

**HOW IS RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP UNDERSTOOD AND PRACTISED BY  
PRINCIPALS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH  
AUSTRALIA?**

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## **STATEMENT OF SOURCES**

I, Francis Joseph McEvoy, declare that this thesis is wholly my own work.

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee, Register Number: V2004.05-11.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the religious dimension of the role of the principal in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia.

The study is set in the context of a complex and changing environment. Society is becoming increasingly secular, and religious values are on the wane. The role of the principal has become progressively more encumbered by government regulation and policy and an increased level of accountability for a wide range of school outcomes, many of these outside the core purposes of the school (Fullan, 2003). In Catholic schools, the numbers of the professed religious men and women, traditionally the backbone of those schools, has declined dramatically in the last two decades and lay persons have taken over from members of religious congregations as principals in most Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia

This represents a paradigm shift in leadership in the Catholic schools. It has resulted in an increased focus from within both the Church and the Catholic Education System on the essential Catholic nature of those schools, and the role of the Principal in nurturing and managing this.

The study found that principals had a deep sense of the importance of this dimension of their role, but that they felt a real need for more support and formation, especially in the scriptural and theological aspects of leadership. Most

felt pressured by the 'normal' routine of principalship, and were looking for ways to 'make time' for reflection in order to better ground their actions and decisions in the core values of the schools, the System and the Church.

As a result of this research, a series of recommendations are offered to Church and System authorities, to principals and to those aspiring to be principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. These relate to professional practice in such areas as defining the nature of the Catholic schools, and recognizing their particular charisms; developing leadership succession strategies and preparation courses for aspiring leaders; exploring alternative approaches to the principal selection process, and developing a mentoring program and professional support networks.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACU	Australian Catholic University
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CEO	Catholic Education Office (SA)
CESA	Catholic Education South Australia
Co-ed	Co-educational School (mixed male and female student cohort)
CPMS	<i>Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools</i> (Document of The Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002)
CS	<i>The Catholic School</i> (Document of The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977)
CSTM	<i>The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium</i> (Document of The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998)
CTC	Catholic Theological College
DCE	<i>Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)</i> (Document of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 1965)
DP	Deputy Principal
ERG	Expert Reference Group
LCS	<i>Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith</i> (Document of The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982)

RDE	<i>The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School</i> (Document of The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Coordinator
SA	South Australia
SACCS	South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools
SCCE	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
SAICTE	South Australian Institute for Catholic Teacher Training
UniSA	University of South Australia
VSAT	Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania – acronym for the 2003 Report (Carlin et al) on leadership succession in those three States.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Nature and Scope of the Study: an Introduction to Religious Leadership**

#### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The Catholic school has its presence in the heart of a world dominated by challenges arising from new technologies, environmental concerns, global warming and terrorism, and where the gap between the rich and the poor, even in a relatively affluent country such as Australia, grows daily wider. Within this world, the Catholic school is called to engage in the dramatic endeavour of “the evangelising mission of the Church” (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997, par 11 – herein after shown as CSTM). This is indeed a challenge.

The principal of the Catholic school must respond to this challenge – daunting as it is – with the added complication of staff, families and students who often have little experience of the Catholic tradition, many of whom are apathetic (CSTM, 1997) to religious matters. Such a challenge calls for more than simply ‘management’ of the school; it calls for a more expansive understanding of leadership, which embraces the formation, nurturing, and inspiration of a faith community in that secular world. In this role, the principal occupies centre stage within this drama, as “one of the chief guardians of the integrity of the drama of schooling”

(Starratt, 1990a, p. 115) who is responsible for raising the enterprise to the highest level of authenticity, as Catholic.

It is a demanding role, with the principal at times strutting the stage, at other times working behind the scenes. It is a complex role, answerable to church, community and state, in terms of both its educational and its religious quality! In this drama of schooling, the principal is chief critic, scene setter, coach and mentor, defining the parameters of the performance. This is the person whose courage, passion, authenticity and presence creates the reality, orchestrates the performance that is the Catholic school! An understanding of this central responsibility is essential to the success of the school as authentically Catholic.

In any school system, principalship is a multidimensional role, and this is even more so in the Catholic school, where the responsibility for the integrity of the school as Catholic immerses the principal in religious leadership. This is not an extra dimension of the role, but a central defining characteristic of it.

Catholic Education, South Australia (herein after, CESA) mandates four key aspects of leadership for principals - Religious, Educational, Community and Administrative (see Appendix A). This study focuses on the religious leadership dimension, but not as a subset of leadership, rather, as the framework within which the leadership of an individual is practised. It represents a “dramatic consciousness” (Starratt, 1990a, p. 81) underpinning and informing all the actions, decisions and priorities of the principal, and it



requires of the religious leader in such a community, a congruence between the principal's self and the integral purposes and values of the school: "the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king!" (Hamlet, Act 11, scene ii).

The Catholic school is required to meet two standards: it must be both a good 'school', and authentically 'Catholic'. This duality of the sacred and secular (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Thomas, 1997; CSTM 1997; Guerra, 2000; Grace, 2002) creates a particular challenge for the principal, yet unless the school is, in its essence, Catholic (whatever that may mean), it fails to justify its existence separate from schools in other systems. It is a matter of priorities: Grace (2002) writes of the world of faith informing the secular, sacralizing the secular. His observation that "Catholic schools of the future and their school leaders and teachers have to devise ways, in changing conditions, of remaining faithful to the principle of St Thomas More: that they should be 'the King's good servant, but God's first'" (Grace, 2002, p. xiii) has particular appeal to me as a staff member at Thomas More College, where these words of More are part of the script, underpinning the Catholic culture of that school. Being 'Catholic' as school is the rationale for the existence of Catholic schools (The Catholic School, 1977 – herein after shown as CS – par. 3), and the maintenance of this character must be understood as one of the key roles of the principal, as a religious leader.

