parents have chosen Catholic schools for their children remains minimal. Bania et al. (2014) examined the criteria for choosing a Catholic school by focusing on the quality of public schools and the value placed on education as reflects the family's background and the characteristics of their communities. The

authors further noted that as the number of children increased within the household, the less likely the family would choose to send their children to Catholic school because it would be difficult to afford the tuition. Lacireno–Paquet and Brantley (2008) examined Catholic school choice, as well as several other choice options.

Further research examined the motivation for parents to send their children to Catholic schools in circumstances where vouchers or other choice options are not available. A family that chooses Catholic school incurs expenses in addition to their tax dollars that are used to aid in funding public schools. Parents have to consider other costs, such as transportation and books, incurred by parents who choose Catholic schools, are other factors when choosing a Catholic school. This qualitative case study provides a deeper understanding of the motivation parents have for sending their children to Catholic schools. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the current literature regarding the history, factors affecting enrollment, methodological issues, and critique of previous research. Chapter 3 focuses on the research question, the purpose of the case study design, the process for sampling, data collection, data analysis, expected findings, and the ethical issues of the case study. Chapter 4 offers the findings and results of the research study. Chapter 5 offers a summary as well as recommendations and conclusions based on this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Catholic school students comprise approximately 10.2% of the students educated in the U.S. of America (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). School A has increased enrollment by 265% over the past five years. The school reported an attendance record of 17 students in the 2014–2015 school year. Due to new marketing concepts, changes in the curriculum, and the adoption of the SProgram, the current enrollment for School A is 72 students, which is an approximate 430% growth over the last five years. Based on this statistic, the need to motivate children and enroll them in Catholic schools that provide a well-rounded educational experience. Many parents have assessed the value of enrolling their children in the Catholic school system because it provides a stable provision of faith integrated into the classroom. Other motivating factors have led parents to enroll their children into the Catholic and parochial school system that includes the following criteria: small class sizes test scores, class offerings at the elementary level, and consistent communication throughout the academic school year (CAPE, 2015). The purpose of this study was to focus on what motivates parents to enroll their children in Catholic schools and how the decision influenced by the faith and academic approach to their child's learning and growth development.

The admin of School A, located in the Midwest operates a Prekindergarten-sixth elementary school. This school currently enrolls approximately 70 students in Grades 2-year-old kindergarten through sixth grade. Approximately 52% of the students remain Catholic, while the other 48% represent a different religious denomination or have not committed to any formalized religion. The parents are generally motivated based on the belief that attending Catholic school promotes some values as it incorporates more resources in

comparison to the public school system. The motivation factors have shifted from a matter of tradition or belief in values taught to them through upbringing, however, the main motivating factor contributes to how the institution affects the community as whole. The Catholic schools seem to offer more, but that is not the case of every Catholic school in relationship to every public school (as reported by the superintendent of the diocese, 2018).

School A has been for more than 75 years. The public schools within the same area have earned offered their students more resources in terms of services, equipment, and class offerings (as reported on the diocesan website, 2018). The question remains what influences parents to send their children to Catholic schools despite the alternative education program offered by the public schools?

The purpose of the literature review was to examine how past research impacted education in parochial schools, as well as, to understand what exactly motivated parents to enroll their children in parochial schools. This literature review explored the foundation of parochial education and the rationale for parents choosing this educational option. Various sources, such as the diocese, were consulted to answer the core research question to focus on the rationale for parents enrolling their children into the Catholic school system.

Other areas that support a parent's decision to send their students to parochial schools may include performance and leadership within parochial schools, as well as, how parochial schools have expanded in terms of what they offer the student. The chapter concluded with information on the public's perception of parochial education and the significant reasons that parents provided for choosing parochial education over public education.

Conceptual Framework

"Children's hearts are delicate, and their consciences are incredibly impressionable" (as reported by the superintendent of the diocese, 2018). Catholic schools make the time for students beyond teaching them the written curriculum. The administrators, clergy, and teachers spend time forming a child. The main concern for most schools in each of the schools is to get to know each student and to develop them as a person. Through newly created marketing strategies, administrators utilize the idea of family to create marketing plans for their schools. Catholic schools' primary mission is to attract more students by incorporating a rigorous enrollment and marketing plan to enhance their recruitment efforts. The Catholic schools has utilized a new marketing strategy to increase enrollment and introduce the SProgram and has been consistent in their strategy over the past five years. This study utilized socialization theory as a critical lens in researching how Catholic schools market their schools in order to convince parents to enroll their students to Catholic schools and overlook the alternative of enrolling their children into the free public education system. Socialization theory relates to administration socialization, but not specifically to Catholic schools. Therefore, this broader conceptual framework and literature review was used to guide the study. Kaplerer (1981) states the idea behind socialization and the order of the school:

> Schools, or more correctly, the teachers and administrators within them, have educational projects: policies, plans, goals, and organizational means of achieving them. Such projects vary from one society to another and within specific societies from once community to another. However, within western society at least, it is clear that all

schools, with whatever degree of intensity, explicitness and self-consciousness, engage a

project that has three major themes: instruction selection, and socialization. (p. 1)

This theory of socialization aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development.

With the two ideas combined, the research confirmed that children learn from collaborating and

socializing with others before they learn to internalize the knowledge on their own.

Forty years ago, Van Maanen and Schein (1977) discussed the concept of organizational

socialization. Van Maanen and Schein (1977) stated, "organizational socialization is the process

by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an

organizational role" (p. 3). Van Maanen and Schein (1977) supported the concept that various

forms of communication are critical in motivating parents in considering Catholic schools as an

option. The conceptual framework used to guide this study focused on the parent's perception of

Catholic schools and best practices used to increase enrollment.

The conceptual framework of this study emphasized two key elements to identify the

needs of the parents and their children. These two critical statements included (a) A general

knowledge of how the parents perceive Catholic schools and (b) How the institution provides

information on the mission and how they intend on maintaining a positive image based on the

parental assessment of their goals. By providing these two essential skills, the Catholic schools

provide a useful marketing tool based on parental reviews of their overall effectiveness that

ultimately increase their enrollment. McLeod (2008) stated that "important outcomes of learning

include not just the concepts, categories, and problem-solving procedures invented previously by

the culture, but also the ability to "invent" these things for oneself" (p. 139). McLeod's quote

replicates the Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development because the basis of learning

for all children is through the collaboration and socialization with others.

The ultimate goal for any young person is to be able to internalize the knowledge and make it their own. This quote from the constructivism approach leads to the main idea that the effective use of knowledge is an integral part of the process. The Catholic school would need to look at ways they can provide resources that would promote their effort and emphasize how these best marketing strategies while addressing student and parental concerns. Over the past five years, student enrollment at School A increased. With the increase in student enrollment allowed for expansion throughout the parish. This expansion involved adding additional buildings to support student growth. There has been a 430% increase in enrollment over the last five years. In terms of overall demographics, the student population has gone from 100% Catholic to 50% Catholic and 50% non-Catholic. Less than half of the student population makes up of non-Catholic students. Through the socialization theory, as well as the constructivist theory, the school's growth is as significant as the faith component offered to its students who practice the Catholic faith.

Socialization Theory

The theory utilized in the research of socialization of people in school or a culture (Bell, 2017). According to Grodszki (2011), "organizational socialization can include changes in the development of new skills, attitudes, dispositions, knowledge, group values, and—very importantly—new social relationships within the group and organization" (p. 2). Grodszki (2011) speculates that socialization matters because it can affect the success or failure of school performance. Through socialization, newcomers can gain a sense of what the organization represents and why their role is essential in the public view. The socialization process provides an opportunity for individuals to find their place within this structure. Grodszki (2011) identified the difference between organizational socialization and defined it as the knowledge, values, and

behaviors required of a particular role within the organization. The educator may learn different values and may differ from the professional as they embark upon professional socialization and how they attribute these acquired behaviors in the school system.

Bruner (n.d.) discussed how the learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to comprehend the information, as well as using constructivism as a way to measure what a person can comprehend without any prior knowledge.

Bruner (1973) connected the idea of socialization theory and constructivism to meet the growing demand for communication between school and home to emphasize the importance of the child's growth and development in a Catholic school setting. Bruner (1973) highlights three essential aspects that allow an organization or an individual to use the knowledge productively provided to them. These three principles Brunner (1973) highlights:

1. Readiness: Instruction focused on the experiences and contexts that assist in the learning outcomes of the student.

2. Spiral organization: Instruction structured in a way that the student can comprehend the information on time.

3. Going beyond the information given: Instruction designed to facilitate extrapolation and or fill in the gaps. (p. 1)

The schools must be prepared to accept the information as a valuable tool to increase marketing or visibility in the community. The school must provide the information that is complacent for parents and students alike to understand what the school can offer the potential student. Finally, the school can transform this information provided and consider developing new materials that draw more families to attend Catholic schools.

Vygotsky's (1997) theory of Zone of Proximal Development complements Bruner's (1973) ideas of of social theory and constructivism. It shows how the layering of every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, first on the social plane and then, on the psychological plane i.e. first between people as an inter-mental category and then within the child as an intramental category (p. 106). Vygotsky (1982) reiterates the fact that social interaction with cultural artifacts forms the most important part of learner's psychological development .Cultural tools or artifacts include all the things we use, from simple things such as a pen, spoon, or table, to the more complex things such as language, traditions, beliefs, arts, or science (Cole, 1997; Vygotsky, 1982). In the zone of proximal development, we look at the way that a learner's performance is mediated socially and how shared understanding has been achieved through moving the learners from current capabilities to a higher, culturally mediated level of development.

Faces of Parochial Schools

John Milton claimed that truth emerges from "the marketplace of ideas," the rich diversity of parochial schools is a staple in the marketplace of American education, and the nation is stronger for it (Council for American Parochial Education, 2017, p. 2). Schools in the .S. were founded based on parochial education. If all students attended public schools, would there be enough classrooms and schools to accommodate this need? Currently, many of the public schools are experiencing an overflow of students, and this can be a challenge because the public schools do not have the funds to meet this demand, consequently leading to more difficulty for future education. Therefore, parochial schools provide the same level of education for students; this type of school offers a spiritual component not offered in public schools. Also,

the students enrolled in parochial schools have the freedom to pray in this setting, and this type of educational setting may contribute to their individual growth and value system.

One of the main differences between parochial schools and public schools is the method of operation and how they get funding. Parochial schools are financed and operated by the money that is brought in by the schools and parish. The three choice programs in the state were designed to help parochial schools and the families in it to afford education. These programs are funded through state and paid for by taxpayers' money. There is some financial relief at the state and federal level due to students in parochial schools. It is more inexpensive to send a child to a parochial school with a voucher than it does send a child to the public school. Not only are parents paying tuition but also paying taxes, which in turn supports the parochial school. Most parishes own their parochial schools. The councils of the parish make decisions for the school, usually headed by the pastor of the church. In the larger parochial schools, the schools governed by an advisory board comprised of members of an education commission, members of the leadership team that may become the president of the system. The head of the governing board is the dean or pastor of the deanery in which the school system resides.

Religious parochial schools generally spend less money per student than public schools because the funds come from local sources (Figlio & Stone, 1997). The budget of a parochial school has three types of outsourcing funding. These three sources come from tuition or voucher funding from the state, fundraising and donations, and parish support in which the local parish or parishes supplement by donating to meet the final needs of the school.

There has been documentation that parochial school students have more significant performance than their public school counterparts. Most parochial schools operate without current educational materials. School supplies and technology that is not up to date leads

advocates to argue that parochial schools are more effective at educating their students (Figlio and Stone, 1997). Dietrich (2010) confirmed that many of the staff and stakeholders of parochial schools share the vision and mission of the Catholic school. Through careful research in other states within the U.S., parents who have a higher socioeconomic status have more financial means to afford the tuition for their children to be able to attend Catholic or other parochial schools. While this might be true for some of the parents in the state, many Catholic schools in the northern part of the state do not share those same statistics (NCES, 2003). Parish schools also provide either reduced or free lunch to those students who are considered low income.

One of the main reasons for enrolling students in parochial schools, as stated by NCES (1997), the class sizes are smaller and that there is a stronger relationship with the parents and the students because the class size can accommodate the communication between the parents and the students. (Kraushaar, 1972). Parochial schools determine the criteria for admission and adhere to these policies, and each school varied depending on where they reside.

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Review of Research Literature

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Colonial Era and the Late 18th Century

In the early years of education, the primary type of education provided to families were parochial schools, not public. There was a lack of diversity in the local school system, primarily due to the merging of grades. There was a difference in the method in which boys and girls received the same level of education (Kennedy, 2008). In 1635, the first public school in the American colonies opened, known as the Boston Latin School. This school mirrored the European educational model based on the trivium, which was courses in grammar, rhetoric, and logic. The Boston school offered and required students to complete the quadrivium, which was a collection of classes in liberal arts, consisting of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

These requirements were established to serve the children of scholars, gentlemen of leisure, and the merchants and innkeepers who were involved in foreign trade (Sexson, 1938). The problem or the difference between educating students under the European educational model versus the American school model was primarily the language that was used to educate students. Most European schools used Latin as the primary language, which was not purposeful for the innkeepers and merchants in America. Harvard was established in 1636 as a seminary and later transformed into a postsecondary school for men.

Dame Schools/Winter and Spring Schools

In 1647, Massachusetts Bay Colony became the first to require towns of at least 50 households to hire a teacher to educate the town's children. Besides, towns that consisted of 100 families would be able to build a public elementary school. By the 19th century, women dominated the field in teaching in New England that resulted in the establishment of two educational institutions: the so-called '"dame schools' and a two-tier system divided into winter and summer sessions (Botticini & Eckstein, 2006). During the school year, genders were taught during separate seasons of the school year. Based on this gender separation, men were responsible for education older boys in the winter months, and female teachers were assigned the task to teach the younger children of both genders (Botticini & Eckstein, 2006).

The Beginning Years in Education

In 1806, the Lancasterian schools, which was formed by wealthy businessmen to provide education for poor students (Mesquita, 2012). One headmaster taught all subject areas to hundreds of students under one school building. Lancasterian schools were supported and promoted in New York City by the "Society for Establishing a Free School in the City of New

York for the Education of Such Poor Children as do not belong to or are not provided for by any Religious Society" (Borne, 1870).

By 1837, the Catholic clergy interceded by addressing the issue of those students who were not provided the same level of education because they were considered low-income. Public schools banned students classified as weak and judged as having no moral standards based on their economic status and how they compared to others in the neighborhood. The demographics of these students consisted of being Irish, Catholic, and very poor (Bourne, 1870). "Knowledge taught by any sect is better than ignorance. I desire to the children of Catholics educated as well as Protestants; not because I want them Catholics, but because I want them to be good citizens" (Loughery, 2018). Every school has the power to teach subjects needed for each persons' success in life; however, it is the parochial schools. They are able to integrate faith within the classroom without compromising teaching subjects all that shape the child. (Louisiana College, 2019).

The Public School Society was a local organization instrumental in leading education by educating the poor (Good, 1970). Advanced students conducted some level of teaching. This teaching approach was known as mutual instruction. By 1826, a new policy change that incorporated tuition for those families that could afford this expense contributed to a decline in enrollment. Six years later, the community rejected the concept of paying tuition, and the parochial society remained active until 1853. After 1853, states to become actively involved in education that led to the Lancastrian schools to become responsible for the transition from parochial to public schools before the Civil War (Good, 1970). As Archer (2000) explained, these Protestant institutions received opposition from Catholics and other religious sects of this time.

The Popularity of Parochial Schools

Catholic schools date back to the 17th century when missionaries established schools in Florida and Louisiana as a means of spreading the Roman Catholic faith (Hunt, Joseph, and Nuzzi, 2004). The expansion of Catholic schools occurred in the nineteenth century (Hunt, Joseph & Nuzzi, 2004**)**. By 1845, there were 1,444 Catholic elementary schools in the U.S. The leadership of the Catholic Church declared that every parish should have a school for its children, and it urged all parents to send their children to Catholic schools (Archer, 2000; Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2004). The Catholic population increased by 300% from 1880 to 1920, and their school enrollment increased by 400%. It was noted, however, that the decree for every child to receive a Catholic education fell well below the mandate (Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2004).

In the late 1800s, Lutherans held the belief that there is a need to provide education in schools. The Catholic church believed that educating students in the more central and homeostatic environment would teach children to be good citizens. The Germans who founded the Lutheran church were positive that their children's faith and culture remain undamaged. Worship services should remain in German, and by forcing children to learn the religion in English weakened their cultural faith (Archer, 2000).

In order to remedy this issue, some states mandated that core subjects in all schools of the state used English as their primary language (Archer, 2000**)**. In 1821 the Boston's English High School opened its door with an enrollment of 102 students. The school is the first tuition-free public high school to have taught English as the only language-based subject. The Bennett Law, which predates World War I, defined a school as a place where all subjects used English as their first teaching language (Tyack, James, & Benavot, 1987). Members of the Catholic and Lutheran faiths struggled to preserve their culture by using the language of their worship service during

the school day. The parochial schools won the battle; however, these religious schools were un-American (Kraushaar, 1972).

Education in the 1900s

In Pierce v. the Society of Sisters, enacted in 1922, mandated that all children between the ages of eight and 16 to attend public schools was declared unconstitutional by 1925 (Kandel, 1955). This law that was supported by the Ku Klux Klan was intended to destroy all parochial elementary schools (Good, 1970). The decision made by the Supreme Court declared that parents have the right to choose the school their children attended. Public expenditures for public schools increased from 47% in 1850 to 79% in 1890. During the same period, the percentage of elementary public school students in rural areas increased to 90% (Tyack, James, & Benavot, 1987). Inflation contributed to a reduction of goods that reduced the income of families, which contributed to families having the inability to afford to enroll their students in parochial difficult. (Kraushaar, 1972). The 10% of students who remained in parochial schools attended Catholic schools in large cities. Kraushaar (1972) explained that parochial schools faced severe financial crisis due to inflation, recession, higher teacher salaries, and other costs which threatened financial survival.

Renewal of Parochial Schools

During World War II, resulted in a 118% increase in student enrollment within parochial schools (Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2004). Their public school counterpart's enrollment increased by 36% of their student population. Kauper (1973) described a court case in which the federal government set funds aside to allow students needing public transportation to attend parochial schools in 1947. Everson versus Board of Education was one court case that contributed to overturning the decision of the language amendment. This case changed the way that individual

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states viewed the strength of the first amendment in terms of religious matters and how it pertains to the law. During World War II, Catholic enrollment had improved in terms of enrollment leading to profitability because tuition covered the expenses of the institution.

Over the next several years, the Catholics placed high expectations of President John F. Kennedy, who was the first Catholic president of the U.S. (Week, 2000). The expectation was to change the way people perceived education. Catholic and other parochial schools desired to be increased their reputation and importance in society. During the 1940s, school enrollment increased their internal power. The rationale for this growth attributed to the fact that soldiers were coming back from the war and Catholic schools increased their enrollment to 110% of their previous student count. During the presidency of John F. Kennedy, Catholics and their institution's enrollment continued to grow. Students who attended parochial schools were able to utilize public transportation. Parents also were able to have more flexibility in their choice to enroll their children with less financial constraints. During the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, a decline in enrollment in Catholic schools; therefore, President Johnson. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which allowed the government to pay for more students in public schools. This act now allocated funding for students classified as low income, funding of programs for special needs, and other supplies. "The law represented a major new commitment by the federal government to "quality and equality" in educating our young people" (Brenchley, 2015).

Religion was considered the most stable element in the realm of parochial education (Week, 2000). At the beginning of the 20th century, enrollment soared with over five million students attending parochial schools. After World War II and the election of John F. Kennedy, the boom in enrollment within parochial attributed to the Catholics believe that the religious

sector should have more power than the government (Archer, 2000). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a decline in parochial education was steadily increasing. As more students entered into other parochial schools, the power of Catholic schools began to decline. One essential reason for the change contributed to the act of parochial school's enrollment because the public school system omitted the daily prayer as part of its daily routine.

Performance of Parochial Schools

Student performance is one element that both public and parochial schools can use as a way to measure its differences in how they provide students with a quality education. Schools of either entity can compare data from different sources such as the family's socioeconomic status, gender, race, and age of students in public and parochial schools (Alt & Peter, 2002). Statistics may affect the score of the standardized assessments given. The test scores could be altered based on the following entities: depending on the class makeup, attitude of the students, current academic performance statistics, or the home life of a student.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2006) reported three groups of parochial school student groups with the highest enrollment. Catholic, Lutheran, and Conservative Christian schools have continued to perform more effectively than public school students. In 2002, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2006) discovered that fourth and eighth-grade parochial school students maintained higher average writing scores in comparison to students in the same grades enrolled in public schools (NAEP). White and Hispanic students who attended Catholic schools in large cities performed better than their public school peers (Neal, 2008). Black students in Catholic schools had higher grade point averages than Black students in public schools in all areas except in fourth-grade mathematics and writing classes (Perie, Vanneman, & Goldstein, 2005).

The study by Figlio & Stone (1997) explained that teenage minority students in urban areas benefitted from attending religious schools because it allowed these students to identity during these critical adolescent years. Parochial schools were more likely than public schools to require their students to complete some community service before graduation (NCES, 1997). Community service provided each student with a sense of community building that would serve as a learning tool as they embark on "real world" experiences. Both students enrolled in Catholic, and other parochial schools educated on the assumption that responsibility to their community was a crucial component in their overall education. For this reason, Catholic school students surpassed other schools in community service (NCES). 98% of 12th graders enrolled in parochial schools in the fall of 2006 graduated in 2007 (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009). During this time, 73.2% of students in public schools were successful graduates (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009).

