

## **Contemplative Practice for Catholic Schools Without Catholic Students**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper explores Catholic identity within Catholic schools that serve predominately non-Catholics. One diocesan case study set within the United States describes explicit questions about religious mission, but also addresses implicit topics including financial responsibility, appropriate leadership, and the relationship between inner city schools and the Church. The study's findings present a rationale for the viability of inner city schools rooted in Catholic social justice teaching that affirms a school's Catholic identity.*

## **Contemplative Practice for Catholic Schools Without Catholic Students**

Closing their chapter in *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*, O'Keefe and Murphy raise the core question explored within this study, "Why should a diocese or religious community devote scarce resources to provide educational opportunities to non-Catholics or marginal Catholics?" (2000, p. 134). This study uses case study research methodology to explore responses of key participants to why and how one American diocese responded to the challenges this question presents.

Building on the philosophical assumptions and decision-making strategies presented in *Character and the Contemplative Principal* (Schuttloffel, 1999), this study investigates both dispositions and decisions data to connect Gospel values and the tradition of Catholic identity, as characterized within traditional Catholic schools in the United States, to schools with predominately non-Catholic students.<sup>1</sup> Contemplative practice demonstrates the connection between beliefs held and the integration of those beliefs into school leadership practice. This study seeks a connection between contemplative practice and the decision making that takes place within diocesan or

religious community leadership as it relates to serving non-Catholic students within Catholic schools.

There is ample research that portrays the value of Catholic schools for minority students particularly from low socio-economic brackets (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Convey, 1992). Typically those students are non-Catholic and attend inner-city Catholic schools attached to parishes with limited financial resources (Harris, 2000). Many of these parishes were created in the previous century to serve the immigrant poor. Their associated schools were a vehicle to transmit ethnic cultural values including religion while systematically preparing children to succeed in mainstream American society (Walch, 2003). Central to this study is a search for a contemporary rationale for these schools.

By exploring Catholic identity within Catholic schools that serve predominately non-Catholics through case studies, I attempt to find a relationship between research on inner-city Catholic schools and contemplative practice. The study further suggests recommendations for a vision of Catholic education that includes financial responsibility, appropriate leadership, and the relationship of Catholic-minority schools to the Church. A definition of Catholic identity that includes an engagement of contemplative practice provides the conditions for this vision of Catholic education.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

The case study method of inquiry is appropriate for research that seeks to plumb the depths of a topic (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). The question raised by O’Keefe and Murphy is best suited to qualitative methods and a case study in particular. This qualitative study was modeled on ethnographic inquiry. Data collected consisted of on-site observations, long interviews, and document analysis. The major participants were three principals, a pastor and a superintendent within the same diocese. Each participant had vast experience within the Heartland Diocese<sup>2</sup> and inner-city schooling. Participants were voluntary and selected. They chose to contribute to the research inquiry due to their

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<sup>1</sup> By traditional Catholic school, I mean those parish schools that served Catholic students whose families were members of the parish.

vested interest in the future of Heartland's inner city schools. The data from the Heartland case study data was triangulated by analogous case studies from other metropolitan dioceses where I have conducted similar case studies and the empirical research noted in the review of literature.

### ***Participants***

The major participants were three principals, a pastor and the superintendent, all of whom worked within the Diocese of Heartland. The superintendent of the Diocese of Heartland met in order to discuss the diocesan strategic plan and its impact on the restructuring of the inner city schools. He also provided me an opportunity to visit with various staff members to gain their perspective on the process. The superintendent was in his third year at that position, but had been a teacher within the diocese and a principal for his more than twenty-five year career. Three principals participated in the study. Two were veteran principals who each had more than 20 years experience in the inner city. The third was novice principal who had been a teacher and vice-principal within the diocese prior to his appointment. The fifth participant was a parish priest who had been an inner city school pastor for most of his twenty-five years in the diocese.

### ***Design of the Study***

Prior to the study, an informant from the diocese with nearly 30 years experience within the diocese and inner city schools, learned that I was conducting a study on this topic. She suggested that I consider the Diocese of Heartland due to its initiation of a strategic plan that required a focus on inner-city schools. My informant believed that numerous diocesan officials would be willing to share their experiences about my study's topic. With my informant providing a gateway into the diocese, I was able to organize numerous interviews and site visits in order to collect data on my research question. As is often the case with ethnographic studies, a key informant is a requisite to entrance to the study site.

