The Dynamic Relationship Between Priest and Principals

in Ontario Catholic Elementary Schools

By

Felicia A. DeFrenza

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ABSTRACT

Catholics have the privilege to send their children to be instructed with a faith-based education in separate schools that are publicly funded. However, since Catholic schools in Ontario are publicly funded, this privilege has to uphold the same legislation, mandates, programs, and policy regulations as the secular school system (Pollock 2013).

The relationship between the parish priest and the Catholic school principal is interesting due to the significant impact of their cooperation on the operation of Catholic schools in the province. Both administrators are important because they both serve the Church in the divine mission to evangelize and educate (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

A major assumption about this relationship is that the priest and the principal work collaboratively together in a space of mutual respect. However, this is not always the case (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006). The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and understand the relationship between parish priests and principals, as the administrators of Catholic schools in the province of Ontario, Canada.
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I cannot express enough gratitude to my PJ141 family. Two years ago, we entered OISE as strangers with our own unique backgrounds. During our time together, we shared our lives with each other and became not just a community but also a family. Now we must part as our time is up together, but I would not have become the teacher that I am today without our experience together.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

In the province of Ontario, there are two distinct public education systems: the secular and Catholic system. The Catholic religion was granted the right to their own education system in the British North American Act of 1867 to assure peace between Roman Catholic minorities and the Protestant majority (Brennan, 2011). Followers of the Catholic faith created their own separate schools where their beliefs were taught in proximity to the parish community with a curriculum that incorporated the faith (Dixon, 2009). For two hundred years, Roman Catholics have fought for their own school system by forming community alliances, banding together, and creating their own private networks so that their children would not be assimilated into the secular way of life (Brennan, 2011). It was not until 1985 that the government of Ontario under Premier William Davis extended full funding for all grades throughout all the Catholic separate school boards within Ontario (Zinga, 2008).

Due to the unique situation within the province of Ontario, the Catholic system is required to prove its validity as an educational institution by responding to the pressures from the Provincial government while simultaneously endeavoring to satisfy the requirements and expectations of the Catholic Church (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Catholic rate payers in several provinces across Canada, such as British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, continue to support separate schools to date so that Catholic children are educated to live a faith-filled life in an increasingly skeptical and atheist society. Today, the Catholic school system serves approximately 600,000 students in both high school and elementary in 37 school boards across the province of Ontario (Pollock, 2013).
1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Catholics have the privilege to instruct their youth with a faith-based education. However, since Catholic schools in Ontario, also known as separate schools, are publically funded, this privilege is subject to the same legislation, mandates, programs, and policy regulations as the secular school system (Pollock, 2013).

The relationship between the parish priest and the Catholic school principal is interesting due to the significant impact of their cooperation on the operation of schools. Both administrators are important because they both serve the Church in the divine mission to educate (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Each administrator brings a specific capability to the relationship: the principal possessing the professional knowledge and skill as an educational leader, and the pastor possessing the authority and knowledge of the Church as a spiritual leader (Weiss, 2007). Cooperation is necessary between these two community leaders because they both guide the young faithful toward academic excellence and faith development (Weiss, 2007).

A major assumption about this relationship is that the priest and the principal work collaboratively together. However, this is not always the case (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006). Tensions arise between these two administrative roles, which impact the operation of Catholic schools. There are two main reasons behind these tensions: the difficult personality and openness of the pastor, and the principal’s lack of understanding the Catholic community, formed and shaped by the parish (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006). When these two leaders do not work collaboratively together, their leadership is unproductive, useless, and hopeless (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Weiss, 2007). The tension does not advance the teaching mission of the Church (Belmonte &
Cranston, 2009; Weiss, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and understand the relationship between parish priests and principals, as the administrators of Catholic schools in the province of Ontario, Canada.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question that I would like to investigate is: What are the perceived roles and responsibilities of the administrators - parish priests and school principals - in regard to education in Catholic schools in the province of Ontario?

My sub questions are:

- How do principals view their roles and responsibilities concerning the spiritual education of their students?
- How do principals view their roles and responsibilities concerning the spiritual education of their students relative to the parish priests of the community?
- How do parish priests perceive their roles and responsibilities concerning the spiritual education of students in Catholic schools?
- How do parish priests perceive their roles and responsibilities concerning the spiritual education of students in Catholic schools relative to those of the school principal?
- What is the relationship between principals and parish priests in terms of administering spiritual education of students in Catholic schools?

1.4 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

I was born and raised a Roman Catholic. In my childhood, I attended both elementary and high school in the Toronto Catholic District School Board in Ontario. I had my baptism, first communion, and confirmation at my home parish in the city of Toronto. My parents made it a priority in their lives as well as mine to nurture and support my religious education.
As a Catholic, I acknowledge that my religious background does provide my research with a clear bias.

The reason I am interested in this topic is because my first teaching experience was as a religious catechist for the First Communion Program at my parish. I began volunteering in 2003 and continued to be part of the program until June 2012. The First Communion Program was designed to prepare children, from the ages of six to eight, for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. I was delighted to witness and partake in the students’ progress of deepening their understanding of God’s love. While I was volunteering, I had the pleasure of working alongside wonderful role models who inspired my own progress as a teacher. The positive atmosphere, collaborative efforts, and teamwork enhanced my desire for teaching.

In September 2011, I was appointed the Assistant Coordinator of the Program. This new position allowed me to gain vital experiences on the administrative and coordination sides of such programs. I worked closely with the parish priests to prepare the curriculum. In this role, I was able to witness the dynamic relationship between my parish priest and the principals of the two affiliated schools. One relationship was effective in maintaining a collaborative connection, while the other relationship lacked communication. I distinctively chose to do my research on the relationship between priests and principals because I aspire to become a principal myself.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF STUDY

To respond to the research questions above, I conducted a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews to converse with three principals and three priests. I investigated how they perceive their roles and responsibilities as the religious educators of the community.
In chapter 2, I review the literature and look specifically at the history of Catholic education in the province. In chapter 3, I elaborate on my research methodology. In chapter 4, I report and discuss the research findings. I conclude in chapter 5 by discussing the implications of the research findings for Catholic school administration and for my own career as an aspiring principal in the Catholic school system.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review is intended and designed as the section within a study to discuss a problem and confidently say that the issue exists (Creswell, 2007). The issue of this study is to investigate the relationship between the administrators of Catholic schools, both priests and principals, to see how their relationship impacts the operation of Catholic schools within Ontario. This literature review is divided into three main sections: the history of Catholic schools in Ontario, the distinctiveness of Catholic education, and the administration of Catholic schools in the parish community.

2.2 HISTORY OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN ONTARIO

2.2.1 POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Under the Day Act of 1841, all religious minorities were generously given the right to establish separate schools so that each religion could educate their children with a curriculum that united every subject with faith (Dixon 1994). This act was also known as the First School Act for the Province of Upper Canada. The Taché Act of 1855 and the Scotts Act of 1863 extended the rights for Catholic minorities in regards to their own separate schools (Dixon, 1994; Brennan, 2011). In 1867, the British North America Act was passed including section 93 that constitutionally secured the educational rights of the Catholic minority within the entire country (Dixon, 1994; Brennan, 2011). The political history of Catholic education in Ontario is worth mentioning because the Catholic school system relies on legislative authority to support the legitimacy of the institution.
2.2.2 Religious Background

When Catholic schools were first established in Ontario, religious orders funded, maintained, and governed their own schools. In the mindset of the nineteenth century, the religious orders were ideal educators for Catholic children because they incorporated the faith into every aspect of learning (Dixon, n.d). Religious men and women, such as nuns or brothers, took on the responsibility of creating and instructing students with their own curriculum (Dixon, 2009). With the constant shortage of teachers in the nineteenth century, it was very practical for the bishops - the highest religious authority in the governance of separate schools - to seek the aid and expertise of religious orders. The religious orders were viewed as ideal teachers in separate schools because they were called to be living examples and witness to the sacramental and apostolic life (Dixon, n.d.). Religious orders were crucial in the Ontario Catholic society, as the link between the Church and laypeople during rapid urbanization and industrialization of the time.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholics desired to gain higher education, as Canadian society began to demand high school diplomas and university degrees to enter the work force (McGowan, n.d). With the increasing professionalization of the work field, the religious orders began to see a decline in the number of postulants who desired to join the religious communities as teachers (McGowan, n.d). Therefore, laymen and women had to become educated in order to teach in the Catholic Separate School System or to join any other profession (McGowan, n.d). Those who were educated became involved and participated in the life of the Church by becoming teachers, principals, and trustees of the Catholic school boards (Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989).
The benefit of the laity’s involvement in the Catholic school system over the past decades is that the Church has been able to utilize the various gifts of the people of God (Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989). The drawback of having the laity participating more in the education system is that there is concern that Catholic schools are becoming less “Catholic” due to the decreased presence of vowed religious (Wallace, 2000). Theodore Wallace claims a drastic shift has taken place from the religious to lay personnel leadership and has created a major identity crisis within Catholic schools. The central tension in this crisis is whether or not Catholic schools are actually “Catholic” or simply religious schools holding onto a religious memory while nurturing a secular presence (Wallace, 2000). James T. Mulligan describes this identity crisis as the difference between schools teaching big “C” Catholic education opposed to little “c” catholic education. He defines big “C” Catholic as knowing that Catholic education is about evangelization and the mission of the church to pass on its traditions (Mulligan, 2008). He explains that Catholic schools in the twenty-first century currently teach little “c” catholic education because separate schools are “on the path towards secularization” (Mulligan, 2008). Mulligan asserts that the Catholic identity is in crisis and it is only going to get more complicated to define in an increasingly secular society. Therefore, the relationship between the pastor and the principal is crucial because both authorities need to be present in order to supervise and ensure the implementation of faith into education.

2.3 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN ONTARIO

2.3.1 THE NATURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Catholic schools teach students not simply how to make a living, but how to live their lives.
(Mulligan, 2006, p.133)
Catholic schools are intellectual centers but academic success is not the main focus in education. Mulligan explains that the whole idea of Catholic education is about having a bias and living by it, which, he argues, is not a bad thing. The Catholic bias is that Christ ought to be the center of education (Mulligan, 2006; McDermott, 1997).

The mission of the Catholic faith is to hand down the traditions of our ancestors so that the Word of God is professed to future generations. The future generations that come into the school are not just learners, but also believers (McDermott, 1997). Catholic schools in Ontario are crucial because they provide children with a safe environment where they can learn about who they are and where they came from (Brennan, 2011). Edwin McDermott states that Catholic children who attend Catholic school receive a better education because they are encouraged and taught by the Catholic community “to cultivate all their intellectual, creative, and aesthetic potentialities” while also being encouraged to “grow in faith in Christ’s presence and influence in the world” (McDermott 1997: p. 26). Thus Catholic schools are vital because they teach about the Catholic way of life, faith, and culture.

In his book, Catholic Education: Ensuring a Future (2006), Mulligan wanted to stress how Catholic separate schools were granted the freedom to profess their own faith. Both Mulligan and Dr. Mark McGowan phrase this freedom as a great blessing and an “enduring gift” for the Catholic Church in Canada (Mulligan, 2006; McGowan, 2013). However, both scholars emphasize that this gift is fragile and should not be taken for granted because it can easily be lost. This was the case for Catholic separate schools in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador (Mulligan, 2006).

In June 1998 Catholic separate schools, which had been operating since the 1720s, opened their doors in Newfoundland and Labrador for the last time (Mulligan, 2006).
Mulligan emphasizes that the closure was not only due to external political and economic factors but also erosion from within (Mulligan, 2006). One religious and Catholic school principal from Newfoundland stated:

Newfoundland church leaders [were] doing nothing to promote Catholic education in the last thirty years or more. There were no efforts made to strengthen the system we had by working to educate teachers in a Catholic theology; no money or resources were put into any of our schools. No effort was made to educate Catholic leaders/principals. There was no support whatsoever. We are now reaping the benefits of neglect and apathy on the part of those in church authority” (Mulligan, 2006: p.116).

The situation of separate schools in Newfoundland and Labrador is important because there were both internal and external factors that caused the failure of the Catholic system.

Mulligan explains that there were two external factors: the government agenda to discourage church-administered schools and the provincial reality that there were too many schools and school boards for the small secular population (Mulligan, 2006). As for the internal factors, Mulligan lists: the clergy abuse scandals, an erosion in the confidence of the church, the failure to promote the vision of Catholic education, an indistinguishable Catholic education, the failure of Catholic educational leadership, the failure of Catholic teachers, the breakdown of the home-school-parish myth, and fatigue (Mulligan, 2006). The main cause of these internal factors was the lack of co-operation between Catholic educational leaders, parents and priests. In sum, there was no longer a Catholic community in Newfoundland that desired to pass on the traditions of the faith. These factors are beneficial in understanding the situation of Catholic education elsewhere in Canada (Mulligan 2006). By examining the case in both Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, administrators all across Canada are now able to put more emphasis on the distinctiveness of Catholic education.
2.3.2 The Idea of Success in Catholic Schools

For many years, researchers have focused on Catholic education regarding climate and school environment with a focus on curriculum and academic achievement (Kostoff, 2010; Brennan, 2011; Pollock, 2013). Katrina Pollock’s article (2013) entitled “Administrations and Teachers’ Perceptions of School Success in a Publicly Funded Catholic School in Ontario, Canada” is a qualitative case study that examines the ways that Catholic schools in Ontario measure success and how the public funding structure influences it. Pollock assumes that teachers in Catholic Schools prioritize academics as the key factor of success, however the findings of this article contradict this assumption. Pollock found that the perception of school success in faith-based schools is much more complex. The main themes that were mentioned in the interviews were: success as more than academics, an emphasis on student well being, the benefits of a committed teaching staff, a positive community attitude towards the school, and the need for a healthy relationship with God (Pollock 2013).

A weakness of this article was how Pollock analyzed her findings on the final theme. Pollock suggests that Catholic schoolteachers believe their schools promote a high expectation in one’s faith so that students can achieve a “healthy” relationship with God (Pollock, 2013). Her approach begs the question, “how does one define a healthy relationship with God?” The idea of having high expectations insinuates that one’s relationship with God can be labeled as successful or unsuccessful dependent on achieving the high expectations set forth by the church. Consequently, one’s relationship with God is characterized as something that can be quantified, measured and tested.

With the over-emphasis on academics in our society, researchers believe that Catholic schools now need to be “audited so that more attention is being paid to the Catholic culture –
the core values – that should define and guide us” (Kostoff, 2010: p.10; Brennan, 2010). John Kostoff stresses that everyone in the school system – administrators, teachers, students and parents should be able to articulate clearly the core values of the faith. It is the role of the community to provide the youth with a meaningful Catholic experience that goes beyond just learning the content (2010). Terri-Lynn K. Brennan similarly asserts that Ontario Roman Catholic Schools need to undertake a process of self-reflection to acknowledge their bias in the ever-changing multi-cultural and multi-spiritual landscape of the province in order to remain a valued institution in the future (Brennan 2011).

2.3.3 A SEPARATE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL SYSTEM IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Ontario has struggled with the issue of denominational rights in education since before the signing of the constitution in 1867 (Zinga, 2008; McDonough, et al., 2013). A significant challenge for the province throughout the years has been Catholicism’s status as the only religion to receive full funding from ratepayers for their faith-based schools. Even though the separate school system is domestically supported constitutionally and upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (1999) has stated that the practice in Ontario is discriminatory because public funding is not provided for all faith-based schools (Zinga, 2008: McDonough, et al., 2013).

During the 2007 elections, the leader of the Conservative Party, John Tory, created a platform that considered the extension of public funding for all faith-based schools from kindergarten to grade 12 or for none (McDonough, et al., 2013). This platform created a heated debate within politics and the media about whether or not faith-based schools cause a threat to social cohesion (McDonough, et al., 2013). This platform ultimately led to a
Conservative Party loss. Tory decided to take on this issue as a black and white problem without realizing and dealing with its complexities.

Dawn Zinga, in her article “Ontario’s Challenge: Denominational Rights in Public Education” (2008), discusses how Ontario is experiencing a tension between accommodating diversity and striving towards universal unity. Zinga looks at several scholars who address the tension by arguing either for or against public funding for Catholic schools. Those against it argue that the constitutional protection for denominational rights is outdated. Also, even though Canada has two official languages there are no official religions, therefore Catholics should not continue to rely on a constitutional privilege (Zinga, 2008). On the other hand, scholars argue that secular public schools offer a very shallow form of multiculturalism by proudly displaying their tolerance while tactfully nurturing assimilation (Zinga, 2008). These scholars stress that a major assumption placed on faith-based schools is that they cannot foster multicultural integration, which they dispute is not the case (Zinga, 2008).

Mario D’Souza argues in his article, “The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education” that Catholic schools teach their students holistically by promoting “the common good” rather than “common goods” (2013). A danger of Canadian society, D’Souza warns, is the divorce between the economic-political and religious-cultural spheres in society, placing more emphasis on materials and academics that lead to the “miniaturization of the human being” (2013). He quotes Walter Feinberg who states:

Education in pluralism extends beyond the local group and presents ideas of justice and fairness as proper expectations for all members of the society, including those whose beliefs and values are shaped by religious traditions that are considerably different from one’s own (D’Souza, 2013: p. 61).