The Catholic school is part of a bigger enterprise, the work of salvation itself (CS, 1977). The school is the "play-within-the-play" (Starratt, 1990b, p. 53),

and its prime purposes are to keep the Catholic faith alive amidst its community, to infuse the everyday with the sacred, and to bring about integration between faith and life (CS, 1977) in those with whom it works. The principal is key to this responsibility, and in the role of religious leader and director of this drama, he/she must have “a clear sense of the play’s unity and integrity” (Starratt, 1990a, p. 19). The principal’s understanding of this core responsibility is essential for the success of the Catholic school within this mission.

In the Catholic educational process, faith is not peripheral, “a mere adjunct” to a secular process. It “penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission” (CSTM 1997, par 11). It is the motif that holds the drama together, that defines the rationale and substance of its existence. While the Catholic school as ‘school’ is “subject to scrutiny from a number of different sources” (Guerra, 2000, p. 83), there is now a “growing accountability for schools to be demonstrably Catholic” (Wallace, 2000, p. 201), and the principal, as “faith leader, is the key to this” (Wallace, 2000, p. 201). In view of this, and the complexity of the education system generally, the Catholic Secondary School principal in South Australia must be supported in this role by the resources of both the Church and the Catholic Education System.

“As systems and individual schools move towards an ‘ideological regeneration” (Sullivan, 2001. p. 14) of their Catholic identity, religious leadership is a dimension of the principal’s role which has become more

explicitly recognised. It has been taken up by bodies such as the National Catholic Education Commission (Australia) as the theme for their Conference in Melbourne in August 2005 – “Leadership in the Religious Domain: Leading in Catholic Schools.” Writers such as McLaughlin (1998) and Duignan (2002) in Australia; Grace (2002) in the United Kingdom; and Starratt (2004) and Cook (2002) in the United States have helped to bring the concept to the fore of academic interest and research. Its importance has been further emphasised in documents such as “The VSAT Report” – (Carlin, d’Arbon, Dorman, Duignan & Neidhart, 2003, “Leadership Succession for Catholic Schools in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania”) - and in policy statements from the various Catholic Education Organisations, notably here in South Australia in the document *Religious Leadership in a Catholic School* (South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (herein after shown as SACCS), May 2004).

In this context, the key issues that are emerging in this drama, and which frame this research, are

- The need to develop common understandings about what it means to be ‘Catholic’ and about the purposes of Catholic schools
- The need for Church and System authorities and principals themselves, to explore ways whereby principals can enhance their mission integrity as leaders in Catholic schools.

- The need for both Church and System to work together to support and affirm the principal in his/her responsibility for authentic religious leadership
- The need to develop mechanisms for documenting and sharing practice wisdom about religious leadership within the System
- The need to develop and refine mechanisms for discerning and selecting persons who are appropriately qualified, both personally and professionally, for the role of principal in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia

## **1.2 Research Aim**

In view of these issues,

**The aim of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to the role and practice of the Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia.**

## **1.3 Research Questions**

To achieve this aim, the study was designed to gather the views of some of the key stakeholders in the field, exploring their understandings of the concept of religious leadership, the attributes they would expect of a person taking on

this responsibility, and the ways in which potential candidates for leadership might best be prepared for the role.

Three Research Questions were developed to facilitate this exploration:

### **Research Question 1**

What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'religious leadership' and how does this shape the role of the principal in a Catholic Secondary School?

### **Research Question 2**

How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

### **Research Question 3**

What are the key principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

## **1.4 Scope of the Research**

The study utilises a Qualitative methodology, seeking to construct meaning from the reflections of practitioners arising out of their interactions with and experiences in the worlds of Church and school. It is an exploration of their

way of thinking about the essential religious purposes of the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia; and their ways of approaching and conceptualising religious leadership as the key to those purposes.

The discourse was limited to the participation of three interest groups: the Church, the System authorities (Directors) and the principals themselves. Clearly other groups have an interest in the leadership of Catholic Secondary Schools, not the least of these being the parents and students, but practical constraints of time and space necessitated this restriction. The role of the community in shaping the principalship was recognised, and forms part of the discourse, but it was not feasible to include representatives in the research. Another group omitted was the teaching staff and those who work with the principal in developing and nurturing the religious climate of the school. These groups may be included in a future research project.

The scope of the study was also limited in its application exclusively to the secondary school sector in South Australia. This restriction enabled a complete survey of the principal cohort to be attempted. It also recognised the particular context of the secondary school.

Secondary schools present a particular problem in the context of religious leadership. Students at this level are adolescents, typically questioning of authority and established norms. Secondary schools themselves also have a tradition of independence in South Australia, and tend to be regional rather than parochial in their affiliations: thus the ties to a parish or a particular

community are less developed than those in the primary schools. The agenda of the schools is also different, with the focus being on subjects, rather than the more holistic approach of the primary schools, and geared towards exams and careers: everything has a 'functional' end point. The decline across South Australia of subjects perceived to be 'less vocationally useful' in the humanities and the arts provides anecdotal evidence of the impact of this trend on the school curriculum. In this utilitarian context, 'religion' as a subject struggles, and engagement with formal Church life as part of life for young people is difficult to nurture! Dwyer (1993) maintained that

Catholic secondary schools are more complex (than primary schools). They tend to be more self-contained and some are relatively isolated from the wider Catholic school culture. They are more subject to the influences of the external examination system and are often more directly affected by government regulations.  
(p.105)

My own experience would indicate that Dwyer's comments are still relevant now, over a decade later, and in this they emphasise the importance of this focus on religious leadership in the secondary schools. Secondary schools are also "often perceived – by parents, priests, scholars and even some teachers themselves – as less effective as agents of evangelisation than the country parish schools" (Dwyer, 1993, p. 105). These factors collectively present a significant challenge to principals in the religious dimension of their role, and it is largely for this reason that the study has focused on the secondary school.

## 1.5 Overview of the Study

The study is presented in eight chapters. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the structure.

*Table 1.1: Overview of the Study*

Chapter 1	The Nature and Scope of the Study: an Introduction to Religious Leadership
Chapter 2	The Research Context
Chapter 3	Review of Literature
Chapter 4	Research Design
Chapter 5	The Church and System Authorities on 'Religious Leadership'
Chapter 6	The Principal as 'Religious Leader'
Chapter 7	Principal Selection and Formation
Chapter 8	Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

In chapter 2 the issue of 'Religious Leadership' and its significance in the role of the principal is developed in the context of the Catholic Education System of South Australia, and situated in relation to the Catholic Secondary Schools. Factors such as the changing natures of the Church and the school systems, the complexity of leadership, and the emergence of lay principals in the Catholic schools are explored, and three key research questions are outlined, each examining a different aspect of the research problem.