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<sup>2</sup> Heartland Diocese is a pseudonym for a metropolitan diocese within the United States. All names have been changed to safeguard participant anonymity. Inconsequential details may have been modified to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Long interviews with each participant provided the core data for the study (Stake, 1994). Interview data was supplemented by site observations, document examination, and informal interviews with other individuals. Each participant was asked semi-structured interview questions, followed by the opportunity for open-ended discussion. Next, I will present a brief description of each participant's responses.

Case study research does not seek findings that apply to other settings. However, case study findings often portray the complexity and ambiguity present within educational settings more richly than quantitative empirical research. This case study intends to capture the emotion, tension and angst school leaders face when confronting the moral dilemmas present within the research question: "Why should a diocese or religious community devote scarce resources to provide educational opportunities to non-Catholics or marginal Catholics? (2000, p. 134)."

The following section of this paper introduces the participants. Then the next section will provide an analysis of their responses in light of contemplative practice. And the final section will make the connection between this case study's findings and recommendations for the future of inner city Catholic schools with a rationale tied to Catholic identity.

### **Walter Smith is the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Heartland**

The Diocese of Heartland was created in 1910 to serve the growing immigrant population in the expanding Middle West of the United States. Currently 159 parishes serve nearly 325,000 Catholics. There are 83 Catholic elementary schools and 10 diocesan high schools. Four other high schools are owned and operated by religious orders within the diocese. As a visitor to the diocese, the numerous large churches including a spectacular cathedral struck me. Described on the diocesan website, "The Cathedral is a masterpiece of art and a monument of immigrant faith. . ." (website).

At the Catholic Schools Office, Superintendent Walter Smith explained that his office is under a mandate from the new bishop to plan for the future of the city center schools. The bishop has expressed concern about the number of dollars spent on these schools and the fact that the schools serve predominately non-Catholic children. The bishop's position is that "Catholic schools should serve Catholic kids."

Smith went on to describe the types of schools that exist within the diocese. He used three categories: Type 1 schools are those that are in immediate need in order to remain open. The urban center schools fit this description since without diocesan subsidies and the Charitable Fund for Kids there would be no way for these schools to remain open. Type 2 schools fall within the next ring of the city schools. Most are found in the inner suburbs and serve blue-collar working parents. Many of these families struggle to pay tuition and if tuition was raised again, they may be forced to leave the schools. These schools serve predominately Catholic students, but increasingly enroll non-Catholic students to meet their budget. Type 3 schools are suburban schools that serve middle and upper middle class families. These schools are perceived to have no financial difficulties as they often have waiting lists.

Part of the current strategic plan is the formation of committees to address the various diocesan needs. The mandate for the educational committee is to provide for schools that are both Catholic in their identity and strong academically. The first order for the plan is that it provides Catholic schools for all who want to attend and that there is quality education. The second criterion is that these schools are accessible and viable from a financial standpoint. Superintendent Smith acknowledges that these are difficult objectives to reconcile especially when some pastors have already determined that Catholic schools simply cost too much to operate today. His hope is that the bishop will exert pressure on pastors to get on board with a diocesan plan that will increase fundraising efforts for the benefit of all schools. The magnitude of the challenge dominated my discussions with diocesan personnel in each department.

### **Sister Mary Louise at Our Lady of Hope Catholic School**

Predominately Polish immigrant families founded Our Lady of Hope Parish 76 years ago. By the 1970s, the neighborhood was beginning a gradual integration of minority families. Today, the school is only 1 to 3 % white or members of the parish. Despite of the incongruity between the parish and the school, about fifty percent of the parishioners are dedicated to the school's survival.

Sister Mary Louise has been principal for 17 years. She described the admissions experience. First there is an interview of the custodial parent or guardian. She examines

old report cards for evidence of satisfactory performance. She notes that it is important that students who enroll can be successful. All students are subject to a 90 day probationary period. Parents who enroll their children in the school typically seek a role for faith in education, discipline, good academics, and safety.

Sister Mary Louise is dedicated to the Catholic identity of Our Lady of Hope School. She described encounters with Catholic identity through daily religion classes and weekly prayer services. All parents sign a formal agreement to have their child participate in religious education. In 17 years she has never had a parent refuse to do so. The principal described about 70% of the parents as church-going. Many Black families are very active in their own churches and speak from a spiritual base. For example, a parent might say, "I know the Lord will provide." Or, "we know we need to keep them in our prayers." Sister Mary Louise sees these comments as evidence of the spiritual support these parents seek for their children. The remaining 30% are un-churched but are comfortable with the spiritual exposure their children receive at the Catholic school. She does offer parents religious education classes for those parents with an interest in learning more about the Catholic faith.