D’Souza explains that Catholic education is distinct because it gives students the ability to think “about unity amongst diversity without losing one’s own religious identity or one’s own
responsibility to the common good [, which] is a particular form of human freedom” (2013: p. 63). The 2007 election proved that the issue of denominational rights in Ontario is a major legal, political, social, cultural, and religious issue within our multicultural society. Thus, Catholic schools are vital because they prepare and equip students with a distinct education to enter into this multicultural population with a realization that they have a vocation and responsibility to enrich the common good (D’Souza, 2013).

2.4 THE ADMINISTRATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The whole Catholic community has a role to play in passing on the faith to children and youth (Institute of Catholic Education (I.C.E.), 2012). I.C.E. is comprised of bishops, priests, principals, teachers, parents, and school staff. In the Catholic School Board, there are two different types of administrators: representatives of the church (the clergy) and representatives of the state (the school board trustees, principals, and teachers). In regards to the former, the local Bishop has the highest authority in Catholic schools. As for the latter, school board officials the highest authorities as the representatives of the province in the Catholic school boards. In the small parish communities, the pastor and the principal are the two individuals that govern the spiritual education of the children and youth in the area. It is important to study the parish microcosm since it is the primary location for community formation and expression (I.C.E, 2012). Effective leadership is needed from both the pastor and the principal to guide Catholic schools and students towards academic excellence and faith development (Weiss, 2007).

2.4.1 THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARISH PASTOR

Canon Law is the set of established rules and values that govern the members of the Roman Catholic faith, and are prepared and enforced by the clergy all around the world
According to the Code of Canon Law, a pastor is, Obliged to make provision so that the Word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish; for this reason, he is to take care that the lay members of the Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially by giving a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation and by offering catechetical instruction. ... He is to have particular care for the Catholic education of children and youth (Canon 528 Section 1).

As the representative of Christ during the celebration of the Eucharist, the most important role of a priest is to proclaim and profess the Word of God to all the members of the church. The homily is significant in the celebration of the Mass because it is the moment when the believers of the faith are educated on how the gospels are relevant in their day-to-day lives. A problem in our society today is that Catholics are not taking the time to go to Mass on Sunday so many do not hear the Word of God (Mulligan, 2006). Thus, great effort is needed by the parish priest to educate the children in Catholic schools about the importance of the gospels.

Similar to Canon 528, the General Directory for Catechesis section 225 states that the role of the pastor is to, “integrate catechetical activity into his program of community evangelization and foster the link between catechesis, sacraments, and liturgy” (I.C.E, 2012: p. 8). The General Directory for Catechesis is a Vatican produced document that the new 2012 *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document* utilizes in order to emphasize that the parish priest’s main role in the community is to create a bond between all members of the Catholic schools. The authors of this curriculum document list the key expectations of the roles and responsibilities of parish priests in Ontario. These include:

To support the principal as the spiritual leader of the school; provide spiritual and religious guidance to enable staff and students to grow in their understanding and commitment to the faith; support teachers in their responsibility to educate children and youth in the faith by sharing resources, knowledge and expertise; participate in the religious education class to draw links between various themes in the religious education program and the Gospel thus contributing within the school environment to the faith development of children and youth; provide opportunities for staff and students
to participate in liturgical celebrations including the Mass and other forms of prayer and devotion as a community of believers; encourage a collegial effort on the part of parish catechists and school teachers in the preparation of children for the reception of the sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation; and create opportunities for continued evangelization of parents and teachers that will support them in their role as religious educators and witnesses to the faith (I.C.E, 2012: p.8).

Thus, it is the role of the priest to support the Catholic schools by their expressions, actions, and presence within the community (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

2.4.2 The Role and Responsibility of the Principal

In the province of Ontario, there are regulations that govern the roles and responsibilities of a principal. The Education Act s. 265 states the duties of the principal include: “discipline; co-operation; record attendance; pupil records; timetable; examination and reports; promote pupils; textbooks; care of pupils and property; report to the medical officer of health; protect access to school or class; and to maintain a visitor’s book” (Scarfo & Zuker, 2011: p. 141-142). The “Operation of Schools- General” Regulation (RRO 1990, Reg 298) under the Education Act offers a more detailed list of principal duties at section 11 (Scarfo & Zuker, 2011: p. 180-183). In sum, the main duties that govern a principal are: to provide a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all students; to record and report to the school boards; and to provide support for teachers and staff within the school.

In the everyday operation of schools in Ontario, principals in public schools and Catholic schools have similar expectations and responsibilities. The Ontario Institute for Education Leadership (I.E.L) is an organization that puts into practice policy and research on effective leadership at the school, board, and provincial levels (I.E.L, 2013). The I.E.L brings together several associations in Ontario, such as the Ontario’s principal associations, supervisory officer’s associations, councils of directors of education, the Council of Senior Business Officials, and the Ministry of Education to discuss evidence-based leadership
practices in Ontario (I.E.L, 2013). It produced a document called *The Ontario Leadership Framework: A School and System Leader’s Guide to Putting Ontario’s Leadership Framework into Action* that provides a shared vision of leadership across the system of education in Ontario (I.E.L, 2012). The purpose of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) is providing a clear leadership roadmap to imbue individuals and recruiters with the traits of effective and successful leaders. Even though the framework is not a job description or a checklist for assessing leadership performance, the OLF describes what good leadership is and the responsibilities that are associated with leadership. The OLF defines leadership as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals” (I.E.L, 2012: p. 12-13).

The OLF is unique because it is a secular government document that was designed to describe leadership in a broad sense in order to be inclusive of the diversity found within Ontario’s education system. One key component of the OLF is the section on school-level leadership, assumed by the role of the principal. The OLF not only has a descriptive list of what effective school-level leadership looks like, but it also has a separate list of what effective Catholic school-level leadership looks like. The two lists have several similar points in terms of the responsibility of a school-level leader. However, the points where these two lists differ surround how the leader should model the school values and practices, and how the leader builds trusting relationships amongst the staff, students, and parents. When comparing these two points, the Catholic school leader has more expectations compared to the secular school leader. The extra responsibilities of a Catholic school leader are: to actively organize liturgies and prayers that nurture the Catholic school culture, to evangelize and commit to life-long faith formation, create and sustain a caring Catholic school culture, and to
foster the relationship among parents, parishes, and the Catholic school community to support faith development and such programs (I.E.L, 2012).

Joyce Castel, Coral Mitchell, and Vineet Gupta’s article, “The Roles of Elementary School Principals in Ontario: Tasks and Tensions” (2002) is a qualitative study that examines twelve principals from both secular and separate public schools in Ontario about the roles and responsibilities of principals. The data revealed five major roles of a principal: management tasks, relationship building, accommodating special needs, mentoring, and direction setting (Castel et al., 2002). The main tensions that were discovered in the study were the tensions between: management and instructional leadership, responsibility and authority, change and stability, and relationship building and control of the personal work environment (Castel et al., 2002). The benefit of this article is that it examines how the principal, whether secular or Catholic, takes on an administrative role that stands at the intersection where all the pressures collide. In other words, it is the duty of the principal to find a balance instead of becoming overwhelmed with all the dilemmas (Castel et al., 2002). A limitation of Castel et. al.’s article for this research is that the article does not acknowledge the additional unique tensions and pressures that exist for Catholic school principals.

The main difference that distinguishes principals in Catholic public schools is that they are characterized as individuals who are “called” to become faith leaders in their schools (Wallace, 2000). The Catholic principal is responsible for guaranteeing that the religious education program is taught and that there is consistency between the teachings of the religious education program and the actual day-to-day life of the school (I.C.E, 2012: Belmonte & Cranston, 2009: I.E.L, 2012). According to section 910 of the Catechism of the Catholic Faith, a Catholic principal is called to cooperate with the pastor, “in service of the
ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life” (Catholic Church, n.d). Principals can fulfill their role as both an academic and spiritual leader by:

- Providing opportunities for ongoing teacher training and all the resources required for planning religious education programs; allocating the time required for teaching the religion program; ensuring the integration of Catholic teaching across the curriculum; providing chaplaincy leadership, particularly in the implementation of some school-based pastoral activities; supporting teachers who find themselves in delicate or difficult situations; promoting and maintaining a good communication network with various stakeholders, especially parents, the parish priest and parish leaders (particularly those responsible for parish-based catechism programs);
- helping to coordinate parish and school responsibilities for the preparation of students for the reception of First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation;
- providing the opportunity for parish-school relationships by sharing effective practices and new religious education resources;
- inviting parents to deepen their involvement with the parish community and its social and ecclesial activities (I.C.E, 2012: p.10).

The role of the Catholic principal is not just being intellectually and academically knowledgeable but spiritually educated as well. As a witness of the faith, the Catholic school principal is viewed as the guardian of the Catholic heritage within the school and plays a vital role in the quality of catholic education (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

2.4.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PASTORS AND PRINCIPALS

Due to the roles and responsibilities of the pastor and the principal, it is expected that the relationship between the two is professional and collegial (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006; Weiss 2007). Their roles are important because both the priest and the principal are viewed as representatives of Christ (Castel et al., 2002). The duty of the parish priest is to be supportive and encouraging for the principal. As well, it is expected that the principal will develop an equal partnership with the priest in school leadership (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

As stated in the introduction, it is an assumption that the parish priest and the principal can work together in a space of mutual respect (Weiss, 2007). One challenge stressed in the
research on this topic is the tension of the perceived notion of authority in these two roles. This tension is often increased when one person believes to have more authority than the other (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006).

Weiss (2007) looks at this tension by describing the Catholic school system as an organization. She claims that even though the principal may be a well-prepared and knowledgeable educator; the Church mandates that the final authority for the operation of the school be with the parish priest since the Catholic school is seen as an extension of the parish (Weiss, 2007). Weiss explicitly states that the Church has more authority in regards to Catholic schools because the Church is a worldwide institution of over 700 million people. In other words, the Church is a significant organization with a significant amount of power (Weiss, 2007).

Belmonte and Cranston (2009) look at the tension more from the principal’s perspective. They considered how the relationship between the principal and the parish priest is very problematic for some principals in Australia. Their case study finds that principals clashed with priests because of their traditional understandings of leadership. The authors overtly explain that a key implication of their research is that priests need to step away from the hierarchical beliefs of authority in order to establish an equal partnership in school leadership (Belmonte and Cranston, 2009).

Mulligan looks at this tension as a lack of communication, which leads to less effort being put into collaborative work. In his book *Catholic Education: Ensuring a Future* (2006), Mulligan looks at the relationships between priests and school educators by examining both the good points and the points of concern in the partnership. From conversations with priests, principals, and teachers, Mulligan identifies a number of concerns and expressions of
appreciation that are shared in the relationship between the representatives of church and state (2006). Clear throughout the research is that the relationship between pastors and principals needs to be resolved with a sense of mutual respect so that the leaders can become a cohesive unit in order to serve a higher good (Mulligan, 2006; Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

2.5 CONCLUSION

There are three themes that make up this literature review on Catholic education in Ontario: (1) a history of Catholic schools in the province, (2) the distinctiveness of Catholic education and (3) the role of administration in Catholic schools. The first theme provides a political and religious context of Catholic schools in the province of Ontario. The second theme discusses how Catholic education focuses on educating the whole individual. The last theme examines the role of administration in Catholic schools. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the intention of this chapter is to discuss an issue that exists (Creswell, 2007). In the province of Ontario, there exists an issue within Catholic schools because they are situated in a multicultural society that fosters a sacred-secular divide. This divide makes its way into the Catholic school system because it is a religious institution that is publicly funded by the provincial government. The issue then is placed on the shoulders of the administrators within Catholic schools, as they are the representatives of the divide. If the principal and the priest cannot work collaboratively together, then they are nurturing the secular-sacred divide that exists within our society. On the other hand, if the priest and principal work together they prove to their students that faith can bridge the divide between the secular and sacred worlds.
CHAPTER 3
METHODODOLOGY

3.1 NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

This research paper is a qualitative study on the relationship between parish priests and principals and their influence on Catholic Schools in Ontario. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) in their SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research define qualitative research as an activity that “locates the observer in the world” (Creswell, 2007: 43). The key benefit of qualitative research is that the focus is on the experience of the participants within the field. Denzin and Lincoln state, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (2011: p.3). John W. Creswell in his book Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches defines qualitative studies as research that “empowers the individual to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize that power relationship that often exists between a research and the participant in the study” (2007: p.48).

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is described as the method of research used in order to explore a problem or an issue. Based on Creswell’s descriptions of approaches to inquiry, this research project features characteristics of a case study approach. The focus of a case study approach is based on developing an in-depth description of a particular case. This research study is focusing on more than one individual’s perception of their role as an administration and their perception of their relationship with another colleague.
3.2 INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

The research methods used in this qualitative case study were informal semi-structured interviews with six individuals. These semi-structured interviews were thirty to sixty minutes in length and took place at a mutually agreed upon location. The instrument for data collection was the Interview Protocol, attached as Appendix A below.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of this study, six individuals were interviewed – three priests and three principals. Each work with or are employed by elementary schools within two Catholic school boards in Ontario. Principal participants selected for this paper are active in their spiritual lives. I also sought out priests who were working with the elementary school or schools associated with his parish.

It was essential that all participants felt comfortable to express both positive and negative experiences. Therefore, the research did not accept parish priests and principals associated with the same school. In the following chapter, I identify my participants with pseudonyms. The three priest participants are identified as Father Alberto, Father Ben and Father Carlos. The three principal participants are identified as Mrs. Diana, Mrs. Elizabeth and Mr. Frank.

3.4 ETHICAL REVIEW PROCEDURES

The Masters of Teaching Program requires all students enrolled to complete an academic research paper in order to graduate. For this assignment, the faculty set an Ethics Review Protocol as a guideline for all students to utilize (University of Toronto, 2011). The Ethics Review Protocol entails that the suggested method for collecting data is to contact and interview two or three knowledgeable educators who can contribute their experiences and
understanding to the specific topic area of the research (University of Toronto, 2011). The procedure for the collection of data is as follows:

Students will contact each interviewee in advance of the interview and the exact reasons for the interview will be discussed and explained. Potential participants will be called on the telephone, visited or communicated online. After the participants agree to participate in the interview, the participants will be provided with the student’s contact information and they will be presented with a letter of informed consent. If the individual agrees to be interviewed, the students will schedule a meeting or a telephone interview and conduct the interview at the participant’s convenience, outside of school time. No participant is ever forced to agree to an interview. They will be informed that, of course, they can stop the interview at any time if they so desire (University of Toronto, 2011: p. 5).

In regard to the consent letter, The Ethics Review Protocol stipulates that the researcher must attain consent from the participants with a consent letter that explains in detail the purposes of the assignment (University of Toronto, 2011). The consent letter, attached as Appendix B below, also informs the participant that confidentiality will be respected, therefore no information or details will be disclosed about the participants.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

Due to the methodological approach set by the Ethics Review Protocol, the research is limited in the methods available for data collection (University of Toronto, 2011). As a result, researchers are not permitted to observe or involve classroom pupils in any way (University of Toronto, 2011). This is a limitation within the research because there is no possibility for gaining insight into how the relationship between principals and priests influences the most important individuals within the school – the students.

Another limitation within the research, which is also a result of the Ethics Review Protocol, is that the assignment is required to be a qualitative study (University of Toronto, 2011). Ercikan and Roth’s article “What Good is Polarizing Research Into Qualitative and Quantitative?” discusses how the potential question or issue addressed in either qualitative or
quantitative research will result in incomplete answers and inappropriate inferences based on
the findings because polarizing the two research methods is confusing and tends to limit
research inquiry (2006). They believe that all phenomena have both qualitative and
quantitative features. They argue that research studies should use both qualitative and
quantitative methods in order to deeply understand the question or issue. Thus by choosing
only a qualitative research structure, the researcher is not able to make statements that can
have a great impact in the field of study.

3.6 STRENGTHS

One strength aspect of this research paper, which is due to the methodological
approach set forth by the Masters of Teaching ethical review, is that I will be interviewing
both principals and pastors to speak with them about their own experiences within their roles
as key figures in Catholic education. I feel that it is important to hear from both voices
because each individual has a significant individual part and a collaborative role to play in the
education of future Catholics.

The opportunity to have these interviews with both pastors and principals allows me
to gain insight into how the relationship between parish priests and principals is significant
and meaningful within Catholic Education in the province of Ontario. As stated above, a
lifetime goal of mine is to become a principal. For this reason, this research study is an
opportunity for me to obtain more knowledge, as well as to share that new knowledge with
fellow classmates and faculty at the end of the program. This research will also be useful for
fellow classmates and faculty since the history of Catholic schools is not a well-known topic.
3.7 CONFIDENTIALITY

The contents of the interviews will be used for this research project, which will include a final paper, a research conference and/or publication. The researcher will not use the participants' names or anything that might identify the participants in the final paper, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. The only person with access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor. The participants are free to change their mind at any time or to withdraw even after they have consented to participate. The participants may decline to answer any specific question. The data from my findings will be stored on my own personal computer locked with a password that only I am privy to. I will destroy the interview audio recordings after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate the data collected from the six interviews conducted with the six participants. Interpreting the data, as Creswell explains, involves making sense of the information and exploring the “lessons learned” in the interview (2007: p. 187). In this chapter I report the “lessons learned” on the perceived roles and responsibilities of both priests and principals in Catholic schools in Ontario. These findings are organized into three themes that are at the core of this paper: 1) the distinctiveness of Catholic Education, 2) the administration of Catholic Education, and 3) the history and future of Catholic Education. I report sub-themes within these where relevant. The chapter will conclude with what I have learned from these interviews.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of this study, six individuals were interviewed. Of the six individuals, three are pastors of parishes in Ontario and the other three are principals who are employed by two Catholic school boards in Ontario. All the participants were given pseudonyms. The three priests are identified as Father Alberto, Father Ben and Father Carlos. Father Alberto became a pastor more than five years ago.