Chapter 3 examines elements of the literature pertaining to the area of leadership in schools, and specifically religious leadership and Catholic school. The documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education enunciate the universal principles under which the enterprise of Catholic Education is developed. These principles provide a frame within which the review of literature is located. Within this context, the body of literature dealing with the purposes of Catholic schools, their communities and their culture, as well as the practical and pastoral tasks of those schools is canvassed. Different approaches to leadership are considered, and from this framework the concept of religious leadership in Catholic schools is reviewed. Overall, the literature offers a theoretical approach to the role, and the lack of material from a practical leadership perspective is identified as a gap or lacuna in the field, which this study addresses.

Chapter 4 details the approach to data collection and analysis taken in the thesis. It presents the epistemological underpinnings of the research, establishes its foundations as a qualitative undertaking, and outlines an approach to the research involving a combination of case study, grounded theory and discourse analysis. Data collection strategies are specified; limitations and delimitations are outlined; ethical issues are presented and responses to the issues of generalisability, validity and dependability are described. A timeline for the study concludes the chapter.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 describe the data obtained from the various sources, organised separately in response to the three key research questions.

Chapter 5 contains the reflections of the Bishops and the Directors of Catholic Education regarding their understandings of the purposes of Catholic schools in South Australia, and their expectations of the principals who lead them. It identifies the essential religious character of the role and discusses the implications, both for schools and for individuals, of the transference of leadership from members of Religious Congregations to lay persons.

These themes are then taken up in chapter 6, in which the question of religious leadership is approached from the perspective of the practitioners. The principals' own understandings of the role, and the implications these have for their approach to leadership are investigated, as well as the challenges they face in developing an authentic Catholic culture in the schools in the midst of an essentially secular society. The particular context of lay leadership, including the community's expectations of these new leaders, is also highlighted.

Chapter 7 focuses on the processes of discernment, formation and selection of potential principals, and on the issues that need to be addressed if religious leadership is to be nurtured and enhanced in South Australian Catholic Secondary Schools in the future. Data from all groups in the study is used to explore the attributes required of those taking on this religious leadership, and the range of supports that are, or need to be, available to principals generally,

but especially in this key dimension of their role. Within this discussion, a strong emphasis is placed on the developing paradigm of lay leadership in the System in South Australia and the implications of this for nurturing the charisms of these schools.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study in light of the aim of the research and the discussions of the findings outlined in the previous chapters. Some implications for the profession in regard to the enhancement and nurturing of religious leadership, are also identified.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Research Context**

#### **2.1 Religious Leadership and the Principal**

The first chapter identified 'Religious Leadership' as a significant dimension of the role of the principal of a Catholic school, and, in a broader sense, as a vital part of the mission of the Catholic Church. The importance of the principal's role in establishing and nurturing the religious culture of the school was introduced, and the perceived competing duality of secular and sacred in the organisation of the school and in the demands on the principal was also briefly explored.

In this chapter, that issue of 'Religious Leadership' and its significance in the role of the principal is developed in the context of the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia. The changing nature of the Church and the school system, the complexity of leadership in this "new millennium" (CSTM, 1997), and the emergence of lay principals as leaders in the Catholic schools is explored. From this, the research problem is identified in its South Australian context, and three key questions emerge, each examining different aspects of that problem. These frame the review of literature and the research direction for the thesis.

In schools throughout the Catholic Education System in South Australia, as in many other jurisdictions around the world, the issue of 'Religious Leadership'

and Catholic schools is a topic of current discussion and debate. It was the focus of a plenary meeting of all principals (Primary and Secondary) called by the Archbishop of Adelaide and the Director of Catholic Education in South Australia in August 2003; and it is the topic of a policy paper released in 2005, intended to be a defining statement for all in leadership positions in these schools. It is however, a dimension of leadership practice that causes uncertainty and at times anxiety amongst principals, as they negotiate and balance the religious, educational and social imperatives of their role.

The policy document “Religious Leadership in a Catholic School” states the religious position of school officers such as the principal unequivocally:

“Those who are appointed to designated Religious Leadership roles in a Catholic school have committed themselves to a public ministry in the Church” (SACCS, 2004, p. 5). Neidhart and Carlin (2003, p. 5) had previously identified this imperative, pointing out that, on top of the existing “responsibilities and pressures, Catholic school principals have religious obligations. Catholic schools exist in the context of the Church’s official mission to promote Gospel values ... (which has) resulted in expanded roles for Principals as religious leaders of the school community.”

In this third millennium, the Catholic Church re-asserts the understanding that the Catholic school is “a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral responsibility” (CSTM 1997 par.11). Such statements situate the role of the principal of a Catholic school firmly within the formal language and authority of that Church – the principalship is a religious position, a

position of ministry, concerned with the mission of the Church. Yet religious leadership is a nebulous notion, likely to be both described, and enacted in practice, in very different ways by different people. Sergiovanni (1995) describes the religious dimension of the principal's role as

knowing about, and making available church documents and other religious resources, providing for spiritual development, being a leader in prayer, creating an environment for religious education, integrating Gospel values and other religious principles into the curriculum, and service to parish and civic community. (p.6)

The Vatican document, "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith" (The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 – herein after shown as SCCE), whilst not dealing explicitly with the role of the principal, refers to the lay educators (who even then constituted the majority of the teaching force in Catholic schools in Australia) exercising "a specific mission within the Church ... they share in the sanctifying, and therefore educational mission of the Church; they cannot regard themselves as cut off from the ecclesial complex" (par. 24). This mission is further described as a "personal vocation in the Church," a calling - "it is, therefore, very desirable that every lay Catholic educator become fully aware of the importance, the richness, and the responsibility of this vocation" (par. 37). Fleming (2002) takes this notion further, and suggests that "referring to the life of a teacher as a vocation, and stressing their role as witness, frames the teacher in church language, as opposed to their primary function as educators" (p. 37). What is written for the

teacher is most certainly also meant for the head teacher and this situates the principalship of a Catholic school very firmly in the religious dimension.