Sister Mary Louise noted that the parish gives a subsidy to the school and a substantial amount of money is acquired from the Kids Charitable Fund. The Heartland diocese also gives a subsidy to the school. Other methods to provide funds are the "adopt a school" and the "adopt a student" campaigns. Seventy to eighty percent of all students receive financial aid.

One weakness prevalent within the city schools is the lack of Black teachers. Sister Mary Louise tries to remedy the situation with Black staff and volunteers. She also responded to questions about the school's relationship with former alumnae. She noted that they are working hard to build a tighter relationship. They have an annual party where there are raffles and alumnae are encouraged to become informed about their old school.

At the school level, there are fears about the diocesan strategic plan and what will become of the parish schools. Parishioners believe that they have not been adequately heard and that school closures are inevitable. During the previous year, the diocesan office closed to schools with little discussion. A passionate debate continues between old-time parishioners who "need a say" in the outcome and critics on the current situation

who retort, “We can’t have seventy-year old altar boys.” Everyone knows that the fate of the schools is tied directly to decisions about parishes.

Sister Mary Louise chafes at the suggestion that the inner city schools, like hers, are not Catholic enough because they serve non-Catholic children. She resists the option that they become charter schools. She believes that the Church owes Heartland as a city these schools. Removing religion is not the answer, in her opinion. She considers her school a worthy project for the Church as it provides a service to the inner city children who will be the future leaders of Heartland. She argues that they need too morals and a religious foundation. She points to the leadership skills her school emphasizes. She wonders where the social justice mission of the Church fits into the current process for restructuring schools.

### **Sister Mary Jerome at St. Clare of the Poor Catholic School**

Saint Clare of the Poor School was built in 1950 as a Polish parish Catholic school. Enrollment began to drop in the sixties and seventies as the neighborhood became more ethnically diverse. This quarter of Heartland is an ethnic melting pot with many Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Because of the early ethnic mix, the neighborhood developed a unique quality life with many biracial families. There are biracial children representing every economic strata of Heartland. The current school enrollment reflects the ethnic mix as well as a high number of non-Catholic children (almost 70%). The history of the parish brings openness to evangelization. Students are predominately Baptist, Lutheran or Muslim. Most parents who enroll their children find a Catholic school attractive for the values that are transmitted.

Sister Mary Jerome, the principal, notes that all children participate in religion classes. Some Muslim will not allow their younger children to attend church, but once the children are more “formed” in their own religion it ceases to be a problem. Sister Mary Jerome respects these parent’s requests. Religion classes try to incorporate a larger picture of religion, for example, that the Koran is a holy book.

This school reflects a unique environment, as there are formal sessions for parents so that they can become informed about the Catholic religion. Their families are not proselytized but they are informed. There are two annual retreats for parents where they

learn about Catholic rituals, sacraments, prayers and music. Deep spiritual themes are explored. Sister Mary Jerome speaks convincingly about her role as missionary within this city environment. She believes that a proper technique and invitation leads to understanding and perhaps even conversion. Her argument rests on the belief that Eucharist, Reconciliation, and other Catholic Christian values are worth sharing.

When asked about the school's relationship with the parish, Sister Mary Jerome admits that virtually none exists. All children pay the same tuition. As is the case with other city center schools, the Kids Charity Fund provides the major financial support for the school. The Heartland diocese also gives a subsidy of over \$200,000. Sister Mary Jerome admits that the diocesan strategic plan seeks to reduce that amount. Recently the school developed an alumnae organization that has been active. Sister Mary Jerome indicated that the new addition to the school, including a gym, was paid for through a campaign led by the alums. Particularly those with strong ties to the neighborhood support the school.

Sister Mary Jerome worked as in foreign missions for many years and she brings that spirit to her work as principal of St. Clare of the Poor School. She believes that Catholics have an obligation to provide an invitation in faith to their neighbors. She sees her role as principal primarily as a catechist. And she defines the mission of the school in terms of spreading the Gospel. At the same time she rejects proselytizing in favor of her preferred term, "invitation."