According to Neal (2008), minimal evidence to support that students attending Catholic schools in suburban areas have higher graduation rates than students of any race. The study demonstrated that students who attend Catholic high schools in cities tend to aspire to their public-school peers. This data contributed to the type of leadership offered at either type of school system. The public schools have less time for instruction, which does change the overall results of their standardized test scores. "The promotion and maintenance of civic involvement have been the heart of the Catholic education success story" (Palestini, 2008).

There is a positive correlation that exists between parental expectations and students' attendance in postsecondary education (NCES, 2003). Additionally, students in religious schools were expected by their parents to graduate from a four-year college (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). Both teachers and admins rate the climate of their parochial school as being better than public

schools. In one extensive study of Catholic high schools, many attributes attributed to the success of the schools. These attributes included the ability for the staff to have shared goals within the building; leaders within the Catholic schools had the primary decision-making responsibility; and the commitment that educators have to the academic, spiritual, and social development of students (Alt & Peter, 2002). These factors are recorded despite the higher salaries in public schools. On average, public school teachers earn 64% higher wages than their local school counterparts, and there is a much higher turnover rate in parochial schools due to the salary differences (McLaughlin, O'Donnell, & Ries, 1995). The salaries for public school admins are twice as much as parochial school administrators (NCES, 1997).

Leadership in Catholic Schools

Leadership is a means of extrinsically using influence as an instrument of achievement, to persuade, in developing a process of creating structure, as the outcome of the interaction, as the impact of power and authority, and a way of behavior and professionalism (Leithword, 2012). In this connection, Leithwood (2012) described leadership as "the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals" (p. 3). Leadership has also been found to be concerned with achieving goals, working with people in a social organization, being ethical and exercising power (Donaldson, 2006).

Variety in Parochial Schools

There are three major categories of parochial schools: Catholic, other religions, or nonsectarian (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009). Catholic schools tend to be larger and have a more diverse population than any other parochial schools (Alt & Peter, 2002). 96% of Catholic and nonsectarian schools enroll minority students (Alt & Peter, 2002). According to Kraushaar

(1972), parochial schools express more interest in poor students than do their public school counterparts. Although the elite nonpublic schools compose only a fraction of parochial schools, they provide scholarships to diversify their student population (Archer, 2000). Generally, parochial schools are not required to adhere to state and federal regulations regarding their admission policies and their curriculum (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) listed thirty-five different religious denominations and seventeen religious school associations.

According to the National Center of Education Statistics, parochial schools are assigned to one of four regions (Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2009). These four geographic locations include the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Parochial schools, evenly distributed within the four geographic regions, with the South having the most significant number of schools and students (Alt & Peter, 2002).

Choice and Parochial Schools

One critical motivating factor for parents choosing parochial schools can be associated with specific research about school choice programs. School choice programs assist students by using vouchers that allow parents more choices in selecting a parochial school of their choice (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). In the state, for the past 20 years, the first two voucher programs developed in the state assisted students in particular cities compared to the third program, covers the remaining parochial and parochial schools in the state. In 1990, the first voucher program decided that there needed to be an alternate way for students to attend parochial schools and was centralized in one particular city. The second voucher program restricted to schools in the city in order to accept vouchers for students who solely that attended those schools. In 2012, all schools in the state could apply for third voucher program. While there were certain limitations on the

third voucher program during the first two years, it eventually developed into a prosperous

program. The third voucher program currently supports 254 schools in the state.

The research that supports parental decisions to send their children to parochial schools is

gathered from the perspective of parochial schools located primarily in large cities that support

these voucher programs. According to Goldring and Hausman (1999), the school system is

devoted to achieving diversity; therefore, school choice programs are targeted to attract low-

income and minority students. This type of effort provides equal opportunity education to these

populations, as well as offer small class sizes in a spiritual, educational setting. Research

demonstrates that the characteristics of parents who utilize the school choice program options

differ from those parents who do not benefit from this program as this difference primarily

contributes to socioeconomic status and the educational background of these families (Goldring

& Hausman, 1999). These statistics cannot be applied to all state school systems that support the

choice programs, specifically the SProgram. The families must meet specific criteria to qualify

for the program and must fall into at least 185% of the poverty level, which is 115% lower than

their counterparts who are enrolled in the MProgram and RProgram program at 300% poverty

level. Parochial schools have an unmatched advantage over public schools stemming from the

parents' desire to choose a parochial education for their children (Alt and Peter, 2002).

According to Alt and Peter (2002), parents that require their children to perform to high

academic standards have expressed that teachers also need to facilitate the same standards and

maintain a stable climate in both parochial and public school systems.

Public Perception of Parochial Education

Parents who enroll their children in parochial schools may be influenced by the general

public opinion that is academically superior to public schools (Kraushaar, 1972; Peterson &

Llaudet, 2006; Neal, 2008). In addition, students who are unrepresented such as minority and students who have socioeconomic challenges perceive the full value of attending parochial schools as they value the following benefits the school system offers compared to public schools: higher expectations for academic achievement, reduced dropout rates, improved critical thinking skills (Alt & Peter, 2002).

The parochial label has caused some to ponder that parochial schools are elitist, which creates a distance between parochial and public schools from the common purpose of educating the nation's youth. Davis (1999) asserted how society had labeled these school systems in a manner that creates a difference.

Another perception of the public's view of parochial schools is that they lack diversity (Kane & Orsini, 1999). Alt and Peter (2001) discussed how private schools were less likely to be diverse than their public-school counterparts. Parochial schools actively seek diversity by drawing students from many communities. Demographics, according to Peterson and Llaudet (2006) and Goldring and Rowley (2006), is an essential factor in student achievement and not which type of school attended by the students.

The Rationale for School Choice

Kraushaar (1972) explained that parents had made a choice to enroll their children in parochial schools because there is a strong belief that these schools offer a superior or distinct kind of education and additional services for their children. One of the main reasons for the existence of parochial schools is to offer a better education than that of public schools (Kane & Orsini, 1999). Each parent defines the term "better" in different ways as they reflect and measure how they perceive a valued education for their child. A religious, educational experience, small class sizes, family-centered environment, and individualized student educational plans are just

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some of the reasons why parents choose Catholic or other parochial or parochial schools. In the secondary parochial educational atmosphere, the graduate rate is high, and the students feel this type of environment offers more opportunities to engage in sports and other extracurricular activities.

Kraushaar (1972) reported that parents give different reasons for their choice, depending on the type of parochial school attended by their children. Figlio and Stone (1997) confirmed Kraushaar's findings by stating that parents might desire their children to interact with a particular group of peers. These peers would share the same interests, study habits, or goals, and they would assess the type of resources provided by the school. Goldring and Hausman (1997) provided survey results that suggested that 68% of parents share that students should have the right to choose what school they would like to attend.

Martinez, Thomas, and Kemerer (1994) examined the characteristics 36 of families that attended parochial schools and the rationale for choosing them. The recurring message was that families desired the best quality education for their children. School Choice (2018) confirmed that parents provide specific reasons for choosing parochial schools, and one of the most popular choices was the ability to utilize school choice**.** Parents were primarily influenced by race and class of the school's population that resulted in their inability to enroll their children in schools with high minority enrollment. Minority parents avoided schools with a high percentage of low-income students (Lacierno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008).

The growing trend of offering school choice has been instrumental in providing some families the option of parochial school education. The major cities with voucher programs are geared toward soliciting minority students from low-income households to attend parochial schools. For example, The Baltimore City Program reflected that the voucher programs in

MProgram, Cleveland, and Washington, DC have been successful with increased test scores and parental satisfaction (Lips, 2005). The MProgram is exemplary in their success in serving students as they have achieved an increase in test scores that leads to promising for the students. Lips (2005) discussed how competition between parochial and public schools would lead to a more efficient and effective education system.

Parents have made a choice to enroll their children in a parochial school because they feel it is more of a disciplined environment, offers religious education, or a higher opportunity to participate in extracurricular sports (Figlio & Stone, 1997). Parents are more than likely to choose a parochial school education for their children, whether there are any specific academic advantages (Figlio & Stone, 1997). In choosing a school, parents have considered more factors outside of academic achievement in choosing a school such as security and participation in extracurricular activities. In addition, parents were dedicated to their child's ability to develop their character through religious training, college ambitions, and their ability to collaborate with peers of higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Review of Methodological Issues

Action research is essential because it provides data and evolving as new research arises. The study provided the researcher with a greater understanding of why parents have made the decision to enroll their children in the Catholic school system. By utilizing action research, as well as statistical data, surveys, and interviews within the literature, provided a solid rationale for these decisions. Creswell (2014) discussed the importance of data collection as a method to share the differences and similarities that can be applied to this research as it reflects the rationale of what attracts parents to Catholic schools.

Quantitative Research

Council for American Parochial Education (2008) surveyed parochial schools that determine different information in comparison to parochial schools throughout the U.S. Kraushaar's (1972) survey used the different types of parochial schools by splitting them into three different categories. The survey also viewed how these nine groups' shared both similarities and differences within these categories. Kraushaar (1972) used a statistical technique known as "multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which can be used to compare group means on several different variables simultaneously. This survey instrument also examines differences between the groups to determine whether or not means on each variable are similar." Bielick and Chapman (2003) explored data surveyed by schools to compare students that attend Catholic schools and compared them to students who are recipients of the choice voucher program. The data is divided into both religious or nonreligious sectors and incorporated a section to understand parentally satisfied that was measured by their specific involvement. Botticini & Eckstein (2006) described a different method to analyze the population using a path dependence approach. Botticini and Eckstein (2006), stated, "Path dependence in occupations can be interpreted to mean that the observed occupational distribution in a population or a subpopulation at a point in time depends on changes that occurred years or centuries earlier" (p. 1).

These researchers evaluated the research to determine how innovations in the economy have impacted future generations. The significance of Botticini and Eckstein's (2006) aligned with this research study that confirmed that parents who have made a choice to enroll their children in Catholic schools assessed the positive impact in society; therefore, solidifying their decision. Botticini and Eckstein (2006), data collection exemplifies how the growth of both

public and parochial schools and what factors have contributed to its growth and to recognize how socioeconomic barriers and other social factors played into the decision for parents to enroll their children (NCES, 1995; NCES, 1997; Peterson & Llaudet, 2006; Mclaughlin, O'Donnell & Ries, 1995; Alt & Peter, 2002; Broughman, 2006).

Qualitative Research

"Qualitative research provides a method to explore and understand the meaning of both individuals and groups and how they ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014). Sexson (1938), provided some historical reflection of how these secondary schools emerged dating back to the 1800s. Over a period of time, secondary education attracted more students who desired to enroll to become educated in different traits to flourish in these fields of interest as follows: merchants, innkeepers, and scholars.

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Theoretical Framework: Leadership Theory

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The following leadership theories offer several examples of literature existing in the field of educational leadership. The findings from this research study are built upon these areas of leadership theory. In the theoretical framework which follows, three leadership styles are discussed: authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a widely researched leadership theory. This style of leadership, as described by Begley (2003), offers "a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration" (p. 1) and has been making inroads in the literature of leadership over the past decades. The authentic leadership model offers an ideal based on values and action, which reflects a profound dignity for the student (Gamson, 2004).

The characteristics of an authentic leader are accountability and admitting to mistakes, and they are perceived as being non-manipulative (Henderson, 1998). This theory highlights the fact that these leaders act on their set of internal values, and are consistent in their behavior. The emphasis is on being an ethical, upright, and authentic person first, which informs and shapes the role of leadership they have, whether it is administrative, educational, or anything else (Smith, 2007). Authentic leaders are aware of their limitations but do not sacrifice their ideals to create comfort zones for themselves (Henderson, 1998). Mistakes are inevitable, but there is an effort to live up to the ideal that is the hallmark of authenticity, to strive beyond oneself rather than complacent acceptance of mediocrity.

Authentic leaders move forward with projects and their specific vision without harming the sincere interpersonal relations; they maintain with staff and students. This authentic leadership style is formed because these relationships are essential to them and for those who are involved in assisting the school in achieving best practices. An authentic leader inspires others to find meaning in their work instead of merely fulfilling a role or function. Furthermore, authentic leaders consider their work as a calling and a mission and thus are often interested in spiritual values. "Spiritual leaders are authentic leaders. However, based on spiritual leadership, the leader also has a sense of receiving life meaning from their work and making a significant difference" (Smith, 2007, p. 70).

Transformational Leadership

Another popular theory of leadership in recent research is transformational leadership. The goal of this approach is to bring about deep life-changes in both the leaders and the followers. James Burns (1978) first introduced the overall concept of Transformational leadership in his work with political leadership. He won a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book

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Award for his book R*oosevelt: Soldier of Freedom 1940–1945.* During this period of his book, the circumstances were ripe for this leadership theory to emerge. Later, Bass (2000) used this theory and adjusted it according to previous research and his findings.

A transformational leader is characterized by one who has a definite impact on others, which based on the potential motives of subordinates (Burns, 1978). The transformational leaders arouse the interests of his followers and work to channel the interest in committing them to work harder towards goals. In one study related to school admins, shows that most school principals use a transformational leadership approach rather than a transactional approach (one that focuses mainly on basic needs), and this leadership tends to lead to a more positive school culture (Sahin, 2004).

One reason why this approach can be successful in strengthening performance and work culture is that this leadership style seeks to satisfy the higher needs of the person. At the same time, this approach offers emotional and dynamic relationships between leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). The human person tends to desire a deeper meaning in life, and this approach can motivate people to feel that they are assisting in reaching a higher level in their own lives and the lives of others. In the transformational approach, the vision of the leader helps to develop the follower not as a means to obtain the vision, but as an end in itself (Miller, 2006). When the transformational leader shares his or her vision, the subordinates feel strongly identified with the leader's personal goals. Besides, followers are more willing to raise their expectations to accomplish challenging goals (Burns, 1978). A transformational leader builds their referent power based on the loyalty and admiration for their leader (Yukl, 2006).

The transformational leader can articulate a straightforward and achievable goal and by acting in proportion to the context and people to obtain this goal (Calabrese, 2002). This type of

leader works with a sense of proportionality to what amount of change he or she may expect from his followers. The transformational leadership theory offers a high level of motivation for their followers. This leadership style illustrates confidence, and this characteristic is defined in how the leader interacts their subordinates. This leadership theory does not offer a secure road towards success if followers are not well-trained or if some crisis occurs, and employees not trained in how to respond (Yukl, 2006).

In summary, according to the transformational leadership approach, both leaders and followers motivate one another and inspire each other to become better people (Burns, 1978). This form of leadership is called "transforming" because it aims to transform both the leaders and those they influence positively (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

Servant Leadership

Building on transformational leadership, servant leadership is another distinct theory of leadership that demands consideration. More than 30 years ago the theory of servant leadership had only recently grown popular among researchers. Greenleaf (1996), who pioneered this theory, defined it in this way:

> The servant–leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served. (p. 2)

As Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) elaborated on the fact that research has been scarce "on the topic of servant leadership precisely because the term *servant–leader* is an oxymoron." In other words, the terms seem to be opposites of one another. The word "servant" is mentioned, it connotes a person who is a follower or in some way inferior to others. "The traditional image of

a leader is a person who is in charge and control of others. In contrast, the image of a servant is one who is submissive, takes orders and does what he is told" (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks, 2007, p. 405).

The notion of a leader who is also a servant, however, offers a uniquely attractive and dynamic approach and draws the interest of many leadership theorists (Bass, 2000; Bowman, 1997; Senge, 1995). The servant–leader is characterized by moral purpose, passion, and courage (Thompson, 2005). This type of leader must also possess the virtues of humility and integrity since he is willing to learn from others for the good of the whole (Taylor et al., 2007). Greenleaf (1996) and Gardner (1990) explained that the current crisis of leadership connects to the way the educational system trains its leaders. Instead of forming responsible participants in society who would provide service for others, current educators tend to focus more on instilling skills of critique and expertise. Servant leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes "service to others, personal development, and shared decision-making;" this helps the servant leaders "meet the needs of everyone… that, in turn, enables the leader to grow and mature as well" (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 405).

Servant leadership, based on the idea of community, which Greenleaf viewed "as the only way in which servant leadership can succeed. He described the community as "a face-to-face group in which the liability of each for the other and all for one is unlimited, or as close to it as it is possible to get'" (Hines, 1999, p. 38). In conclusion, research based on the theories of authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership provides the theoretical framework for this study.

Synthesis of Research Findings

What motivates a family to decide to send their children to Catholic schools? Throughout the literature, there have been repeated occurrences that focused on the strength of attending a parochial school. One key strength is that there is a sense of community because the classes are small, and the child can focus on social, spiritual, emotional, and academics in the parochial school setting The review of the literature exemplifies the motivation of enrolling students to parochial schools that can be discerned into the following five categories: history, performance, leadership, variety, and public perception.

Throughout U.S. history, there have been shifts in popularity for public and parochial schools. The first established schools were parochial schools. These schools were established to serve the children of scholars, gentlemen of leisure, and the merchants and innkeepers who were involved in foreign trade (Sexson, 1938). The adoption of the Lancastrian model that "free" education was designed to provide access to all. Later in the 19th century, the priests became the current models of education and were mainly in what they thought should be used to educate students. "Knowledge taught by any sect is better than ignorance. I desire to the children of Catholics educated as well as Protestants; not because I want them Catholics, but because I want them to be good citizens" (Loughery, 2018). The educational platform in which children are educated is based on the idea of what is best for the child. Those parents who chose parochial schools are looking for more in their child's education, which primarily consists of religious education which is simply not offered in public schools.

The emphasis on performance promoted pressure for administrators and teachers to ensure that the classroom meets student expectations and standards. Researchers have noted that there is considerably more time spent specific areas of testing to ensure overall student

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achievement on state testing (Cox-Petersen & Spencer, 2006; Lapp et al., 2013; McEwan, 2012; Romance & Vitale, 2012). The focus on student performance has remained a priority to public and parochial schools as they reflect upon their overall academic success. Schools, either public or private can compare data from different sources such as the family's socioeconomic status, gender, race, and age of students as variables to measure success. (Alt & Peter, 2002). Strong leadership that can focus on making effective curriculum changes to meet the needs of students can change the overall student performance. Leithwood (2012) stated leadership as "the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals" (p. 3). Fullan (2002 stated) that "Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement" (p. 1). Fullan (2002) explained that leaders have a more profound lasting influence on organizations and provide comprehensive leadership in instances where they are able to focus on meeting high standards set forth by the school system.

In order for parochial schools to have equal status as their public-school counterparts increasing diversity would be an essential step in the process. By having a diversified group of students, students are exposed to different academic programs, scholarships, and grants that are accessible to all student populations. A majority of rural schools are dominated by one specific race; therefore, diversity is essential to provide a collaborative learning environment. In more extensive parochial school settings that are located in urban areas is comprised of diverse populations. Students who attend Catholic schools are the largest group of students that attend parochial schools. These schools have made every effort to improve education for their students and make themselves comparable to their public-school counterparts.

Public perception can correlate with how public and parochial schools are motivated in the way they instruct students and support community efforts to support their growth. Additionally, more emphasis should be placed on increasing diversity and obtaining community financial support to fund this effort. Alt and Peter (2002) explained that minority students and those students who are from low-income backgrounds would benefit offered from parochial schools such as low dropout rates, improved critical thinking skills. Students are more apt to learn in academic environments that support them, and the importance of equal opportunity in parochial schools is essential for their individual growth that attributes to their spiritual, emotional, and learning needs.

Critique of Previous Research

The literature supported the fact that parents use various levels of rationale in supporting the choice of whether or not to enroll their child into the local school system by assessing the advantages and disadvantages. Throughout history, there has been some evidence of the growing schools within the U.S., whether they are parochial or public. Parents have assessed the benefits of enrolling their children in this system. There are reasons why individual Catholic schools closed and why others flourished. One of the main reasons was due to the involvement of the state and federal government in Catholic and other parochial and private schools. By the 20th century, Americans received more freedom by allowing the voucher programs into the state system that aided families with the opportunity to afford parochial education. Families can choose to incorporate religion as part of their education. Another question remains have people become so self-involved that it leads them to be a follower of a group of people rather than a leader and make decisions for themselves and the betterment of their children? The study expanded its research to understand how current families in rural and urban schools choose to

send their children to parochial schools over public schools and how it impacted their child's future.

Because there are alternatives to public education, there is a greater need for data on parochial or parochial education. Parochial schools in the U.S. have supported the overall growth and prosperity of the nation, impacting every socioeconomic and ethnic group in America (Davis, 1999). Thus, a greater understanding of the reasons behind the continuing presence of parochial schools is needed as an alternative to public schools. Substantial research has been provided to explore academic advantages. Some parents are choosing to send their children to parochial schools despite statistics from an alternative education (Figlio & Stone, 1997). Some parents have expressed the need to enroll their children in schools of the same socioeconomic status and ethnicity. However, researchers have reported that parochial schools have a more diverse population; however, Caucasian parents elected to choose parochial education because they see the educational benefits over the public school system. (Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008). The majority of Blacks and Hispanic parents have made the choice of sending their children to parochial because the voucher program provides the financial resources to support their decision. This type of segregation is evident in the religious parochial education sector. There are three types of parochial schools, and the majority of students enrolled in them attend Catholic parochial schools. While the student population may be more diverse than public schools, the diversity of parochial school educators differs from teachers employed in public education. Parents who attended parochial schools are more likely to enroll their children (Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008). The parents of parochial school students and parents in the community assess parochial schools as a stable education system.