Religious Leadership in a Catholic Secondary School – the focus of this study – is a complex concept. While the essence of such leadership is clearly centred in the person of Jesus Christ (Sultmann & McLaughlin, 2000; McLaughlin, 1997), a simple, practical definition for the term remains to be established in the literature. From my own experience, practice and observation, and drawing on the literature in the area, I have used the following 'working definition' as a starting point for this discussion of religious leadership in relation to the role of the principal in a Catholic School:

Religious leadership constitutes ...

- those actions - conscious and deliberate, or unconscious but none the less powerful - which provide meaning and direction to the community as to its basic purposes and values (Sergiovanni, 1984, 1995; Starratt, 1986: Flynn, 1993; Grace, 2002; Fullan, 2003); and
- those actions and intentions of the principal that give life to the religious culture and values underlying the culture and curriculum of the school (Flynn, 1993; Schuttloffel, 1999; Cook, 2002)

In the context of the Catholic Secondary school in particular, those actions and intentions are necessarily defined by Catholic teaching and tradition.

Given this understanding, this relatively clear statement of such a key term in

the research has helped to set the direction of questions in interviews and to frame the survey instrument used later in the research process. However, it is important to recognise that, in situating religious leadership in the realm of the 'actions' of the principal, this 'Religious Leadership' is not a subset of leadership, something 'extra' that the leader of the Catholic school must factor into actions. Rather, it is the framework within which the leadership of an individual is practised, consisting of the ideals, values and beliefs that inspire the actions (Flynn, 1993; Fullan, 2003). It is a state of being, a consciousness, which underpins and informs all actions and processes – and the very way in which that leadership is evidenced. It is, in essence, what that person brings to the role in his or her own self (Grace, 2002). This is authentic leadership (Terry, 1993; Duignan, 2002; Starratt, 2004), "internal, not external" (Stone, 2005, p.6). It is "ethical leadership" – acting "from the principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values in the leader's espoused system of ethics" (Starratt, 2004, p.5). It is that integration of faith and culture, and of faith and life spoken of in *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977, pars. 38-44), which in many ways is a paradigm for this approach to leadership – and specifically to religious leadership.

## **2.2 South Australian Context of the Research**

Catholic Education in South Australia began in 1844 when the original chapel-school was established in Pirie St., within the City of Adelaide, under instruction from Bishop Francis Murphy. In those early years, the schools were seen as "essential not only to the effective formation of children in the



faith but also to the continuance of the faith in Australia” (Battams, 2002, p. 269), and so the Bishop appointed Mr. and Mrs. William James as the first teachers. “From this beginning of probably a handful of students, Catholic education in South Australia has grown 160 years later to (include) more than 46,000 students and 106 schools” (Thomas, 2005, p. 4). In those early years, the vast majority of staff, including the principals, were lay persons, but after the arrival of members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1856, the formation of the Sisters of St Joseph in 1867 (a congregation of religious women, often called the Josephites, founded in SA by Sister Mary of the Cross - Mary MacKillop) and the influx of a number of other religious congregations in succeeding years, the picture changed. In 1866, Fr. Julian Tenison Woods was appointed as Director-General of Catholic Education in South Australia, and a systematic development of this fledgling education enterprise began. A fundamental “perception that Catholic education (was) best undertaken by religious” (Thomas, 2005, p.4) drove the movement, and Thomas (2005) noted that,

with the advent of these religious orders the number of schools conducted by lay people diminished such that during the period 1870 to 1900 the number of lay-taught schools decreased from 20 to three and the number of religious-taught schools increased from 36 to 42. The last Catholic school conducted by a lay person prior to the last couple of decades was St. Thomas’ Goodwood ... conducted by Thomas Grogan. (p.5)

Such was the concentration and investment of the personnel and financial resources of the church in this emerging Catholic school system, that “by the first half of the twentieth century the Catholic school system, comprising both primary and secondary schools, had become the Australian church’s largest pastoral organization toward which the major proportion of the church’s resources were devoted” (Battams, 2002, p. 270).

This situation remained the status quo in South Australia until the pressures of society post World War Two began to have their impact. The “rapidly increasing population of Catholic migrants, the baby-boom generation and the decline in members of religious orders teaching in schools meant that resources became stretched” (Ryan, Brennan & Willmetts, 1996, p. 36). These concerns were coupled with increasing expectations in the Catholic community about the standard of facilities in the schools, as well as issues such as class sizes, teaching qualifications of staff, school retention rates and government funding. Such pressures were most intensely experienced in the secondary arena, with the students in years eight through to twelve (from the ages of approximately thirteen to eighteen years). Some of these pressures are illustrated by the statistics: in 1966 there were 6,314 students in Catholic Secondary Schools in SA: by 1975 there were 9,584 (Thomas, 2005), an increase of over 50% in less than a decade. More, and better-qualified teachers were needed for these students, and they were sourced from the increasingly educated Catholic lay community. This progress can be observed in Table 2.1 below.

*Table 2.1 Growth in the Numbers of Lay Staff in Catholic Schools, SA:  
1969 to 2005*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage of lay teachers of all teachers in Catholic Schools, SA</b>
1969	53.5
1986	91.3
2005	99.5

(after Thomas, 2005, p.6)

These figures are not peculiar to South Australia, or even Australia: similar figures, for example, are presented by Tuohy (2005, p. 7) in relation to the Irish situation. There has been a worldwide trend towards an increasing involvement of lay people in Catholic schools in this period.