Father Alberto explained to me the foundation of his decision to become a priest. He stated,

The challenges of being a priest in the year 2014 in the Archdiocese of Toronto are fairly complex but that was the basis of my decision to be a priest was I think a may have the skills that are necessary that can help the church (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Ben became a pastor less than five years ago. Father Ben feels that he is still a new priest in his position as this is the first time he is running a parish. Father Carlos began his
priesthood at his parish as an associate priest many years ago. After many years away, he became the pastor at the parish where he began his ministry.

The three principals are identified as Ms. Diana, Ms. Elizabeth and Mr. Frank. Ms. Diana began her career over twenty years ago and has been an administrator for more than ten years at several different schools in Toronto. Ms. Elizabeth has been an educator for almost thirty years. She was a teacher for approximately twenty years and became an administrator less than ten years ago. Similar to Father Carlos, Ms. Elizabeth was a vice-principal first at her current school and then came back to become an administrator years later. Mr. Frank became an educator about forty years ago. The majority of his career was spent as an administrator. All of the participants shared their knowledge and experience with me and each provided this study with insights into the topic of Catholic Education in the province of Ontario.

4.3 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

4.3.1 The Purpose of Catholic Education

The key purpose of Catholic Education, as stated in the literature review by James T. Mulligan, is about having a bias and living by it. All the participants of this study were asked what Catholic Education meant to them. Many participants echoed Mulligan’s assertion. Father Carlos described catholic education as the basic core curriculum taught throughout the province from a Catholic standpoint. He believes “the obligation as a faith community is to ensure that the child of God receives an education that is fitting [and] that is proper but also faith-based” (Interview 1, January 22 2015). Father Ben asserted that the purpose of catholic education is “whatever we are learning in the lens of our Catholic faith in Christ” (Interview, October 10 2014). Mr. Frank had the same view as Father Ben and Father Carlos. He stated,
It means overseeing the education of the child within a Catholic framework within a Catholic setting. Teaching the children the necessary curriculum subjects as mandated by the Ministry of Education within the framework of our Catholic faith as best we can (Interview 2, January 22 2015).

All three of these participants asserted that Catholic Education is approaching education from a faith perspective.

The Catholic bias, which Mulligan explains, is that Christ ought to be the center of education. Ms. Elizabeth explained that Catholic Education is education focused on Christ, “We read the gospels. We read all Jesus’ miracles and how he acted. We are His examples and we should be living by that” (Interview, December 15 2014). As examples of Christ, she believes that Catholic Education is for the followers of Christ to develop and acknowledge their identity as Catholics. She terms it as being educated as “the people that we are” (Interview, December 15 2014).

Ms. Diana had a similar response when it came to the education of Catholic students. She believes that “everybody deserves the education that is right for them” (Interview, December 8 2014). She views the purpose of catholic education as instruction that “serves the catholic community” (Interview, December 8 2014). It is a system where educators support, nurture, and instill the values of the faith. She believes that the Catholic school system specifically supports and serves the needs of the parents, who are the primary formators of the faith.

Father Carlos remarked that Catholic system educators, as the secondary formators of the faith, are intended to be,

People of faith willing to impart their lessons to the children not just in the curriculum itself but [also] in their behaviour with the children. The life lessons that they share with the children that are reflective of the faith of what our lord taught us to do and be with one another (Interview 1, January 22 2015).
In other words, Catholic education is not just learning about facts and dates but also instilling in students how one should interact with others.

Father Alberto brought a different perspective regarding the purpose of Catholic education. He acknowledged that there was good within the Catholic school system; however, he realized that there is also a problem. The problem, he explained, was a life lesson his mother taught him. At a young age, he lost his father. As an only child, his immigrant mother raised him with no life insurance on Ontario welfare. His mother made a conscious decision to put him in the Ontario public school system for both elementary and high school. When he asked his mother why she made that decision she explained her reasoning to him “I always went to a public school because my mother smelled something she did not like and what she obviously smelled was parents who were Catholic in name but in practice were not” (Interview, October 1 2014). For this reason, Father Alberto believes he has a fairly objective perspective because he did not experience school where there was a connection between faith and education. He did not step into a Catholic school until he was thirty-five years old and explained in the interview that,

I could certainly see what my mother smelled. I could smell what my mother smelled, but of course by 1995 it was a stench. It was not a smell. In 1964/1965, it was a smell. It got worse. You know, I see the good in the catholic education system but I also see the stench. Catholic education can serve a purpose assuming that the stench is minimized (Interview, October 1 2014).

4.3.2 The Nature of Catholic Education

The individuals in this study were questioned whether or not they believe Catholic education teaches the whole individual. As stated in the literature review, Edwin McDermott suggests that Catholic children who attend Catholic schools receive a better education because they are encouraged and taught by the Catholic community “to cultivate all their
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intellectual, creative, and aesthetic potentialities” while also being encouraged to “grow in faith in Christ’s presence and influence in the world” (1997: p. 26). Father Ben believes that Catholic education offers “a more total approach in light of the Christian ideals”. He believes that “Catholic education has four pillars of formation: academic, spiritual, pastoral and human formation” (Interview, October 10 2014). Mr. Frank expressed the same thought as Father Ben. He explains the nature of Catholic education in the following manner,

Our faith teaches us that we have a soul and that there is an afterlife. And we are meant to honour worship our God, worship our creator, and work towards a better life for ourselves and for others as our gospel values would teach us. So spiritually that is a large part of the person we believe. That is the nature of our faith” (Interview 2, January 22 2015).

Ms. Elizabeth believes that the nature of Catholic education is that faith and education are inseparable. She could not imagine an environment where she could not talk about Christ in her interactions with the staff and students. Relatedly, she noted that Catholic education supports the development of the person because it focuses on compassion and the idea of ‘paying it forward’,

It is the way we deal with each other. Like, if I am talking to you with respect then I expect you to be respectful towards me. If you are kind to someone then it is contagious. You are going to then someone else is going to be kind to you” (Interview, December 15 2014).

She believes that Catholic education gives students the responsibility to go into the world and influence others. Thus Catholic schools are places where students can learn and develop their potentialities as well as grow in faith to understand how they can make a difference in the world around them.

4.3.3 The Idea of Success in Catholic Schools

In the literature review, John Kostoff’s article “Auditing Our Catholic Schools: A Process of Discernment, Discussion, and Action” stressed that everyone in the school system
administrators, teachers, students, and parents - should be able to articulate clearly the core values of the faith. He believed that it is the role of the community to provide the youth with a meaningful Catholic experience that goes beyond just learning the content (Kostoff, 2010).

Thus, I wanted to hear from all the participants on the topic of success in Catholic education.

Mr. Frank considers the enhancement of the whole child as success in Catholic schools. He stated,

Success would mean a student achieving academically. It would mean the development of their faith that we be part of. It would mean the development of the whole child, the social-emotional aspect. So all aspects of the child we would consider and hope to enhance their development in all those areas academically, spiritually, socially and emotionally (Interview 2, January 22 2015).

Father Carlos also thought of success in terms of the student. He took the perspective of what a successful student should feel like after graduation. He described the successful student feeling “equipped and nurtured with the faith for the future” (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

He asserted the student would realize God’s plan for them,

A young person who has really begun to understand and recognize their gifts and talents. Has felt that there’s been opportunity not just to recognize those talents but also to hopefully begin the process of developing some of those talents. Also recognizing that they have that opportunity to share it. Not just for their own benefit but the benefit of the community that they will be living in. And recognizing again that these talents are also a gift from God. They did not just come to them by chance. It was God’s plan for them that they would have particular gifts and talents (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

From Father Carlos’ perspective, it is vital that Catholic Education focuses on making those talents known to the student in order to share them with the greater society.

Ms. Diana replied with a viewpoint of how educators can be successful in teaching Catholic education. She suggested that success as an educator was focusing on the benefit of Catholic education for the student. She believes,
We have lots of modeling especially in terms of Catholic Social Justice. It insists that we look at the individual and how we are serving the individual and how we are serving our students and not necessarily doing things because that is what were being told to do, but doing things because that is the right thing to do. That is what will help nurture and to support our students so that they can become the best individuals that they possibly can become (Interview, December 8 2014).

Father Ben answered the question by quoting Mother Teresa who said, “we are not called to be successful but to be faithful” (Interview, October 10 2014). He believes that the idea of success is measured by how individuals live out their lives.

Ms. Elizabeth thinks the idea of success has everything to do with the relationships that we work on and build in the Catholic school setting. She stressed that intelligence is not everything. What is also important is “how kids and how people in general deal with each other [because] you have to be able to build relationships with people” (Interview, December 15 2014). Ms. Elizabeth brought back the idea of success to the importance of modeling Christ. She gave the example of making sure Christmas was about the birth of Christ and having a Christmas concert with religious songs instead of songs like *Jingle Bells* or *Santa Clause is Coming to Town*. She believes that success is twofold: focusing on Christ and educating the students on the human aspect of life.

To approach this topic with a different perspective, Father Alberto believes that Catholic schools are not successful because, although they are trying to be Christ-centered and Christ-focused, they are not teaching the authentic Jesus Christ. His philosophy and message in his parish is that 500 years ago with the Protestant Reformation, “the Protestants ran away with the Bible, the Catholics ran away with the sacraments, and the Pentecostals ran away with the Holy Spirit” (Interview, October 1 2014). He believes that because of this schism, Catholics tend to underuse their Bible and lack knowledge about the real biblical Jesus Christ,
We have done an excellent job in teaching ‘Jesus loves you unconditionally’. [...] I will introduce to them the commandments of Jesus Christ in the gospels. They would not even know what I am talking about. The commandments of Jesus Christ are not in the Catholic school curriculum. They keep sticking to the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments are lovely and they are a good basis foundation. They are in the catechism. Fine. But Jesus came to go beyond the 10 commandments. But we never take the kids beyond the 10 commandments (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto used the analogy of learning about Jesus as a two-sided coin. Discovering Jesus as someone who is all merciful and loving as well as someone who gave us commandments and who has expectations of us above and beyond the commandments given to Moses. He asserts that,

You need to know both sides of the coin in order to know the real Jesus Christ and unfortunately many people today, and that is the basis of the lack of success, teach half of Christ. Half of Jesus is no Jesus. So they tend to emphasize God loves you unconditionally, but not the other side of what does God expects of you (Interview, October 1 2014).

4.3.4 THE THREAT TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The above subsections explored the positive benefits of the purpose, nature, and success of Catholic education. Amongst the answers given, the participants gave examples of the internal and external factors that are impacting Catholic schools. To dive into these issues further, I also asked the participants their opinions on the internal and external factors that impacted the demise of Catholic separate education in Newfoundland and Labrador to see if the same factors are present in Ontario. The next three themes in this section are: 1) culture influencing religion instead of religion influencing culture, 2) the political side of the Catholic education system, and 3) the home-school-parish connection. These three themes were raised as the greatest threats that the Ontario Catholic system is currently facing.
4.3.4.1 Culture Influencing Religion Instead of Religion Influencing Culture

The participants viewed change in society as a threat to Catholic education in the present Ontario school system. In the literature review, the research highlighted that the mission of the Catholic faith is to hand down the traditions from ancestors so that the Word of God is professed to future generations. The young generations that come into the school are not just learners, but also believers (McDermott, 1997). Catholic schools in Ontario are therefore crucial to provide children with a safe environment in which they can learn about who they are and where they came from (Brennan, 2011). The current state of our society makes it very hard for educators to instruct young minds because of external influences that challenge their beliefs.

Father Ben described our society by stating that there is “an absence of religion in the entire society” (Interview, October 10 2014). Father Ben reminisced about how religion used to influence the culture here in Canada. For example, malls and shops were closed on Sunday so that everyone could have a day of rest to spend with family. Also, the types of movies or shows that were on the television were religious based. For example, in 1960, the number one television show was Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s Emmy winning Life is Worth Living. Father Ben asserted that it was a different time when “children were being brought [up] and raised in the faith, in their families, on television, in schools, [and] at mass” (Interview, October 10 2014). In today’s society it is a different story. Father Ben sees a problem with how the separate system is educating students on a curriculum that is void of God. As an example, he asserts,

The science books say George Lemaitre is the founder of the Big Bang Theory. Right? But they fail to say, even in the Catholic school, Father George Lemaitre because it does not say Jesuit Physicist from Rome” (Interview, October 10 2014).
Another example that he gives is that the Catholic Education system teaches the Darwinian theory that ignores and discredits the story of creation from Genesis.

Father Alberto similarly expressed how culture is influencing religion. He accentuates that the school system is “watering down the message of Christ to suit the secular reality of today” (Interview, October 1 2014). Father Alberto believes that,

A lot of people say they are Christ focused but they are not teaching or learning the actual biblical Jesus. They are learning the Canadian version because there is a Canadian version of Jesus Christ, just like there is an American version of Jesus Christ or a European version of Jesus Christ or a South American version of Jesus Christ. In other words, cultures create Jesus in their own image. And so there is a watered down Canadian version of Jesus Christ that is being taught to placate the masses (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto stressed that our culture is doing so by only teaching half of Christ. As discussed above, Father Alberto believes instead students are learning about “the Gospel of Nice”. He explains, “the watered down politically correct gentle loving version is only half of Christ, which is basically no different than what a Mohammed, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa would expect of you” (Interview, October 1 2014). And again, for Father Alberto, learning half of Christ is not actually learning the real Christ at all.

Mr. Frank described our society as less dogmatic about Catholicism than in the past (Interview 2, January 22 2015). Ms. Diana expressed a similar conviction that our society has shifted from a hierarchical view to one that is more in the shape of a circle. With the change in generations, she sees how “people are not taken care of the way they were [...] when my parents were part of the Catholic Church. They do not go to the church you know in times of trouble necessarily” (Interview, December 8 2014). Ms. Diana asserted, “It is the hierarchy telling the younger people that they are not good enough that they are not doing a good enough job. People do not want to hear that” (Interview, December 8 2014).
4.3.4.2 The Political Side of the Catholic School System

Another threat to the Catholic education system in Ontario is the reality that the system is publicly funded. Therefore, as mentioned in Chapter 1 and 2, the Catholic separate system finds itself in a difficult situation where it has to serve two masters – the church and the provincial government. Father Alberto believes that Cardinal Carter’s decision accept full government funding was unwise since “you could not pay the piper and still call the tune” (Interview, October 1 2014). By using this analogy, Father Alberto emphasizes how the Catholic system has to conform to the government’s wishes because we no longer pay the piper. As an example, Father Alberto explained how a private Catholic school in Toronto – De La Salle College Oaklands – went from a private Catholic school to a public school and then transitioned back into a private Catholic school. He stated,

I lived at De La Salle, a private Catholic school, at Avenue Road and St. Clair when they took government funding and let in OECTA [Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association] teachers and recognized very quickly the problem with letting in OECTA teachers. [They] decided to re-privatize the school and made it a private Catholic school again. So can it be done? Well De La Salle did it (Interview, October 1 2014).

The problem with letting in OECTA teachers as Father Alberto explained was that they educated students on how to conform and assimilate into society instead of how to stay true to their faith and beliefs. Father Alberto explained, he sees the conflict of two masters as a real threat to the future of Catholic system but he believes that “it doesn’t necessarily mean it will be gone. It basically means re-privatized” (Interview, October 1 2014).

Hearing from the teachers at his schools, Father Ben also sees the problem with the unions and stressed again how OECTA is,

Supposed to represent teachers with things like “should the teachers go and support the gay pride parade and be on board with that?” A lot of teachers were like, “that is not what I am saying; I do not want to go into this”. I don’t believe in this. And yet they
make them unilaterally, without any discussion, without any say [from] the teachers and what they want to do (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben sees this as a problem because the issues surrounding homosexuality and the LGBTQ community are very touchy for Catholics. Since the Catholic system is publicly funded there is pressure from the government and unions to push their own agenda on tolerance regarding sexual orientation. Some Catholics do not feel comfortable with this because of their religious beliefs. Father Alberto also touched upon this subject because he believes that there will come a time when the government will no longer fund the,

Catholic school system that teaches the Catholic teaching on homosexuality. [...] We believe [that] children have the right to gender homes and not make them have the right to marriage for people who are gay (Interview, October 1 2014).

Ms. Diana believes that the Ontario Catholic system will fail due to internal problems because to “divide and conquer the forces from within is a generally accepted political way to handle the situation or conflict” (Interview, December 8 2014). The government will twist any internal conflict to their advantage if their objective is one public system. Father Carlos, Ms. Diana, and Ms. Elizabeth look at the political threat as boiling down to economic issues. Ms. Diana also believes that a major political threat is when educators from within, “stop thinking about the benefit of the students and start looking at it as a political institution” (Interview, December 8 2014). Father Ben believes that the government would not do anything to the Catholic school system from a political standpoint because “the government just tries to make the voters happy” (Interview, October 10 2014). Father Carlos agreed and stated, “no government is at that point where they are going to act upon it [to create one board]” (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

However, if it does come down to the closure of Catholic schools, Father Carlos believes that the government would close them down because of discrimination claims. He
considers this to be our biggest outside danger. He believes it will be the, “governments bowing to [...] enough newspapers and very prominent citizens and citizen groups [...] saying that this is discriminatory you know they support one faith based organization” (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

On the other hand, Father Alberto and Father Carlos highlighted how the church hierarchy is becoming more strident in open communication about Catholic education to the public (Interview 1, January 22 2015). Father Alberto explains that the Cardinal has made his standpoint known and clear to the rest of the clergy that “he still sees great value added in the Catholic school system and he is a big supporter of government-funded Catholic schools [because] that at least we have access to the children” (Interview, October 1 2014). Mr. Frank also concentrated on how,

Working in the system long enough, you get to know there are very very strong voices out there for and they are poised ready to fight if this issue is taken on. It would be heated and it would get ugly probably. But I do see it; I do see a form of it happening to it one day because it has happened everywhere else (Interview 2, January 22 2015).