When Sister Mary Jerome was asked to give evidence of Catholic identity within her school, she characterized the school as a community. Parents, students, and teachers are expected to join into that spirit, if they choose not to join in the community spirit, they are asked to go where they can. Sister believes that the more the community enters into the lives of the members, the stronger the community and the more the members benefit. She recognizes that her families have many personal problems, so they need the Gospel of hope. She does not think that it is helpful to separate the community into their separate churches as she recognizes that may lead to problems. She prefers to draw on those beliefs that all the members can share. She reminded that church is not about a building, but about community. Sister Mary Jerome believes that the Gospel message brings all people together.

The diocesan strategic plan seeks to restructure the parishes and Sister Mary Jerome fears that the decisions are being made without acknowledgement of the people whose lives will be affected. She argues that recognition of the Divine presence in the Eucharist and carried within each person is where you find Catholic identity. Sister Mary Jerome's passion for the Gospel is contagious.

### **Bryan Williams at the Cathedral School**

The Cathedral School was founded in 1914 and was actually built before the parish church. The 1920s and 1930s saw the Cathedral neighborhood as the center of Heartland's economic growth. Elite families build luxurious homes and the neighborhood reflected the success of these prominent businessmen. By 1953, a new school was needed and built by the parish. But in the 1960's economic decline began to set in as jobs decreased. Families started to move to the suburbs. Until the 1990's the neighborhood declined, but recently a neighborhood revival has attempted to salvage the historic homes.

Reflecting the change in neighborhood demographics, the school population dropped from a high near 1000 students, to the current numbers, less than 200. The school population is 95% African-American, 2% Latino, and 3% white. Only three to five percent of the students are Catholic.

Bryan Williams is a novice principal who was a former high school vice-principal and classroom teacher. He came to the Cathedral School to gain experience as a principal and improve his odds at becoming principal of a new diocesan middle school. Unfortunately for Bryan, the likelihood that a middle school will be formed has diminished as the restructuring discussion for the diocesan strategic plan has been revamped numerous times. Meanwhile, Bryan is dedicated to making Cathedral School work. He has developed a good relationship with the pastor and tries to create a school program based in character building. The current director of the cathedral provides masses and services. The parish provides about 50% or more in subsidies for the school's operating budget.

When parents seek admission to the school, Bryan notes that he emphasizes that the school is Catholic and asked if the parent is familiar with the Catholic Church or

school. Religion classes have a moral or values emphasis that transcends the students' various religions. Teachers attempt to focus on similarities between religious values.

As with the other inner city Catholic schools, Cathedral students are required to take religion class. Students attend Mass once a month and there is a weekly prayer service. No excuses are accepted. Parents who send their children to Cathedral School are often looking for discipline and order for their children.

Each of the inner-city schools competes for teachers with the other Catholic schools. Bryan notes that he needs teachers with classroom experience, content area specialty, classroom management skills, a positive attitude, and a degree of religiosity. The teacher does not have to be Catholic, but must be willing to promote Catholic values. Just like Sisters Mary Louise and Jerome, Bryan would like to have a more diverse teaching faculty to provide students with role models.

Bryan responds enthusiastically that Catholic identity within Cathedral School centers on developing a good moral character in the students. For example, students have required service hours. He used the sports program as an example of Catholic identity. The way the students are expected to act and respond at sporting events reflects the school's Catholic identity. He spoke the "Catholic way" of presenting right and wrong. Bryan states that students are expected to respect and support their classmates. These values are presented to parents so they too can provide support.

Bryan would like to build a stronger relationship with the school's alumnae. Many of them have become successful in the community and would make excellent student role models. Ultimately, Bryan distinguishes the school's Catholic identity with how the students act. He hopes that when his students are in the neighborhood and they are well-behaved, people will say, "they go to the Catholic school." To Bryan that is the substance of Catholic identity: Christian values expressed through action. Bryan adds that as a Christian he believes he also is held to a higher standard and must be an example. This is how he characterizes the role the school plays even with a predominately non-Catholic student body: To develop individuals willing to make a difference by doing the right thing.

### **Father George as School Pastor**

My interview with Father George immediately took on a different tenor. He arrived dressed in sweat pants and a jacket wearing a baseball cap. His demeanor resembled a priest who “lived on the streets.” He was unassuming, but serious. Whereas the other participants were gracious interviewees, Father George appeared agitated and motivated to deliver his thoughts on the research topic unfiltered, but reflective. His responses mirrored his thirty years as a pastor within the inner city and included the successes and shortcomings he experienced.