Another defining characteristic of parochial schools in the size of the school with a smaller classroom that can contribute to one-to-one attention. Their size. Most parochial schools are smaller than public schools and therefore have fewer students in the class. Small class sizes can lead to low attendance in sports programs or diversity in class sizes. Low attendance in academic classes leads to less participation in any extracurricular activity because there of a small group of students. Parents exhibit the right to enroll their child into a school system of their choice. School voucher programs that are designed to benefit low-income students have provided parents with the choice to enroll their children in parochial schools, and the financial support has made the decision easier for them. There is limited research on parents' choice of a parochial education that is not funded with some form of a voucher. Parents shared their satisfaction with the engagement and expectations of parochial schools that incorporate more activities and college readiness to attend a parochial school. (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). Figlio and Stone (1997) suggested that parents choose parochial schools because they might desire a religious education, a more disciplined atmosphere, or more opportunities for their children to participate in extracurricular activities. The need for more research on the motivation for parents to choose parochial schools and what it reveals about the values of society allows parents to make that decision?

Chapter 2 Summary

Parents are challenged with the decision what is best for their child, and their concerns evolving around education. What defines an academic, spiritual, and emotional student? The literature review has identified personal assessment and observation of parents and teachers in how they perceive education. "Religious education is one curriculum area that can effectively address the interplay between the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of learning"

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(Buchanan & Hyde, 2008, p. 1). The decisions that parents make for their children are complicated. Many factors are assessed in the decision-making process.

The researcher chose to focus on a qualitative research study that would highlight the current physical and academic setting of the researcher's school and the future intended for the school. The review of the literature regarding the motivation to send students to parochial schools discerned into five categories: history, performance, leadership, variety, and public perception.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

Over the past two decades, the Catholic Schools in the diocese have struggled with enrollment. Since the invention of technology, there are more school options for families. In the past three years, there has been movement to increase enrollment. The students who are applying to Catholic schools, are not necessarily Catholic however, parents are seeking an alternative for school choice. The purpose of the qualitative case study is to determine why parents elect to enroll their children in Catholic schools despite the many other educational opportunities for children. Yin (2009) commented that the need for a case study arises when there is a need to understand a particular social phenomenon. Yin (2009) further commented that a case study is a preferred method in "examining contemporary events" (p. 11). The literature examining the changes of Catholic schools has been complex as it highlighted the financial struggles and social acceptance contributed to acceptance into to Catholic schools. The method of research selected for this study is a case study because it was beneficial in understanding the "particularity and complexity of a single case" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Parents choose to enroll their children in Catholic schools, choose to pay for education. Public schools are free and the burden to finance this type of education is reliant on the citizens of the community through taxation, however, the community recognizes the importance of religion as it is incorporated into the curriculum of parochial schools. .

Overview of Methodology

The research questions were designed to be investigative and flexible in that the focus was to understand the perspectives of the participants as defined by Creswell (2009) the research questions were aligned with a qualitative study. Additionally, qualitative research constructs or

develops as the data unfolds within each session with the parents, administrators, and clergy. The idea of how schoolchildren adapt to their learning environment lends itself to the uniqueness based on the responses from the parents. The researcher understand the level of bias entering this study and the researcher removed this bias in order to convey a clear connection on how the data answers the research questions. Examples of different ways to present data from interviews, observations, and interpretation of data not easily reduced to numbers." (Anderson, 2010). The research questions proposed that many people were needed in order to determine everyday experiences among parents in five different Catholic schools throughout the Diocese of the Midwest.

This study is reminiscent of Etchegary's strategy in which the investigator (2011) initiated telephone calls and sent informational packages to build a rapport with the participants in the study. This research study utilized one-to-one interviews to build trust between the researcher and the participant. This relationship allowed the researcher to obtain an emic, or insider's perspective of the lived experiences of others, which reflected a distinguishing characteristic of IPA research. By looking holistically at individual account from each participant, the data was used to establish patterns that formed themes that emerged in comparing and contrasting multiple stories. This intentional investigation, which explored the commonalities that IDPs face, expanded current knowledge of displacement in the context of wildfires, and the researcher used the following analytical questions to guide the second round of data analysis: (a) how do displaced persons anticipate a sense of belonging or identification before resettlement? (b) What differences or discontinuities do participants experienced at the beginning of 69 resettlement? (c) How do displaced persons maintain separate or distinct identities during the acculturation process? (d) What factors contributed to a feeling of

belongingness when integrating into the new culture during the resettlement process? These questions provided many opportunities to engage with the descriptive elements, which participants used to share their lived experiences.

"Though many, we are one" is the motto for one of the schools in the state. This statement symbolizes that particular school system inclusive of Catholic and other parochial schools as the system focuses on educating the whole child, The U.S. Department of Education (2005) has documented that parochial schools were the source for education in the U.S., and they have played an integral role in the education of youth in America (Broughman, 2006). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the number of parochial elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. has increased from 20,764 in the 1980–1981 school year to 33,619 schools in the fall of 2013.

In contrast, the total enrollment for public schools has only increased from 85,982 in the 1980–1981 school to 98,271 in 2013. These enrollment statistics represent 13% increase of schools over the past 34 years, whereas the parochial schools continue to have a positive gain in enrollment, which shows a gain of 34% in the last 34 years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

In the state, the Parental Choice Program is a program that provided vouchers to students who financially qualify for a tuition voucher that is used to attend parochial schools. There are three programs within the state. By 2013, the state introduced the SProgram Parental Choice Program (SPCP). These programs offer school vouchers to students whose families meet specific income criteria for consideration (edchoice.org, 2017). Over the past decade, the voucher program has been instrumental in increasing the enrollment in the parochial school system. The

SProgram Choice Program has increased enrollment in parochial schools by 89% of its previous

matriculation.

Parents desire option for their children and view Catholic education as venue where students can

grow academically, socially, and spiritually (as reported by the superintendent of the

diocese, 2018). One of the reasons parents are seeking alternatives for educating their

child is because public schools have increased class size that can impact the quality of

education for the child. The voucher system facilitates a lottery system to select minority

students or students who have socioeconomic barriers. The purpose of voucher program

is to assist lower-income families receive the best possible education that is available to

them. The programs are established based on assertions that education can provide a

quality education for all children when parents can choose their children's schools

(Hassett, 2001).

According to Kosunen & Carrasco (2016), parents who chose their children's schools

were more likely to be satisfied with the school. Public schools have some advantages over

parochial schools that include the following: free books, competitive sports at multiple grade

levels, state-certified educators and administrators, free and reduced lunches, and free

transportation. Parochial schools offer teachers and administrators the opportunity to seek

certification through the state licensing program and these schools offer a reduced lunch program

options. Parents assess the value of these benefits in making a final decision to enroll their

students to either public or parochial schools.

One disadvantage of the Catholic school system is that they cannot compete with the sports

program offered by the public school system especially at the elementary level. For

example, smaller Catholic schools, have great difficulty forming sports teams. Public

schools receive strong support from the school district to create a solid sports program

within the school system. However, the public school system has made provisions to

support the Catholic schools who do not have enough participants in their sports teams to

allocate their tea members. Both public and parochial schools provide some advantages

for those students who wish to participate in sports as it provides an opportunity to

strengthen their interest in the chosen sport and to provide a solid foundation for students

entering high school. . . . Another advantage of attending parochial school is

transportation as public schools are willing to transport these students. Consequently,

public schools support those students who attend parochial schools. In addition, some

schools receive vouchers to transport students to a parochial school because it works

merely for budgetary reasons (as reported by the superintendent of the diocese, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the benefits of Catholic education and

to understand better the motivation for enrolling students to Catholic schools. The study also

explored the roles that parochial schools play in the lives of children and society. This chapter

included a description of the research design, participants, and the instrumentation, data

collection and analysis used in the design of this research study. The data collection reflected the

following research question: What are the benefits of Catholic education to understand what

motivates parents to enroll their children in Catholic schools, as well as, examine the roles that

parochial schools play in the lives of children as they embark into society?

This research study conducted a qualitative research design was used to explore the

benefits of enrolling their children to Catholic schools over sending them to public schools. This

chapter is divided into several sections to provide an overview of the purpose of the study,

research questions, design, participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedures,

limitations of the research design, validation of trustworthiness and credibility, expected

findings, and ethical issues.

Research Questions

In this study, the notion of why parents choose to enroll their children into parochial

schools. The following questions were designed to gain a better understanding of the

demographics of the Diocese of the Midwest. This intention of the study was to increase the

value to the how parents perceive Catholic schools and what motivates these parents. The

practice of listening to the voice of the parents may create a dialogue between the parochial

schools and the parent and leading to making effective changes that benefit the child. This study,

specifically, included families in the Diocese of the Midwest. Within the diocese, there are

deaneries in which the schools and parishes are divided up. The parents served as a focus of the

study through individual interviews and focus groups.

The questions were formulated to examine what marketing tool or concepts convinced

the parents that Catholic education was the right fit for the families as follows:.

RQ 1: What factors do parents highlight for sending the children to Catholic school?

RQ 2: How has the decision to send their children to Catholic schools impacted the faith

and academic approach to their child's learning and growth development?

RQ 3: What roles do the parochial schools play in the lives of children in society?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to collect qualitative data to investigate the benefits of

Catholic education and the motivation of why parents enroll their children in Catholic schools.

Within the Diocese of the Midwest. A good case study provided an in-depth understanding of

some unique phenomenon that is of concern (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). A basic interpretive

qualitative design was used to explore the reasons why parents choose to enroll their children to Catholic schools. According to Lichtman (2006), qualitative research methods are used to describe, understand, and interpret a situation in its entirety. This research design was an account of perceptions of the participants from several different parochial schools within the Diocese of the Midwest. The research study should utilize a design that captures the perspectives of participants (Merriam et al., 2002).

Qualitative research provides an inductive data collection approach. The researcher avoided investigating data pertaining to parental decisions involving the choice of where to send their children to school; therefore, the study is focused purely on what was provided directly from the participants. (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). To examine the reasons why parents, choose Catholic education, the researcher relied solely on the interviews and focus groups from the surrounding schools. The data was collected from Catholic school parents throughout the Diocese of the Midwest, which includes system schools, K–12 and parish schools and elementary schools. The researcher focused on veteran parents and parents who have recently entered the schools either as a new family or as a transfer from the public school.

The case study, conducted in-person utilized parents of Catholic schools, in face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and observations. The researcher conducted the investigation throughout the diocese. The participants were asked specific questions related to their experiences within Catholic schools. Additionally, participants were asked open-ended questions through focus groups, thereby allowing for more in-depth responses.

Research Population

The population of this study includes parents from Catholic schools in the diocese. The schools in this study contain parents of from different demographics. Two specific differences in

demographics showcased within the case study include religion and race. These parents have children enrolled in grade levels of prekindergarten through 12th grade. Each interview included an investigation of demographics, as well as, questions pertaining to the history of a family in education. By understanding, a parent's background played an integral part in the choice of where their children would attend school. Outside influences such as marketing or statistics also influenced their decision. The parents were more than willing to become participants in the study.

The research demographics was limited to the Diocese of the Midwest. The diocese consists of a diverse population of students. These schools were willing to participate and the researcher provided an information letter that provided the specific elements of the study to include interviews and focus group participation. Of the seven systems, kindergarten through twelfth grade, two of the systems reported having 265 families combined these schools reside in the central region of the state and lie on the eastern edge of the diocese. Through these four parish elementary schools and system school, the researcher conducted a more defined focus group and created face-to-face interviews within the parish. The research focus was to understand the parental motivation for enrolling their children to Catholic schools.

Sampling Method

The families that were selected include a variety of different groups ranging from new entrants into the Catholic school system to a veteran family. Patton (2015) noted that in qualitative research, there are no real rules for the exact number of participants for a study. However, in order to gain depth rather than breadth in the research, a researcher might choose to keep the sample size smaller. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted that the researcher's intent of

the study, along with the setting of the research, would dictate how many participants the researcher recruited for the study. According to Blackstone (2012), quota sampling is:

> When conducting quota sampling, a researcher identifies categories that are important to the study and while having some variation. Subgroups are created based on each category, and the researcher decides how many people to include from each subgroup and collects data from that number for each subgroup. (p. 3)

Through quota sampling, the researcher requested parents in the six schools within the diocese to meet in individual locations to participate in either personal interviews or focus group meetings. All of the participants have children enrolled in Catholic schools. Some of the participants were of Catholic denomination, and others were not. There are also be families that entered into Catholic education at the beginning of their time in school and others who were a transfer from an alternative school setting: home, public, or charter school.

Instrumentation

In qualitative studies, the researcher is referred to as an instrument of the research (Patton, 2001). To that end, this researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data as part of the research for this study. Possible sources for evidence in a case study are comprised of documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). In order to thoroughly understand the parents and their choices within the Catholic schools of the Diocese of the Midwest, this case study relied on three sources of data gathering as follows: an interview, document gathering, and focus groups. The multiple sources of data collection identified the parent's preconceived knowledge of Catholic schools, the reason for sending their students to

Catholic schools, and the reasons for not choosing to send their students to an alternative

educational programs.

Interview

One of the most important sources of data collection in a case study is the interview (Yin,

2009). The interview of the quota sampling of parents within the Diocese of the Midwest was a

standardized and open-ended interview. The interviews were consistent and used the same

sequence of questions and wording as its guide (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Due to the

distance between the researcher and the participants, the researcher arranged a convenient time

for the participants and conducted face-to-face interviews. When the researcher met with the

participants, they met at the school building in which the participants enrolled their children

(Creswell, 2013). Participants who agreed to meet in a focus group setting were made aware by

the researcher that the information that was given during the session was kept confidential and

would not be conveyed to any school admin in the diocese. The information was recorded on the

researchers google drive. The researcher secured the drive under a password protected folder. As

an alternative, the researcher utilized phone or video conferencing platform to accommodate

those participants who could not meet in person.

Documentation

Patton (2002) commented that documents could serve as a rich source of information in

qualitative research. Furthermore, Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) noted that documentation can be

used in every case study and can take on many forms. After obtaining permission from the

school administration, as well as, the participants, the researcher collected documents or artifacts

to "corroborate and augment evidence" (Yin, 2009) from the interview. The documents would

support the reasons why the parents choose a Catholic education for the children. By using

documentation to include pamphlets and other marketing materials to support new enrollment, the marketing strategy would include positive student reviews.

Focus Group

A focus group, in comparison to participant observation, is the opportunity to observe interaction on a topic within limited amount of time (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups are beneficial in providing large amounts of information that can be dedicated to a specific topic. The participants involved in the focus group have a direct interest within the case study. One advantage of using focus groups is that it provides more influence on the data. The focus group questions were compile as predetermined questions that provided consistency throughout the study. The participants of the focus groups were required to fill out a questionnaire that included follow up questions. The focus group provided the researcher in understanding the importance of a Catholic education and this data was pertinent in making these specific discoveries. This type of follow-up questioning is referred to responsive interviewing because the researcher can respond and ask further questions about what is heard from the focus groups or other interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This interviewing style was essential in "reconstruct events the researchers have never experienced; by putting together descriptions from separate interviewees, the researcher created a portrait of complicated processes" (p. 3). Through the interviews, documentation, and focus groups, the participants were asked to describe their experience in a Catholic school and their motivation factors.. Throughout this process of data collection, scaffolding is essential and marks the point of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (2014) stated, "learning begins on a social level and then is internalized" (p. 45). This dialogue between the researcher and the participants increased a greater understanding of what motivated the parents in their choice to enroll their children in Catholic schools.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to address the research questions and provide an analysis of the research proposal, data gathered through the use of focus group questions, and a second step interview. In qualitative research, data analysis follows a process beginning with "narrow units of analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 79), or significant statements, and evolving into detailed descriptions that ultimately bring about the what and how of individual experience (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the triangulation process, or the corroborating of evidence was accomplished through interviews of each participant in the study (Gibson, 2017).

The data for this research was compiled from 40 families within the system and parish schools preselected in the Diocese of the Midwest. Before the data collection began, the researcher obtained approval from the Concordia University Institutional Review Board to conduct the research study. After the approval to conduct the research was granted from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board, the researcher requested permission to collect data from the participants through the Diocese of the Midwest.

Semistructured Interviews

The researcher informed the participants of the intent of the research that consisted of an initial interview of 30 minutes, a request for documents, and a focus group interview of 60 minutes (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2013) noted that qualitative data could take many forms. The researcher focused on utilizing interviews and documented the data collection to form the research. Creswell (2013), Patton (2002), Stake (1995), and Yin (2009) noted that a significant strength of conducting a case study involves collecting data from many sources. In this study, the data was collected from 40 families in six different schools whom all were committed to Catholic education.

One-on-one semistructured interviews were conducted in person with 40 families within six schools of the diocese. The 15-minute interviews were conducted with a set of predetermined questions with the participants. The interview was designed to understand the parental background and their knowledge in reference to Catholic education and all it has to offer. Those interviewed were expected to reflect unique experience of the participants with the questions posed (Stake, 1995).

Document Collection

Patton (2002) stated, "that documents provide a rich source of information about many organizations and programs" (p. 293). Furthermore, Yin (2009) noted that "documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (p. 101). The researcher requested supporting documents from the participants that validate their statements in Catholic education. All these documents are secured in a locked filing cabinet throughout the duration of the study.

Yin (2009) commented "the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry" (p. 115). Furthermore, Patton (2002) noted that the triangulation of data is an ideal method for conducting a case study. The interviews and the focus groups has served as a truthful source of information that aided the researcher in understanding the historical attitudes and reflections on how parents perceived Catholic education. The collection of multiple data sources allows the researcher the opportunity to triangulate the information gathered, thereby giving the research credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Yin, 2009).

Focus Groups

The group was informed at the beginning of the session that all of the information that was provided to the researcher at the time of the focus group would be kept confidential from

anyone in the diocese. Any information that was recorded was kept in a password protected file to ensure confidentiality of the participants of the focus group. The focus group were involved asking the same questions, but worded differently, so those interviewed can either support or contradict the responses to the first interview (Yin, 2009). The focus group was scheduled to accommodate the schedules of those being interviewed. A week before the interviews, the participants were provided with the list of questions that would be used in both the interview and the focus group. By providing the research participants with the questions, this allowed the participants to reflect their direct experiences. All interviews were conducted in person, allowing the researcher an opportunity to record the interviews with a recording device.

Additionally, the researcher recorded the responses to the questions on a prepared interview guide (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). After the interviews were conducted, the researcher compared field notes to the recorded responses to ensure accuracy. This approach provided the researcher with the opportunity to reflect and elaborate on the information provided (Patton, 2002). Once the field notes were completed and interviews were transcribed, all recorded interviews were deleted to ensure the privacy of the participants. The responses recorded on the interview guide were saved on the researcher's local computer, Google Drive account, as well as, on an external hard drive. The folders in the drive were password protected.

Polkinghorne (1989) stated, "Research methods are plans used in the pursuit of knowledge. They are outlines of investigative journeys, laying out previously developed paths, which, if followed by researchers, are supposed to lead to valid knowledge" (p. 41). The main objective of this research was to meet with a group of children currently attend parochial schools families who have provided some rationale of why they enrolled their children in Catholic

schools. A few small parental focus groups were formed at different geographical locations to determine the motivation for sending their children to Catholic schools. After the focus groups completed their part of the study, the data was collected and analyzed. Follow-up interviews were conducted gather more detailed information that the researcher needs to complete fill any data gaps in the study. The main goals was to gather information that would aid the researcher in understanding how Catholic schools could enhance academic performance that would serve as an asset to their future college endeavors.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis segment of this case study required data collection and making sense of the data by dividing the information into meaningful pattern and lastly correlating the main elements into one finding. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested that there are four phases of analyzing the vast amount of data collected. They include "organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data" (p. 135). Creswell (2014) noted similar phases to analyzing the data but suggested two more phases. These phases included expanding the description of the themes in the narrative and, finally, making an interpretation of the findings. Patton (2002) and Yin (2009) both recommended conducting a cross-case analysis to develop additional themes and patterns. In all, the data analysis process required the researcher to "winnow" the data down to manageable chunks in order to make sense of the whole (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002).

The analysis of the data was inductive (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Patton, 2002). Creswell (1995) suggested that most of the researcher's time could be spent in a direct interpretation of the data collected. The analysis of data was reactionary upon completion of the focus groups. The focus groups were essential in the researchers' task of gathering notes

developing common themes through the practice of labeling and numbering. The interviewees

are then chosen based on those common themes and the information that was provided by the

researcher. The questioning, in some cases, leads to subsequent questions and insight; thus,

allowing for clarifications or a deeper understanding of the answers given by the participants.

After the completion of the interviews, the data was revisited for clarity purposes. This process is

imperative in the final analysis of the project. The data was reported in narrative form with the

use of tables to display the demographics of the participants and their schools. The researcher

analyzed the transcripts to identify commonalities as well as, creation of the findings, which

include quotes from the interviews. Recurring patterns or common themes were identified. A

descriptive account of these findings were presented, referencing the literature that framed the

study. Themes and concepts are compared across the interviews using the constant comparison

method.

1. "Values Coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a

    participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or

    worldview" (Schnell, 2017). Value Coding was not the only source used as part of

    the interviews, documentation, and focus group information was used to

    understand the parent as they share and the researcher can observe them in their

    own environment. The researcher coded the interviews, observations, and focus

    group transcripts as either a (V) for value, (A) for attitude, or B for belief. This

    approach was beneficial in combing the data collection into categories where the

    researcher combined to form interconnected ideas into categories into which the

    researcher can reflect on their collective meaning, interaction, and interplay

    (Saldaña, 2016). This type of coding was beneficial because it was a reflection of

why parents selected Catholic schools and how they valued education and what
impact it had on its value system and currently living situation.