In sum, the political aspect of the situation poses major threat to Catholic education, but if the people of the Church still believe in the distinctiveness of Catholic education, it might have a fighting chance to survive.

4.3.4.3 The Home – School – Parish Connection

The home-school-parish connection is another issue that was brought up in the interviews with participants of this study. As stated in chapter one, followers of the Catholic faith created their own separate schools in the 1800s so that their beliefs and traditions could be passed on in proximity to the parish community with a curriculum that incorporated the faith (Dixon, 2009). Mr. Frank described the purpose of Catholic education as teaching the whole child along with the home and the parish too (Interview 2, January 22 2015). Ms.
Diana explained that the purpose of the Catholic school system is to serve the parents of the community, who wish to raise their children in the faith (Interview, December 8 2014).

During the interviews, the priests were very concerned about the role of parents in their child’s education as well as the parents’ relationship with the parish. In society, parents are the primary educators. In the Catholic faith, the baptismal rite is when the parents make a promise to become the primary educators of the faith to their child. Father Alberto claims that immigrant and baby boomer parents do not know how to make a Catholic child in Canada. He explained that parents are now “outsourcing their child’s faith education to the school” (Interview, October 1 2014). This outsourcing is what his mother smelled when she was considering Catholic schools in the 60s. He claims that outsourcing is a fundamental problem with separate schools,

Teachers complain to me, I not only have to be the teacher, I also have to be a parent. And that is a big temptation for parents, especially immigrant parents, because the reality is they come here, they do not know how to bring up a Catholic kid in Canada. And so they delegate it to the teacher. So they say “eh you get paid 60, 70, 80 grand a year, you make my kid Catholic. Is not that your job? Is not that why you get paid?” (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto continued to explain that the child then becomes confused about the role of the school taking over the role of the parent. If the parents do not have a relationship with the church and do not see the importance of going to mass, then they are confused about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Father Alberto believes that it becomes a cycle of confused parents producing confused children. He thinks,

Ultimately the confusion comes from the assumption that teachers are practicing, the curriculum is current and the school-home-church model functions with synergy and they are all working towards the same goal and giving the same message. So again Catholic education has a function that can be very positive assuming that the parents remain the primary teachers of the faith (Interview, October 1 2014).
The result of the breakdown between the church-school-home triad is that the student’s relationship with Christ becomes shallow and superficial because the faith is not reinforced at home or at the parish. As an example of this, Father Alberto confirmed 94 students in 2014 and he was appalled the next Sunday when only eight students returned for mass (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Ben also pressed the importance of parents as the primary formators of the faith. He believes that the school and the church are meant to support that role and not to take it over. This year, he is trying something new. In collaboration with the parents, Father Ben is placing the responsibility back into their hands. For his parish’s first communion program,

We will be having books that they take home and then also them coming here particularly for catechetical sessions but they are going through books with their children and teaching them for each sacrament (Interview, October 10 2014).

When looking at the home-school-parish triad, Father Ben does not put blame on teachers or priests for not instilling the faith in the students. He stated,

Once again the primary educators of the faith is not the educators, not the teachers, not the priests but the parents. So there’s a three-prong approach. And what I have found is, if there is a lack of faith in their school, it is really look at the parents because they are not coming to mass either (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben also believes that because we live in an imperfect world a, “form of the home, school, and parish is still there but [...] it breaks down. You might not see it all the time because there is imperfections in it as there always will be” (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Carlos also sees a challenge with students not growing up in a faith-based home. When it comes to the First Communion program at the parish school he comments,

It is astounding; even though we push you know the opportunity for First Reconciliation and First Communion in grade 2, how many of the parents refuse to bother to enroll their children in those programs. And it is not because of a lack of trying from the school. The school is excellent. Both schools are excellent about sharing the information and letting the parents know even on the opening parents night.
Knowing that many of them are not going to church but if you are open to this here is the information from the church (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

Father Carlos also expressed that there are some situations where the home-school-parish relationship is strong; however, he does not see that as universal.

Both Ms. Elizabeth and Mr. Frank raised the issue of declining church attendance in the discussion about the home-school-parish relationship. As stated in chapter two, a problem with our society today is that Catholics are not taking the time to go to Mass on Sunday so many do not hear the word of God (Mulligan, 2006). Ms. Elizabeth believes that it is the role of educators to inspire their students with the desire to go to church so that “maybe they will go home and say to their parents ‘I would like to go to church today, could you take me?’” (Interview, December 15 2014). Ms. Elizabeth explained in a few weeks she was going to participate in a zone meeting with priests and higher officials in the church to discuss Catholic education with superintendents and other principals. She predicted two challenges that were going to be discussed: first, the declining numbers of people going to mass and second, the fact that Catholic parents are putting their un-baptized children in Catholic school. In the separate system, children can be accepted into the school only if they have been baptized or if one parent is baptized. She saw this as an issue because children are coming into the school even though their parents are not practicing or even willing to baptize their child to be part of the faith.

4.4 THE ADMINISTRATION OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

As stated in the literature review, the whole Catholic community has a role to play in passing on the faith to children and youth (I.C.E, 2012). In the Catholic School Board, there are two different types of administrators: the representatives of the church (the clergy) and the representatives of the state (the school board trustees, principals, and teachers). In the small
parish communities, the pastor and principal are the two individuals that govern the spiritual education of the children and youth in the area. This theme will explore the importance of studying the small parish because the parish is the primary location in which the community is formed and expressed (I.C.E, 2012). Effective leadership is needed from both the pastor and the principal to guide the Catholic schools towards academic excellence and faith development (Weiss, 2007). The following section will be broken down into two main parts: first is the priest’s perspective, followed by the perspective of the principal. Both parts are divided even further to investigate how the participants viewed their position, their roles and responsibilities, their relationship with the school administration or the parish administration, the challenges they experience working within a collaborative relationship and how they feel their roles differ from their administrative counterpart.

4.4.1 The Priest’s Perspective

In the separate school board system, it is the role of the priest to support Catholic schools by their expressions, actions, and presence within the community (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). The following section explores how three priests view themselves as religious leaders in the school communities they belong to.

4.4.1.1 The Job

The 2012 *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document* points out that the parish priest’s main role in the community is to create a bond between all members of the Catholic schools. Father Ben believes that as a pastor he is fulfilling what God has called him to do, “I was always searching for happiness, searching for something, and I found it as a priest and you know wherever God sends me in this ministry, I am always the happiest” (Interview, October 10 2014). For Father Ben, being a priest means living.
Father Alberto and Father Carlos both described their careers as administrators because they have a building to run and maintain (Interview, October 1 2014: Interview 2, January 22 2015). Father Alberto described his position further. He explained that when he was appointed as the pastor at his parish, the state of the building reflected the state of his parish community. For twenty-five years, the physical building was poorly maintained. Similarly, the community was a “very sleepy parish” as he described it “with no connection to the schools or the youth” (Interview, October 1 2014). When appointed, he hired a pastoral assistant to help him connect with the youth again. Father Ben and Father Carlos also talked about how they hired pastoral assistants to help run youth and children-directed programs in the parish.

4.4.1.2 The Roles and Responsibilities of the Priest

The authors of the new religion curriculum, *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document*, list the key roles and responsibilities of parish priests in Ontario, found in the literature review above. Father Carlos explained that the fundamental role of the pastor is to support the schools, “because of government funding, the priest does not have a management role but a support role” (Interview 1, January 22 2015). He described his duties by pointing out how he supports the students in the school,

As a parish priest, I have to go to [them] first of all. Then I have to recognize my importance in their lives and so: to be [an] example of faith to them, to be present to them to the best of my ability. Still recognizing that I have got all kinds of parish activities that I am going to be tied up with. Provide opportunities for them in terms of sacramental celebrations. Help to facilitate celebrations that will be meaningful to them. [To] ensure that these children are also, besides what they are receiving in the school in terms of their religious curriculum, also receiving other additional opportunities to develop as they go through the First Communion, Reconciliation and Confirmation programs (Interview, January 22 2015).
The key theme in this quote is how Father Carlos feels he has to be present for his students. He knows that it is his role to provide opportunities and facilitate sacramental celebrations. He acknowledges that the purpose of his role is primarily for the sake of the students to help in their development.

Father Ben also discussed how it is his role and responsibility to go into the school and spend time with the students in the classroom. During the interview, he broke down how much time he spends in each grade. More time is set aside for grades 2 and 8 due to sacramental preparation. Before he came to this parish, the school was in charge of sacramental preparation. Therefore, in his first year as pastor he spent thirty minutes with those classes. For the other grades, Father Ben had discussions with the students by answering any questions they might have. Father Ben explained how he enjoys investing his time with the students in his schools. He also described how he reached out to one particular high school outside of his parish jurisdiction in order to help the high school reconnect to the church. He explained,

     The high school here and it is technically not ours. But they got it changed in the school board to be ours because I want to go in. I want to celebrate the masses. They come here for their school masses and I found it odd. I said, “well why are you using the church instead of the church that you belong to?” And they explained the whole situation. So I said, “well do you want me to start celebrating masses? Do you want me to start coming?” Going to the schools there, I really enjoy high school kids too. The questions and answers and stuff like that (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben did not inform me about the situation that occurred between the high school and the other parish that it was first affiliated with. Nevertheless, the significance of his message is that as the pastor of his community, he knew it was important to have the school reconnected to a church. He took the time to reach out to a school community that needed his
presence. Father Ben believes that his most important responsibility is to be a spiritual presence to his community. He stated,

I think the responsibility for us is to be like father, spiritually present to them. Present to not only to the principal, and the teachers, and the students, to the parents. We are present as a religious leader to guide them spiritually and to help them. Like think of a parent. So that is why they call me father. To do that role for them. To be a father (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Alberto’s philosophy in his parish is that,

Ultimately my role as pastor, as I see it, is to bring together the three pieces that were lost and should never have been lost in the Protestant Reformation that was lost so long ago: Jesus Christ in the bible, Jesus Christ in the Sacraments, and Jesus Christ via the Holy Spirit. Keep them centered. Keep them focused on Jesus Christ (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto agrees that it is his role and responsibility to provide opportunities for student to be linked to the church and that his role is still very much sacramentally based. However, he firmly does not believe that it is important for him to go into the classroom to visit the students. He asserted,

I do not do a lot of school visitations because you know the reality is different philosophies on this. Some priests think there is value in going from classroom to classroom to classroom. I have personally found that there is no value in going to classroom to classroom to classroom. If I am a stranger to them because their parents do not introduce them to the faith community of the parish, then I might as well be whoever Jo Blow guest coming in just to give the teacher a break. You know people say, “oh no but then you are the priests and they make a connection”. No, they do not. They would not make the connection but there are different thoughts and philosophies in this. [...] I have personally found over the years of my experience, there is no value added in going to the classes other than to be you know a break for the teacher. The kids need to come here. The parents need to help the kids understand the value added of this because the other point that people argue is that if you go to the classroom, if you go to the school you are just overemphasizing the fact that the school is their faith community (Interview, October 1 2014).

For Father Alberto, the problem with visiting the classroom is that many students do not see a purpose in going to church after graduation. He explained it is in the psyche of our culture
that Catholics believe graduation from eight grade is also graduation from the church

(Interview, October 1 2014). This is an issue because,

After grade eight they disappear until next time they want to come to a shopping trip. It is something called their wedding interview. That is the reality of what we have done by making the whole system sacramentally based. Basically instructing them that the role of a Catholic is to jump through the hoops or come shopping when they want something because to most people I am not the Catholic priest, this is not the church. I am a manager, this is sacramental shopping mall where they come shopping for sacraments. That is what the church has created and the school has created and that is what they have absorbed. What it means to be a Catholic is to come here when you need to shop for something. It has nothing to do with faith (Interview, October 1 2014).

To him, the school should not be the center of the faith community but rather the parish should be.

In order to have the students connected and linked to the church, Father Alberto provides a lot of opportunities not only for students in second and eight grades. Father Alberto started a summer camp program for all students so that students can be “spiritually focused all year long. Not to shut down during the summer but to activate during the summer” (Interview, October 1 2014). Also he suggests that confirmation should happen earlier so that students are not leaving the church once confirmation is over.

4.4.1.3 Relationship with the Principal

As representatives of Christ within the school setting, the relationship between the priest and the principal is vital to the faith in the school community (Castel et al., 2002). All the priests expressed in the interviews that the ultimate goal in the relationship between the priests and principals is collaboration with open and constant communication, flexibility, and patience. At the beginning of the school year, the priests schedule a meeting with the principals to make sure that all administrators convey the same message and understanding to their staff and students about the importance of the faith and Jesus in their lives (Interview,
The primary focus of the administration is to make sure that the wellbeing of the student comes first. Father Ben affirms that the function of the administration in Catholic school is to “co-exist for the education of our young people” (Interview, October 10 2014). With this in mind, Father Alberto explained that the priest and the principal also work together to help families in need, either emotionally or financially, because they also have a role as part of the “counseling arm of the church” (Interview, October 1 2014).

Due to the roles and responsibilities of the pastor and the principal, it is expected that the relationship between these two individuals is professional and collegial (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006; Weiss 2007). It is the duty of the parish priest to be supportive and encouraging for the principal (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Father Ben explained this encouragement role as a ‘collaboration partnership dance’ where the priest and the principal are dancing together. He stresses that it is not a dance where “one leads but that it is a give and take” (Interview, October 10 2014). Father Carlos believes his duty is, “if I see a good principal, to affirm that principal, to support that principal” (Interview 2, January 22 2015). All the priests expressed that they have a good professional relationship with the principals they are working with. Father Ben explained that he also has a great personal friendship established with the principal because they both began their positions at the same time and they have worked together adapting to their new roles (Interview, October 10 2014).

4.4.1.4 CHALLENGES WITH THE PRINCIPAL

As stated in the introduction and explored in the literature review, it is an assumption that the parish priest and the principal can work together from a place of mutual respect (Weiss, 2007). One challenge stressed in the research is that there is tension in the perceived
notion of authority of the two roles. This tension often increases when one person believes that they have more authority than the other (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006).

Weiss looks at this tension by relating the Catholic school system to an organization. She claims that even if the principal is a well-prepared and knowledgeable educator, the Church mandates the final authority for the operation of the school is with the parish priest, since the Catholic school is seen an extension of the parish (2007). Father Carlos did not express the same sentiments as Weiss. As stated above, Father Carlos does not believe that he has a managerial role in the schools but a support role. However, he did comment on how his participation in the school is impacted if he does not have a good relationship with the school principal,

I have witnessed it in my own priesthood that if I do not have a good relationship with the principals, my participation in the school is much more limited. And much more the teachers recognize whether or not I have a good relationship with the principal. And they take their cue; many of them take their cue from that (Interview 2, January 22 2015).

He also articulated that when he has a challenging relationship with the principal, his relationships with students and the teachers are negatively influenced. When that happens, he is put into situations where he says to himself, “How are we still going to make the essential things happen without strangling each other, so to speak?” (Interview, January 22 2015).

Father Carlos explained that if the principal is a strong person of faith then “it is super easy to be involved in the school and have a relationship with someone who has the same vision” (Interview, January 22 2015).

Another researcher located the source of tension between priests and principals in lack of communication. In his book *Catholic Education: Ensuring a Future* (2006), Mulligan
looks at the relationships between priests and school educators by examining both the points of affirmation and the points of concern in the partnership. One point of concern is that many priests have a lack of openness with Catholic educators.

Father Ben gives an example of how flexibility is important in the relationship between priests and principals. He explains that in the relationship there are times when priests can bend and sometimes when a priest has to uphold the teachings of the faith. He explained that the liturgical committee at the school sent him the outline of the prayers that the children were going to read for Thanksgiving mass. The problem that arose was the prayer selected by the liturgical committee was actually the Opening Collect, which is a prayer at the beginning of the mass that the priest is required to recite. This was the conversation he had with the school principal,

I said to Mr. Bob [pseudonym], “I just read the prayer because I just got it now”, I thought it was just any prayer. Any prayer can be done before mass. But I said, ‘it is the Collect, which the priests says. He goes, ‘ohh okay. We can x-nay it’. And I said ‘well you know, what if the student’s already done it? We will have them do it but I am going to have to do it again because it is the actual Collect’. Right? So we can do it before the mass and no one is going to really pay attention to it or they will pay attention but they are not going to know where it is from. And then I will really do it because that is really the prayer of Christ to the Father. That is why it is called a ‘Collect’ because the priest collects all the prayers. [...] So I could have been mean or I could have said, ‘no you can not do that’ or I could have said, ‘this is just to let you know in the future’. So now he knows in the future when they are looking for a prayer, it is not going to happen again. But they know that they are allowed to do a prayer or give a talk before mass starts. They know that. So I am flexible like that too. Some priests will say, ‘no mass just starts and that is it’. Some priests say forego all those things but if you are building a relationship, once it is not contrary to the faith or scandalous then there is room for flexibility in that sense (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben explained that the biggest challenge that he experiences with the school principal is coordinating schedules. He acknowledged how both individuals are very busy. For the principal, the school board sets aside certain dates. For the priest, he has his own schedule running the parish. So far, Father Ben thinks the school year is working out well with the
principal because they planned their schedules before school began and they have been collaborating and communicating well together.