Father George began with a description of how the Catholic parishes “used to be.” He noted that a parish is belonged to the neighborhoods. And the parish sponsored neighborhood schools. The schools served churched children of parish families and were values centered. Catholicity superimposed itself over the neighborhood. There were Catholic teachers, Catholic religion classes and regular masses. Then, the Catholics moved to the suburbs where the schools were predictable and stable.

When the Catholics left the neighborhoods, the paradigm of catholicity over neighborhood schools remained. But the new families mainly wanted an option to public schools. They liked the idea of a small school with discipline and high academic standards. These were good people attracted to the values promoted within the Catholic schools. And the principals and teachers were prompted by a calling to serve these children.

Father George goes on thoughtfully and voicing regrets about how the transition to a new population within the neighborhoods was engaged by the Church. “I am not sure we did as much as we might have done to adapt to the God constituency of the school. We might have done more to adapt to the needs. We are insensitive to people of color, referring to them as “you people” in a condescending sort of voice. We could have done more to acclimate.”

All of these comments were prelude to Father George’s next statements. He seems to feel the need to respond to his critics. Father George closed his parish Catholic school and reopened it as a charter school. His actions have brought a fire-storm from individuals such as Sisters Mary Louise and Mary Jerome. Those women reject the charter movement as a replacement for inner city Catholic schools.

Father George goes on to explain that under the charter school they serve the same neighborhood kids, they have a Black principal and one Black teacher. He notes that they could not have afforded to hire them in the past. Some individuals interpret his move as “giving up” but he believes it is the appropriate response for the neighborhood. The new charter school is called Circle of Hope Academy. Hope is the overarching value and Father George goes on to say, "in some ways we were in a position to support the kids in their own denominational values." Again as a point of explanation or defense, Father George adds that if there were Catholic students in the neighborhood there would be no point in having a charter school, but only about five percent of the students are Catholic.

Father George is straight-forward in stating that money was the motivator. His parish had lost more than \$100,000 per year for the last two years. He points out that the "connection between parish in school was only institutional." The school took all the resources from the parish. He felt like he could not justify that to the parish. So Father George decided to follow a Gospel value of service. He explains that the parish has had a soup kitchen for many years. The soup kitchen does not just serve Catholics, but anyone who needs the service. That is a Catholic mission of service. He chose to follow that model with the school.

When moving from Catholic schools to charter schools, “you lose something, no doubt about it.” Father George continued. “I don't think charter schools will be as good as Catholic parish schools." But Father George hopes to build the culture of the school around hope values.

People such as Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Gandhi and Jesus all brought hope to the oppressed. Rights and responsibilities will be emphasized to students. “No doubt there will be a struggle about the values a charter school endorses and ours is taking place on the board and within the faculty,” Father George admitted. He explained that they have to write a hope curriculum where one did not exist and it is a challenge.

Father George believes that a charter school is a legitimate school and a legitimate way for Catholics to provide service. He knows that a good school is necessary for neighborhood development. Even a Catholic parish was regarded as a stabilizing institution within the neighborhood. That is why there are so many concerns about the

diocesan restructuring plan if it includes closing inner city parishes. Father George would argue that Catholic identity presents itself in many ways and service to the inner city through a soup kitchen, or a homeless shelter, or a charter school, are each legitimate service in light of the Gospel.

### **History of the Kids Charity Fund**

In 1970, Father Harry Bones recognized that the inner city had changed. He was a diocesan priest who understood fundraising as he had an economics degree. He and four Protestant pastors formed a group and approached local businesses about the importance of saving the inner city Catholic schools. In 1970, they raised \$100,000 for, at that time, 12 schools. They preached on Sundays and had special collections. They visited parish councils to plead their case. And perhaps most important, Father Harry cooked for an annual chili luncheon for the Priest Personnel Board in an effort to place pastors sympathetic to inner city schools at those parishes.

Over time, the schools became smaller, many were consolidated or closed, and the needs became larger. The Kids Charity Fund decided to establish a development office. They hold an annual banquet where inner city school graduates are honored and students provide the entertainment. Even with large amount of money raised, the schools were still needy. Father George was a good friend of Father Harry during these years. Father George proclaims that there needs to be a “conversion of attitude” so that all Catholics recognize their responsibilities.