When the Second Vatican Council was convened, about seventy five per cent of those teaching in Catholic schools around the world were priests and religious personnel. Since then, this “great clerico-religious enterprise” (Arthur, 1994, p. 174) has undergone a radical transformation. By 1986, over eighty per cent of teachers were lay men and women (Hunt, 1986, p. 109) and this percentage continued to increase in each subsequent year. (O’Donoghue, 1997, p. 31)

In this context, it is important to note that South Australia, unlike a number of the other Australian States, has never had a Catholic Teacher Training College. Recognising the need for formation of the growing lay group within the schools, and to maintain and protect the religious character and content of those schools, the Catholic Education Office (herein after shown as CEO)

developed a range of inservice offerings in the areas of theology and scripture in the mid to late 1970s. These courses supported teachers established in Catholic schools, but they were informal and unaccredited. A more formal approach emerged in the mid 1980s, when first the Centre for Catholic Studies was set up to provide courses for leadership (unaccredited), and then the South Australian Institute for Catholic Teacher Education (SAICTE) was formed to develop and coordinate tertiary courses linking theology and scripture with the practice of teaching and leading in the Catholic school. As a result, in the late 80s the 'Catholic strand' of the Bachelor of Education in the University of South Australia (UniSA) was established, and the Australian Catholic University (ACU) was contracted to deliver Masters level courses in Educational Administration and later, in Religious Education and Educational Leadership. These courses were theologically grounded, and directly and practically related to service and leadership in the Catholic school system. By the 1990s UniSA had developed its own courses in Catholic Studies, culminating in Masters and Higher Degree options, and in 1998 the Catholic Theological College of South Australia (CTC), a member college of the ecumenical Adelaide College of Divinity, had emerged as a further provider of professional development and academic courses for teachers and leaders in Catholic schools (Source: personal communications from CEO and CTC personnel. For a graphic representation of this development, see Appendix B).

The development of this network of Catholic education and leadership courses reflected the vision and commitment of the Directors of Catholic

Education in South Australia, and the Catholic Education community generally, to developing in the local situation a broader and more substantial range of qualification options in the religious domain, particularly for those in positions of responsibility. Thomas (2005, p. 6) described the teaching cohort in Catholic schools in South Australia as “among the most highly qualified in Australia”, but perhaps a more objective assessment of the success of this policy at the leadership level lies in the reality that of the 33 currently serving principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia, 23 have at least one post graduate qualification in some form of Catholic based study, another 3 are currently enrolled in higher level courses, and of the remainder, most have undertaken formation and studied extensively in the area, though perhaps not for formal qualifications (Survey of Principals in this study).

The growth in the lay teaching force was eventually reflected in the changing face of the leadership, both of the schools and of the System. The last thirty-five years saw a dramatic shift in South Australia, as in other States, to lay leadership of the Catholic Schools. This role of principal, which (apart from the very earliest years of establishment) once belonged almost exclusively to the Religious Orders, is now almost entirely the domain of the lay person. The change was most significantly seen “in 1972 (when) the first lay Director of Catholic Education, Mr. John McDonald, was appointed. (And then) in 1973 the first lay Principal ... was appointed to Mercedes College” (Thomas, 2005, p. 6). By the start of 2005, of the thirty-two Catholic Secondary Schools in this State, twenty-five were led by a lay person - and that number will increase again in the near future (source: CEO, South Australia, 2005).

The way in which principals are appointed has undergone considerable change in this period. When Religious Congregations provided principals for their schools from within the Order's own personnel, a balance between the religious and the educational imperatives, and the availability of a willing candidate were the main considerations in determining who would fill the role in each school (source: conversations with two former Congregation Leaders). That system served these schools well – these “Religious Orders ... made a unique and unrepeatable contribution to life in Australia” (Densley, 1997, p. 71) - and the symbol of members of Religious Congregations in leadership, as well as in the classroom, emphasised and strengthened the Catholic culture of the schools.

As lay leaders replaced Religious women and men in the Catholic schools, and began to move into leadership, the CEO developed more structured and formal procedures for the selection and appointment of principals. The policy on “Assessment of Catholic School Leaders” identifies “effective selection processes for the appointment of Principals ... as the first step in ensuring effective leadership in our schools” (SACCS, 1994, p. 3). The normal process of selection is through advertisement and application. In both Dioceses in South Australia, the first requirement of candidates is that they “demonstrate an active involvement in a Catholic eucharistic community” (SACCS, Selection of Principal: Essential Criteria – see Appendix A): that they are, in fact, practising Catholics. Most other Dioceses in Australia (Melbourne, Canberra, Perth and others) have the same requirement, and Grace (2002, p.

136) notes a similar prerequisite for Head teachers in Catholic schools in England and Wales. Interested and appropriately qualified persons respond to the 'person specifications' (derived from the outline in Appendix A) and the role description provided for the position, and a panel is then established, inducted, and begins the process of sorting the applicants and conducting interviews. A typical flow chart for this process is shown in Appendix C: Selection of CEO Staff. The preferred candidate is then recommended to the Director and, since "all teachers in leadership in Catholic education receive their mandate from the Bishop of the Diocese" (SACCS, 1994, p.1), to the (Arch) bishop for approval.

In those cases where leaders are not appointed by the Director, but by the Provincials of Religious Orders, they are in fact still accountable, through those bodies, to the Bishop, who in turn requires of them that they employ "appropriate methods of selection and review to ensure effective leadership in Catholic schools for which they are responsible" (SACCS, 1994, p. 1).

Table 2. 2 illustrates the change in the leadership of Catholic schools, from 1970, with the exclusive occupancy of the principalship by members of Religious Congregations, to today's situation. Fleming (2002, p. 12) notes similarly, in Victoria, that "in 2002, lay teachers occupy the majority of the key leadership roles of Principal, Deputy Principal, RECs (Religious Education Coordinators) and Curriculum Coordinators in Catholic schools."