Father Alberto did not state any challenges he has with the principals he works with in the schools but he understood and answered the question in a different way by articulating what challenges the principal and the priest face together. Father Alberto believes that the two main challenges for priests and principals are the curriculum and the spirituality of the Catholic teacher. In terms of the curriculum, he questioned whether or not “the current Catholic school curriculum [is] creating mature disciples of the real biblical Jesus Christ” (Interview, October 1 2014). In terms of the Catholic schoolteacher, Father Alberto questioned whether or not teachers are educated enough to clearly articulate the teachings of the faith. He stated,

Do teachers speak about this? Do teachers go to confession on a regular basis? From what I have seen the answer is no. And so you can only give what you got. The kids will absorb things either being serious to you or not. And obviously issues come up of premarital sex or issues come up of the secular world or issues come up of you know various other areas that are controversial. Again, depending on how mature the Catholic school teacher is and articulate about these issues the challenges are there in terms of you know you can only give what you got. And again are the Catholic school teachers formed enough through their primarily religion I religion II courses? Which is pretty much all the formal education they get in order to articulate the faith to these students (Interview, October 1 2014).

As explained earlier, Father Alberto believes that there is a lot of hypocrisy in the Catholic school system. Mulligan similarly raises this point of concern: “too many Catholic teachers and administrators are not ‘confident Catholics’. They do not seem to know the story, so how can they reasonably be expected to transmit the story and share their own faith?” (2006: p. 98).
4.4.1.5 The Comparison Between Priests and Principals

Both administrators are important in the separate school system because they each serve the Church in its divine mission to educate (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Each administrator brings a specific capability to the relationship: the principal possessing the professional knowledge and skill as an educational leader, and the pastor possessing the authority and knowledge of the Church as a spiritual leader (Weiss, 2007). Cooperation is needed amongst these two leadership roles in the community (Weiss, 2007). All three priests viewed their positions as possessing one significant similarity with that of the principal: they are both administrators with a building to run and a community to serve. Father Carlos expressed empathy for the principals he works with because he understood the many responsibilities they have. He referred to the principal’s responsibilities as similar to Gumby, a famous cartoon character. Like Gumby, a principal is pulled in many directions because they have to deal with so many individuals, such as staff, teachers, support staff, the CSAC organization (Catholic School Advisory Council), parents, students, the superintendent, and board representatives (Interview, January 22 2015). However, Father Carlos mentioned that,

The principal has to be cognizant of the fact that they are running a Catholic school. And so as they are running a Catholic school that gives them extra responsibility and that is making sure that things are carried out in line with the teachings of our faith (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

Therefore, he asserted that the Catholic school principal is the “principle faith model for the school” as the representative and role model for the other teachers (Interview 1, January 22 2015).
Father Carlos’ attitude of appreciation for the principal is reflected in Mulligan research. Mulligan explains how one priest that he interviewed defined the ‘theology’ of a principal as the faith leader of the school,

The chair of the principal, in her office, can be seen, in a symbolic way, as an extension of the bishop, especially of the teachings and pasturing role of the bishop, and as an extension of the parents, who are the primary faith educators of their children (Mulligan, 2006: 96).

In comparing himself to the principal, Father Carlos believes that he has little influence in the school community and is considered an outsider and auxiliary member of the school community. In regard to their roles as the representatives of church and state, Father Carlos acknowledged that the two administrators are different because they both have to deal with a different level of bureaucracy. He explains that,

The priest is dealing with a smaller bureaucracy with the chancery office so the priest has a lot more flexibility in choosing the programs run at the parish, where the principal has programs thrust upon them to implement (Interview 1, January 22 2015).

Father Ben also views the principal’s role as a caregiver for the staff and students of the school. He sees the importance of the principals since they decide how “to show the staff and the teachers what direction that they want to go in” (Interview, October 10 2014). He understands that he is different from the principal because his role is for the salvation of the students’ souls while the principal has to take into consideration the students’ academic performance. He explains that, “the principal might have the same agenda to make them into saints but he has to follow the curriculum so they both have a different measurement of success” (Interview, October 10 2014). Father Ben’s response can be connected back to Katrina Pollock’s article entitled “Administrations and Teachers’ Perceptions of School Success in a Publicly Funded Catholic School in Ontario, Canada” (2013). Pollock presumed that teachers in Catholic schools prioritize academics as the key factor of success; however
the findings of her article suggested that the perception of school success in faith-based schools is actually very complex (Pollock 2013). Father Ben explained that different administrators look at success in different ways,

We are both looking almost at the same thing but it is different in the sense of how we approach it because he is approaching it not just spiritually, but academically. I am looking at it on a human level and spiritual level to know their virtue and to build their knowledge and love of God (Interview, October 10 2014).

As an example of this, Father Ben described an activity he does with university students. He begins by writing titles given to those who graduate with a degree on the board. He even writes down the titles that are on his business card, for example S.T.B (Sacred Theological Baccalaureate). After this, Father Ben explains to the students that,

You know what, none of this matters. All of that does not really make a difference because everything we have learned, if it does not change us to be a better person then it is useless, it is worthless and the only important [thing that] matters at the end of our life that is important is the two letters in front of our name. S.T. Saint. That is it (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben shows the students with this activity that everyone should be more proud of prioritizing their spiritual life before their professional and academic life. This fact exemplifies who the priest’s role is very different from that of the academic guide, the principal, whom I consider in the next section.

4.4.2 THE PRINCIPAL’S PERSPECTIVE

In the province of Ontario there are regulations that govern the roles and responsibilities of a principal. The Education Act and its associated regulations provide a detailed list of the duties of a principal. In sum, the main duties are: to provide a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all students to record and report to the school boards and to provide support for teachers and staff within the school (Scarfo & Zuker, 2011). In the Ontario Leadership Framework, there are extra responsibilities for a Catholic school
principal compared to the principals in secular public schools. The extra responsibilities of a Catholic school leader are: to facilitate liturgies and prayers that nurture the Catholic school culture, to evangelize and commit to life-long faith formation, to create and sustain a caring Catholic school culture, and to foster the relationship among parents, parishes and the Catholic school community to support faith development and such programs (I.E.L., 2012). The following section explores how three principals view themselves as educational and spiritual leaders in their own communities.

4.4.2.1 THE JOB

The main difference that distinguishes principals in Catholic public schools from principals in secular public schools is that they are characterized as “called” to become faith leaders in their schools (Wallace, 2000). Ms. Diana explained that her desire to become a principal was a calling because she was given many leadership opportunities that led her to this position. Ms. Elizabeth also described her decision to become a principal as a calling. Growing up, her faith was greatly influenced by her family,

I was raised in a very Catholic home as a child. I went to Catholic elementary school and then I went to a Catholic high school. For me, going to church was very important. I grew up with that type of value” (Interview, December 15 2014).

She explained that faith is important to her because it is part of her identity, “part of my culture, part of my tradition, part of who I am” (Interview, December 15 2014).

Mr. Frank described his calling as a tap on the shoulder. He described the calling as a compliment from his former principal, which led him to consider the possibility of becoming a principal himself. He described his calling as,

A type of compliment to me. Once I considered her suggestion. I became very excited by the prospect and I went on a blitz to obtain this position. So I got myself better educated. I jumped through the hoops at the board level. I went after it and I obtained it.
And I am happy to say that um I believe I have been for the most part successful (Interview, January 22 2015).

Each principal conveyed the same idea that they were given a path to follow with many opportunities that opened further doors and led them to this vocation.

**4.4.2.2 The Roles and Responsibilities of the Principal**

The Education Act s. 265 outlines the duties of the principal which include:

“discipline; co-operation; record attendance; pupil records; timetable; examination and reports; promote pupils; textbooks; care of pupils and property; report to the medical officer of health; protect access to school or class; and to maintain a visitor’s book” (Scarfo & Zuker, 2011: p. 141-142). Ms. Elizabeth described her roles and responsibilities in the school as,

Making sure everything runs properly in the school as well as making sure the kids are getting educated, making sure the kids are being successful, taking care of the staff. There are a lot of responsibilities in that aspect and just the administration part of the school (Interview, December 15 2014).

As mentioned earlier, Catholic school principals have additional roles and responsibilities compared to those of secular public school principals. Mr. Frank acknowledged how different his roles is because he has to take the faith into consideration in everything that he does. Mr. Frank expressed the same conclusions that were found in the qualitative study by Joyce Castel, Coral Mitchell and Vineet Gupta in their article, “The Roles of Elementary School Principals in Ontario: Tasks and Tensions” (2002). Castel et. al., Mitchell and Gupta reported that individuals in administrative role stand at the intersection where all the pressures collide and it the principal’s duty to find a balance instead of becoming overwhelmed by the dilemmas (2002). Mr. Frank explained that there are “a multitude of roles and responsibilities” and that it would take over an hour to list them all (Interview, January 22 2015). He asserted though that it is more important for the principal to
find a balance in their position because one cannot do everything. He compared his role to that of a juggling act. If the juggler has too many balls up in the air, it becomes hard to juggle. Similar to the analogy given by Father Carlos, Mr. Frank believes his position is a juggling act because he has to deal with so many people. He expressed that his position is the, “one position where you can have the greatest influence on a school community for better or for worse” (Interview, January 22 2015).

Ms. Diana sees her most important role as the principal as doing what is best for the children to help them develop into the person God intends them to be. In order to fulfill her roles and responsibilities, Ms. Diana explained her philosophy on how to be a true leader,

I believe firmly not only servant leadership but also something called nudge leadership, which means that we try to do is we try to nudge people in the right direction to do the right thing. If you are nudging people to try something a little more complex that is something that could lead to um something greater something beyond themselves something that is our true calling. Move them beyond their comfort zone as well because ultimately were not just responsible for a student achievement, we are also responsible for um inspiring students to be the person that God intended them to be (Interview, December 8 2014).

Ms. Diana believes that challenging a person head on can result in the person feeling frightened rather than empowered to make a change. With nudge leadership, one can provide incremental change for the school environment by supporting and encouraging their staff and students.

Ms. Elizabeth sees her roles and responsibilities as not only an educational leader but a spiritual leader as well, “in many ways, I am the leader of the school but I am also that spiritual leader of the school too” (Interview, December 15 2014). As a spiritual leader of her school community, she feels it is her duty to promote the relationship and connection between the church and the school. One example that Ms. Elizabeth provided of promoting the connection between the church and school was a time when,
We had an advent mass with the school. And the alter servers, at the end of the mass, Father makes hot chocolate for them and they have treats and hot chocolate. So rather than just ignoring that, I go. I made my appearance and sat with them. I had my hot chocolate with them and I acknowledged the fact that this is wonderful. He is building that relationship with these altar servers. The kids are the ones who organized it. Each child brought a treat and Father did the hot chocolate. So that to me is community building, that is relationship building. As a principal it is my obligation and my duty to promote it (Interview, December 15 2014).

For her staff, Ms. Elizabeth also promotes community building by delegating some of her roles and responsibilities as a spiritual leader to the liturgical committee as an opportunity for others at school to become involved with the faith. For her students, Ms. Elizabeth believes daily religion classes promote connection between faith and education because the time spent on religion provides a foundation for spiritual formation.

4.4.2.3 Relationship with the Priest

As stated earlier, it is expected that the relationship between pastor and the principal is professional and friendly (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006; Weiss, 2007). The duty of the parish priest is to be supportive and encouraging to the principal. As well, it is expected that the principal develop an equal partnership with the priest in school leadership (Belmonte & Cranston 2009).

All three principals felt the parish priest is personally welcoming to them in their community. Ms. Diana spoke of how the priest she works with is an engaging and busy individual who is “not into politics” but “has a distinct vision of how to serve his community” (Interview, December 8 2014). She stressed how both figures are in the community to meet the needs of the people.

Ms. Elizabeth explained her relationship with her priest as very open and inviting. The priest comes to the school often and, “it really is all about building relationships like he will come in and he will head the chess club or he will have a tournament” (Interview,
December 15 2014). She explained that in the relationship, “I am very open with them. I am available when they want to talk. We acknowledge and we are very grateful for everything they do for our school” (Interview, December 15 2014).

Mr. Frank spoke about how his relationship with the new priest at his parish is off to a great start. He attributes the success of this relationship to the priest’s personality and the amount of effort he is putting into the relationship with the school (Interview, January 22 2015). However, Mr. Frank stressed that his relationships with past parish priests have changed over the years. He has noticed that there is less of a connection between the church and the school than in the past (Interview, January 22 2015). This will be explored further in the next section.

4.4.2.4 CHALLENGES WITH THE PRIEST

In the research, Belmonte and Cranston (2009) look at the tension between priests and principals from more of the principal’s perspective in Australian Catholic schools. Their case study finds that principals clashed with priests over because of their traditional understandings of leadership. Belmonte and Cranston overtly explained that a key implication of their research is that priests need to step away from hierarchical authority in order to establish an equal partnership in school leadership (2009).

Ms. Diana and the priest in her community did not establish an equal partnership in the school community. She explained that she defers to the priest. To defer means to “submit humbly to another person’s wishes or qualities” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). She stated, I think that ultimately I do defer to him. I am a humble individual when it comes to my calling. As a Catholic leader, I believe that I need his support and in this community I go to him with requests but ultimately whether he answers those requests or not is really up to him. I try to be respectful of that. Sometimes I am put into a difficult position. I have to ask for things. It is uncomfortable because I think that you know he is very much a leader within his community and I am very much a leader within my
community. So it is difficult sometimes to be a servant leader and to put myself at his feet, which I find that I have to do. I have to be humble. I have to respect that sometimes he does not answer my emails. That sometimes he does not respond in a way that will allow me to respond to my community. He makes requests of me sometimes that I think ultimately I cannot necessarily fulfill; but I try because again I believe that it is really important that we get that support from him and that we build that relationship (Interview, December 8 2014).

The reason this relationship is not equal is because Ms. Diana often feels uncomfortable because both individuals are considered leaders in their own community. The predicament is that the principal perceives the school community and the parish community as two separate bodies. This is evident in how she explained the church as the priest’s home, “when I go into the church it is his home and I am very respectful of his home” (Interview, December 8 2014). At the church then, she feels like a guest instead of viewing it as her home as well. She also talks about how she has to be the ‘servant leader’ in the relationship and put herself at the priest’s feet. The challenge Ms. Diana has with her relationship with the priest demonstrates how their relationship is still structured as a hierarchy.

Mr. Frank expressed the same tension as Ms. Diana regarding the hierarchical views of leadership. Mr. Frank has seen a trend that over the years priests are making less of a commitment to stay connected to the schools,

But generally speaking, what I have found is that they have been personally friendly. Again I am going to use the word generally, but they have been reluctant for whatever reason to involve themselves more in the life of the school. This may be a directive from the Archdiocese. [...] The sense I have gotten over the years is that they are, the parishes, are pulling away. This might sound unfair but in my experience they seem to be pulling away from the schools rather than attaching themselves more to the schools. So there does seem to be a kind of chasm growing. This is what I have seen unfortunately. From some, I would even suggest that they have written off the Catholic schools to some extent. Some of them I think believe that we are not doing our job properly, that we are not Catholic enough. Therefore, they feel that they are going to do their job without us. I have sensed that from some but not all, which is sad. There was one I had dealt with who put that to me in so many words. They did not feel that the staff was Catholic enough according to his definition (Interview, January 22 2015).
This quotation is striking. Mr. Frank finds its very upsetting it is that there is a chasm growing between the church and the schools. He believes the Archdiocese is instructing priests to pull away from the schools because educators are not Catholic enough. He explains, “I do not know whether that is deliberate or whether that is a function of the men in those roles” (Interview, January 22 2015). He also believes some priests are shy and do not know how to establish and build a working relationship with the principal or, more importantly, the students (Interview, January 22 2015). Thus, Mr. Frank believes the biggest challenge is that priests are no longer making a commitment to come to the schools,

The challenge would be to physically get them into the school. Getting them to know the kids, welcoming the kids. The kids are the future of the church and they have to connect with them. And they need certain people skills (Interview, January 22 2015).

Ms. Elizabeth believes that her biggest challenge with the parish priest is time. Like Father Ben and Mr. Frank, she would like to see the priest in the school more often. She knows how busy the priests are with other responsibilities. The priests in her community also have to work with four other Catholic schools. She stated,

I find that they are dealing with four schools not to mention everything else that happens in the community, funerals and all that. So they are bogged down too and I understand that because on Friday I said “Father I have not seen you in the school for a while where have you been?” He said, “oh you know I have been so busy”. [...] I wish that there were more time that he could come into the school and spend a lot more time with the kids (Interview, December 15 2014).