Following the first interview, the researcher asked the participants for documents related to the research question. Stake (1995) commented that the process of studying documents is similar to conducting interviews. Therefore, the researcher collected documents provided by the participants as well as the documents collected by the researcher from online sources. After the documents are collected, they were coded and analyzed for data related information as it pertains to the research questions (Stake, 1995). Document analysis aided the researcher in making sense of the information provided in the interviews, as well as, provide the researcher with a complete picture of the background of these parents and how they chose a school for their child (Patton, 2002). The data collection process assisted the researcher in triangulating the data collected with the first and second interviews, thereby allowing the researcher an opportunity to come to a more in-depth understanding of the topic being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Limitations

The act of being transparent about the limitations and delimitations helps maintain reliability and validity and thereby ensure the study is trustworthy (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Parents who volunteered be a part of the focus group might also be involved in other school activities within the school or have generational reasons why they have attended the school. Other parents who may share similar reflections are not part of the study. These results were analyzed, and then smaller groups of individuals were chosen for the interviews to seek further information based on their original commentary in the focus groups. It is the role of the researcher to identify the results of the interview, as well as, the findings of the focus groups.

The researcher reflected upon the interviews with both the clergy and administrators who demonstrated a strong knowledge of the Catholic practice in education, therefore, their expertise would be considered credible

Delimitations

Delimitations assists in the description of the choices made by the researcher. They help "clarify the boundaries of your study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The boundaries the researcher selected for this study included purposeful and homogeneous sampling, instrumentation, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and clarifying the bias of the researcher.

The researcher has some biases because the attendance in the Catholic school system, which the interviewees were informed. However, to ensure credibility, the researcher must be careful not to allow personal biases to influence the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013). The researcher may have some biases in terms of how the interpretation of data is presented because of the researcher's direct background in the Catholic school system. Because the researcher acknowledges these particular biases, the researcher removed these biases and listen effectively to the participants experience through both the focus groups and interview process.

<center>**Validation**</center>

Credibility

The researcher's ethical decisions are based on the teachings of her Catholic upbringing but mirror the theory of Palmer's Mobius Strip, "whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to form or deform, our lives" (p. 47). Palmer and Greenleaf worked collectively with the idea that we are

servants of ourselves. The researcher and the participants in this study are constantly challenged with outside influences that impact the decision-making process.

In qualitative research, the credibility or trustworthiness of a study needs to be well-established (Creswell, 2013). Since all the participants in the study are attending Catholic schools, there is an underlying understanding that all participants should be truthful in their responses regarding their insight on Catholic education. Because the themes were repetitive throughout the interview and focus group sessions at the different locations and schools, the research deemed credible.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research depends on what the researcher sees and hears. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important in establishing trustworthiness. One of the ways to ensure credibility and transferability is to ensure that those interviewed have the experience to discuss the phenomenon the researcher seeks to explore (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Demonstrating saturation was also a factor in ensuring that the data gathered includes data sufficient to provide credibility to the theory claimed (Charmaz, 2006). Transferability was limited in this research study as this study sought to explore a unique topic. The research must be accessible to aid trustworthiness (Yin, 2011). While the data for this research will be accessible for 5 years following the study, all transcripts and recordings will thereafter be disposed of. The unavailability of the data after five years causes a potential limitation to the trustworthiness and credibility of this study in the future.

Another potential limitation of this study was conducting the interviews by phone versus in person. Birks and Mills (2011) noted that the researcher should increase attention to verbal

communication to try to overcome the impact of missing nonverbal cues. To maintain consistency among all interviews, the interviews were all conducted the same way, on the telephone, even if proximity to the interviewee allowed for an in-person interview. Introducing bias to the phenomenon or theory that emerges from this study was minimized in several ways. Yin (2011) suggested to set clear rules and follow them to help minimize bias in research. This researcher had a set of clear rules and several controls to Show evidence of how you assured the accuracy of data. Explain how you lessened the impact of potential researcher bias. Using conference call recordings and a digital audio recorder to capture the interviews prevented the researcher from adding to or excluding any data from the participants' interviews. Manually coding the interviews using grounded theory methodology helped ensure objective interpretation of the data, which also helped to minimize bias. The use of memos also helped the researcher stay accountable to the theory that emerged by aiding reflection and helping during the research process (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Dependability

Parents provided information through interviews, documentation, and focus groups to create triangulation in data by gaining different perspectives. Bias was reduced or eliminated during the research by using triangulation (Lichtman, 2006). The use of multiple sources led to credibility of the investigation. Creswell (2008) explains, "The idea of data validation by saying that triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals such as parents, types of data such as field notes, and case studies, and methods of data collection such as documents and interviews." The end goal of using mixed methods or triangulation is for the researcher to be able to draw upon multiple viewpoints to draw out a theme.

This study emphasized data triangulation in which the parents of children who attended parochial schools were interviewed. More specifically, the researcher focused on what Creswell (1994) called "dominant-less dominant design." The researcher presented the study "within a single dominant paradigm with one small component of the overall study approach is a quantitative study based on testing a theory in an experiment with a small qualitative interview component in the data collection phase" (Creswell, 1994, p. 177). The overall arching topic of constructivism and socialization theory links together with the information gathered from the interview or focus groups. Correlations made throughout the process with standing foundational theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Brunner (1966) with the less dominant information of the interview that ties in current/local information to the theory.

Expected Findings

The use of focus groups and the interviews that examined how motivation to send children to Catholic schools and aid students grow academically, emotionally, and spiritually through the compassion of qualified educators in a small classroom environment. Current marketing and enrollment programs that are currently instituted by the schools in the Diocese of the Midwest have this underlying understanding of why parents send their students to Catholic schools. Through the results of the research, schools in the Diocese of the Midwest hope to gain a better understanding of the population of students they are serving, what resources they need from the Catholic school to retain their students. This information also assisted them in creating an appeal for the future students of Catholic schools and create more opportunities for the betterment of education in each of the schools.

Ethical Issues

The researcher ensured ethics remained a top priority throughout the study. After obtaining approval from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board, it was determined that there was no imminent areas of conflict that pertained to pursuing further research. Following the methods as outlined in this chapter was paramount in ensuring the validity and reliability of the study. The risks to human subjects associated with this study were minimal. All participants were over 18 years of age, and did not demonstrate any impaired mental capacity, as determined by their ability to perform the positions that they hold in the workplace. Meeting these criteria qualified them as participants in this study. Additionally, all recorded materials will be erased after 3 years, following final approval by the research committee, minimizing any future risks related to confidentiality.

Summary

The descriptive case study explored the motivations of why parents send their children s to Catholic schools. The qualitative case study used multiple sources of evidence: parents of children who attend the Catholic institution, Catholic school staff, and Catholic school administrators. This triangulation of data allows for more credibility to the study. The research design allowed the researcher to interview parents, staff, and school administrators in rural and metropolitan areas in the Diocese of the Midwest (pseudonym). Collect the research questions served as the instrument of the study and the data that was from the responses from the interviews. Responses to the interview questions were reported based on the patterns or themes discovered for the rationale of why parents choose to send their children to Catholic schools. Ultimately, the goal of the research is to determine the reasons parents, students, and administrators believe why parents send their children to Catholic schools. Chapter 3 describes

the methodology of the case study. In this chapter, the researcher provided the questions, setting, participants, data analysis, limitations, and delimitations.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the number of parochial elementary schools has increased. The number of students has increased from 5.3 million students enrolled in parochial schools in 2011 to 5.8 million students enrolled in 2015. Parochial school enrollment is approximately 10% of the total elementary and secondary school-age enrollment in the most current reported school year of the 2015–2016 (NCES, 2018). One of the many reasons for the increase in parochial school enrollment broadly relates to the existence of the school choice voucher program for those schools who participate (Chingos & Kuehn, 2017).

The Diocese of the Midwest, operated by the bishop and a superintendent of schools, is the largest diocese in the state in terms of landmass. The Diocese of the Midwest has 7 system schools and 64 parish schools. Of the schools in the Diocese of the Midwest, the seven system schools, as well, as the four parish schools are part of the voucher program (as reported on the diocesan website, 2019). School choice and voucher programs have allowed parochial schools to increase their enrollment throughout the Midwest (as reported in the state's 2018 data). Parents have chosen to enroll their children over sending their children to public schools. By making this choice, this may impact both parochial and private schools. Parents consider this choice based on specific criteria such as the class size, teacher to student ratio and access to religious education. The increase in enrollment in parochial schools are contributed to the above considerations.

Parents consider their child's education are seeking to meet the needs of their child throughout their academic years to satisfy the needs of their child throughout their academic career. According to the Council for American Parochial Education (2018), parents in schools across the nation reported they were more satisfied with the outcome of their child's Catholic school education versus sending their children to the area public school. Other parents are

satisfied with the academic skills their children have acquired in the public school system. A Catholic school education is a choice offered to any family seeking an alternative school choice for their children. This alternative school choice comes with the potential availability of acceptance into the voucher programs that aids families by providing financial relief for their child to be able to attend Catholic schools. (Howell, 2006; McKenna, 2017; Schmalz, 2009).

The study explored the factors that aid the parents in determining attendance in a Catholic school. These factors are used in the parent's final decision to send their children to Catholic schools. The schools in this study were mostly in rural areas of the Midwest. More importantly, the parents in this study were raised in the same rural upbringing as they are providing to their child/ren. The study was designed to understand the factors that attract parents to Catholic schools and how a Catholic education attributes to their personal and spiritual growth as they enter society.. The overarching statement that guided the investigation on the exploration of why parents choose Catholic schools. Within IPA, researchers Parks (2016) and Smith (2009) explained that individual cases were examined before a cross-case analysis. The results of this study were acquired through individual interviews and focus group sessions that created major themes attained through a cross-case analysis approach.

Since the researcher used a qualitative case study as the strategy of inquiry that focused on capturing the lived experiences of participants, many quotes were used to establish these findings. The analysis takes into consideration the in-depth interviews, as well as, the narrative accounts that the researcher contributed to the reflective journal. Throughout the process, the participants had many opportunities to provide feedback on the collected data. To begin, it is important to identify the individuals or groups in the study and each of their experiences in a Catholic school.

This chapter presents the data from the school administrators and parents who participated in the study, a description of the interview process, an explanation of the data analysis, and an exposition of the pertinent data obtained from the research study. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What factors do parents highlight for sending the children to Catholic school?

RQ 2: How has the decision to send their children to Catholic schools impacted the faith and academic approach to their child's learning and growth development?

RQ 3: What roles do the parochial schools play in the lives of children in society?

The researcher's position, as a rural Catholic elementary school principal, offered an additional perspective on interpreting the data and describing the participants' current experiences in Catholic school system. In communication with the superintendent of schools, the researcher was eager to lead discussions through diocesan in-services, as well as, provide updated literature on what attracted families to the Catholic schools within the diocese. The researcher is willing to work collectively with schools on using the information discovered in the study as a measure to improve the overall health of the school. The study explored student growth, enrollment factors and various programs offered to Catholic schools as part of this process that can be shared to enrich the current school system. Furthermore, the researcher assisted other schools in the diocese by offering by understanding how the parents observe Catholic education and the differences that their schools make in the lives of children, family, and community through the experiences.

To avoid bias, the participants within the schools were selectively chosen by the administrators. The administrators requested that all the parents within the schools to participate allowing; therefore, minimizing the probability of any biases on the part of the participants in the

study. The researcher created preset questions that were asked of everyone that participated in the interviews and focus groups. The researcher was able to obtain more information as the initial questions led to more conversation with the participants in the study. These additional questions were comprised of knowledge obtained by the parents and administrators. Additionally, the researcher allowed the parents to answer the questions and collaborate on different questions and ideas that were presented during the interview and focus group process. The researcher recorded all responses from the participants in the study.

Description of the Sample

The researcher collected data from four rural Catholic schools in the western Midwest and one urban Catholic school. The urban Catholic school offers a secondary education option for some of the rural Catholic schools identified in the study. The Catholic urban school is a system school that offers preschool through 12th-grade education. Some of the elementary schools in this study promote after sixth grade while others promote to the high school level upon completion of the eighth grade. The system school is the continuation of Catholic education for high school academic needs. Most of the elementary schools educate up to the sixth or eighth grade level. The system schools become relevant to parents who wish to continue their child's education into high school. Students in parish schools then transfer to the system schools to complete upper middle or high school education to complete for a complete Catholic education. The population of the schools ranged from 60 to 600 students within the give schools.

The schools were selected for purposive sampling that provided the opportunity for the researcher to travel to the schools and retrieve information for the study. Patton (2002) defined purposeful sampling as qualitative inquiry that typically focuses on an in-depth on relatively small sample, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully. Because of how the diocese

structure, purposive sampling was most applicable for this sample pool. There are seven systems in the Diocese of the Midwest, each similar to one another in that all are surrounded by small parish schools that subsidize the system school. The schools chosen for this study consisted of a section of the Diocese of the Midwest. The convenience sampling for this study was comprised of four parish schools under one system. The parish schools operate differently in terms of overall daily operations and general set up of the building but the same in terms of the curriculum and core beliefs taught.

The reason that convenience sampling was incorporated into the study is because the schools that were that participated in the study were in close proximity to the researcher's home base. Convenience sampling was beneficial because the research could be completed within a reasonable period and the data would support the diocese collectively. The administrators within each school were instrumental in obtaining the participants by sending correspondence through emails to facilitate volunteers for the study. The administrators did not manipulate or enforce the parents to participate, moreover, introduced the study and asking if they wanted to be involved in the research. The researcher did not share any information that was obtained attained from either the interviews or focus groups to maintain the integrity of the data collection.

The interviewees and focus group participants in each of the schools had specific information that was beneficial to the overall study. The information provided by the participants included the following: ideals about their upbringing, similar educational themes that were present throughout the schools and the vision of the parents about their child's education upon their promotion. All the schools in the study are made up of different levels of education. Two out of five schools represented in this study, Schools B and C were traditional elementary/middle schools and serve populations of students in Grades PK−8. One of the schools that was a part of

the study consisted of early childhood through upper elementary Catholic school, School A, the last group served 2–year–old preschool grade through sixth grade. School D that served students in Grades 1–8. Students enrolled in kindergarten classes were located in a nearby town that served the whole school system. School E that serviced students in grades prekindergarten through 12th grade, and this was the only school in an urban setting. The four elementary/middle schools were in rural settings.

During 1980 to 2010, the Catholic schools faced a decline in enrollment that was largely attributed the following issues: family demographics, lack of employment, financial hardship; sports and activities, course offerings and the student population. By 2014, the enrollment began to shift in a positive direction that was attributed to the statewide voucher program. In 2018– 2019, three out of five schools who participated in the study were recipients of the statewide voucher program. Twenty-six percent of the families were eligible for ProgramM and ProgramR (EdChoice, 2019) Of the percentage of families eligible for the statewide program, 26% of the families are currently participating in the program outside of ProgamM and ProgramR (EdChoice, 2019). Figure 1 Statewide Parental Program Participation was a depiction of the growth of the choice program and its increase in enrollment by 2014.
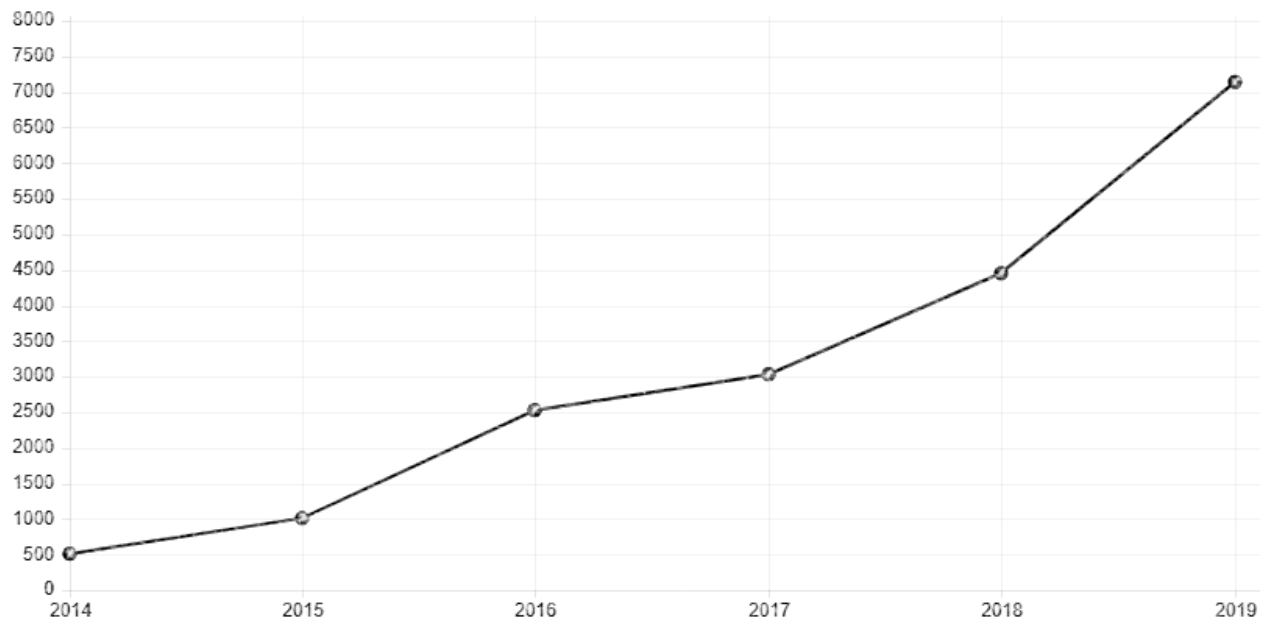
Figure 1. Statewide parental choice program participation.

Consequently, three out of five schools, Schools A, B, and E are involved in the voucher program. The other two schools, Schools C and D enrollment numbers have increased based on people sharing, social media and other forms of advertising. The increase in enrollment can be attributed to the financial stability of the voucher program and small class sizes that can provide but because individual attention, and faith formation (School Choice, 2019). These are some factors to explain the rationale provided by the administrators to justify this increase. "Some of the families would not have joined our school if it wasn't for the option to obtain a voucher," commented the administrator of School A.

Table 2 depicted the schools that participated in the study, the number of parents who attended, grades in which the school offers the current enrollment and the most current demographics of the school.

Table 1

Demographics of the Schools and the Parents who volunteered in the Study

Schools	# of Parents Interviewed/School	Grades offered at each school	Enrollment total at each school	Demographics of each school
School A	12	PK–5	75	Rural/99% White
School B	6	PK–8	60	Rural/99% White
School C	10	PK–8	105	Rural/100% White
School D	4	1–8	57	Rural/100% White
School E	12	PK–12	685	Urban/93% White

The general makeup of the northern half of the diocese is homogeneous in terms of demographics. Approximately, 90% of the northern part of the diocese is racially White and live in a rural area. In this study, all parents in each of the schools were recruited to be a part of the interviews and or focus group sessions. Each of the administrators contacted each family and requested their participation in this study. Additionally, administrators and priests were also interviewed.

Administrators

The administrator of School A has served the school for the past 6 years and has been affiliated with Catholic education for a total of 15 years. This study site is in a small rural town with an enrollment of 75 students representing kindergarten–sixth grade. School A's administrator was the first to apply for the statewide voucher program as a parish school in the Diocese of the Midwest. Admission into this program has been fruitful for the parish and the school. She explains how much the school has grown since their admittance into the program:

> The statewide program has changed the whole dynamic of the school in terms of financial
>
> responsibility. School A is an educational institution that gives students and families the

opportunity to learn and grow in their faith. Once a student grows in their faith, they can

start to explore how they fit into the larger population of their faith community.

School B's Admin has been a principal for the past three years in his current role, this

administrator has been employed in the field of education for the past 20 years at the public

school level. This school site is located in small rural town, with 55 enrolled students in Grades

PK–8. He has made significant changes within the School B and has started to transform the

current school year with a focus on making positive financial changes. His comments regarding

the shift from public school to parochial describe the way a Catholic education impacts life:

> A Catholic Education is a way for our faith to be taught to our students so they can be
>
> stewards of the Catholic life. The principles of our Catholic faith depend upon the
>
> Catholic student to be the future of our church.

School B's administrator explains that there are many differences between Catholic and public

education. He stated:

> I believe that Catholic school teachers can "teach." Meaning there are very few mandates
>
> or restrictions on the subject matter taught to the students. Teachers feel comfortable in
>
> the classroom. Most of the Catholic School teachers are in Catholic Schools because they
>
> want to show there. They believe strongly in the subject matter and the principles of the
>
> Catholic religion. In addition, the parents are incredibly supportive of the school. They
>
> invested in the child's education and support the teachers in any way they can.

Principal C is a great example of a lifelong learner that has committed herself to Catholic

education for many years. Her building located in a rural setting also has an attendance of

approximately 160 students, which ranges from prekindergarten to eighth grade. She has been

employed with the Catholic schools for a lifetime. She is committed to be a great educator,

continues to further her own education by taking classes to improve her leadership skills, and continues to lead others. Principal C represents the characteristics of a servant leader who is devoted to improve the school atmosphere by seeking new effective strategies.

Principal D worked in the Catholic school system for over 25 years. She is a teacher, as well as, the administrator of the school. She is a veteran teacher and principal and has dedicated her lifelong career to School D. In addition, School D is unique from the other schools in that the grading system begins with first grade instead of pre-K or kindergarten. However, the elementary school serves students from first grade to eighth like the other Catholic elementary schools that were part of the study. School D is in a rural area that has an enrollment of approximately 70 students. School D is in proximity of the Pre-Kindergarten–12th grade that most of the students attend after leaving School D.

Since graduation from college, Principal E worked has worked in Catholic education system. There are two principals within the system one with the two elementary buildings and one with the middle school/high school. School E's network is comprised of enrollment of approximately 400 students and encompasses grades pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade. One of the principals commented on what Catholic education stands for in terms of a system-wide operation and stated:

> Catholic education stands for the universal love of people and learning. We educate our children and help them encounter the person of Jesus Christ. In cooperation with our parishes, we engage the children in the sacraments, prayer, and virtues. Our staff is passionate about forming disciples, and through classroom activities, school-wide events, and parent involvement, we can engage students in our faith very deeply.