The Kids Charity Fund is now part of the strategic plan discussions and no one knows what the future will be. There are concerns that the grassroots nature of the network will be lost. Previously, principals and pastors made the decisions, but the trend seems to be toward the diocesan level. Many would argue that is a contradiction of the Church’s subsidiary rule.

### **Discussion of the findings**

Contemplative leadership practice demonstrates the relationship between fundamental beliefs and decision-making within Catholic schools (Schuttloffel, 1999). Each decision a school leader makes reflects an understanding and engagement of the

Gospel values and Church teaching provide the *why* or the critical level of reflection for the decision making for Catholic school leaders. One might argue that the spiritual and corporal works of mercy are an example the technical aspect or *how* for Catholic practice. Church membership and mainstream society regularly interpret Catholic educational practice looking for a message or meaning that is consistent with the Church's fundamental principles articulated through documents and teachings.

According a commonly accepted definition (Schuttloffel, 1999, p. ), Gospel values include the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity) and the four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice) and Church teachings specific to how to live out these virtues. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy typically exemplify virtuous living (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994).

One of the most common themes within Church documents in the twentieth century is social justice. Beginning with *Rerum Novarem* and continued through more recent USCCB documents on the definition and practices of social justice (1986), the Catholic Church propagated the concept of social justice before modern culture popularized the term.

In the twentieth century, American Catholic Bishops distinguished themselves through documents that clarified and strengthened the Church's position on numerous social justice issues. These documents intentionally help to shape the leadership role the Catholic Church enjoyed in American society until the sexual abuse scandals. These documents were influenced by previous writings concerning the social state of the worker in the world and the risks of the modern political environment (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891; *Mater et Magistra*, 1961).

Catholic social teaching addresses the following ten topics (Krietemeyer, 2000): human dignity, community and the common good, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor, participation, work and rights of workers, stewardship of creation, solidarity, the role of government, and promotion of peace. Often these topics are summarized within seven themes: (1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person, (2) Call to Family, Community, and Participation, (3) Rights and Responsibilities, (4) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, (5) The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, (6) Solidarity, and (7) Care for God's Creation ([www.USCCB.org](http://www.USCCB.org)). Human dignity refers to the belief that all

persons are created in the image and likeness of God, and thereby, are worthy of respect. Community and common good refers to the need to consider the welfare of others beyond oneself and those actions that build-up community. Rights and responsibilities emphasize the balance between these two concepts in a society that focuses on rights of the individual often overlooking responsibilities to the common good or community. Option for the poor brings to the forefront not only those actions that favor the common good, but also those actions that give preference to the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized. Participation includes those behaviors that require removing ourselves from our comfort zone and taking public action. Work and rights of workers have a long history in Catholic social teaching articulated by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum.*, which emphasized the rights and well-being of the worker during the peak of industrial society. Stewardship of creation reminds Catholics that responsibility and the common good do not refer only to humans, but to God's entire creation. Solidarity was clearly demonstrated during the fall of communism as the ability of individuals to stand together for a common, worthy cause that liberates. The role of government characterizes the fact that individuals cannot always solve their problems alone. Government might need to intervene and assist in addressing the needs that go beyond the resources of individuals. Promotion of peace is the fruition of the challenge of Christianity. These topics demonstrate the breadth of the Catholic Church's challenge for social justice thinking and practice within American society.

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops circulates numerous publications that explore social justice and its integration into the lives of American Catholics including *Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*. Also includes the *Summary Report of the Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education*, *Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today*, and the *Tenth Anniversary Edition of Economic Justice for All and Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. The National Catholic Educational Association also provides guidance for teachers to embed Catholic social justice teaching within curricula: *Leaven for the Modern World: Catholic social teaching and Catholic education* and *Integrating the Social Teaching of the Church into Catholic Schools: Conversations in Excellence 2000*.

Gospel values and Church teaching provide the *why* or the critical level of reflection for the decision making for Catholic school leaders. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy are an example the technical aspect or *how* for Catholic practice. Catholic educational decisions inherently create meaning or send a message to students, teachers, and parents. Church membership and mainstream society regularly interpret Catholic educational practice looking for a message or meaning that is consistent with the Church's fundamental principles articulated through documents and teachings.

When analyzing the case study data, the relationship between contemplative practice and participant comments becomes fairly obvious. The influence of Catholic social justice teaching is a theme throughout the interviews with Sisters Mary Louise and Mary Jerome, Father George and Bryan. Each of these individuals argued for the continuation of Catholic parishes and schools within the inner city, not for the growth of the Church, but to fulfill the Church's obligation to support stability of inner city neighborhoods. The well being of the aged, poor, and minorities is directly tied to the ability of neighborhoods to retain quality institutions.