Ms. Elizabeth sees how busy the parish priest is at her church and she believes that if there are more priests then they could contribute more of themselves to the school. She explained that,

I think the challenging part is the time and there is not I mean I think the population of priesthood is diminishing so they have got more work to do. If we had more priests, we would share the wealth (Interview, December 15 2014).
Both Ms. Elizabeth and Mr. Frank raised a very important issue of how the shortage of priests is impacting the Western world. In his book, Mulligan also highlights testimonies from teachers who discuss this area of concern. Catholic teachers described that priests coming from other countries may have poor English skills and fail to understand or adapt to Canadian culture (Mulligan, 2006). Mr. Frank sees this as an issue because,

Canada and the United States are importing priests from the developing world because there is such a shortage here. And the developing world priests, God bless them, but they have a difficult time connecting with our culture here. They are coming from a very very different culture so its difficult. It is asking a lot of them to connect with our way of life here because our way of life here is certainly very different than the world they have come from. But they need the human connection with the people, with the children. And often I am not seeing it (Interview, January 22 2015).

This is a very difficult issue because there is a shortage of priests in Ontario. For this reason, the priests in the parish have many more commitments and responsibilities previously shared among multiple priests or pastors. Even though time limitation is a significant problem, Ms. Elizabeth believes that she has very few challenges in her community because of how proactive and enthusiastic the priest is in the school.

4.4.2.5 The Comparison Between Priests and Principals

According to s. 910 of the Catechism of the Catholic Faith, a Catholic principal is called to cooperate with the pastor, “in service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life” (Catholic Church, n.d). The role of the Catholic principal is not just to be intellectually and academically knowledgeable but spiritually educated as well. As a witness of the faith, the Catholic school principal is viewed as the guardian of the Catholic heritage within the school and plays a vital role in the quality of Catholic education (Belmonte & Cranston 2009). Each principal was asked to discuss how he or she views themselves and
their roles in relation to that of the parish priest. Ms. Diana explained how important her role is in keeping the story of the faith alive in her community. She stated,

Anyway I can help keep the story and the community alive I definitely support that particular role as the principal in the school. I want [the priest] to feel part of this community, the school community because I think he is an important role in this particular school community (Interview, December 8 2014).

In comparing herself to the priest, Ms. Diana explained that,

You know I am not the faith leader of this community. He is the faith leader of this community. I am a faith-filled individual. I am the leader but my role is not as deep and personal as his is and so I defer to his role (Interview, December 8 2014).

Ms. Diana sees the two positions as two very distinct leaders with two separate roles: one leader is an instructional leader and the other is a faith leader. The reason for this separation in her perspective is because she doesn’t “think I have a leadership role within the church. I think I have a leadership role within the Catholic school” (Interview, December 8 2014). For this reason, Ms. Diana believes that the priest’s role is more deep and personal in the faith than her role is (Interview, December 8 2014).

Mr. Frank expressed a contradictory viewpoint compared to Ms. Diana. He believes that the priest has a much more limited leadership role than the principal in the Catholic education of a child. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Frank views his position as,

more about the education of the whole person: academically, spiritually, socially, emotionally, physically, whereas [the priest’s] role would be limited more to the development of the spirit. Just the spirit, I believe. So I would suggest, were more considered, we consider the whole child more than the church would. That is the way I see it (Interview, January 22 2015).

While comparing his role to that of the priest, Mr. Frank explained that he does not presume to know what the role of the priest is; however he would like to see the priest making more of an effort to engage with show the students on a human level. He explained,
I do not pretend to tell [the priests] what their role is. I know what I would like their role to be and simply connecting more with the kids in the school and their faith. Getting to know them. Let the kids get to know them as people, not just priests, at a human level (Interview, January 22 2015).

Mr. Frank would like to see more priests in the school so they can connect and build relationships with the students and share their belief in the faith like he does as a Catholic educator.

Ms. Elizabeth explained her role as the principal and how she contributes to the Catholic education of her students: “my role with the Catholic Church is basically to provide whatever the kids need in order to fulfill their Catholic education I guess” (Interview, December 15 2014). As mentioned earlier, Ms. Elizabeth views herself as a spiritual leader in the school like Mr. Frank. She also expressed that everyone would benefit from open communication and participation from the parish priests. As an example of this, she described how her parish priest brings her community together.

I am very blessed to be here. [...] Our parish has four different schools so they are very busy. [...] They are very busy but what they do is they invite all of us, all the administrators, myself, my vice-principals, the other principals in those schools, their vice-principals and we have a meeting in September. And what we do is we bring our calendars and we set all the dates of all our masses. [...] So we set our dates too that we know our first communion, when our kids are doing their first communion, when they are doing their confirmation and so on. [...] Father, he leads it, and we then talk about things that maybe we can change to make it better this year. Sometimes it is technical stuff like mass. You know like the kids, we want them more to participate in mass and so on. [...] And then we set dates throughout the year of our liturgies. And then after that Father invites us, and he has a lunch for us. And it is a homemade lunch and we all sit together at the table and we kind of share bread, which is really nice. [...] That again builds that community that relationship because we do. I have to tell you, we do work together with the priest. Definitely. (Interview, December 15 2014).

This passage shows how these leaders come together, as Eucharist people, to discuss how to better serve their community (Mulligan, 2006). By making a homemade meal for the principals, the priest is ensuring that everyone is working in communion with each other.
Perhaps more importantly, he is showing his appreciation for the principals, as witnesses of the faith in the schools. Ms. Elizabeth expressed how blessed she feels to be in her school community because she feels she has an equal partnership with the parish priest and they are all working towards to common good for all.

4.5 THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

4.5.1 The Identity Crisis: Big “C” Catholics versus Little “c” Catholics

The relationship between the pastor and the principal is essential in the separate school system because both authorities help authenticate the identity of the Ontario Catholic school system. Researchers Theodore Wallace and James T. Mulligan both discuss a drastic shift in the identity of Catholic schools over the last decades. Wallace asserts that the transition from the religious to lay personnel leadership in Catholic education has created a major identity crisis. James T. Mulligan describes this identity crisis as the difference between schools teaching little “c” catholic education opposed to big “C” Catholic education. He defines big “C” Catholic, as knowing that Catholic education is about evangelization and passing on the traditions of the church (Mulligan, 2008). He explains that Catholic schools in the twenty-first century currently teach little “c” catholic education because separate schools are “on the path towards secularization” (Mulligan, 2008). Mulligan asserts that the Catholic identity is in crisis and that it is going to become more complicated to define in an increasing secular society.

In the interviews conducted, I asked the participants whether students are becoming less Catholic because few religious individuals (nuns, brothers, or priests) teach in the Catholic school system. The participants were also asked whether they agree or disagree with
Wallace’s assertion that Catholic schools are just religious schools holding onto a religious memory while nurturing a secular presence (Wallace, 2000).

Ms. Diana found Theodore Wallace’s comment to be patronizing (Interview, October 8 2014). She asserted that leadership opportunities in the school system should not be limited to individuals in religious orders:

I do not think [...] that we have less of a story, less of a tradition, less of an importance in Catholic education because we go home to a family as opposed to going home to a community. My family is faithful. I think that ritual is important, do not get me wrong. I think that iconography is important. I think that people taking positions of importance within the church; but leadership is complex. [...] I do not want to limit people’s leadership potential because they do not have a calling to go into the seminary or to go into the convent. [...] Um not that we do not encourage people to take on those leadership positions if that is their calling but we have all seen people in callings and positions of leadership that are not there for the right reasons. And they are not responsive to the needs of their community as a result of that because they are in there for very personal reasons instead of a calling to serve others (Interview, October 8 2014).

She does not believe that the laity should be restricted from the vocation of leadership within the Catholic school system.

Ms. Diana also spoke about a message that stood out to her from a recent school mass. The priest spoke about the church’s obsession with ritual (Interview, October 8 2014). She mentioned that while rituals might have comforted older generations, younger generations have a different way of demonstrating their faith in their lives (Interview, December 8 2014).

She explained that a problem with the Catholic identity of the schools and the church, is that it is a system, which professes to be welcoming, but,

I think that when we spend hours with our churches discussing how to exclude people rather than instead of how to encourage them to be part of communities then [...] that is the disservice we do to our communities (Interview, December 8 2014).

Mr. Frank expressed the same response as Ms. Diana. He asserted that some would agree that the school system is less Catholic (Interview, January 22 2015). He thought the
reason for this is society giving religion “more thought” today and present day Catholics are “only embracing certain parts of Catholicism and not buying into it entirely like society used to” (Interview, January 22 2015). He calls them ‘Cafeteria Catholics’ (Interview, January 22 2015). In response to being asked whether Catholics school and their students are more or less Catholic than in the past, Mr. Frank answered,

If you are going by strict dogma, old school religion, then we probably are not [more Catholic than in the past]. But if we are talking about teaching gospel values then I think we are more Catholic than ever. So really it is debatable but it depends on how you define Catholic (Interview, January 22 2015).

Mr. Frank also emphasized how the Catholic school system has shifted the focus to educating the students on social justice:

In the last couple of years, in particular, we are teaching social justice issues, which is very Catholic. Were we doing that ten years ago? Not as much. That would impress some leaders of the Church; some would be blasé about it. They might be more interested in how often we are praying. So I suppose you measure it in different ways (Interview, January 22 2015).

As mentioned above, Mr. Frank believes that some figures in the Church are purposefully pulling away from the Catholic schools because they do not believe the schools are Catholic anymore. Mr. Frank provided an example:

The church has taken over totally sacramental preparation. Now, part of our curriculum in grade two and eight is sacramental preparation. So there is an overlap there obviously in preparation that I have a difficult time with. [...] The council of bishops: that may be a conscious move on their part to distance themselves from the schools, thinking the Catholic schools will not exist ten years from now, and maybe they will not. [...] So it is a little hard for me to understand why the two of them are going on at the same time. Especially when you consider the kids in the neighbourhood who do not attend a Catholic school attend the same [parish sacramental] classes that our Catholic school kids attend. They are getting the same information. So I wonder as principal why would our kids need to get as much as the non-Catholic school kids? So it is almost that our program is not recognized anymore (Interview, January 22 2015).
Mr. Frank believes that since the church hierarchy does not see a future for the Catholic schools, they have already started to strip them of their identity by making them redundant with regard to Catholic education.

Ms. Elizabeth began her response by reminiscing about the principals at the elementary and high schools she attended, who were nuns. She felt that the identity of the Catholic school system relies on the personality of the educators of the faith. She felt that,

In order for us to promote this Catholic education you [the priests] have to reach out to the source. You have to reach out to these kids [...] or else it is not going to mean anything. We want to be welcoming. We want to be in a church that is welcoming (Interview, December 15 2014).

Other participants also discussed the importance of a welcoming priest. Regarding teachers being the educators of the faith, Ms. Elizabeth shared her dissatisfaction with teachers who request to have their planning time compensated when it falls at the same time as a scheduled school mass:

I also do worry when, let us say, a teacher comes up to you and says, ‘I went to mass with the school and I want my planning time because I missed it because I was at mass’. That worries me because if we are Catholics you should not even be thinking of planning time (Interview, December 15 2014).

The truth of the matter is that teachers are supposed to be role models for their students. Ms. Elizabeth explained how hypocritical it would look to students if their teachers were absent from mass:

I understand the restrictions and so on but if we are Catholic educators then we have to show the kids that God’s teaching is important. It is important to be at church not because I had my planning time or my break, it is important to be there. I think that just says who we are as people and the kids see that. Like if you bring your class and the teacher is not there, [the students] are like “why are they not there?” How do you explain to them [the students] like “oh it is their planning time?” I am fortunate here [at my school] because it does not happen here but I hear at other schools. I think that is so sad that we have come to that point where [...] you have got people that are in the Catholic board because they got their job and they are not really practicing Catholics.
And you do not have to be a practicing Catholic as long as you instill that value with the kids (Interview, December 15 2014).

Father Alberto discussed how the school system needs to accept the call for change. Change needs to occur in order to keep the faith alive. One change is that teachers need to become more mature in the faith. He stated,

Getting teachers to be more mature in the faith and not depending on what would have been fine in 1920, which is religion one and religion two. But recognizing in a much more complex world, you need a much more complex spiritual formation of teachers. They get now what they would have gotten seventy years ago, but this is a very different world. It is much more complex. The teachers need a much more complex spiritual formation process (Interview, October 1 2014).

With regard to secularization of the schools, Father Alberto used the following analogy to explain how his friends, twenty years ago, decided not to put their children into the Catholic separate school system. He paraphrased his friend’s response:

If I am going to put my kid in skiing school to learn to become a skier: a good skier, a safe skier, the best skier. And I look at the graduating class and ninety percent of the graduating class cannot ski, do not ski, do not even like skiing, why would I put my kid in that skiing school? Well guys, I am deciding where to put my kid in school and I just looked through a couple of Catholic schools. And I looked at the grade 8s because what do I care about the earlier grades? I want to see what the graduating class is like. And using the skiing analogy, ninety percent of the kids in grade 8 do not practice, do not know their faith, and do not probably plan on practicing it in grade 9. And so given that analogy like I would not put my kid in skiing school where ninety percent of the kids cannot ski. Why would I put my kid in Catholic school where ninety percent of the graduating class in grade 8 are not maturing, do not really know Christ, are not faithful, [and] do not have an interest in really seriously other than confirmation. Like why would I do that? (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto stated that the majority of his friends decided to put their children into private Catholic or Christian schools, or into the public system (Interview, October 1 2014). He shared with me that he is a godfather to five of his friends’ children and out of the five only one of his godchildren went to a publicly funded Catholic school (Interview, October 1 2014).
As the years passed and as his godchildren grew, he had a serious chat with them when they were old enough. He said,

Just to give you a little insight, my one goddaughter that did go to Catholic school, I had a serious meeting with her, as I did with my other godchildren, who did not go to Catholic school. But I spoke to them about secularism. I spoke to her about hypocrisy and I taught her about real Catholics and pretend Catholics. And I let her know that she was being raised as a real Catholic and I defined it for her. And I said “look, a lot of those kids you go to school with are pretend Catholics” and she knew the difference between real and pretend. And I said to her “you know, you are going to have to be very careful because if you make them your best friends your likely to become a pretend Catholic yourself, so be careful. And you know you have to be careful because your role now is to make pretend Catholics real Catholics. It is not their fault because it is not like they chose to become pretend Catholic. Parents make pretend Catholic schoolchildren and ultimately your role is to be a witness to them of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a real Catholic Christian. And that is your function”. And over the years and obviously she is much older, she is in her early twenties. As time went on she had to contend with that as all my kids do who come here and I always say to them, “how is the battle going against the other side, the pretend Catholic side, the non practicing?” And they say it is not easy because they are the majority now and it is tough when you are the minority. But at the same time it does prepare them for the real world (Interview, October 1 2014).

For Catholic parents, Father Alberto gives the following advice,

Both ways you are going to have do deal with teaching your kids something. If you put them in a public school, you are going to have to teach them to fight against secularism. If you put them in a Catholic school, you are going to have to teach them to fight against hypocrisy. So either way you have a challenge as a parent because either way you are going to have to teach your kid how to fight (Interview, October 1 2014).

All three priests discussed who they believe is responsible for the crisis in the identity of the Catholic school system. Father Ben answered this question by claiming that if the three parts of the home-school-parish community were working together it would improve the situation. He said that,

Whether the nuns and the priests taught does not make a difference. They are teaching the exact same thing that the laity are teaching so the curriculum is the same. It is not, but what is the difference? The difference is we are living in a different era, a different time (Interview, October 10 2014).
Therefore Father Ben sees broader society as the biggest factor for change in the identity of the school system. Father Carlos believes that a number of factors impact the identity crisis of the schools. He explained,

I think it is a number of factors. I think it is the society that our children are growing up in. That it is a lot more secular a lot less faith-based. I think many of their home environments are a lot less faith-based than say they would have been when I was their age. And then thirdly [...] probably there is more than a few staff members whose faith is not particularly important to them and that negatively affects the children. So I see it as actually three areas. Of those three areas only one is based off of the staff itself. But I think that really the biggest challenge of all our children are not growing up in a faith-based environment at home (Interview, January 22 2015).

Father Carlos pointed out how the teachers’ approach to faith is an issue, but it is not the one impacting the identity of the schools the most. For him, it is the home environment that has the greatest impact on the Catholic schools (Interview, January 22, 2015).

Father Alberto’s believes that the four formators of the faith are all to blame for the loss of faith in the school system. He acknowledged that,

When people say to me who is to blame, who is to blame, who is to blame, I always, and I think it is incredibly fair, I always blame equally twenty-five percent the four formators of faith: society/culture, Catholic Church, Catholic school, Catholic parents. That way nobody can say ‘oh you are so bias, you are so prejudice, you hate the Catholic school system’. No no no no no. I think the failure, and you have to use the failure word or otherwise you will never get change in Canada. Canadians hate the word failure because we are so unaggressive and passive and gentle and loving and sweet. If you do not use the word failure change is never going to happen. And so the reality is when people ask me I always say all four formators of faith are failing equally twenty-five percent. It is a waste of time to figure out 40, 30, 50. Forget about it. Twenty-five, twenty-five, twenty-five, twenty-five. Four formators of faith are all failing, especially the Catholic Church because I can certainly you know criticize my own [...] because again what is the use of having a Catholic Christian faith if the focus is not the real biblical Jesus Christ (Interview, October 1 2014).