Table 2

Demographics of the Administrators who volunteered in the Study

Administrators	Gender	Years in Catholic Education	Attended Catholic School	Race/Ethnicity
School A's Admin	Female	11–14	Yes	Non-Hispanic/White
School B's Admin	Male	0–5	No	Non-Hispanic/White
School C's Admin	Female	15–20	Yes	Non-Hispanic/White
School D's Admin	Female	31–35	Yes	Non-Hispanic/White
School E's Admin	Male	25–30	Yes	Non-Hispanic/White

Priests. The priests are the authority figure in any of the parish school in the Diocese of the Midwest. Each school or parish have a different structure of the clergy within the system. The priests and deacons have made it a weekly practice to celebrate masses and to visit each classroom to maintain that connection with the student population. They are also involved in the religious education classes that are offered to build a connection with their spiritual family through sacramental preparation. While a school system is constructed differently through duties performed daily by the administration and the priest. A dean or priest who is in charge or present within the school system continue to be the advocate and the leader to lead the school. The dean is the head priest within the deanery, a section of schools and or parishes brought together for

convenience and common purpose. In addition, a president, like a superintendent in public schools, is involved in handling the daily operations of the school and leading the principals are in charge of making the best decisions for the school system. Table 3 provides a description of the experience of the priests and their years that the administrators have served in Catholic education.

Table 3

Demographics of the Priests who Volunteered in the Study

Administrators	Gender	Years as a clergy member	Attended Catholic School	Race/Ethnicity
School A's Priest	Male	30–40	Yes	non-Hispanic/White
School B's Priest	Male	30–40	Yes	non-Hispanic/White
School C's Priest	Male	10–20	Yes	non-Hispanic/White
School D's Priest	Male	40–50	Yes	non-Hispanic/White
School E's Priest/Dean	Male	10–20	Yes	non-Hispanic/White

The following sections of this chapter offered a description of each of the schools, as well as the background of the ' parent interview and focus groups' A summary of their responses to the question that define the rationale for why parents choose to send their children to Catholic schools. The last section comprise of the research questions and any additional insights that evolved as part of the interview process. Upon completion of the interviews and focus groups, there was some overlapping data within two of the research questions. The first research question, regarding *factors of why current parents send their children to Catholic schools*,

implies the *current* sources of why the parents of current students send their children to Catholic schools while reaching back in the past to how Catholic education affected the parents. The second question is *maintaining* Catholic school and the overlapping of the Catholic faith across all subject areas as well as how religion plays an impact on the daily instruction of the students. The third question focused on the future and how Catholic schools affects the lives of children and their role in society. When inquiring about what sources of assistance have aided the current Catholic schools in *upholding* a Catholic education in their school, the common themes parents highlighted include tradition, values, family, and faith.

School A. School A has more than 70 students enrolled in their Catholic school. There are five certified teachers and two early childhood teachers within the building. The school is located in a rural setting with students ranging from 2-year-old all-day preschool through sixth grade. The parish in which the school resides is compiled of three churches, in three different towns; all of which have a school building. The outlying schools have preschools and daycares that serves as the feeder for the elementary school in the middle town. There were four parents who participated in the interviews and six who participated also contributed in the focus groups. School A's parents consisted of both Catholic and non-Catholic who attended participated in both the interviews and focus groups.

Table 4

Demographics of the Parents of School A Who Volunteered in the Study

Parents	# of Children in the School	Male or Female	Race/Ethnicity	Length of time in Catholic Schools	Had Previously Attended a public school
1a	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	Yes
2a	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
3a	4	Both	White/Non-Hispanic	11–15 years	No
4a	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	Yes
5a	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	11–15 years	No
6a	2	Both	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 year	Yes
7a	4	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	Yes (half of kids)
8a	5	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	26–30 years	No
9a	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
10a	4	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No

School B. School B's make up was similar to School A. The schools are comparable in terms of enrollment numbers. The priests cover multiple churches within their parish. School B's parents all were part of a focus group session. These parents were excited and eager to discuss

how they perceived their school and the impact that it made on their children as well as the rest of the children in the school in which their parents were not present to answer research questions. Also, like School A's parent makeup of Catholic versus non-Catholic families, School B's parents were similar. Of the families that participated in the study, two out of five parents were non-Catholic.

Table 5

Demographics of the Parents of School B who Volunteered in the Study

Parents	# of Children in the School	Male or Female	Race/Ethnicity	Length of time in Catholic Schools	Had Previously attended Public School
1b	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	11–15 years	No
2b	2	Both	White/Non-Hispanic	5–10 years	No
3b	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	5–10 years	Yes
4b	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	5–10 years	No
5b	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–4 years	No

School C. School C represented most of the parent volunteers for the study. They were the largest parish school interviewed and contained the most participants for this study. The total student enrollment was comprised of 106 students. Each parent participated in the focus groups that were held at this location. All ten volunteers were of the Catholic faith.

Table 6

Demographics of the Parents of School C who Volunteered in the Study

Parents	# of Children in the School	Male or Female	Race/Ethnicity	Length of time in Catholic Schools	Had Previously attended Public School
1c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
2c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
3c	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
4c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
5c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
6c	2	Female	White Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
7c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
8c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
9c	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
10c	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 year	No

School D. School D's make up was like School A and B. The schools were comparably

the same size in terms of enrollment. The priests cover multiple churches within their parish.

School D's parents all were part of an interview session. School C's parent makeup of Catholic versus non-Catholic families, School D's parents were all Catholic families.

Table 7

Demographics of the Parents of School D who Volunteered in the Study

Parents	# of Children in the School	Male or Female	Race/Ethnicity	Length of time in Catholic Schools	Had Previously attended Public School
1d	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
2d	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
3d	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
4d	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No

School E. School E is a system school in the Diocese of the Midwest. This school has 600 students enrolled from prekindergarten through 12th grade. This school represents one of the seven-system schools in the diocese. There are three buildings that make–up the system as follows: Grades K–2 building, Grades 3–5 building, and a Grades 6–12 building. The school is located in an urban setting with students ranging from 4-year old kindergarten students through sixth grade. The school does host a daycare center that services students from 18 months to four years of age. The parish in which the school resides is comprised of three different parishes, in one town. Twelve parents participated in the interviews.

Table 8

Demographics of the Parents of School E who Participated in This Study

Parents	# of Children in the School	Male or Female	Race/Ethnicity	Length of time in Catholic Schools	Had Previously attended Public School
1e	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
2e	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
3e	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	11–15 years	No
4e	4	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	11–15 years	No
5e	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
6e	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	6–10 years	No
7e	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
8e	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
9e	2	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
10e	1	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	0–5 years	No
11e	3	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	16–20 years	No

Data Analysis Overview

Common themes were identified through the researcher's focus group visits and interviews so that the result is "a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the ones who have experienced it firsthand" (Leedy & Ormond, 2005, p. 140). This qualitative research design utilized a qualitative approach. This type of study described the meaning of the experiences of a phenomenon.

The interviews with the parents adequately responded to the research questions. The interviews consisted of an average of twenty to thirty minutes in length. The researcher was involved with collecting and making sense of the data by breaking the information down into meaningful patterns or themes and then putting it back together again (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested that there are four phases of analyzing the vast amount of data collected. This data collection process includes "organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data" (p. 135). Then the researcher dissected the data by using a specific coding system known as Values coding. Values coding is an "application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). The value coding furnished the researcher with the ability to become objective and understand the true essence of the parental decision making techniques by taking on this approach.

As the parents shared their rationale of why they chose Catholic schools for their children and the participants were able to identify these values and how they influenced their decision. The parents were observed in their natural environment, sharing what they know about their children and how this decision would impact their future. The collected data was arranged

according to the themes and subthemes based on significant statements, and omitted data irrelevant to the study; therefore, making an impactful description based on the experiences of focus groups or interviews outcomes. Establishing categories and themes to that compared significant points of the data. Developing the ideas offered the researcher and having the ability to write a textual description, which aimed at uncovering the essence of the phenomenon.

Stage One. Initially, the investigation began as the texts from the interviews and focus groups, which were, transcribed (Banda & Adetomokun, 2015). During the first stage, the researcher read the transcripts multiple times (Stucky, 2017). Data analysis in IPA, based on the richness of the text, rather than the prevalence of phrases or words in books (Smith, 2017). During these readings, the researcher highlighted documents that seemed relevant to the research questions.

Stage Two. An idiographic study analysis is at the level of the participants of the study. This type of study derives from the understanding of individual cases and specific statements made from those participants. This ties back to IPA because IPA objective in understanding the parents' perspective. The participants in the study were engaged in conversations that lead to more thought-provoking questions in which the participants provided some responses; however, the researcher began making more inquiries to further understand the information provided by by the participants (Smith, 2015). Within this homogenous sample of Catholic school parents, the research questions closely defined the significance or meaningfulness of the subject.

Stage Three. Next, the researcher analyzed the data across cases using the convergence or divergence of multiple stories through a constant cross-comparative approach (Morse, 2016). The researcher implemented a strategy to cluster the themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), based on recurring topics that aligned with corresponding text(s) from participants. The researcher then

identified codes that provide a word for word account attained from the transcripts to illustrate each identity statement. At this stage, the researcher contributed an interpretation of the data categorized at a level one or two to ensure that "good research" was conducted (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

      Stage Four. After the coding process, the investigator conferred with the participants about narrative anecdotes and the interpretation of the data. In the first stage of the analysis, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to find the significance based of the parents that responded to the questions. In this first stage, the researcher spent time using values coding to separate the wants from the needs, the morals from the values, and the expectations from the demands. The researcher developed emergent themes from the dominant information in the text analysis. After the themes were discovered, the sub themes were determined which fit into the overarching emergent themes. The researcher used a reflective approach by contacting the participants by telephone to validate and present a summary of the findings. Throughout the investigation, the researcher confirmed that the information from the data collection and analysis was stored safely.

Summary of Findings

      The first research question that focused on *why current parents send their children to Catholic schools* implies the *current* sources of why the parents of current students send their children to Catholic schools while reaching back in the past to how Catholic education influenced the parents. The first emergent theme described in detail the factors that parents elaborated on why their children are attending Catholic schools. The second question, regarding *maintaining* Catholic schools and the overlapping of Catholic education throughout all subject areas and how religion plays role on the daily instruction of the students. The third question

analyzed the future and how Catholic schools affect the lives of children and their role in society. While the researcher understood this distinction clearly, the parents were able to visualize the information that brought those responses to the same conclusions. When asking what sources of assistance have aided the current Catholic schools in *upholding* a Catholic education in their school, the common themes parents spoke of were tradition, values, family, and faith.

At one time, each school experienced growth for a prolonged period of time that can be contributed to the interest of parents to enroll children. Some Catholic schools in the Diocese of the Midwest overcame the idea of closing. Others lost the battle due to lessened student enrollment over the years. The bishop within the Diocese of the Midwest is hugely for Catholic education and helped to find ways to keep the schools open to continue the evangelization of the faith as long as possible. The leaders within the schools of the Diocese of the Midwest, along with their pastors, successfully navigated cultural changes, and leadership challenges bringing their schools back to a time of growth.

Emergent Themes

The data revealed consistent of data retrieved from parents who have previously attended Catholic schools. The emergent themes throughout the research emphasized the outcomes of both the interviews and focus groups within the five schools. The subthemes were created directly from the patterns that were established from the three major emergent themes. Upon identification of initial codes, a reassembling (Yin, 2016), took place. This phase of reassembling (Yin, 2016), allowed for the identification of themes between and among the responses of each participant. This process was an opportunity to interpret the data for completeness, fairness, empirical accuracy, value, and credibility (Yin, 2016). The analysis process presented codes, which aligned with the research questions that served as a foundation for this study. Yin (2016)

stated, ""it created an understanding of data "richness" (p. 221). By mapping the themes and subthemes collectively, the researcher was able to establish a conclusion of the findings. The following chart exhibits the themes and subthemes identified through reassembly of data in the second round of coding.

Table 9

Emergent Themes

	Theme 1: Factors that bring families to Catholic Schools	Theme 2: The Importance of Catholic Schools	Theme 3: Upholding the Future of Catholic Education
Subthemes	Family Vision Welcoming, Friendly, Personable School Characteristics Small Class Sizes Quality of education	Teaching of Values Community Participation Formation of a Child Teaching the Values	Workshops Marketing Campaigns Family atmosphere Active Faith Life with an emphasis on support of clergy Tradition

Theme 1: Experiences of Catholic School Parents

 Family. The term *"family"* appeared numerous times in the interview transcripts that described everyday experiences and relationships with school staff. Parents also commented on how the students responded when a new person walked into the building creating a welcoming atmosphere for parents. The students were curious and wanted to know more about the teachers and other staff members at the school. The students were eager to learn about each other and how to make connections with the teachers for having a positive impact in their own education. Each parent enrolled their children in both types of school settings; one in public school and one in Catholic school. A parent of School A commented, "There is an immediate sense of wanting to

be a part of Catholic school experience because of the students. They want you to be there. "The participants used the word "*family"* to describe a picture of what these parents perceived in their surroundings. In addition, the parents observed young children interacting with older children and adults genuinely caring for the children and a clear illustration of student success.

Vision. In many ways, the keyword "*vision"* related to the idea of *family.* Without a view, there can be no sense of family because there would be no place to build the foundation of the school and the practices in which the school educates the students in the faith. The parents believed the vision of the school was solid in how they furnished these students with a substantial education. The vision statements that were shared from each of the schools' centered on the same concepts of family and educational community. Each school was focused on building the foundation for growth within the whole child through emotional, spiritual, and academic development. The interviews and focus groups were dedicated to utilizing their vision through each class and building their understanding of growth as they continue their education through the school or school system. A parent of School C emphasized the word "vision" in describing the overall attitude of School C because this school is devoted to taking extraordinary steps to market the schools' philosophy on Catholic education. Those parents, teachers, and administrators who caught the *vision* within each of the schools "stepped-up" and gave their time, energy, and skills to facilitate change. The administrators perceive the value of education by incorporating *valuable* leadership characteristic and determining factor for those willing to take positive steps in the right direction, informing the students as a whole.

Welcoming, friendly, and personable. In each school, welcoming, friendly, and personable described the overarching concept of how parents who have entered Catholic schools in the diocese of the Midwest. Each school's mission and vision are stemmed from a *personable*

character with the school's *welcoming* and *friendliness* to attendee's and those outside the school. Parents of the schools described their first experiences with each of the schools as welcoming *and* friendly. Parents that attended School B credits the school*'s* warm and welcoming culture as a vital characteristic that contributed their choice. To facilitate this vision, the schools have worked diligently to facilitate upgrades to their curriculum, physical property, technology, and marketing models to accommodate the needs of families in society.

School characteristics. Parents overwhelmingly stated perceived school characteristics as the number one factor in choosing a Catholic school education for their children. Among the responses categorized as characteristics were student diversity, honesty, personal responsibility, reputation, strong Catholic values, and structure. A parent of School C noted that her child's public school had a dramatic change in the way they handled procedures with the children in the classroom, which led to the family's search for an alternative educational setting. They wanted a school that was personal and valued their child's individuality.

Small class sizes. One of the main environmental factors that parents highlighted as prominent factor in the part of their decision is the small class sizes. Parents and administrators emphasized the importance small class size multiple times throughout the study, therefore small class sizes as a theme emerged from the data collection.

Parents of School A demonstrated enthusiasm when it came to individual attention in the classroom and small class sizes. One child came from a preschool program in a public school. The number of kids, as well as the atmosphere of the classroom, were too much for the child in the public school. The child may require additional one on one attention to establish a relationship with a teacher that could meet the child's needs—the child coped by crawling under a table and stayed there during unstructured parts of the day. The child was receiving little to no

education, and the teacher was undoubtedly frustrated with a student that kept hiding under the tables. Since the child was enrolled in School A, the child could express herself through the day. The teachers are familiar with the type of behaviors were exhibited by this student and have found innovative ways to make changes I the routine to provide a successful day for the student.

Another parent in School C discussed her decision to enroll her children into the Catholic school system. The parent emphasized faith formation and the schools' ability to meet her child's needs. She stated, "My child is not a number but a face with a name and a special personality." The participants believed that small class size contributed to building relationships and trust in the classroom, as well as, creating a venue for assessing the students' cognitive abilities by the increase in one on one interaction. The time spent with a child is vital to the success of the academic growth a child can make within the academic year. Because the teachers devoted time to know the students, they have experienced an increase in communication them outside the school. The administrator of School A recently visited a class where some students were participating in courses at the public school. Some Catholic school children acknowledged her presence and interacted by sharing their experience in the classroom. A parent from School B shared that the close relationships established are a valuable asset of this school.

Quality of education. Small class sizes have contributed to a better understanding of course materials in comparison to larger class settings. The responses from all parents and administrators preferred the quality of education as another contributing factor in choosing a Catholic school. The specific reflections were that parents wanted a high-quality educational program, academic rigor, and strict academic standards. Most of the parents shared how appreciated how academic excellence was intertwined into a faith-based education. Other parents who are not practicing Catholics were in favor of religious education because they knew that

faith was a tool that provided to their children in parochial education that they would not receive at any other school. The principal of School A stated that:

> Religion is always a high talking point that is important with parents that tour the school. Teaching the Catholic doctrine becomes the basis in which each teacher teaches. If there is any difference with their beliefs in their own home, then it is the parent's job to explain those differences to the children.

Theme 2: The Importance of Catholic Schools

Teaching of values. During the coding process, there were numerous interjections of text with the code of values and tradition. "Values" was defined as "the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something" as well as "a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life" Dictionary, (2006). Both definitions defined in Webster's dictionary for the term values indicated in many of the interviews and focus group sessions within each of the schools. A Catholic education can attribute to the students' success because of the values that is incorporated into the curriculum. Parents placed a strong emphasis on the importance of values. Values are taught within Catholic schools to educate the whole child. Parents were more interested in the child's education, however, they perceived the value of the hearts of teachers, principals, and pastors as part of how these values played a role in their daily operations of student success in the classroom.

When asked how she defines Catholic education, Principal C reverberated the words of all the other principals by sharing her personal reflection of the Catholic school setting and what elements were significant in how these key elements have impacted her role as an educator.

> My incentive in Catholic schools is to be a great example for young people in terms of their faith. I have always felt that my upbringing and the reason they hired me, as a

principal was my background to be a great role model not only to the students but also to the staff. I believe in the values of respect, honesty, compassion, integrity, and responsibility. I believe that values not only lie in the hand of the school but where they first begin to witness, values are in the actions of the parents or with the guardians that they reside. Our job, as administrators and teachers, is to continue to provide support during school hours for the students to continue the great work that their parents started. Without parents and the community, we would not be able to provide the roles that we do. We are great staff, and without the staff, my job would not be possible.

Community participation. The inquiry on how the parents and administrators would define their justifications behind Catholic schools, School A's parent 1f described their school in terms of its unique atmosphere. "People come to visit the building and say, this school has such a nice family feeling here, children greet you and say good morning/or afternoon, the staff is amicable, and I know my children are taken care of here." Principal C worked collectively with members of her school community to create a dedicated atmosphere for the children to feel safe, as well as, outline the expectations for the students. As a team of students, staff, and community members, School C perceived a sense of community that impacted others. As one of the teachers commented, "Everything centered on faith and family," which is confirmation that the actions of School C's mission serves as a solid foundation for the mission of the school.

Formation of a Child. Parents of School A provided responses dedicated to faith formation and expressed how activities are related to the Catholicity within the school: "Masses given to the community, charitable works, collections, clothing, food, and so much more." Parents and the administrator provide School B with the life skills taught to include

responsibility, perseverance, and work ethic. One parent who interviewed addressed some of the significant benefits of School B:

> These are often even better indicators of how well a student will succeed in life, and School B does a great job of teaching these skills in their everyday experience. The skills taught within small class sizes, which pushes the individualized and differentiated learning. The instruction matches the content that taught for each child rather than the one style of learning the whole group.

> Parent, 2c, of the focus group replied, "It is the simple actions of students and the questions they have about their faith and how they grow in their faith." The family atmosphere is the welcoming contribution to any of Catholic school, and School B exhibits this quality. An example of the family atmosphere is witnessed on the playground when the kindergarteners can interact with the eighth graders. The principal of School B explained this relationship as a spiritual connection that these children have with one another.

> The dean of the system pointed out, the mission of School E is to "spread the Good News and live it actively." The parents of school E commented and reiterated what many of the other schools interviewed and discussed were forming a child's mind, body, and spirit. The public school system also works in the best interest of the child in their academic success. However, Catholic schools take a different path in providing the resources and creating a different climate. "Catholic education, concerning the Church's mission, is to send out disciples in the likeness of Jesus to what the world needs," explained by one of the administrators within the system. She continues by saying, "Developing their God-given gifts to be able to do that. There is a grander goal for the good of all." One of the parents, 1a, continued how faith incorporated into the

classroom by saying "We wanted education that had faith integrated, smaller classroom sizes and discipline that was more structured (similar to what a parent would give)."

Catholic schools operate differently from the public school system because they incorporate religion as part of the curriculum, and this is a main attraction for parents as they consider enrolling their child into this type of school system. One of the principals stated:

> Although our local public schools are excellent, they have a different approach to education. When they provide character education, they are missing the common thread that unites the virtues: a relationship with God. Because of that difference, Catholic schools are better able to instill values like kindness, generosity, and integrity in our students.