*Table 2.2      Principalship in Catholic Secondary Schools, SA: 1970 to 2005*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Catholic Secondary Schools</b>	<b>Principals who were members of Religious Congregations</b>	<b>Lay Principals</b>
1970	26	26	0
1980	29	28	1
1989*	31	19	12
2000	32	12	21** #
2005	32	6	27** #

(from: Statistical Returns, Systemic and Non-Systemic Schools, CEO Adelaide)

\* figures for 1990 not available to researcher

\*\* figures include the leader of one school designated as 'Education Officer'

# Includes one school with joint principals

But the change has not simply been a change of personnel, from principals from Religious Congregations to lay leaders. Each of the schools affected by such a change had its own story, its own traditions, its own charism, stemming in large part from the presence and action of those priests, nuns and brothers (Grace, 2002; Thomas, 1997; Flynn, 1993). They were the ones who established, formed and nurtured those schools, before passing the baton of leadership to the new generation of lay principals. Those incoming lay principals have had not only to take on that religious leadership, but also the particular way in which it needed to be articulated in that community. This is the culture of the school (Dwyer, 1993; Flynn, 1993), that which makes it Catholic, and unique. There is no such thing as 'generic' religious leadership: to be authentic, it must come from the heart, and it must relate to the community and the tradition of each place in which it operates (Terry, 1993; Bhindi & Duignan, 1997; Starratt, 2004). This is a very significant challenge



for the new lay leadership in Catholic Secondary Schools in particular.

Students in this stage of their formal education could be the very ones that the Congregation for Catholic Education had in mind when it described pupils who “are not only indifferent and non-practising, but also ... lacking in religious or moral formation” (CSTM, 1997, par. 6). In his study of school culture in New South Wales, Flynn (1993, p. 103) identified that “*religious values* rank among the lowest priorities of Year 12 students,” though he goes on to suggest that another way of looking at this finding would be that “these values are *not the most urgent needs students face at this stage of their lives.*” It is certainly an age of questioning and testing – but this is the context in which the principal is charged with responsibility “in a unique way for the school’s religious identity” (SACCS, 2004, p.1).

All these changes have occurred in a post-Vatican II Church, since the late 1960s, where issues of direction, leadership, doctrine and ecumenism occupied the whole Catholic Church, and extended into the schools, with their young questioning adolescents – and teachers! It is not coincidental that in this same period (1965 to 2002), the Congregation for Catholic Education produced seven defining documents dealing with the Catholic school and its place in the Church. In a sense, it is the Church reclaiming the schools in the face of the dominant secular values of society. The issue of religious leadership, and the religious nature of the Catholic schools was, and remains, an important concern to both the global and the local Church, as well as to the Catholic Education System.

The transfer of leadership from members of Religious Congregations to lay educators has happened over a time of rapid and at times unsettling change in the Church and an increasing secularism and complexity in the wider society. This was recognised in the various documents of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, in particular in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998 – herein after shown as CCE). The Catholic Bishops of Australia made similar observations as recently as 2003 (National Catholic Education Commission, 2003), and a variety of writers in the field (Carlin et al., 2003; Thomas, 1997; Duignan, 1997) reinforced these remarks in their commentaries. The South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS), the “public juridical body established by the Archbishop of Adelaide ... to make and review policy in those matters relating to Catholic schools in South Australia” (Battams, 2002, p. x), echoed these concerns in a recent policy paper on the topic, declaring that “the task of religious leadership has become more complex in our time because of a variety of factors which can be related to the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole” (SACCS, 2004, p. 1). The role of principal in any school is a complex and demanding task, but in this context there is an added imperative for the principal of the Catholic School to take on the role of religious leader in that community.

In highlighting the many demands of the principal’s role, Hoerr (2005, p.82), exploring ‘perceptions and reality’ in regard to stresses of the principal’s position, spoke of “fighting fires, dancing with massive amounts of paperwork,

and sitting through endless meetings”. In a study by Stoney (1997) one principal declared that “I have sometimes regretted my lack of professional training in Law, Business, Administration and Economics” (p. 7). Flockton (2001, p. 20, quoted in Carlin et al., 2003, p. 16) described the complexity of the role, in which the principal is “expected to be legal expert, health and social services co-ordinator, fundraiser, diplomat, negotiator, adjudicator, public relations consultant, security officer, technological innovator and topnotch resource manager, whose most important job is the promotion of teaching and learning”. For the principal of a Catholic school, “the religious dimension must be added” (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 6) – and not only added, but integrated within this array of roles and responsibilities. The report on *Leadership Succession for Catholic Schools in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania* (Carlin et al., 2003) also highlighted that specifically religious dimension of principalship in a Catholic school attributing it, at least in part, to a decrease in the number of clergy and the restructuring of parishes (Carlin et al., 2003).

This religious identity of the school is bound up in the understanding of the Catholic school as “part of the evangelising mission of the Church” (CSTM, 1998, par. 32), and is what makes it distinctive, unique – “the attempt to create a community ... permeated by the Gospel spirit” (*Declaration on Christian Education*, 1965, par. 8 – herein after shown as DCE). As Roche (1996, p. 45) asserts, “unless a Catholic school is intrinsically viable and inherently distinct, then it cannot exist by definition. If it is not unique, then it is

unnecessary". It is the religious leadership of the principal that focuses the institution on this unique quality of Catholic schools.

This religious dimension of the Catholic school "is not an option" (Ashley, 1998, p.13). The principal is a key player in creating, forming and nurturing this essential heart of the institution. This study investigates the way in which principals, as practitioners in the field, understand and put into practice this responsibility.

### **2.3 The Research Problem**

As described earlier in this thesis, there has been a significant shift in the leadership of Catholic schools from members of Religious Congregations to the laity over the last thirty years. Catholic schools and their new leaders are challenged to respond to this changed situation, to create communities faithful to the Gospel spirit. This is a call for renewal (CSTM, 1998, par. 3), for schools to reclaim their real purpose. The importance of the role of "teachers and educators" in achieving this (par. 19) is clearly indicated in this Vatican document.

It falls naturally to the principal, as the leader of the particular community, to take responsibility for the nature of the school – its community, its curriculum, its ethos (Grace, 1995; McLaughlin, 1997; Treston, 1997; Cook, 2002). This responsibility is exercised in the context of a new and secular millennium, and an emerging lay leadership paradigm. Writers such as Flynn (1985, 1993) and

Flynn and Mok (2002) developed our understanding of the importance of 'Catholic identity' and 'culture' in schools; and McMahon, Neidhart and Chapman (1997), McLaughlin (1997,1998), Duignan & D'Arbon (1998a & b), Sultmann & McLaughlin (2000), Duncan & Riley (2002) and others developed the more specific understandings of the forms of educational leadership appropriate in the Catholic setting in Australia.