Consequently, as the Catholic community continues to struggle with the mission of the faith to evangelize and pass on the message and traditions to the younger generations, the identity of the Catholic school system will continue to lose its legitimacy and validity.
4.5.2 The Future of Catholic Education

Both James T. Mulligan and Dr. Mark McGowan emphasize that Catholics in Canada were granted an “enduring gift” when they were given the freedom to profess the faith in public separate schools across the country (Mulligan 2006: McGowan, 2013). The publicly funded separate school system no longer exists in all Canadian provinces and territories. As such, the final question asked to the participants in this study was: what do you believe will happen in the future of Catholic Education in Ontario?

Father Ben, Ms. Elizabeth and Mr. Frank were all optimistic and hopeful that the Canadian Constitution will continue to secure rights for Catholic separate schools in the future. Father Alberto, Father Carlos and Ms. Diana do not believe the Constitution will secure rights for Catholics in Ontario. Instead they believe Catholic schools will be amalgamated with public school into one secular school board system.

Father Carlos believes that the future of the Catholic school system does not look promising because of recent religio-political decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada. He stated,

The Supreme Court has just been for decades now just on a string of decisions that do not support faith. And so you know it is not anti-Catholicism it is an anti-faith type of thing. So to be perfectly honest if it ever goes to the Supreme Court of Canada that is our death now you know in my opinion. So we just hope to God it never goes to the Supreme Court of Canada (Interview, January 22 2015).

In comparison to the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, Father Carlos clarified how the separate school system there closed because there were not only separate Catholic schools, but several other faith-based schools too. Changing demographics was a factor in the closure of these separate schools. As noted in the literature, there were more schools than needed to support the population (Mulligan, 2006). Father Alberto discussed how the
Catholic demographic change impacts the significance of the Ontario Catholic school system too:

When I came to this parish my three elementary schools would have had 900 kids. Seven years later in 2014, [...] I think we're at 650. So again, as Catholics have less children because we no longer see the value of children. I believe we want the _bella vita_ and we define that as having less children. As we see the demographic change and the people do not have the perceived value [in the school system] (Interview, October 1 2014).

With the decrease in the population of Catholics in Ontario, the government could push for one system in order to save money on schools that are only 50-60% filled.

Father Alberto raised the point that with changing demographics, there will be fewer people who see the perceived value in the Catholic system. Father Ben and Father Carlos also spoke about the importance in the perceived value of the system. Father Carlos believes that the greatest danger to the separate system is, “if there is not a perception amongst the general public that Catholic schools are actually making a difference” (Interview, January 22 2015).

Father Ben also sees a problem with the perceived value of the separate system. He states,

The problem is this: The school board system that is Catholic, they are conforming to what the ministry is saying. The guidelines for curriculum and stuff like that. The problem is so other groups might say, “well we do not want to give up what we are teaching”. Well then you are asking to be a private school. Just like St. Mike’s. Just like all those Catholic ones that are saying we cannot teach that. We are going to go with our own curriculum. Okay. You are a private school. You are not funded at all. So it is not inhumane. And even the same thing goes with the parents. If a parents says, “I do not think I like what you are teaching. I am going to do my own private, my own home schooling”. The parent is not given the money, any money to do that. They still have to go buy the resources. They still have to go do all those things because they are privately doing it. So it is not inhumane because if it was inhumane then the government should be doing it across the board for everyone: including the home schoolers, including the private schools. It is because the home schools, private schools, and all those different ones are saying, “no we do not want to conform to that curriculum”. That is the only difference. So it is not because favouritism. Right? It is not because okay those Catholics they are wild in numbers they get what they want. Yea but we still have to conform to certain things that the ministry wants (Interview, October 10 2014).
In this statement, Father Ben refers to the comment made by the United Nation about how the Ontario government is inhumane for funding the Catholic school board. As he addressed, some may perceive that Catholics get full funding because they are favoured, which is not the case. Father Ben emphasizes how the separate Catholic school board system has to conform to the teachings of the ministry in order to continue teaching students of the faith with funding. He highlights that the problem with conforming is evident in the debates over the new Ontario physical education/sexual education curriculum,

So ultimately [...] the ministry is the one that decides those things. Right? What type of curriculum. Like you hear the vibe of, oh the Sex Ed is coming in now into elementary school and parents are saying ‘we do not want that in our schools’. So to what degree? Because if we say no to that, we lose our Catholic planning (Interview, October 10 2014).

Father Ben identifies that it will be hard for Catholic teachers to teach young students about the Catholic practice of natural family planning if they are required to learn a physical education/sexual education curriculum that includes practices that are not in line with the teachings of the church such as contraception, masturbation and same-sex relationships.

Going back to the question that was asked, Father Ben remarked that,

The Constitution does not keep the rights for Catholics? Well we have to look at the difference of what is a ‘right’? That is the other definition you have to look at. Is it a right for us to have a private school and funding? It is not a right. It is a privilege. So that is the other thing you have to look at. The only right that we have is the right with the parents. The right for them to educate their own child and for them to say, “I do not want”. [...] The thing is the parents. We live in a society now that is perpetuating that both parents need to work so they do not have time to educate their children so [...] it is like you are trapped. But if the parents have time and they say, “you know what, I am going to teach my own child”. Imagine that. If every parent stood up that did not want to really bring their child there [to school] because you say, “well I do not want them teaching the sex education”. Well pull them out of the school. Do your own home school education. If every parent did that could you imagine what the government would say? That would rock them and say oh! Because then they just spent millions of dollars on schools that would have to be closed down (Interview, October 10 2014).
Similar to the works of Dr. Mark McGowan and Father James T. Mulligan, Father Ben sees the separate school system as a privilege and not a right. This special gift was given to Catholic parents and it will come down to their actions to maintain and fight for the separate school system if they believe in its value.

Father Alberto believes that it is not just the parents who must believe in the value of the Catholic school system. He believes that the entire system is failing; therefore it is time for everyone affiliated with the separate school system to start making changes.

Again the picture I showed the other day at mass of the bishop with his head in the sand. That is the issue. If you know there is a need for change and you put your head in the sand and pretend everything is okay when it is not okay. That is not what is coming out and as long as that is not what is coming out we should be making changes. We need to make fundamental changes, fundamental changes, and again all I can do as a priest is be somewhat of an example [...] The goal is to have them recognize that if you make the right changes pin pointed in the right areas, strategically, the faith will mature, the faith will develop, the faith will grow, and it can work. But if you do not make changes, nothing will change, nothing will grow, nothing will develop, because you are just pumping them through the system, pumping them through the system. Nothing will ever change because you are not making any attempt to recognize the need. So again, I use the word failure a lot. It really bothers a lot of people, but in my experience unless you use the word failure nothing changes. Any other word that is more politically correct does not have the serious impact on people in terms of seeing a drastic need a serious need for change and God knows in home, school, church, and society we have a very serious need for change because we are failing at producing disciples of Jesus Christ as the Bible requires (Interview, October 1 2014).

Father Alberto recognizes that Catholics have an opportunity to instill the faith into the students. However, there is no value if students continue to be pumped through the system. He believes it will only survive if changes are made at home, in school, at church, and in society. If not, then the system will continue to fail in its apostolic mission.

Ms. Diana explained that Catholics were given the right to a publicly funded system in the Constitution, which was helpful to secure full funding for Catholic schools in the
twentieth century; however, she does not see the Constitution securing rights for Catholics in the future.

I think that we have a publically funded Catholic education system because of political will and we have seen in Canada that many of our rights as Canadians under the Constitution have been challenged in strange ways. Though, there is lots of ways to challenge Catholic education and it is not the Constitution that is going to keep us alive. The Constitution was helpful pushing through the full funding for Catholic schools. However, it was the will of one political system in order to appease a whole number of immigrants who were Catholic and voting and to ensure the political supremacy of one political party. I do not really think, although the Constitution is a nice way of saying it but that anything is guaranteed that the constitution and that has certainly been proven in other provinces with Catholic education. If there is a will to get rid of Catholic education, they will get rid of Catholic education despite what it says in the Constitution. They have done it in other provinces. They will do it again. Again that is why I think it is important to build these relationships. Like, I think that if we do not build relationships, the real threat comes from funding it, comes from within, it comes from the community - the larger community that we need to live in. And everyone, even within Catholic education, is jockeying for power. That is our biggest threat (Interview, December 8 2014).

Ms. Elizabeth also discussed how the future of the Catholic system is a heated topic with the provincial government. She believes and hopes that the Constitution will secure rights for Catholics in the future:

I want to say yes that [the Constitution] will secure the rights for Catholics. I think we still have a long way to go before they do take the Catholic board out. I do not think that is going to happen anytime soon but I do think it is something that has been brewing for a long time. I figured they have not done it yet, I do not think it will happen. But change of government - you never know. I do not think this government will do that. But you know what? It is hard to say. I would hope that we are the way we are right now. You know? I would hope that it remains the way it is. But you know what, I think it really matters on a lot of stuff. I think we have to make the difference. I think we have to show that there is a difference because if the government thinks it is just the same, public Catholic it is the same, they do not see a difference then it is going to it is going to definitely it is going to go to one board. But if we can show them that, yeah you know what? Catholic education: it is a very different thing and things that we do with the kids. But I do have a lot of parents too, regardless if they are Catholic or not, they do want their children to come to the Catholic school. And it is because of that. Religion, I believe. So I do not know if I answered that. I think if we do not show a difference then it will be lost. But if we can show the difference and [...] if we can practice what we preach. [...] That is a big one (Interview, December 15 2014).
Ms. Diana and Ms. Elizabeth stand on two separate ends of the debate on the future of separate school system and Mr. Frank’s view is what he calls “a middle course”. Mr. Frank stated,

I think the Constitution will secure our rights but I predict that there will be a Catholic component within a public school. For example, at a very simple level, you close St. ___ down. We go and join the closest public school that is large enough to house us. And for a certain part of the day, there would be Catholic education within that. Kids would be required to attend but those who wanted to would have that right and it would be within school hours. I think it would look something like that (Interview, January 22 2015).

Mr. Frank believes that the Constitution grants Catholics some guarantees with regard to religious education so that if separate schools are closed down in the future Catholic education would continue but in a different form. He believes,

We have certain Constitutional rights; they are guaranteed to Catholic education. I think there is going to be some sort of accommodation. But in the name of economic efficiency, I would not be surprised if one day, down the line, if it became one school board with a Catholic component to it (Interview, January 22 2015).

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reported on the research findings and provided supporting quotes from the research participants. I began this chapter by looking at the participants’ perspective on the distinctiveness of Catholic education. I also explored how the separate school system is being threatened with internal and external factors. The main section of this research focused on the administration of Catholic schools from the perspective of three pastors and three principals. The final section examined the history and future of Catholic education as the separate school board system goes through a major identity crisis. In the last and final chapter, I will analyze these themes.
5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this fifth and final chapter is to discuss the significance of the findings in chapter four within the context of the literature. Below, I explain how my findings contribute to this existing body of research. I also discuss the significance of the findings for myself, as a new teacher and new educational researcher. I will express recommendations for the various stakeholders in the education system, and I will identify areas for further research.

5.2 THE ADMINISTRATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN ONTARIO

The main purpose of this research study was to answer the following question: what are the perceived roles and responsibilities of the administrators - parish priests and school principals - in regard to education in Catholic schools in the province of Ontario? In the literature review, I explored, investigated, and discussed research that identified issues in the relationship between the administrators of Catholic schools in Ontario, both priests and principals, and how this relationship impacts the operation and dynamic of the Catholic school. In chapter four, I interviewed and questioned three priests and three principals to hear their perspective on the relationship they have with their counterparts. I will now explain the connection between my findings and the existing research on the pastor-principal relationship and discuss how the research is significant for myself as an aspiring administrator to be.

When I first delved into this research topic, it reminded me of a passage from the Gospel of Matthew: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24, New International Version). In the Catholic school board, schools serve both God and money. Since Catholics have the privilege to instruct their youth with a
faith-based education, this privilege is subject to the same legislation, mandates, programs, and policy regulations as non-religious public schools (Pollock, 2013). Consequently, Catholic schools must conform their curriculum to whatever the government dictates. As the representatives of Church and state, respectively, the relationship between the parish priest and the principal is unique because their cooperation has a significant impact on the operation of Catholic schools. The principals and the priests have the greatest influence in choosing to prioritize God before money, or money before God. Both roles are important because they both serve the Church in its divine mission to educate (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). The literature revealed a major assumption: that priests and principals can work together in a space of mutual respect (Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006). The sections below are based off of the subquestions listed in the first chapter. They explore whether or not the participants agree that this is still a major assumption, and if so, I delve into the implications of such a finding.

5.2.1 THE PRINCIPAL’S VIEW OF THEIR ROLES – NUDGE LEADERSHIP

There are “a multitude of roles and responsibilities” for Catholic school principals according to Mr. Frank (Interview, January 22 2015). All of the principals acknowledged that they received a certain ‘calling’ to take on the unique roles and responsibilities of a Catholic school principal (Interview, December 8 2014; Interview, December 15 2014; Interview, January 22 2015). As Catholic school principals, all commented on how their duties focused on incorporating the faith into all aspects of the administration of the school (Interview, December 8 2014; Interview, December 15 2014; Interview, January 22 2015). The research also highlighted that the main responsibility of a Catholic principal is to guarantee that the religious education program is taught and that there is consistency between the religious

Ms. Diana and Ms. Elizabeth discussed how they shared their leadership responsibilities with others educators in the school. Ms. Diana called this shared leadership ‘nudge leadership’: it is her duty to nudge people into opportunities that will encourage them to go beyond their comfort zone (Interview, December 8 2014). Ms. Elizabeth spoke of the liturgical committee that she created in order to delegate the responsibility of creating a welcoming and caring Catholic atmosphere. With a committee, Ms. Elizabeth has a team of individuals who are interdependent on each other. Belmonte and Cranston also discuss this shared approach to leadership in their article, “The Religion Dimension of Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools: Preserving Catholic Culture in an Era of Change” (2009). Their findings identified a shift in the form of leadership towards a more inclusive approach. Principals are now sharing power with teachers in order to promote a more positive and collegial relationship in the school environment (Belmonte and Cranston, 2009). For aspiring principals, it is important to realize that by sharing the responsibilities in the school, it is easier to deal with “being pulled in many directions” or having to “juggle” many tasks as Father Ben and Mr. Frank described it. As Ms. Diana put it, it is much easier to nudge people than to intimidate them with a big task because people can become discouraged. With nudge leadership, principals have the ability to encourage staff and students to explore their talents and creativity for the common good of the community. The sharing of leadership is also an example for students on how all humans, not only Catholics, were created to work in unity and solidarity with one another for the common good of society. Mulligan best summarized my views on nudge leadership: “true leadership does not control. It liberates” (2006).
5.2.2 The Principal’s View Relative to the Parish Priest

It is expected that both the pastor and the principal are accountable for building a relationship that is professional and friendly (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Mulligan, 2006; Weiss, 2007). In the interviews, the principals articulated what they expect from a pastor associated with their school. They listed attributes such as: welcoming, engaging, a serving individual, open, inviting, flexible, responsive, and approachable. All the principals, Mr. Frank especially, stressed the importance of the priest being friendly and making an effort in the relationships - not only with the principal, but more importantly, with the students. Weiss states, “there is no stronger team than the pastor and the principal who work cooperatively” (2007).

In comparing themselves with the parish priests, all three principals had different viewpoints on how their positions compared to that of the parish priests, in regard to catholic education. Ms. Diana does not see her position as a faith leader within her community because she views that as the priest’s role. His role is more deep and personal in the faith compared to hers (Interview, December 8 2014). Mr. Frank believes that he has more of a duty to the Catholic education of his students than the priest. Ms. Elizabeth sees herself as an equal spiritual leader compared to the parish priest. My rationale for asking the principals how they viewed themselves in comparison with the priests, was to see if there is a connection between one’s self identity and the type the relationship that was created. My analysis regarding this connection will be discussed in another subsection below.

5.2.3 The Priest’s View of their Roles – The Spiritual Presence in the School

The primary role of the Catholic priest in a Catholic school is to be spiritual leader to the staff and students, and be supportive of them in order to create a bond between all
members of the religious community (I.C.E, 2012). Sharon Weiss describes the role of the parish priest as follows:

In cooperation with the principal of the Catholic school, the parish priest is also instrumental in many areas of school life. He has the responsibility to ensure the competence of those who teach religion, to maintain Catholic identity, and to celebrate the sacraments with the entire school community (2007: p. 15).

Father Ben and Father Carlos provided their perspectives of how they fulfill their role by visiting the schools when their busy schedules allow them to make an appearance. Father Alberto, on the other hand, does not see the added value of his presence at the school. However, he believes he makes up for his absence by providing a wide range of programs at his parish for children of all ages to be physically and spiritually linked to the parish all year long (Interview, October 1 2014). I found that the responses given for this question powerfully displayed the debate on whether or not priests should be involved in the schools. I agree with Father Ben and Father Carlos that it is important for priests to be involved in the schools, so that priests have access to the students to evangelize and teach them about the importance of the church and of Mass. Then again, I also find truth in Father Alberto’s analysis of what happens to students once they leave the school community. Thus, Father Alberto has made me wonder how students feel when they see the priest at their school. Do they actually make a connection when the priest enters the school building? As they grow older, is the priest creating a bond with them to stay connected to the parish? Or are priests letting students jump through the hoops hoping one day they will somehow make their way back to the faith?