This parent shared, "We can be a part of 5d's school day by volunteering. We have open communication with the teachers and principal. There is a higher emphasis on the children being respectful and showing civility a higher moral code to follow**."** The parents and teachers collectively agree that the school system is devoted to building a strong Catholic foundation. In addition, the notion that the student can become strong in their religious practices by leading by example. For example, St. Teresa of Calcutta believed that every person is Jesus in disguise, and every person is treated the same and has the highest respect for one another. This example of St. Theresa coincides with the interactions that the priests have with the students during the school year.

Teacher/student relationships. Parents and administrators within the schools declared that the themes run deep into the core values taught and the relationships made between the students, staff, parents, and parish community. Parents in School B explained their concept of Catholic education and the justification behind choosing a Catholic school is related to the

concept that the school works with the parents in assessing and providing the best possible outcomes for their child. The parent group shared that Catholic education is something within a person, a way of acting and being that is part of who a person they are going to be and the person they are going to be. "It is about forming the whole child, not just about the academics," explains one of the teachers of School B. One of the main concepts evolved the value of Catholic values and how that contributes to the structure of the classroom and how they incorporate these values. The staff does a fantastic job projecting these values to the students. One parent commented, "We want the best for our children, and we know that this school, these teachers, and this staff provide the best education for our children."

Catholic schools are considered to provide more than academics. As one parent stated, "It's something that you know. . . . I don't believe it is something taught." Parent 1d of School D elaborated on her rationale for choosing School D in the first place. She went on to speak of her child's experience in transferring from the public school to School D.

> My son attended public school for kindergarten, and this was my first experience with a public school. I was fortunate that my child had no academic concerns/needs. I volunteered for 1 hour weekly in the classroom, and it was quite the experience. The class size was about 20ish (cannot remember the exact number) students to 1 teacher. The challenge was the varying level of learning that all the students were at and for one teacher to handle it all. The behaviors and mannerisms of the students were at-best par. There were constant disruptions to learning due to discipline. I feel this is no fault of the teacher. She did very well, and I was continually amazed by how she handled herself. The reason for choosing a public school for kindergarten was due to not being able to afford the parochial school tuition with another in parochial middle school and two

younger children in full-time daycare. The plan was to move him back to parochial school for first grade at School D. (Of those two younger children, both have/will be attending a catholic kindergarten).

Other parents discussed how the Catholic schools serve as a solid foundation for faith development in a child's life. This component, along with the small class sizes, offers special attention to the students. These parents emphasized the importance of consistent values and how they contribute to the overall satisfaction of parents within the focus groups. The parents assessed that these core values contributed to the overall success of the student in their future endeavors. In closing, the parents in the focus group came to the consensus that the students are receiving a quality education in the following subject areas: reading, math, and science. In addition, these students are able to access the value of spiritual formation and how that contributes to their overall success.

Theme 3: Upholding the future of Catholic education

What motivates parents to enroll their children to Catholic schools, School A's principal mentioned how the diocese offers general ideas on how to bring in families to obtain valuable feedback. The diocese has improved its efforts on aiding schools by creating a marketing video that assisted the school in capturing a glimpse of what each school represents academically and spiritually.

In School A's video, *Witnessing the Difference,* it focused on "forming the child in mind, body, and spirit; rather than just educating them" (personal interview, 2018). The priest (2018) of the school believed that "Catholic education provides a safe environment along with an atmosphere of faith. The teachers, students, and parents work together to form close relationship that flow into our homes and in the communities."

In discussing what retains their children to remain in Catholic education for their students, the response was unanimous, the family atmosphere and the active faith environment in which the kids are wrapped up in every day. The principal of School A stated, "it was the children that made her push forward and make the educational atmosphere better for the children." She emphasized how the children's presence served as a motivation for her career endeavors as she is able to witness the transition of growth and faith with each student. She noted that, "the priest of School A does a fantastic job with the students in getting them to participate within the Mass weekly."

When an inquiry about how to uphold Catholic education and what it stands for, School B's principal replied, "The tradition and values of the school and what it stands for long before he came into the school." He also shared that it takes a village to raise a child, which involves more support from staff and the community at large. The priest has many roles within the school and the parish as celebrating the mass with the children on a weekly basis and his other administrative duties do not provide him with much time to make more connections with the students. He is as willing to be a part of the student's lives and spiritual inspiration as time will allow. The parents unanimously commented on the fact that the parish priest is exceptionally supportive of Catholic education. He believes School B is forming the next generation of Catholics and which is a vital mission.

The parents expressed their satisfaction on how the teaching staff is dedicated to the success of the students. One of the parents made a supportive statement about the teachers and their need for role models and provided extra support to students by stating:

> They support the students that need a little extra help by walking them to the public
>
> school for services. They are part of their spiritual, academic, and emotional formation

throughout their years at School B. Their faith formation with the students is consistent and apparent in the actions that the students have daily and how they think of others. The personal experiences shared by each of these families have aided in understanding the robust Catholic faith within the school. The families emphasized how their own families have internalized their belief, which assists them in applying their experience aiding their child grow in faith and the overall Catholic environment. School B's parents shared how their own teachers have emphasized the importance of upholding the Catholic traditions that have contributed in their choice of enrolling their children in attending Catholic schools.

Principal C mentioned the support of the families within the school and her ties to the community. The priest within the parish is the closest form of support for the school. The families interviewed individually and within the focus group mentioned that they are a united front. The participants believe that School C is an excellent representation of that village that is a reflection of the best practices of this school. A parent of School C went on to say, "They do an outstanding job of educating the whole student; their talents, values, behaviors, and academics." This statement couples with the mission of School C in that the mission of School C is to team with the family to educate our children helping them develop strong faith, leadership, and excellence in all endeavors in a Christ-centered community. They later identify with School C when the students are out of elementary school and in high school. They notice the difference with academics, behavior, and responsibility.

School C has been fortunate to have the support of the clergy. The priest of School C recognized that School C provides "a great education, but they also provide an education in goodness, and the students also treat each other well." The Priest stated, "We teach the values that are the foundation for life." These two impactful statements by the priest of School C reflect

that the mission and vision of the school are being carried out throughout the entire community. The parents shared their overall satisfaction that the children are participating in the weekly masses and taking initiative to be a part of this religious commitment.

School C's administration stated." that parents choose her school primarily for academics and discipline." "We love children and want them to be successful." The family atmosphere is critical component to all participants whose child is enrolled in School C. The teacher relationships are important to the parents because they perceive the value of one on one instruction and how this method led to student success. This personalized attention provides a student the indirect instruction to be kind to others. Parents 4e states that "Our students are genuinely kind, which is a great quality to possess, considering the world they are growing up in." Everyone knows everyone, and tradition is essential and evident within the school. The sizes of the classes are representative of the town in which the school resides with Christian values.

School D shared that the parish financially supports the school in making it feasible for families to attend School D. In addition, the pastor supports the mission of the small parish school in carrying the mission from generation to generation. This type of generational support captured the common believe that the parish builds community.

The students are older than most traditional schools having grades from first to eighth grade. This range of students changes the maturity of the students to a more sophisticated group of students. One common theme is developed through the student body in all of the schools is the connection and bond between the students young and old. The older students become role models for the younger students, which is a characteristic that is passed down from the teachers within School D.

Students also have time to pray and be at one with Jesus throughout the entire day. One of the parents shared the joy that since she attended Catholic schools, her children could do the same. The parent made grade statement about School D and the education as follows:

I attended Catholic grade school and wanted the same for my children. After seeing the public school, and two different parochial schools, we are pleased where we are currently at School D. I have been nothing but impressed with School D. The behavior, the curriculum, and the staff are all amazing. I love that my children can pray at any time, can talk about Jesus at any time, have time carved out to attend mass, prayer services, confession and the rosary throughout the week all while still having a very vigorous curriculum. The standards at St. Peter's is very high. Children are expected to have a high level of respect towards their classmates, teachers, and administrators as is role-modeled through the staff and taught as a way of finding and seeing Jesus in every person.

The family atmosphere is considered the best school because they are aware of costs and find innovative ways to lessen the financial impact to the families and use parents as volunteers as part of this cost saving approach.

When the students leave School D, they receive a name. They are known as the School D kids. They have graduated 10–15 valedictorians in the last 20 years. The parent responded by stating:

I was looking for a faith-based curriculum and an academically strong school. I liked the idea of smaller classrooms for more individual attention. I got all of that wrapped up into one. I feel so blessed to have become part of the St. Peter's family. It is not for everyone you have to be willing to be involved and roll your sleeves up. I love to be involved and

given additional opportunities to be able to tutor some first and second grade students for an hour, once a week. It was a reward for both the students and I!

The priests make an active choice to come in and visit the classrooms and participate in their learning—the dynamic and supportive participants in all aspects of school life. The school does a great job of approaching issues by using the teachings of Jesus. Another one of the parents, 5e notes what she likes best about School E is that "we know almost every kid and their family in our kids' classes, the small class sizes which help when kids need extra help, the faith-based education, that the kids learn more than just academics (community service, athletics, music)." She goes onto say that we, as parents also like knowing that "knowing that there is a crucifix in every classroom and that God is holding them accountable for how they act, treat their teachers and friends, as well as Christmas and Easter celebrations, are a part of the year and most importantly going to Mass."

The parents appreciate schools that the teachers knew their names and held accountable for their actions. The parents have many opportunities to be involved in their child's daily school routine and prayer life. With the public school across the street from the Catholic school, School E provides a small classroom environment for the students. They are not just a number they are affecting the lives of students every day.

There is a mix of veteran and new teachers in the building. They are all grounded in the mission of the school because they are vested. The members stand united in the practices held by the Catholic school. A staff member stated, "That's not how we do things here." The teachers live by the mission and vision of the school daily. Lastly, Principal E mentioned," like many of the others, regarding her role in Catholic education, she stated "is part of me, it has always been there."

Success is achieved primarily through the example in different instructional activities that lead each student to success. One of the parents that was interviewed transferred her child from the public school provided a summary of what transferring schools meant to her as follows: "The Catholic school provides more 1:1. Their ability to hug children, discipline children, and instill kindness and love thru the word of Christ allowed for a more focused, personalized education than moving to a different public district." Children are challenged to meet the requirements. The students continue to achieve their goals in academics, social skills and faith formation.

Parents made comments relating to how the staff demonstrate the safety and security of students during the school day and throughout their years within St. Joseph School. Teachers within School A lead by example, which teaches the children to lead by example. The students are good role models within today's society of how to care or be compassionate for others. One parent stated:

> "Whether it is a fifth grader looking after a preschool child after lunch is over to help
> them with their coat, or to make sure that a first-grader is on the right page in Mass, it all
> comes down to the sense of community the children are building during the early years in
> education at School A."

Parent 3a stated that:

> As students in public school, several of my children struggled. My oldest struggled to
> overcome bullying due to dyslexia. My second oldest was suspended for four days due to
> a playground incident when he had never had any prior discipline. My daughter had
> identified as having reading deficiencies, and her test scores way below expectations. My
> youngest son had the most compelling issues. He had attended a preschool without
> question, and when he moved to the public school for four-year-old-kindergarten, he

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struggled in the larger group of children with one teacher. When kindergarten started, he still struggled to be in a large group and was moved to a Catholic school. The accessible attributes of the Catholic school were the smaller class sizes as well as the teachers were more family-oriented, and communication between school and the home was consistent. All four children's grades improved, they no longer dreaded going to school, bullying decreased, and as my youngest grew older health, issues arose. The Catholic staff embraced my ill child and did not make him feel like an outcast. My daughter is shy, and large class sizes hindered her from participating, making it unknown that she knew the material.

Many of the students are attracted to the school based on the small class sizes and individualized attention, which has increased the students' ability to succeed. The rigorous classes combined with the resources challenge the students and increase their ability to succeed. The administrator commented, "That the public schools' that rely on standardized testing scores were not a huge factor in making School A the choice a reason their children are sent to the school." While parents believe School A fits within the statistical scoring boundaries of the public schools, each year the students within School A are accomplishing better outcomes in relation to their standardized testing which confirms the activities present with the classroom and the school.

School A's parents are motivated to the growth of the school. As the school has grown, more parents are taking an interest in being involved within the school and the day-to-day interactions. The parents are part of the volunteers that are needed throughout the academic year. The students and parents are what motivates others to be a part of a growing Catholic school. The parent's involvement has contributed to the overall success of School A's mission.

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In assessing the responses provided by School B parents and administrators, the administrators shared that the teachers, staff, priest, and other members of the community come together to incorporate Catholic formation throughout the curriculum, as well as, the importance of having strong role models for the students; the faculty. They emphasized the fact that they seek to work with the school to integrate Catholic teachings and traditions in the school for the students and the families. School B's principal commented on the connection between the church and the school, indicating that:

> Our parish is strongly supported, and teachers recognize that. Having this support allows our teachers the opportunities to teach the Catholic faith throughout the school day and not just in religion class. Catholic education is a way for our faith to be prepared to our students so they can be the stewards of Catholic life. The principles of our Catholic faith depend upon Catholic students to be the future of our church.

For the parents of School B, these behaviors are what separates Catholic school from those of public schools. Many of the parents are concerned what will happen to their children upon graduation from the Catholic school. They parents ponder on how the separation from this environment will affect their future.

The school families believe that Catholic schools are an intrinsic part of a person's outlook and decision-making entity throughout their whole life. Each of the families that were interviewed or part of the focus group indicated that their life's choices were due to the education or experience they had with School B. The parents want to uphold that tradition and value system for their family and continue to learn with their child on how faith is really at the core of everything taught within School B.

Principal C mentioned the support of the families within the school and her ties to the community. The priest within the parish is the closest form of support for the school. The families interviewed individually and within the focus group mentioned that they are a united front. It takes a village to raise children. They believe that School C is an excellent representation of that village. A parent of School C stated, "They do an outstanding job of educating the whole student; their talents, values, behaviors, and academics." This statement coupled with the mission of School C in that the purpose of School C is to team with the family to educate our children helping them develop strong faith, leadership, and excellence in all endeavors in a Christ-centered community. The parents identified with School C when the students transition from elementary school to the high school setting, they notice a change in their academics and social responsibility

The parents and the administrator strongly agree that School C has been fortunate to have the support of the clergy. The priest of School C recognizes that School C provides "a great education, but they also provide an education in goodness, and the students also treat each other well." He went on to say, "We teach the values that are the foundation for life." These two impactful statements by the priest of School C reflect that the mission and vision of the school that is transferred into the entire community.

School C's principal stated, "The parents' choice the school primarily for academics and discipline. We love children and want them to be successful." Caring and compassion are excellent examples of what Catholic education means for students as they are provided with a small classroom setting that provides these valuable resources. The family atmosphere is essential to everyone at School C and the teachers emphasized the importance of creating a special bond with the students. The bond is essential in situations where teachers are able to

provide one on one individualized instruction. This personalized attention provided the student

the indirect instruction to be kind to others. "Our students are genuinely kind, which is a great

quality to possess, considering the world they are growing up in." Everyone knows everyone,

and tradition is essential and evident within the school.

The way that the principal of School C expressed that, she maintains her involvement in

Catholic education is her ability to continue being a role model and to live with the Catholic

values that were part of her own upbringing, encouraging her students to do the same. One parent

was able to assess the impact of School C and how their philosophy changed the behavior of

children because it incorporates the religious component that enhanced the moral and values of

the students. The parents unanimously believe that the morals and values that are instilled in the

children every day impact the way they interact with others and how they establish positive

relationships with the children.

For Principal C, believed that Catholic education is more than just an education. Principal

C stated, "Everyone within the school community sees the school as a community of family and

faith." The pastor is a means that have assisted the principal in moving School C in a forward

direction.

In answering the question regarding what is helping in School D to maintain the quality

of Catholic education, the principal immediately emphasized her staff:

> I think, again, going back to that, the need or want for a Catholic school is ingrained in
>
> everything every decision we make, every service project we do, everything we do
>
> together as a faculty. How do I explain it? I cannot give you specifics, but I know it is
>
> here because everybody who comes into the building and spends time here sees it.

She also noted that the parish connected to the school offers an active collaboration and opportunities for community service, another aspect of maintaining the quality of educating the whole child at School D.

The parents of School D see Catholic education as a tool for life. The means become engrained in the children, and they use them to succeed in everything they do after they leave School D. A final thought by one of the parents about School D is

> "While my children know no other, they are pleased with their school and the level of buy-in required. They may not see the value until they move onto High School or are away from the system, to appreciate what they had. They have learned so much more than academics, and I couldn't be happier."

The consensus is across the board through all the schools. It takes a village to raise children. With faith, accomplishments flourish, and the achievements go far beyond the classroom. While it is essential to gain an understanding of academics, it is also crucial to become educated in understanding yourself. Through the education of faith by the priests and through the family and emotional instruction of the teachers, children become formed in a mature human being.

Parents and educators of School E shared that there is motivation by the kids themselves and being a part of the family atmosphere and that this is what continues to push toward keeping their children in Catholic schools. The children are accustomed to this way of instruction and learning. School E shared that the students are a constant reminder of why we do what we do; they are just so open and honest, and giving. One of the administrators commented about the student population that from pre-kindergarten to 12th, "it is known here as the School E way, and that way is a message of hope for the future of our students." All of the parents are consistent in

stating their desire for their children to be fully grounded in their religious studies and understand how important God and faith impactful in everyday life.

Catholic schools have gained a stronger understanding of the needs of students. The schools are offering more support for students who have behavioral issues and provide academic support for those who more time to understand the materials. School E students strive to be the best and work with the neighboring Catholic schools to aid in building an education before the students transition to high school. The school mission to assist the students perceive how learning faith is not enough to be academically successful and that community service and other social interaction can contribute to this balance. The parents believe that increasing prayer life in young children is important because it develops the child on a more personal level. Only the child knows their level of trust or faith in God and the child can make decisions based on the belief and knowledge that they have of Him. Parents have mentioned countless times that prayer, their role in Eucharistic adoration and the parts they have in Mass are an essential part of their religious education.

Summary

The interviews conducted with principals and parents provided insight into the lived experiences of those who have attended or are sending their children to Catholic schools. This qualitative case study was developed in understanding how the research question addressed the lived experiences of principals and parents in the Western Diocese of the Midwest. Through a conceptual framework, the researcher explored the experiences in Catholic education and the decision-making process that aided them in their decision to enroll. The theoretical framework of this study consists of three interpretive lenses informing the researcher's investigation of the parents and how these parents came to their decision to send their children to Catholic schools to

include the importance of Catholic Schools, upholding the future of Catholic Schools and Catholic Schools and beyond. These lenses are a basis for interpretation from experiences to send their children to Catholic schools, which continues in the next chapter. This study uniquely describes the relationship between principals and families that led their schools to success.

The principals, parents, and staff that interviewed or took a role in the focus group sessions seemed to have similar views about what motivates parents to send their children to Catholic schools. They agreed that Catholic schools are not only a reality portrayed through external signs and symbols, but also an inner conviction to be lived out and transmitted to the students, faculty, and parents. Some principals had a less precise way of defining why parents chose to send their students coming to Catholic schools, but the main essence was present in all of them. An area most parents believed to be important was upholding Catholic identity within the schools and taught in the classroom with the collaboration of all the staff within the schools. Most of the parents have been raised in the Catholic faith and attended Catholic schools. They have chosen Catholic schools for their children based on their personal experiences. The parents provided support to the children from both the family and the school community to incorporate teachers and other parents to become actively involved in aiding the child in their educational endeavors.

There were some variances among the parents regarding why they choice Catholic education for their children. Some of the parents believed that everything was going the way they wanted it to go, and others thought there could be improvements made to the overall program with such things as updating curriculum materials, new class initiatives or ideas, or having larger class sizes. Some of these suggestions by the parents may take time for the school to accommodate these valued suggestions. Most of the parents were extremely satisfied with their

decision to enroll students in the Catholic school system. These families, along with many others

continue the tradition of offering their children a faith-filled experience throughout their

elementary school career and in some cases their middle and high school career.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the reasons that parents chose to send their children to Catholic schools. Discussed throughout this chapter are the thematic findings of the study and their relationship to the identified educational theories, which were the foundation for the study's construction: Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to cognitive development divides into three distinct categories: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the Zone of Proximal Development (McLeod, 2018). This chapter offers a synopsis to this research and consideration of future evolution on this topic while providing a definition of the prospective need for further research in this area of study.

The majority of the Catholic schools in the diocese of the Midwest are located in rural areas (as reported on the diocesan website, 2019). There are a few schools remaining that are located in urban areas. These urban areas schools enroll a consistent number of students from year to year. The main reason for the increase in growth in some of the Catholic schools largely equates to the voucher program that recently instituted within the entire state for Catholic, Lutheran, Charter, and other parochial schools (SchoolChoice, 2018). The participants in this study related their lived experiences of Catholic schools to tradition, values, and high academic expectations. The significance of this study was to provide insight to understand the experiences of rural and urban Catholic schools and the reason for the shift in enrollment over the years.

This chapter explores the findings and how the results correlate with the literature explored as part of the research. The limitations of the study and implications for the procedure, marketing, and theory discussed throughout this chapter. Themes and subthemes served as a connector between the researched literature and theoretical framework that explored the relevance and significance behind these s findings. Though separate and unique, the identified

themes and subthemes connect with the evidence posed throughout the literature and how the research question directly relates to the theoretical framework that guided the study.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what factors contributed to the rationale for parents choosing to enroll their children in Catholic schools. More specifically, this study examined family, vision, school characteristics, class sizes, values, community, and the quality of education. Furthermore, this study explored the connection of marketing schemes, active faith lives, and tradition were an ultimate goal of many Catholic schools. Administrators, clergy, and parents shared their thoughts and experiences that allowed the researcher the opportunity to deduct logical and evidenced-based reasons for why parents send their children to Catholic schools.