In the current context, a range of different approaches and theories has emerged to describe and explain practice. However, from the stand point of the Catholic School, there appears to be a "gap" (Clark and Causer, 1991, p. 165) in the literature and research material in relation to a key concept - that of religious leadership. The literature refers to the religious role of the principal and the importance of a strong Catholic community and culture – but there is very little practical guidance as to how this religious leadership might happen, what principals think about the term, and how they might be prepared for it, and supported in it.

This has been the focus of the research, the problem. Therefore the purpose of this study is

**to investigate the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to the role and practice of the Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia.**

## **2.4 Research Questions**

The new policy on “Religious Leadership in the Catholic School”, released in South Australia in 2004, places the religious dimension of the principal’s role at the forefront of consideration for persons aspiring to that position. This policy originally focussed on the role of the REC, but it was finally developed in terms of a wider vision and understanding of the concept of leadership in Catholic schools generally, emphasising that “the principal is responsible in a unique way for the school’s religious identity” (SACCS, 2004, p. 1).

This is a “problem of ‘practice’ “ (Robson, 2002, p. 50), in that principals are now required to give conscious priority to this dimension of their leadership, at a time when the system is only just beginning to define what the term might mean in a school setting. This is, therefore, “real world research” (Robson, 2002, p. 52), and in order to explore the problem in specific detail, three research questions were developed.

### **2.4.1 Research Question One**

What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, and ... this is to be found in *a)* the educational climate, *b)* the personal development of each student, *c)* the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, *d)* the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith. (*The Religious Dimension of*

*Education in Catholic Schools*, 1988, par. 1 – herein after shown as RDE)

The various documents of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education do not speak specifically of leadership of individuals (principals) but they do set out explicitly the nature of Catholic schools, and their essential religious character. The imperative of creating and maintaining this environment, “one illumined by the light of faith” (RDE, 1988, par 25) belongs to the whole community (SACCS 2004, p. 3), but the primary responsibility must be with the principal: “one of the consistent findings of research on Catholic schooling is that the principal and leadership team in the school have a unique influence on the establishment of the climate which exists in the school” (Ryan, Brennan & Willmet, 1996, p.96). Given the clear mandate to celebrate and nurture that religious dimension, and the principal’s responsibility in this, the first Research question asks,

***What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?***

In this changing world, the establishment of that essential religious character in any institution is a challenge. Leaders in Catholic schools indeed take on “an inspirational ideology” (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 301), but this is a challenging leadership, in a world where globalization, secularism, apathy, racism and materialism (CSTM, 1997) seem at times the dominant ethos. The

Catholic school professes a Gospel oriented school culture (The Catholic School, SCCS, 1977, par. 49 – herein after shown as CS), and strives to “build a better world” (CS, 1977, par. 71), working for the “Common Good” (Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2002), and with a particular care for the poor and the disadvantaged (CSTM, 1997, par. 15; CS, 1977, par. 58). This is an explicit mandate, and the study sought to determine how the Church and System authorities – represented by the Catholic Bishops of South Australia, and the Directors of Catholic Education - interpret it in terms of the principal’s role in shaping and nurturing the Catholic Secondary School in South Australia.

#### **2.4.2 Research Question Two**

“Catholic schools need Principals who can lead their faculty and students to embrace and be animated by the Catholic vision of life” (Cook, 2002, p. iv). Such statements help us to understand and define the responsibility of the principal, emphasizing the religious nature of this “vocation” (Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982, par. 37 – herein after shown as LCS), but they do not tell the principal how to do this, how to “preserve and perfect the identity of the Catholic school.” (Cook, 2002, p. iv). It is evident from the literature (RDE, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1990; Dwyer, 1993; Flynn, 1993; McLaughlin 1998; Cook, 2002) that this Catholic identity is bound up intimately and intricately with the culture of the schools, and the importance of the role of the principal in creating and nurturing that Catholic culture is succinctly and bluntly asserted by Schein (1992, p.2): “the one thing of real



importance that principals do is to create and manage the culture of the school.” The second Research question therefore asks

***How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?***

It is the reflections on the practical experiences of those working in the field that are sought in this question. It is the way in which principals address this nebulous concept, the religious leadership mandate, and bring it to life that gives substance to the “religious environment” of the schools.

One of the difficulties in establishing the impact of this religious leadership, or even the existence of it, is that it is a vague concept, difficult to measure in concrete ways – but it is none-the-less real and at the heart of the school’s identity as Catholic. And, as the fox said to the Little Prince (De Saint-Exupery, 1995, p. 82), so often “what is essential is invisible to the eye.” This elusive concept, this approach to practice which calls upon the authenticity and experience of the principal, and impacts upon the routine and ritual of the community of the school, may be the ‘invisible’ force, but it is essential to the Catholicity of the school.

This question explores the mindset of practitioners in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia, and their understanding of this aspect of the role. It then seeks further to explore what religious leadership ‘looks like’ in daily practice.

### **2.4.3 Research Question Three**

The 'Religious Leadership' policy document in South Australia asserts unequivocally that "religious leadership in a Catholic school is of critical importance. Appropriate methods of advertising, selection and induction must therefore be employed to reflect the significance of the appointments to leadership" (SACCS, 2004, p.6). This research sought to explore, with both the System authorities and the practitioners themselves, the way in which these issues of selection and induction in particular are addressed in South Australia. The third research question asks

**What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?**

Directors of Catholic Education in South Australia have consistently placed a high value on qualifications in the religious domain for all persons in positions of leadership. This was emphasized in an article written in 1997 by one of the current Assistant Directors, who asserted that "principals need to be knowledgeable in Catholic theology and philosophy of education in order to be able to provide the necessary spiritual and visionary leadership" (Thomas, 1997, p.105). This is reinforced in the policy on Religious Leadership, which states "religious leaders must hold substantial postgraduate qualifications in theology, Scripture or Religious Education, or must be working towards obtaining those qualifications" (SACCS, 2004, p. 6). The impact of this policy,

and the Director's vision, can be seen in the data on principals' qualifications described earlier in this chapter.