Father George argues that the same rationale that provides for a Catholic church sponsored soup kitchen or homeless shelter can be used to defend a Catholic school for non-Catholics. Sister Mary Louise sees Catholic education as the vehicle for developing Heartland's future minority leadership. She wants those future leaders shaped by Gospel values. Sister Mary Jerome believes that parishes and schools are the key elements in forming a community spirit built on respect and understanding. Her rationale claims that authentic Catholic social justice requires Catholics to lift others up whether or not they are Catholic. Bryan offers a motivation that also includes character and leadership development for the community's benefit.

Implicit and explicit in the remarks of these Catholic school leaders is the influence of Catholic social justice teaching. For them, the appropriateness of service to the inner city is obvious and the rationale resides within the Church's own teaching. Each of the participants rejects the mentality of "Catholic schools for Catholic kids" and "we can't afford to keep these schools open" as counter arguments. Their fundamental beliefs, based in Gospel values, demand that the Church maintains a presence within the inner city for the welfare of the city and the Church. The study's participants do not

associate Catholic identity with the number of Catholic students in a school. Their definition of Catholic identity is associated with contemplative practice. The connection between beliefs (Catholic social justice teaching) and action (inner city Catholic parishes and schools) defines Catholic identity for the participants of this study.

Sister Mary Louise responds forthrightly [when asked about school closings], “Where does social justice fit in?” Sister Mary Jerome asks [about school closings], “Where is the Gospel of hope?” Bryan states, “Catholic identity is in their [students] actions.” And Father George argues for his charter school, “a charter school is . . . a legitimate way for Catholics to provide service [to the neighborhood].”

At the same time Superintendent Smith states the obvious, that the schools need money to survive and time is running out. All of the participants know that the financial reality drives the decisions made at the Diocesan Schools Office. At the parish school level, each community lobbies for its individual significance, but the reality is that several parishes are within steeple view of each other. Unless there is a rapid reversal in population, neither parishioners nor the diocese can continue to maintain every single parish. Members of the diocesan strategic planning task force grapple with multiple strategies to levy funds. The dilemma between finances and social justice wears on the arguments of the participants. The future seems to hold more painful decisions.

### **Lessons Learned from the Diocese of Heartland**

The conflict between finances and social justice is a dilemma faced by numerous dioceses in the United States. Contemplative practice challenges Catholic educational leaders to be thoughtful about principles when making decisions. The Diocese of Heartland provides no simple solution, no educational silver bullet, but there are dispositions and ideas to consider. For more than 30 years the Kids Charitable Fund worked to keep inner city schools open. The concept has potential if the dollar amount could be substantially increased. Businesses, charitable foundations, and government have much to gain by investments into institutions with a proven track record. Catholic hospitals and clinics are an example of institutions that receive private and public funds in order to carry out their works. Inner city Catholic schools provide a service to the

larger civic community beyond the Catholic Church. Debates over charter schools and vouchers are short sighted when the evidence demonstrates these schools' effectiveness at educating poor minority students. The pivotal question is whether these inner city Catholic schools would be as effective if the Catholic identity is removed (e.g., charter school)? Charter schools are simply too young to provide an unequivocal answer. More research will be required to address this question.

One of Father George's comments requires serious consideration if any resolution to the plight of the poor and marginalized populating inner cities will be found. He called for a "change in attitude." The obligation of the larger community, Church and civic, state and national, to serve the needs of the poor and marginalized whether they live in the inner city or in rural areas or in remote mountain regions, must be engaged. Until everyone feels a connection to other human beings, inner city gentrification and urban renewal will only relocate the poor, but not reconnect them to the Gospel of hope. A fundamental change in attitude, a dispositional quality, addresses the dilemma of finances or social justice as not an either or choice, but as a challenge to a community's creative thinking. The risk is that a change in attitude takes time, and time is always running out for the inner city schools.

Sister Mary Jerome asked me, "Where are the holy men and women [who will figure out a solution]?" Her question challenges each of us, Catholic or not, to consider our obligation to those in our community, nation, and world, who do not look like us, pray like us, or talk like us, but who are created by God, like us. Where are the saints of our time? What would saints do in our time?

## **References**

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