There are two types of parochial schools in the diocese. The first one is a parish school. A parish school connects with the parish in which the school building resides. The central authority of the parish school is the priest and the school administrator handles the day-to-day operations of the school. The control of the finances of a parish school monitored by the parish finance committee in which it resides, and the council provides fiscal advice to the pastor as part of the decision making process. There is usually another council called a parish council, who handles all non-financial matters within the parish. There are many subgroups within a parish, including human resources, women and men's groups, buildings and grounds, marriage and family life (as reported on the diocesan website, 2019).

The other type of school within the Diocese of the Midwest is a school system. A school system is an arrangement of schools consisting of multiple parishes of a larger city. A collection of individuals appointed from the parishes that make up the school system form an education

commission, which is the governing body for the school. The dean or head priest are the leaders of the commission, who are appointed by one of the parishes that make the decisions for the school system. The system houses children from preschool to twelfth grade. Most of the outlying parish schools within the Diocese of the Midwest connect with a system school in some way (as reported on the diocesan website, 2019).

The researcher interpreted the phenomenon of why parents choose to send their children in rural and urban areas to attend Catholic schools. Through the process, the researcher discovered two themes that were present in participant descriptions of the phenomena. The first theme is attained by families in all the schools that have enrolled their child for at least one year in Catholic education. The second theme derives from the participants in the study that experienced alternative education, such as public schools.

The administrators, clergy and parents were recruited through an email invitation. Participants were asked to respond affirmatively or reject the request for participation. The administrators contacted the researcher and set the time and the date for the interviews or focus group sessions. Full disclosure of the intent and desire for participation in the research process were provided to each research participant. This included the confidentiality statements and objectives for individuals within the Catholic schools that chose to participate.

The data collection process provided the researcher with a wealth of information that was significant for the study. Interpretation and evaluation of the data to determine validity, contradiction, or conflicts followed (Yin, 2014). Themes and subthemes became apparent upon analysis of the data retrieved during the semi-structured interviews. Categorical coding occurred during analysis, a complex process that connected the content to context, situations, ways of thinking, perspectives, processes, and relationship (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Each parent who participated in the collectively shared that students in Catholic schools have a different mindset compared to public schools due to their faith background. The review of parent comments were reflective in how they perceived their children in relation to their readiness for future educational opportunities. The administrators of the schools indicated that throughout the years, students who were enrolled in Catholic schools often times out performed students in public schools because they had the ability to work with teachers one on one, create relationships with teachers, and develop values from the faith education that they received while attending.

The findings indicated that administrators, teachers and parents are more than aiding the students in learning rather the way in which they learn., Increased opportunities in non-classroom settings are indicative of a learning model which was both active and interactive by educator and student, using concepts to build competency of both knowledge and skillset. Evidence from educator interviews supported the theory reflected by Vygotsky's (1978) theories on social development regarding social interactions, more knowledge other and Zone of Proximal development (McLeod, 2018). Parents expressed the impact that the administrators, staff and clergy have with students in Catholic schools.

Connecting the Findings to the Conceptual Framework

There are many challenges in retaining enrollment and the Catholic school system continues to address these issues and move in a positive direction. The marketing strategy required some level of innovativeness and creativity to attract new students and the recruitment of parents to aid in the development of programs is crucial to their overall enrollment. The research also affirmed Vygotsky's Theory (1978) of Social Development and the three-targeted areas in Vygotsky's (1978) research: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the

Zone of Proximal Development. The first principle of Vygotsky's theory emphasizes culture affecting cognitive development (McLeod, 2018).

Sociocultural Interaction

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of human learning described learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) states:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This theory applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

The families in each of the schools chose Catholic schools for various but similar reasons. These factors include the following: values, morals, family-like atmosphere, faith-based instruction, and small class sizes. The families within the five schools collectively agreed that the schools their children are attending provide support to the moral upbringing taught at home. Because the families are sending their students to a Catholic school, there are particular values from the faith-based education instilled in the children everyday life. As the child passes through additional grade levels, the value system increases in terms of the knowledge the students learn but on a deeper level in terms of meaning.

On the other hand, to emphasize Vygotsky's (1978) theory of culture and cognitive development, some factors led some parents to withdraw their children from Catholic schools. Those factors included small class sizes, which led to a limited amount of peer interaction,

limited sports availability, and in some cases, limited resource potential. The literature emphasized the importance of active academic development while also helping the child grow in their faith and moral development (Huttunen & Kokkori, 2012). Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development is an important concept for theories of moral learning and moral development. With the aid of teachers, administrators, and clergy within the school, the students learn their faith and other academic materials. Through collaborative learning, discourse, modelling, and scaffolding, students learn strategies for supporting the intellectual knowledge as well as through the guidance throughout a child's education. This is an example of the scaffolding that takes place in the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) describes the interaction with others and the integration of self-understanding:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. Once a child completes their years in Catholic school and enter society the parent now will be able to make moral decisions on their own based on the support they received in their education.

In Vygotsky's second theme of social interaction, social factors contribute to cognitive development. McLeod (2018) discussed Vygotsky; "the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about" (p. 2). Students placed in an environment where a family are present in a child's life, addressed by their name and their needs met, and the values and moral system taught in Catholic schools is an intricate part of the daily lessons taught. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory concludes that these students will have a greater

chance of growing up practicing their faith through their adult years. For Vygotsky, the environment in which children grow up influence how they think and how they think. This "zone" is the area of exploration for which the student is cognitively prepared, but requires help and social interaction in order to fully develop (McLeod, 2018).

The third theme to social interaction "adults transmit their culture's tools of intellectual adaptation that children internalize" (McLeod, 2018). Huttunen and Kokkori (2014) use the foundation of Vygotsky's view of language and thought that have different origins but are interconnected and interwoven inseparably. This hermeneutical approach to understanding of language is a close view. This approach provides a possibility of interconnecting language to the development of the human being, including moral development. According to the hermeneutic notion, language is something more than a tool or instrument of communication. The hermeneutic notion of language matched with Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory, in which linguistic and thoughts are intertwined. The difficult task of moral philosophy and the theory of moral development is to grasp the nature of this higher-level moral learning or developmental process that precedes it.

Through the interaction with adults, administrators, teachers, priests, and parish community members of a parish or system school, children learn through the experiences and knowledge of the adult (Huttunen & Kokkori, 2012). The adults in Catholic schools are trained teachers, by an accrediting institution and by the diocese in which they teach or administer. It is an essential job of the educators in a child's life, to teach the curriculum but skills necessary for life. In one of the focus groups, the parents heavily focused on the differences that they saw between students in their public schools compared to their Catholic school. The parents commented on how well the students in the Catholic schools behaved; understand how to speak

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with adults, and the appropriate use of language in the school setting. Even though these parents witnessed the difference between the two schools, they also pointed out how the differences were possible.

According to the parents of the study, students in the public school system have substantial class sizes. These large class sizes contribute to the teacher having less time to personalize their instruction. According to Vygotsky (1986), adults are an essential facilitator of development, and if that source is not available to some students, the development becomes limited which therefore leaves the student learning from uneducated sources.

The More Knowledgeable Other

The second principle discussed by Vygotsky, the More Knowledgeable Other, "refers to someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, concerning a particular task, process, or concept" (McLeod, 2018). Most of the time, this description applies to an adult, teacher, parent, or another authority figure. But, Vygotsky also stated that, "Many times, a child's peers or an adult's children may be the individuals with more knowledge or experience" (McLeod, 2018, p. 2). Parents who participated in the study expressed how students today are knowledgeable compared to those students over three decades ago as they learn from their surroundings. Students learn from their surroundings. When a student completely immerses into a culture where there are many students or other children, they learn from those children. The parents of the schools shared that the family type atmosphere that their Catholic schools is priceless. Parents with one child in their family thrive on the socialization skill that their child has attained because these opportunities are limited outside of the school atmosphere. The concept is considered deeper than friendships as many of the students in these Catholic schools interact with different age levels through play and socialization activities. The students enrolled

in preschool enjoy interacting with the older students and the older students like to have a responsibility in helping the younger students in different activities. The younger students learn from the older students the skills necessary to grow in their cognitive understanding, for example, sharing and manners. The older students learn from, the younger students in terms of looking at situations differently, how to teach or play with their friends, and how the decisions they make impact others around them.

Catholic schools thrive on the concept of family so it is essential to look at the relationships that form in them. While the younger students can achieve activities independently, the assistance or the instruction from peers or adults, to increase that knowledge is invaluable. An adult might have a hard time penetrating knowledge to a student, but another peer might be able to explain a situation or problem in another way that makes sense to the troubled child, therefore, developing the mental function of the child.

Zone of Proximal Development

The third principle to Vygotsky's constructivist theory is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). McLeod (2018) states that "This is an important concept that relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner" (p. 3). The Zone of Proximal Development describes many examples of student interactions and instruction in any school.

The researcher used her knowledge of Catholic schools to describe the importance of teachers in the Zone of Proximal Development. The teachers in Catholic schools can create those guided learning environments that lead to greater understanding within the individual learner. The guidance provided from the skilled adult, in this case the administrator; teacher and clergy can actively use scaffolding to educate the child to use learning process in order to become an

independent thinker. The material taught in a Catholic School is different from material taught in public or larger parochial schools. The material, tailored to meet the student's needs, because of the ability to get to know the student from on a more personal level.

This study examined factors that determined why parents send their children to Catholic schools and their perceptions of children in society. The results of this study revealed the need to create open lines of communication from the school to the community to provide the families of future students to connect to the school. The study established that Catholic schools take a particular interest in educating the whole child from an academic, faith, and moral component.

<div align="center">**Discussion of Results**</div>

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What factors do parents highlight for sending the children to Catholic school?

RQ 2: How has the decision to send their children to Catholic schools impacted the faith
and academic approach to their child's learning and growth development?

RQ 3: What roles do the parochial schools play in the lives of children in society?

Parents, principals, and staff interviewed described their experiences similarly within their school culture. There was much overlap between all of the parish schools, as well as, some overlap with the system school. However, the lived experiences of all participants revealed a shared pattern of the Catholic school experience. Participants shared how a similar language provided meaning to how they are motivated to send their children to Catholic schools.

Theme 1: Experiences of Catholic School Parents

Growth of Catholic schools. Initially the numbers within the schools started very low. The schools have administrators that demonstrate dedication and commitment to schools, their faith, and the overall improvement of Catholic education. Over a period of time the schools

grew, which formed not only their academic strengths, but they also became confident in the ministry they taught, which formed their overall mission and visions for the schools. At one point, each school plateaued in their enrollment based on the following circumstances: attendance due to issues within the economy, internal struggles, or diocesan changes. Some of the contributed to the financial struggles, while other changes made it necessary to rethink the structure in the school setting.

One of the schools initially started the semester with 17 students in one building that has currently increased to over 150 students in three buildings in just five years. Strong pastoral leadership within School A was a key factor in this increase in enrollment. In School B, changes in growth are happening this school year. They have recently adapted the state's voucher program that enables students to attend Catholic school without having to pay for tuition. School A and E, the midwest voucher program has impacted the school's daily operation. In addition, this change has also opened the eyes of many parents who thought they could not afford a Catholic education, but now have the freedom to make the best decision for their child with no strings attached.

Schools C and D's administrators and families are increasing enrollment in the old-fashioned way, by word of mouth and which brings people together to form a child through education and faith-filled journey—parents dedicated to completing the work at school. Not only are the parents committed to the high expectations set forth by the staff, but they are also committed to helping the school grow in their financially. These parents know to share the commitment to Catholic education and make the sacrifices by volunteering whenever possible. The parents are committed to making a link from school to home by mimicking the high

expectation standards, as well as, the selflessness by giving their time to be at school events and functions.

Interventions within Catholic schools. Intervention attempts to reverse the declining attendance over a period to take different forms. Some of the schools received new pastors that were committed to making education the priority within their parish; some of the schools received new leadership itself. Other schools involved the community in more of what the school was doing to spread the news of the school. Another intervention strategy includes the ability to be a part of the [state] School Choice Program, which has saved many schools within the state from closing. Even the diocese stepped in, making a stronger connection to each of the schools in the diocese. The diocese has helped each school with marketing needs and other promotional tools that allow the schools to be more visible in the public eye.

Options to go from good to great. The educational leader must make a decision that would change the way finances handled. With 90% of the school's budget covered by the parish, options had to change, or it would result in a decrease in staff, that would add more duties to the remaining staff left in the parish. The parish and school decided to take on the voucher program in order to accept government funding into the school to aid low-income families in paying for tuition. With just as little as 12 students, the school would decrease the amount of parish aid, and they would be able to keep the teaching staff as well as allow the principal to administrate. The pastor was on board with the option to take on the state voucher program, as it seemed like the only solution to change the financial dynamic for the school. The principal and pastor set up several meetings to gather all the information the parish needed in order to communicate that with the school community. The results were astoundingly reaching over 20 students in their first year. With the extra income, the parish is at ease supporting the totality of employees within the

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parish and school. The school can now offer more to the students by having the proper teachers and administrators to meet the needs of all the students.

In all cases, the priests are willing and able to work with various school settings to capitalize on the education needed in order to make evangelization prominent in young people of the Diocese of the Midwest. Whether the schools remain in an urban or rural setting, the role of the clergy and the outlook that they have on Catholic education is necessary. While in some of the schools, especially, B, D, and E, the principals expressed the desire to have the pastors in the school building more often. The parents are aware that the priests are busy with the business of the entire parish; however, acknowledge their devotion to the schools. The parent expressed that the priests play an essential role in the children lives and this method and set them apart from the public school system. The time with the priests allows the students to explore their own individual spirituality and they ask questions of the priests to make the students more secure in their faith. Within Schools A and C, there is a weekly presence by the priests within the schools. The priests provide time in the classroom to talk with the children separated by age level to provide a home like atmosphere where students can share their thoughts and questions. All the pastors have different backgrounds that align with the specific needs of the parish. The priests also rely heavily on experiences of the administrators to carry out the mission and vision of the daily objectives within the school.

Not having pastoral leadership that has experience with small Catholic schools makes a difference in the overall sense of the policies and procedures that take place when running a business within a business, like a school within a parish. This position requires the knowledge of priests and administrators who are dedicated to whether or not the schools make positive changes to succeed and grow. In conducting these interviews, the researcher observed more collaboration

among not only the parents and staff within the parish and school communities but also the collaboration of the other principals within the Diocese of the Midwest that communicated and made differences within their schools through the help and guidance of others. Individually, the principals' performed the grunt work associated with changing the school's profile, but it was not without the assistance and guidance of their colleagues, parents, and parish community members. Participating principals were leaders who honestly assessed the current situation and moved forward toward the goal of returning the schools to health and growth.

Navigating change. All participating schools have parents that observed changes over the years. Some parents' children have been enrolled in the Catholic school system for over a decade compared to some parents who are at the beginning phases of choosing the best educational option for their child and are seeking a faith-based environment. In recent years, most parents noticed a change in the culture of the school. Within the past 1o years, the overall school climate was almost 100% Catholic families. Other options for families is to choose a school of their choice; many families who are not Catholic are looking at alternatives to education. Small classes, individualized attention, family atmosphere, faith-based instruction are some of the key quality indicators relevant to the families within the interviews and focus groups. Parents, today compete with other families to do the very best for their children. If parents feel that they can push their child, they can and will with the support of the professional that can help that child. One of the parents of School A affirmed how Catholic schools had made differences in the life of her daughter, who will be attending first grade in the fall:

> Our family believes that my daughter has a gift for learning. Teachers and staff of School
> A allow my children to reach their potential and push goals. They treat her like one of
> their own and expect the best out of her.

A lay teacher of School A spoke at length about the children and how the teachers in all Catholic schools educate the students on how to be good human beings. Lay teacher of School A comments that "the kids are just willing to help, they want to make a difference, and they do." The parents recognize their children have a secure connection with teachers and the staff at the schools and the children want to be a part of everything that the schools do. The priest of the School A complemented this by stating

The students formed in the likeness and image of God and the teachers and priest help the students form themselves by being a positive role model in the community and helping the students recognize the importance and value of family.

He summarized the changes were possible because "there is a trust from families of the staff at School A to educate the whole child and likewise of the staff to trust the parents to carry out the taught material." The parents interviewed demonstrated a commitment and trust to the teachers in each of the schools. This commitment is a direct reflection on how each of the schools operates structurally. The ideology of each interview and focus groups give the idea that the priests genuinely do have the opportunity to cast a distant vision while collaborating with the other staff members within the parish and school.

Parents work together to bring about academic, faith, and cultural changes in the lives of the children that made their experience within the Catholic schools unique to that of other school experiences. From a Catholic school standpoint, each of the school experiences within the Diocese of Midwest allows for the tradition of heading the faith from generation to generation (Priest, School D, 2018). The priests, school administration, and teachers form the bounteous opportunities that is not offered in other school settings. These opportunities include family, faith formation, and creating community interaction throughout their school careers at each of the

locations. The students have the opportunity to engage positively with their local communities and evangelize with the parish community during weekly Mass and special events throughout the year.

Growth. Growth did not arise from the participating schools because of a single event, administrator, or priest. The researcher asked all participants to identify a single moment when they knew the school was growing. In some cases, growth can mean multiple things. Some of the parents and teachers experienced internal growth where the students were able to grow with the curriculum taught and to make academic and faith advances over a length of time. Some of the schools saw external growth, where the size of the school multiplied each year. There are many reasons for the growth in each of the schools. In two of the schools, the growth contributed to the voucher program. In other schools, it contributed to the marketing conducted throughout the year that impacted the interest of new entrants. All parents and administrators struggled to identify a single moment. Instead, they saw many contributing factors that led to the success of the school that they are currently attending.

Parents within the schools have modeled a heart for service and sacrifice within the community. They all pride themselves on identifying with the Catholic school because of the values and morals taught within the school. However, the school cannot teach these values and morals alone. The schools can create an extension to the home that incorporate faith as part of the educational experience. The administration in these schools provide an environment where new ideas were expected and encouraged by both the students and staff. School B administrator commented, "We presented with a financial struggle, and the school had to find a way to make a turnaround for the betterment of the school or we would lose teachers in the process." The priest, the administrator, and the teachers collaborated to bring their ideas into reality, forming a vision

for the future of the school. The result was more participation by the teachers in school. The

participation increased because of the open communication led by both the priest and

administrator. The teachers communicated with the parents; the solution in the school made a

foundational change for the future.

Theme 2: The Importance of Catholic Schools

The intention of this qualitative case study discovered the examination of texts

transcribed from interviews and focus groups supplied by the pastors, administration, and parents

of Catholic schools in the Diocese of the Midwest. The researcher used texts to find essentials

meanings from the participants' descriptions of their experience in Catholic schools in the rural

Midwest. During the process of reading, writing, and reflection, the researcher observed repeated

words or word groups that was expressed by the participants to describe Catholic school

experience that resulted in the formation of these themes. The parents comprised of returning,

traditionalist family or as a new family looking for a options for their child's education. The

keywords presented below in ranked order based on the usage of the word or word groups during

interviews with participants.

Family. Building *family* is at the forefront of the indirect education that students,

teachers, administrators and parish communities in the onset of their education. Another parent

in a different school, School D commented, "They are taught that everyone is an image in God's

eye and that we have to care for everyone in the image of God."

According to Mayntz (2019), a real family provides its members with emotional and spiritual

kinship through:

Shared values, beliefs, and traditions, everyday experiences and activities, Unconditional,

nonjudgmental support. In many ways, different individuals relate to groups of people

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who provide them with emotional and spiritual connection as a family, even if they share no legal or genetic bonds (p. 1).

For administrators, the *family* is the responsibility of the entire school, and it supports everything envisioned throughout the school year as well as the mission of the school. Administrators believe they are free to shape the idea of family through input and ideas from the parents and parish members within each of the schools. The parents cast the idea of family when each family enters the building at each of their schools. "It was imperative that the education that once began at home in raising our child to be continued throughout the school day" firmly stated a parent at School D. The parents believed their input and ideas were vital to continue the concept that family in every hour of every day of the school year. "The administrators and teaching staff do an excellent job in creating the idea of family and sharing the passion for education and their faith," commented by a parent of School C. In no small way, administrators, teachers and parents are always engaged in dialogue concerning the formation and implementation of the faith thought to support the *family*. The priests are very much involved in bringing the students together through weekly Mass and classroom visits in many of the schools within the Diocese of the Midwest. The schools provide the parents ownership into making each school unique through the value of the input set by the parents in every conference, fundraising meeting, and other events during the school year.

Vision. Ultimately, the word *vision* described the attitude of teachers in each of the buildings. Each of the visions looked a little differently depending upon what the goals of the school were. In some cases, the goals were financial, and the vision-based concept was framed around the students, teachers, administrators, priest and parish community would work toward educating the children while working on the vision of the school which is to become financially

sound. The vision in some of the schools was to become part of the voucher program. This vision would allow students to receive a Catholic education and support the parish financially as the state provides the money necessary to educate a student. Administrators, teachers, and parents recognize that action must take place in order to provide something different and more for the students to come to Catholic schools. Money is a negative tag on any parochial school and the reason that most people do not choose Catholic schools. The voucher program was adopted by the state for the purpose of assisting students of families who demonstrated financial need and this demand increased based on the number of parents who were interested in sending their children to the Catholic school system. Administrators can now assess the possibilities that are available to families to attend Catholic schools over denying these students based on their inability to pay. They worked collectively to adhere to the school's *vision* and to bring the parents on board with the necessary changes that need to take place in order for the school to be successful.