5.2.4 Priest’s View Relative to the Principal – A Collaborative Partnership

All three priests viewed their positions as having one significant similarity with that of the principal: both are administrators with a building to run and a community to serve.
Belmonte and Cranston examined the challenges of principal leadership and stated that lay principals in their study felt that priests still had unrealistic expectations of principals (2009). The one expectation that Father Carlos did mention was how principals need to be cognizant that they are running a Catholic school - he or she has the responsibility to be a role model for everyone else in the community. In comparing himself to the principal, Father Carlos believes he has a lesser role in the school community, that is, that he has an inferior amount of authority at the school. Father Ben saw himself more as an equal. He described his relationship with principals as a collaborative partnership dance where there is a give and take from both parties. Father Ben suggests the main difference between himself and the principal was that they each have a different view of Catholic education success. Father Ben’s role is for the salvation of the students’ souls, while the principal’s role takes into consideration the student’s success in academics and performance.

It was informative to hear the priests’ perspective and to learn about how they see themselves in a school community. An assumption I had made based on my own experience was that priests would think they had more of leadership or authoritarian role when comparing themselves to that of the principals. However, my findings proved otherwise. As Mulligan explains,

> The church must earn the right to be heard with an intelligible, challenging, and inviting message. One can no longer speak simply from authority. Authority must be seen to be at the service of the pilgrim people and the society and culture in which we find ourselves (2006: p. 101).

I have come to realize that the success of the priest-principal relationship all depends on the personalities of the individuals and how they assert themselves in the relationship. As Mulligan stresses, it is no longer acceptable to speak from authority. In our modern world, it is more important to speak through actions.
Father Alberto, Father Ben, and Father Carlos all discussed how important the role of the principal is, and each tried to express their gratitude for their principal counterparts. All priests expressed appreciation of individual principals who rose to their calling to be leaders in Catholic education because without them Catholic schools would not continue to function (Interview, October 1 2014; Interview, October 10 2014; Interview, January 22 2015).

5.2.5 Relationship Between Principals and Priests – The Need for Mutual Respect

“Collaboration and compatibility between the parish priest and the principal are essential for the effective operation of the school and all involved in the educational process” (Weiss, 2007). The relationship between pastors and principals needs to be built with a sense of mutual respect in order to serve a higher good (Mulligan, 2006; Weiss, 2007; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Again, it is an assumption that the parish priest and the principal can work together in a space of mutual respect. Nevertheless, some challenges to this relationship are: differing views of hierarchy, lack of communication, lack of commitment, lack of time, assigned priests from different cultures, and lack of faith. Some challenges are unavoidable and unpreventable, such as the difficulties arising from priests assigned from foreign nations. However, most of the challenges arise because the relationship between the priest and principal is not established as an equal partnership. For example, Ms. Diana’s relationship with her pastor is unequal because she feels uncomfortable with him. That feeling of tension and concern would put a strain on any relationship. How can one see him or herself as an equal partner when they are treated unequally?

However, not every relationship can be ideally perfect or equal - there will be times when two different personalities do not agree or are not compatible with each other. Father Carlos’ words of wisdom come to mind when he discussed his experiences with principals he
did not agree with. He explained, “how are we still going to make the essential things happen without strangling each other, so to speak?” (Interview, January 22 2015). If a parish priest and principal cannot work together then, as the research indicates their leadership becomes unproductive, useless, and hopeless for the people who matter the most in Catholic education – the students (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Weiss, 2007).

As Father Alberto stressed, the problem in the Catholic school system is hypocrisy.

Jesus explained who a true follower of Christ is and warned against those who do not practice what they preach:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23: 2-12, New International Version).

This Bible passage has always stood out to me. Jesus tells us that He is the one true instructor of the faith and that the humble will be rewarded. A true follower is someone who practices what they preach and puts the needs of others before their own position. Both priests and principals must do so to make their relationship productive for the better instruction of their students/their parishoners. As such, I am in complete agreement with Sharon Weiss. She concluded her article on the relationship between pastors and principals by describing successful leaders as,

Wise leaders who can find simplicity and order under organizational confusion and chaos [...] Wise leaders who love their work and their organizations enough to care
deeply about the people whom they serve [...] Wise leaders to combine a deep commitment to values and purposes larger than themselves. And in the Catholic school, it requires pastors and principals willing to resolve tension and conflict in their own relationships in order to serve the higher good (Weiss, 2007).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

My research focused mainly on the administration of Catholic schools in Ontario. While reflecting on this topic, I wanted to hear the participants’ opinions on the subject of Catholic education in the Ontario separate school system. For that reason, I asked my participants: what they thought was distinct about Catholic education, what they thought was a threat, and what they think will happen in the future of Catholic education in the province.

In 1999, the Ontario Catholic School’s Trustees’ Association began a dialogue to gain feedback on the state of Catholic schools in the province (I.C.E, 2007). In 2006, the Institute for Catholic Education restarted this dialogue about the priorities and issues that face the separate school board system (I.C.E, 2007). Over 10,000 individuals took part in this discussion on: the distinctiveness of Catholic education, the value of Catholic schools, the community’s hopes for Catholic schools, the major issues facing Catholic schools today, strategies for promoting and protecting Catholic education, and what to tell the school boards and the Institute for Catholic Education (I.C.E, 2007). I chose my interview questions so that my research would resume this conversation almost a decade later. Therefore, the target audience of this research and the various stakeholders involved have updated information about what individuals within the system say are the pros and cons of Catholic education.

The findings of my research have opened up my eyes to the politics and the culture behind a profession I want to be a part of in the future. As stated in chapter one, I believe it is my vocation to become a teacher and eventually a principal. I found it very insightful to listen to different perspectives on the current state of Catholic education. I relate with Ms.
Elizabeth’s statement about her vocation being part of her identity. In addition, my religion is a very significant piece of who I am. For this reason, I took on this research project as a means to educate myself and to develop my understanding of Catholic education and what it means to me.

5.3.1 The Purpose of Catholic Education To Me

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church s. 358, “God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him” (Catholic Church, n.d.). The key purpose of Catholic education is to educate young believers about how to live a Catholic life that is to know that we are here on earth to love and serve God and to do good according to His will.

The authors as well as the participants in this study all stressed that Catholic schools teach about the world within a faith-based framework, in a safe and open environment. However, Father Ben’s explanation of the purpose of Catholic education stood out to me the most. He phrased it as “whatever we’re learning in the lens of our Catholic faith in Christ” (Interview, October 10 2014).

I can analogize Father Ben’s message with my own experience of putting on eyeglasses for the first time. Students in Catholic schools are given the sight to view the world through a Catholic lens. With this new sight, Catholic education can approach the mandated Ontario curriculum in a different way and has the ability to see things more “clearly”. The theme of blindness and sight is significant in Christian literature and teachings. As well; in my undergraduate academia, I studied the juxtaposition of blindness and sight in mediaeval art. This theme is particularly poignant in Jesus’ miracle of restoring sight to a blind man the blind man, “Whether He [Jesus] is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do
know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25, New International Version). Therefore, Catholic students are given the opportunity to see the world differently by encountering Christ everywhere, and each and every day in Catholic schools.

Through the responses given in the interviews, the articles I have read, and the experiences I have had, my findings have helped me to develop my own philosophy of Catholic education. My philosophy is: Catholic education is about learning and experiencing the world through the lens of our faith. In Ontario, we are blessed with the gift of a publicly funded system to pass on our traditions and our Catholic social justice teaching to the younger generations. With Christ as our model, the community deepens their understanding of God's love together by building relationships with one another in the classroom. At Catholic schools, we are privileged with the ability to create an atmosphere where students can talk openly about God and beliefs. Our faith teaches us that as brothers and sisters of Christ we are all part of one big inclusive family and created as unique masterpieces in order to do His will. I truly believe in the saying at my parish that as Catholics we are "one faith and many cultures". I believe Catholic Education serves the Catholic community by educating children about how Christians are governed by our values and morals. With the messages from the Gospels, I believe Catholic education assists in the maturation of students as effective communicators, critical thinkers, and responsible citizens. The Catholic education system is therefore a support system where we nurture students in their development of knowledge and skills to explore their true paths in life.

I truly believe that the Catholic education system in Ontario aids students to find their true calling. I was one of those students who graduated from a Catholic school. I believe that I was given the tools that I needed to find my true path in life. But for me, it was not just the
school that nurtured my growth as a Catholic. My parents had a great deal of influence in my religious education. This occurred through their words, but more importantly through their actions as active and contributing members of our parish. I was taught how to love and serve God by loving and serving my community around me. Now I believe it is my calling to offer His creations back to Him by educating young minds about His love and compassion.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

As stated in the methodology chapter above, the greatest limitation to this research is my inability to interview students of Catholic schools in Ontario. By only speaking to the administration, I am limited to their perspective and to hearing how they “talk the talk”. If I were able to hear the students’ perspectives then I would also be able to measure whether the administration “walks the walk”.

Another limitation is the study’s qualitative nature. Ercikan and Roth discuss how the potential question addressed in either qualitative or quantitative research will result in incomplete answers and inappropriate inferences based on the findings. They believe that polarizing the two research methods is confusing and tends to limit research inquiry (Ercikan and Roth, 2006). Due to the time constraints and the number of participants I interviewed, the findings of this study can be influential to the reader or interested audience; however, the research will not significantly impact the field of study, which is the study of Catholic education.

5.5 AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

During this research process, several areas of further research arose that piqued my interest. One participant asked “what should Catholic education look like”? This question is appropriate because it is easy to judge the Catholic system for its imperfections but it is hard
to actually pinpoint what Catholic education should be like. Perhaps this is why there are so many different forms of religious education: because faith and education have a different meaning to different people.

Another area of future research may be studying the effects of the changing demographics of Catholics in Ontario. This might be a quantitative study considering looking how immigrant populations keep the Catholic school system alive.

Another research area might be further investigation of the concept of ‘success’ in Catholic schools from the student and parent perspectives. Do catholic parents and graduates feel equipped to enter the world and live and profess their faith? This area of research could be a continuation of Katrina Pollock’s article on the idea of success in Catholic schools in Ontario.

A final point of further research migh be whether or not the Catholic school requires a connection to a parish in the 21st century. With the creation of Catholic schools in the 19th century, followers of the Catholic faith created their own separate schools where their beliefs were taught in proximity to the parish community with a curriculum that incorporated the faith (Dixon, 2009). Both Father Alberto and Father Ben discussed how schools are calling in priests that are unassociated with the schools to perform the sacrament of the Eucharist on a monthly basis. So the question to be investigated is: can catholic schools operate without the link to the parish? In other words, can the schools operate without the supportive role of the ever-present pastor? I believe all of these questions are worth mentioning and investigating in the future if the Ontario Catholic school board remains open.
5.6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was conducted for educational leaders in the separate Catholic school board system in Ontario to understand and appreciate the complex relationship between pastors and principals. Superintendents, trustees, principals, vice-principals, priests, aspiring leaders, and parents are all educational leaders within the Catholic school board system. There are different philosophies on how administrators operate Catholic schools, as demonstrated in this research. Due to the number of participants and the structure of this study, the findings reported cannot determine which philosophy is correct or incorrect. The findings cannot determine whether one priest or principal is more accurate than another because the author does not have the authority to judge their relationship. What can be determined from this study is the expressed perspective and shared experiences of the six participants who are part of the Catholic school board system in the Greater Toronto Area.

From the findings of this research, there are three recommendations I would like to share. The first is that educational leaders continue to have hope for the future of the separate school board system. If hope is lost, then the Catholic school system looses its purpose. Hope is important to Catholics because as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength; yet, on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (Catholic Church, n.d). Catholics are blessed with the separate system because of the courage of individuals who had hope and the grace of God to create, establish, and maintain faith-based schools in Ontario. Therefore, the Catholic separate system is a privilege and a gift that should be treated accordingly and as the participants stressed, changes need to be made in order to keep this distinct privilege alive.
Another piece of advice is for pastors and principals. Find new opportunities to bring Catholics back to the faith. This is something Father Alberto was succeeding with at his parish. This suggestion comes from Pope Francis who urged that,

Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent (Spadaro, 2013).

If priests and principals have a problem with people who are not ‘Catholic enough’, it is no longer acceptable for priests and principals to exclude those teachers, parents or students. In particular, I believe priests and principals need to work together to provide additional professional development opportunities for Catholic teachers like retreats or community building activities so that they feel part of the parish community. The saying “because I said so” from priests, teachers, and parents is no longer an incentive for youth to go to church. Parents, priests and principals need to create a desire in students to become part of the community.

A final recommendation for educational leaders is to remember that both the pastor and the principal are human beings who each have their own faults. The role of a priest or principal is not an easy job to fill. They require individuals who are willing to be selfless like Christ. Since, the pastor and the principal have the duty to educate children with a faith-based curriculum it is important for both administrators to keep their priorities and goals focused on the faith together.

Having enjoyed the experience of writing this qualitative study, I am interested in continuing my research further. I would like to pursue my PhD in the near future to investigate how students perceive their own Catholic education. It would be very interesting to hear whether or not students see value in their own system and if it would be something
they stand up for in the future. However, I believe it is vital to this future work that I gain some experience and witness student’s growth in the classroom as a full time Catholic schoolteacher.

Nevertheless, from the participant’s responses, I now have a fuller understanding of the roles and responsibilities of pastors and principals as they play out ‘on the ground’. Both pastors and principals are gatekeepers to Christ for their students. As servant leaders, the principal and pastor have the opportunity to spiritually guide Ontario parents and students to the gate, and stand and hold open the doors for others. Perhaps the most important role is that of the parents who choose to take their children through the gate with them. The gate that I imagine is unique because it has two doors. Each individual has his or her side of the gate to open. Each door has its own weight of responsibilities that the administrators have to bear in order to let others through. In this relationship, one person cannot instruct the other to hold their door open for them by ordering them to do so. This is impossible, as one person cannot be in two places at once. Also, one individual cannot take over the other’s person role by ordering them to leave. The weight of two doors is too heavy for one. Both the pastor and the principal are required to be present and supportive for each other in order to keep the gate open. If one individual is missing then the students are not able to access Christ in His entirety. If both individuals refuse the task of holding the gate open together then all hope is lost in the search for Christ.
References


APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

10 Questions for Principals
• How long have you worked as an educator within the Catholic school system?
  a. How many years as a teacher?
  b. Which grades?
  c. Which subjects?
  d. How many years as a vice-principal or principal?

Theme #1: History of Catholic Schools
• Are students becoming less Catholic because there is an absence of religious individuals within the school? How? Are we just holding onto a religious memory and nurturing a secular presence?
• In your opinion, do you think the constitution will secure rights for Catholics in the future? What do you think will happen to the future of Catholic education?

Theme #2: Distinctiveness of Catholic Schools
• What does Catholic Education mean to you?
• How does Catholic education teach the whole person?
• In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador: in your opinion does the Ontario government discourage church administered schools? Do the same internal factors impact Ontario schools as well?
• What does success mean to you in regard to Catholic education?

Theme #3: The Administration of Catholic Schools
• How did you come to the decision that you wanted to become a Catholic School Principal?
• How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a Catholic School Principal?
• Can you describe for me what your professional relationship looks like with the parish priest?
• What challenges do you experience working within a collaborative leadership dynamic with the parish priest?
• What is the role and responsibilities of the parish priest in the school community, in your view?
• How does your role and your responsibilities differ from theirs?
• How do you and the parish priest work collaboratively in your distinct leadership roles in the Catholic school community?
• What range of factors do you think supports strong collaborative leadership between principals and parish priests in Catholic schools?

10 Questions for Priests
• Can you tell me about your decision to become a priest?
  o How long have you been working as a parish priest in this school community?

Theme #1: History of Catholic Schools
• Are students becoming less Catholic because there is an absence of religious individuals within the school? How? Are we just holding onto a religious memory and nurturing a secular presence?
• In your opinion, do you think the constitution will secure rights for Catholics in the future? What do you think will happen to the future of Catholic education?

**Theme #2: Distinctiveness of Catholic Schools**
• What does Catholic Education mean to you?
• What does success mean to you in regard to Catholic education?
• How does Catholic education teach the whole person?
• In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador: in your opinion does the Ontario government discourage church administered schools? Do the same internal factors impact Ontario schools as well?

**Theme #3: The Administration of Catholic Schools**
• What does it mean to you to be a parish priest in this position?
• What is the role of the parish priest in the school community, in your view? How would you describe your role as a parish priest for school communities?
• What are the responsibilities of the parish priest in the school community, in your view? How would you describe your responsibilities as a parish priest within Catholic school contexts?
• Can you describe for me what your professional relationship looks like with the school principal?
• What are the responsibilities of the principal, in your view?
• How does your role and your responsibilities differ from theirs?
• How do you and the principal work collaboratively in your distinct leadership roles in the Catholic school community?
• What challenges do you experience working within a collaborative leadership dynamic with the principal?
• What range of factors do you think supports strong collaborative leadership between principals and parish priests in Catholic schools?
APPENDIX B - CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date:
Dear ____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. I am studying the dynamic relationship between priests and principals in Ontario Catholic Schools for the purposes of a graduate research paper. Your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement of the Masters of Teaching program. My research supervisor who is providing support for this assignment this year is Nick Scarfo. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 60-minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Felicia A. DeFrenza

Researcher Name: FELICIA DEFRENZA
Cell Phone Number: (647)272-3762
Email: felicia.defrenza@mail.utoronto.ca

Supervisors Name: Nick Scarfo
Supervisor’s Email: nick.scarfo@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I, ______________________, acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ______________________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________