Welcoming, friendly, and personable. The intention to create a warm and welcoming environment served to build bridges between the schools and their growing population within the schools. Parent attendees are engaged and continue to contribute to the school community. The parents spent hours building parade floats, preparing for fundraisers, helping with designing marketing material and executing outreach events with the parenting organizations in each of the schools. The fruit of those hours was to influence the school and attract new families to enroll in any one of the schools. The expectation was simple: the more people who participate in these outreach events, the better the chances for new families to join the school flourish it. The school system performed outreach with the outlying rural schools. This marketing tool has allowed the

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rural schools to promote a preschool through 12th grade Catholic education, and it enabled the system schools to promote higher learning within their middle school and high school levels.

School characteristics. Character, fairness, honesty, and empathy divulged as contributing features in the selection process. This parent added, "They notice that the Catholic school in the same town promoted a faith-based education" as the deciding factor for choosing an alternative to the public school. A parent of School E mentioned the desire for a structured, traditional environment that considered their children's unique personalities. Many of the parents concluded that academic curriculum, class size, student–teacher mentoring, social environment, and low tuition rates were key factors influencing their decision for selecting a Catholic school for their children. A parent in Schools A, B, and C found it significant to mention that their children's social skills have improved. Many administrators mentioned the reason some of their parents transferred or enrolled their child in their school is because of the overall success of the schools and the reputation it had with other parents, alum, and community members that they knew.

Small class sizes. One of the critical marketing phrases when speaking to a family interested in one of the schools is that there are classroom caps, which is a specific number to ensure each teacher meets the needs of the students. The parents sense this level of satisfaction because they know the students are receiving one on one attention in the classroom setting that motivate the students to succeed.

The families that transferred into the school after preschool also made mention regarding the benefits regarding small class sizes. The parents are pleased with the difference in how their children communicate with them and other people in society. The children have less fear and are more confident about their ability to learn. The students are required to serve, read, and sing at

Mass, which builds their confidence in being in front of a group of people. As the students work on their academic skills in the classroom, they are able to transition these skills within the weekly Mass. Confidence is a learned trait that is incorporated throughout the week by practicing readings or songs. The students have higher confidence levels that attribute to the relationships stabled within the classroom.

The parents discussed how they can see the difference in how the students who do not attend Catholic school are not connected with the church: therefore, providing the well-rounded education for the children. Study participants perceived how the parents are willing to participate in school and church-sponsored activities. The reputation of the school is crucial in determining how these others types of schools are available.

Quality of Education

A parent in School D stated, "There is no comparison of the two types of schools." In her opinion, "The level of education our children receive at School D far outweighs what we would ever receive at the public school in our area." Parents in all the schools were conclusive in their answers regarding the quality of education in Catholic schools. They concluded that respect for tradition and structure-guided their decision for Catholic education." They wanted an excellent education for their children. The reason for quality education as expressed by the parents relate to how each school incorporates vision tied to the faith and provides quality education through teaching and instruction. These parents expressed the importance of preparation and educational success for their children in assessing their future. The administrators shared how their school offered the academic standards that met the expectations of both the parents and the students enrolled in their institution.

The environment. The participants explained through both the focus groups and individualized interviews the significance of Catholic education as it relates to the environmental factors as structure, organization and the overall healthy social setting. The participants provided specific examples of environmental factors that focused on the safety element that the school provided their students. Parents transferred their children from the public school system to the Catholic school system because they felt this environment would ensure them that their children would be safer. The administrator of School C stated, "Many of them come to us because of our environment. Some of the parents who transferred from public schools are concerned as though the public schools do not offer them the environment that they want for their child." The administrator stated, "Parents are seeking a school environment where their child can achieve his/her greatest potential as a learner." Administrators in all of the schools said parents wanted a safe, caring, loving, and nurturing as factors in the school's environment that aided in their decisions to choose Catholic education.

Parents stated a range of environmental factors that they considered when choosing a Catholic school. One of the parents of School A stated that:

> School A welcomed her child after getting into some pure mischief at their public school. There have not been any issues with the child since he arrived at School A, he is doing very well, and he will continue through Catholic school through high school.

School A's administrator discussed the environment and its student population. She explained how there is a connection with the public schools for educating all kinds of students, especially students with special needs. She explained:

Some students that come to our school have needs that we cannot educate alone. It is with the help of our public schools and having services provided by professionals that help in the overall education of our children.

Each of the families has their own reason for sending their children to Catholic schools, but knowing they are in an environment that is safe with a community to protect them is a strong consideration in their overall decision.

The common language outlined above forms a picture of Catholic education in the rural Midwest. *Vision* is the foundation of the schools. *Vision* depends on the attitude of the school and the people that are present in the lives of the children in the school. *Vision* and with the assistance of the school *family* sets the stage for assisting the school in providing a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. The *school characteristics* of respect, honesty, personal responsibility, strong character values, and structure are essential in providing the educators employed in the Catholic school system to make a difference in the lives of the students. . These *school characteristics* align with how the institution can provide a quality education, as well as, continued strong communication between the administrators and the parents. The researcher perceived the importance of a *welcoming and friendly* atmosphere as a strong component to what constitutes a quality education.

Theme 3: Upholding the Future of Catholic Education

The additional research questions was designed to understand whether Catholic schools made an impact on the approach for faith and academic development and development has influenced the growth in each child and how that it makes a difference in society. The researcher determined that the parents' rationale for choosing a Catholic school were their faith-based education, was tied to their faith.. In an article by the

Parents are critical stakeholders in Catholic education because they are personally invested in their child's future. The views of parents, as well as, perceptions of the changes within Catholic schools, play a vital role in determining the future marketing, recruitment, and overall growth of the school. One of the critical reasons that parents have chosen to send their children to a Catholic school is related to how students are learning in faith-based education. These students are receiving a religious element that is prohibited in the public school system.

The activities that the Catholic schools provide to their students contribute to their ability to strive in society. Students are taught to serve in the congregation, sing and read. These skills are valuable in building confidence of the child as they become independent in these tasks. People's Alliance for Continuing Education (PACE; 2016) noted some of the essential benefits of Catholic education:

> It not only focuses on engagement and responsibility concerning the church but also to the community as a whole. According to a survey done by a non-Catholic and non-American source, the study suggested that students coming from parochial schools are the least to engage in civic engagement. On the other hand, the study indicated that students from Catholic education ranked highest in terms of participating in community and civic engagement. Community involvement could mean the highest in terms of charity donations, writing to legislators, volunteering, and voting. (p. 1)

Parents indicated that many children enter society and interact with adults effectively because they are exposed to individualized instruction in the classroom. Since the class sizes are small, the children are required to participate in this small setting.

Another critical fundamental of Catholic education is the value of service and wanting to help others. PACE (2016) states, "Catholic education values in God's word that states, "you are

your brother's keeper." Hence, Catholic students are always taught to be sensitive to the needs of others, and respond positively in any way they can." The parents explained how they are pleased with the interaction between elementary and younger student interaction as the younger students view the older students as mentors. . More specifically, a parent stated: "students in the school are like brothers and sisters because the school is small. They love each other like family and also have their disagreements like family, but in the end, they are truly family." Other participants noted that they wanted a God-oriented Christian based education. Thus, the reasons stated by parents in this study did not vary by the type of parochial school chosen.

In a Catholic school context, the expectation is that the school aims to create a climate in which teachers assist students in their development as unique individuals, as well, develop healthy moral attitudes. School climate is the "quality and character of school life" and is "predictive of students' ability to learn and develop in healthy ways" (National School Climate Center, 2014). Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) proposed that the two types of teacher–student relationships are interpersonal relationships and learning relationships. To facilitate learning, "students and teachers need to negotiate to enable interpersonal relationships which can then lead to learning relationships, allowing… the movement towards more complex activity" (p. 15). Catholic schools have the opportunity to develop children by instilling into the culture of the school a moral and spiritual life. Part of this moral obligation found in a social justice context can serve as a framework for teacher educators to address injustice in educational settings (Collopy & Bowman, 2012).

> Catholic social teaching based on the idea that every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. The Church, and, subsequently, educational programs

have the God-given mission and the unique capacity to call people to live with integrity,

compassion, responsibility, and concern for others. (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

[USCCB], 1998, para. 5)

As shared in Cook and Simonds (2011), the Congregation for Catholic Education described how

relationships must be the foundation of the educational process in Catholic schools:

During childhood and adolescence, a student needs to experience personal relations with

outstanding educators, and teaching has a more significant influence on the student's

formation when placed in a context of personal involvement, genuine reciprocity,

coherence of attitudes, lifestyles and day-to-day behavior. (Cook & Simonds, 2011, p.

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In each of the quoted texts, the researcher highlights the need to show that it is not just the five

schools that were interviewed that show the critical constructs of Catholic schools, but it is the

basis in which each school builds a foundation. The parents, administrators, and the priests

believe it is the development of the whole child and trust shared from each to the students in the

classroom. Teachers develop knowledge about the students within the classroom, as well as

character, faith, and academic development that stem from the relationship formed by each

teacher and student.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Preparing students to be equipped for life is one variable that is shared between parents

and teachers.. This requires competency in conceptual aspects of an academic life: knowledge,

communication, critical thinking, teamwork, life-long learning strategies, and social skills (North

& Shriver, 2016; Wratcher, 2016). A traditional format by which students are educated and

equipped with such knowledge and skillsets, often referred to as soft skills (Godin, 2017), which

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became the synopsis of the factors that bring parents to Catholic schools. In Catholic schools, another aspect is how students are educated, through their faith. Along with learning the curriculum, there are required assessments and evaluations to ensure the students are ready for the next stage of their life, whether that be middle or high school or college. The other essential component includes faith and how this aids the students in their overall being. God is the forefront in the lives of the children and in every one of us, but there is no way to tangibly show students who or what God looks like.

Each individual involved in this qualitative case study recognized that every school provides some level of success, through the instruction of many different teachers, and through the use of many different types of media and technology. The research participants reflected how additional instruction of faith along within small class sizes, individualized instruction, and the idea that the educators within Catholic schools form a child mind, body, and spirit created a student with the essential skills needed to succeed in society.

This specific finding corresponds to the literature in demonstrating how the parents require more for their child outside the realm of education. The parents wanted their children to learn about faith. The families that sent their children to Catholic school wanted them to learn about the faith. Immigrants who came from Ireland had a high demand for Catholic education. Elizabeth Ann Seton is referred to as the patron saint of Catholic schools. It is within her schools that "values education" laid its foundation. In 2016, the California Catholic Conferences reviewed the history of Catholic schools. The following statement was made about Elizabeth Seton and her work within Catholic schools:

> Because of her commitment to values-based education, Mother Seton originally educated
> only the needy girls of the area. However, the school eventually accepted girls from

wealthy families who paid tuition, thus enabling the Sisters of Charity to continue their charitable mission. Mother Seton felt it was important to welcome all students, regardless of their ability to pay (p. 1).

Historically, Catholic schools are considered strong in their Catholic identity and the mission to serve one another. This is largely due to the staff of which were comprised of men and women from religious orders. Their focus was the spiritual formation, which created an environment of Christian witness with a program integrated with Gospel values. After Vatican II, the church perceived a change in staff as many of the teachers became lay teachers (NCEA, 2015). Through the 21st century, the expectations of those who taught in a Catholic school included being grounded in faith-based culture, being bonded to Christ and the Church, and being witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions. Arthur (2015) from the Cardinal Newman Society speaks on Catholic education today and how the long lasting values that were developed centuries ago are still engrained on todays' youth.

"Education today is a complex task, which is made more difficult by rapid social, economic, and cultural changes. Its specific mission remains the integral formation of the human person. Children and young people must be guaranteed the possibility of developing harmoniously their own physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual gifts, and they must also be helped to develop their sense of responsibility, learn the correct use of freedom, and participate actively in social life. He goes on to explain because "children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God" (p. 6).

Administrators, clergy and parents recognize the value of a values-based education prepare students to maximize their conceptual understanding of faith based education and content-based proficiency in the academic subjects. The theoretical framework, constructivism, related to this study by aiding the understanding that in students need to understand and be involved in the world around them, students also have to construct their own meanings that correspond to their experiences. This directly corresponded to the three themes derived from the participant interviews and focus groups, which are factors that bring families to Catholic schools, the importance of Catholic schools and upholding the future in Catholic education. The parents of the study demonstrated support for the teachers and professionals that work with their children on a daily basis to achieve the values of a Catholic education.

In the 1800's, the need for Catholic education was simply to inform and provide instruction about the faith and to receive the necessary basics to better the children of the parents that came over from Europe. The evaluation or assessment relies on for the students administrators, teachers and clergy members to understand how in preparing the student in their future endeavors. Each individual involved in this qualitative, qualitative case study acknowledged that success in Catholic schools is more than growth on the academic chart. Research participants reflected that family, class sizes, and faith education would provide the skills necessary to form a child mind, body and spirit. The first schools that opened in the U.S. were private. Religion was the reason for living. To be educated in the faith meant that a person had the opportunity to gain more in life than past generations who worked tirelessly to support their family in the fields.

Evidence from this study's independent research and literature review shows positive alignment between the factors of why parents want to send their children to Catholic schools, the

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importance of a faith life in Catholic schools and the upholding Catholic education through

different marketing and teaching strategies through Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study was the number of participating schools, parents, and

administrators within the Diocese of the Midwest. The findings in this study were rich in detail,

provided in combination with literature and data collected through the qualitative research

process. The study explored the experiences of parents and administrators in Catholic schools

and the factors that contributed to their decision to send their children to Catholic schools.

However, the number of participants limited the scope of the study to the experiences of a small

group. Since the data was collected through interviews and focus groups sessions, the number of

participants was fewer in comparison to a distributed survey poll that may have captured a wider

audience (Yin, 2011). The researcher carefully examined the phenomenon of Catholic schools in

the rural Midwest through the conceptual framework guiding this study. The setting for the pool

of research participants included two sources, rural Catholic schools and urban Catholic schools

in the Diocese of the Midwest. Administrators, clergy, and parents of students in Catholic

schools were the target for the study. Each administrator sent out emails to all of their parents

and only 44 chose to participate.

Nevertheless, the participating rural school parents and school staff confirmed the

qualitative characteristics found in the literature as they verbally described their experience in

Catholic schools. The researcher examined the data to extract the themes, subthemes, and

keywords that describe the experiences within Catholic schools from each of the participants.

The researcher assumed that participants were answering questions to the best of their

knowledge and with truthfulness. However, the reliability of the findings was dependent on the honesty and accuracy of participant answers to interview questions.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy and Theory

This study dealt made all considerations of what factors contributed to the parents decision to enroll their child in the Catholic school system. The data collection process allowed the researcher to evaluate what changes would enhance the researchers' own school in making changes for future enhancements Based on the findings of the study involving five Catholic schools of the Diocese of the Midwest of the U.S., there are some considerations for general implications.

Implication 1. To Provide Awareness and Support for Strengthening the Growth of Catholic schools

This study revealed that Catholic schools rely mainly on their families and parish community, tradition, diocese, and other stakeholders to uphold Catholic traditions in the decision to enroll their children to Catholic schools. While the information provided by the families were helpful, the researcher recognizes that there is a need to understand what additional supports would be helpful in enhancing the Catholic school. The recommendations as offering workshops and creating a diocesan position to facilitate Catholic identity in the schools would provide Catholic educators with a supportive environment to continue to them strive in the classroom setting

Implication 2. The Study Enhances Educational Leadership Practices in General

While the research focused on the factors that parents believed that was important for sending their children to Catholic schools, the implications extend beyond the individual Catholic school to a much broader place within the diocese. The formation recommended by the

researcher for Catholic school administrators includes marketing methods that would enhance enrollment numbers. These workshops could benefit parents that are members of the home and school groups or who are as part of the religious education programs within the parish. The school needs more advertisement than simply the parents' ability to share how the school enhances their child's ability, but rather other marketing methods should be considered in increasing enrollment.

Catholic education is essential because it is considered a quality education. Studies have shown that students who attend Catholic schools have higher test scores and academic achievements than those students who attend comparable public schools (Carbonaro & Covay, 2010; Jeynes, 2002; Marks, 2009; Sander, 1996). The values that foster a Catholic school community are spiritual and provide a humanistic side: feeling compassion towards others, demonstrating a magnanimous spirit, acting with courage, and exhibiting interpersonal sensitivity (R. M. Jacobs, 2005).

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Research</div>

Recommendation 1: Offer Workshops on Catholic Teachings

From the interviews and focus group sessions with the researcher, the parents desired a more traditional type of formation in Catholic schools. The diocesan office could spend time developing those factors of Catholic schools into marketing strategies that bring people into the schools. At the diocesan level, these workshops demonstrated the importance of what Catholic education offers children. The workshops were interactive and provided a venue for continued communication to understand how plans can be initiated and implemented to meet the needs of the students to include a faith component that can be used to develop the child. This recommendation supersedes the administrator daily responsibilities, however, focus on making a

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difference within the parish and the school. The families need to have a voice within this dialogue and understand how these decisions are being made to benefit the overall student experience. By providing training and ongoing interactive methods of transmitting formation would respond to the challenges of bringing in new families mentioned by the researcher.

Recommendation 2: Designating a Marketing Facilitator in the Diocese

There is a need to act on the factors that bring families into Catholic schools or are essential to current families of Catholic schools. Currently, schools are working independently of one other to increase enrollment from year to year. The diocese has offered a more significant scope of marketing events that have influenced some increase of enrollment in the schools. After more extensive based marketing strategies as the incorporation of videos and fundraising events and to measure how these activities have impacted enrollment and how the rural schools may have attributed to the lack of participation.

The researcher is interested in a follow up system initiated at the diocesan level to continue providing feedback, growth, and other methods to increase enrollment. Based on the research in this study, one possible solution would be to create a position within the Diocesan Catholic Schools Office, the role of which would be to accompany and provide marketing strategies, especially for the expansion of rural schools. While many of the system schools have their marketing facilitator, it is difficult for a parish school to handle this job independently. This role would be not one of authority, but of guidance and support in forming and educating Catholic school administrators to set tangible goals to increase and strengthen the viability of the schools according to the needs and wants of the parish community. The facilitator's work could incorporate the following: organizing seminars and workshops, for parents in helping them in each of their own parent groups within the individual school, providing physical, academic, and

spiritual goals and concrete practices for the administrators and staff to meet the needs of the parents.

Recommendation 3: Extended Research Outside the Diocese of the Midwest

Further research should consider studying a more significant number of principals from all areas in the diocese, state and other dioceses in the country. This expansion could provide a broader perspective of how other Catholic schools market and consider factors important to parents. This study focused on Catholic schools in the Midwest, but it would be helpful to research how Catholic schools in other parts of the country have understood the needs of parents in making their choses for Catholic education. Additionally it would be considered beneficial to compare the means of support they have in the diocese, as well as, other schools to improve the enrollment, programs, practices, connection to faith, and overall environment of their school. There are regions of the U.S. that have higher or lower concentrations of Catholics due to culture, demographics, and history. It would be useful to research the differences and similarities, by region, on how they use the data to capitalize on families that attend their school.

Recommendation 4: Increase School Data From a Broader Range of Administrators

Most dioceses or Catholic education associations are aware of exceptional Catholic schools in terms of how they fulfilling their mission in maintaining a substantial population of students supported by dedicated parents. Through interviewing and creating a broader focus group, the researcher could determine what has aided them in their increase in enrollment and other factors that facilitated the overall stakeholders support. Additional research can explore how principals, parents, teachers and other stakeholders in Catholic schools gained this knowledge and support in upholding Catholic education, as well as making a note of their methods of execution (as reported on the diocesan website, 2018).

Conclusion

A case study approach was used to explore the experiences of Catholic school parents and what factors that led them to enroll their children in Catholic schools. This study provided an avenue through which priests, administrators, and parents could express the positives and negative challenges of being a part of a Catholic school. Together participants discussed how they love the school community. The parents and administrators articulated their own perceptions of how working together for the same purpose, and that is educating a child.

Participating parents and administrators recognized the challenges of Catholic schools in rural areas. Distances, resources, lack of communication have separated schools, and the need to improve the overall quality of their educational program. Some of the principals believe that where their school lies geographically makes it challenging to create a learning community for the administrators or to bring the parent groups closer together to share ideas.

For some of the schools, an acceptance of the methods of instruction have set the minds of parents and administrators. New programs challenged, such as the school voucher programs allowed the school to have an increase in revenue, as well as, provide an opportunity for students who cannot afford the tuition to attend. The voucher program is a government supplemental program that requires the schools within the state to adhere to the procedures set forth by this type of funding. The school was able to understand how they need to comply with the standards of this program to meet the needs of potential student entrants. The Catholic schools have worked collectively to provide an innovative education that facilitates a religious component that provided each student with solid education that aids in their future success. The expectations of the Catholic schools have met the needs of both the parents and the students as they embark upon their role in society.

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Appendix A: Research Schedule

The preliminary schedule for the doctoral research process:

Pre-Phase: Checking Data Collection Materials	Stage 1: Participant Selection Confirmation and Informed Consent	Stage 2: Data Collection and Data Analysis		Stage 3: Discussion and Findings
March 2019	April 2019	End of April beginning to middle of May 2019		June and July 2019
Amend the chronological timeline prompt and interview questions as necessary.	Initial Emails to administrators requesting participation from them as well as families of the school Create a contact summary sheet with information regarding participants.	The researcher interviewed participants (45–60-minute interviews). Transcribe the interviews and email copies to participants individually.	Code the recorded interviews manually. The researcher used constant comparative analysis to identify patterns and cluster themes. Confer with colleagues and advisers to increase validity.	Write up analysis with master themes and findings. Consult with participants to reflect on analysis and historical anecdotes. Modify any details as requested (10–15 minutes).
	Build a relationship with participants.			Discuss prevalent themes and the interpretation of the results.

Appendix B: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar–practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically–informed, rigorously researched, inquiry–based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy.

This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi–media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association,*

Sara
Giza_____
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Sara Giza _____
Name (Typed)

May 9, 2020_____
Date