In addition to tertiary accredited courses, there are a variety of programs for leadership formation in place in South Australia at the time of writing, and consideration is being given to further development in this area. Currently, the CEO offers the following formal programs for school leaders:

- A 'Discernment and Foundation module' for aspiring leaders, covering
  - discovering the leader within
  - discerning leadership capacity
  - developing a vision for leadership
  - surviving and thriving as a leader
  - the challenges in leading people
  - learning the tools of the trade.
- A compulsory Induction program for Newly Appointed Principals and Deputies, with provision to include, by invitation, such others as RECs.
- A series of 'Leaders' Seminars'.
- A Leadership Development Program, open to all leaders, with a priority given to newly appointed leaders, covering
  - Leadership Style
  - Leading Teams
  - Managing Performance
  - Building Constructive, Interpersonal Relationships'.

(source: Leadership Programs 2005, CEO Document)

It should be noted, however, that the VSAT report of 2003 (Carlin et al.) posited that amongst the various programs of development and formation for principals in the member States (which included SA), it was “difficult to ascertain evidence about the extent to which these programs contribute to the competence and integrity of the principal as both the religious and educational leader of the school” (p. 36). Indeed, this concern further emphasises the need for practical formation in those areas “which inform the spiritual, personal and emotional intelligences which ... constitute an educator’s leadership capability” (Leadership Formation Review Working Party in South Australia, April 2004, p. 6). It is hoped that the conclusions and recommendations arising from this study can contribute to the further development of selection, formation and induction programs in South Australia, and perhaps in the wider field of Catholic education.

## **2.5 Significance of the Research**

This study investigates the phenomenon of religious leadership as it applies to the role and practice of principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. It names and gives substance to that nebulous concept, recognising its significance in maintaining the integrity and essential purpose of the Catholic schools. It celebrates and recognises practice in those schools.

Whilst there is an growing body of literature on the various aspects of leadership and the principal’s role, about ‘leadership styles’ (Sergiovanni, 1990; P. Ryan, 1997, Treston, 2005), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977;

McLaughlin, 1997), and “The Inner Principal” (Loader, 1997), little previous research has touched on the specific area of religious leadership. This concept, critical to the authenticity of the schools as Catholic (Dwyer, 1993; Flynn, 1993; Cook, 2002; Grace, 2002), is attracting an increasing level of attention in the Catholic Education System in South Australia. This study builds on the current literature about leadership and focuses on investigating this lacuna in the research, the religious leadership of the principal. It offers a relevant and positive contribution to the body of knowledge in professional practice, and adds to the existing literature in its elucidation of the practical context of the role. It seeks to clarify current understandings of the concept and to open to a wider audience aspects of good practice and creative thinking which otherwise would remain localised and unknown.

The study gives voice to those working in this challenging role, and in the very act of naming their practical actions, both explicit and implicit, it provides ideas and support for those principals who struggle with the religious aspect of their leadership. It is hoped that the results of this study will affirm those principals in their role as religious leaders, and that the recommendations arising from their contributions will make a significant contribution to practice and policy in South Australia.

The principals are the people ‘in situ’ responsible for the viability of the school, both as an educational institution of high quality, and as a vital and integral part of Church. The opening statement of The Vision for Catholic Schools in South Australia (see Appendix D) asserts definitively that “Catholic schools, in

partnership with parents, in union with Christ's saving mission and communities, educate young people for participation in the Church and world communities today" (SACCS, 1991). It is this aspect of mission, and the expectation that there be a religious and practical outcome of the Catholic schooling process which presents principals with their greatest challenge. The reflections of the participants in this study provide an insight into this, and highlight the professional and personal needs of principals as the key religious leaders in their schools, striving to make this mandate a reality. The recommendations arising from their thoughts on principal selection, formation in the religious domain and continuing professional and spiritual development have the potential to serve as a guide to support and supplement the formation and professional learning programs for new principals, as well as to offer critique of, and suggestions for, employing practices.

In the light of the reflections of those who might at times have struggled with this demanding role, the study offers insights into the working realities of the principal's role and responsibilities. These insights may be useful Tertiary authorities and the CEO in tailoring the development of courses designed for prospective principals. In addition, candidates for leadership might well benefit from the practical wisdom of those who have provided their commentaries and reflections for this study. These give flesh to the literature and theory and suggest pathways to the responsibility of principals in religious leadership. In these ways, the study has the potential to provide a strong practical contribution to the field of leadership in Catholic Secondary Schools in South

Australia, and in particular to the key dimension of the principal as religious leader.

This chapter has described the concern of both the Church and the Catholic Education authorities in South Australia for the schools under their direction. As leadership of the Catholic Secondary Schools passed progressively in the post-Vatican II period from members of Religious Congregations to lay persons, an increased emphasis was consciously placed on the Catholic identity of the schools. The principals now operate in an era which expects that, as school leaders they are also religious leaders, leaders of communities devoted to the “complete and comprehensive education of the person” (Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools, 2002, par 41 – herein after shown as CPMS). In this context, the research questions were developed, to explore understandings of the role and the way it is lived and expressed in practice, and to identify supports that might be needed by principals in the schools.

Having acknowledged the context within which the study was conducted, chapter three explores aspects of leadership, and more specifically ‘religious leadership’ in the literature. This exploration establishes the conceptual framework for the study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Review of Literature**

Chapter 2 presented the issue of the principal's religious leadership role in the context of the Catholic Education System of South Australia and particularly in relation to the Catholic Secondary Schools.

In this chapter, the elements of the literature pertaining to leadership in schools, and specifically religious leadership and Catholic schools are described. The documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education provide the framework for the review. In the light of these, the literature exploring the purposes of the Catholic school, their culture and their relationship to the concept of community are canvassed. Different approaches to leadership are considered, and from this framework the concept of religious leadership in Catholic schools is reviewed. Overall, the literature offers a theoretical approach to the role. The lack of material from a practical leadership perspective is identified as a gap or lacuna in the field, which this study addresses.

#### **3.1 Conceptual Framework**

The role of the Catholic school principal is a complex and multifaceted one, which “engages primarily with the human” aspect of organization, and is therefore marked by ambiguity and inconsistency of interpretation (Benjamin, 2002, p. 74). Leadership itself is a much debated notion (MacBeath, 2004;



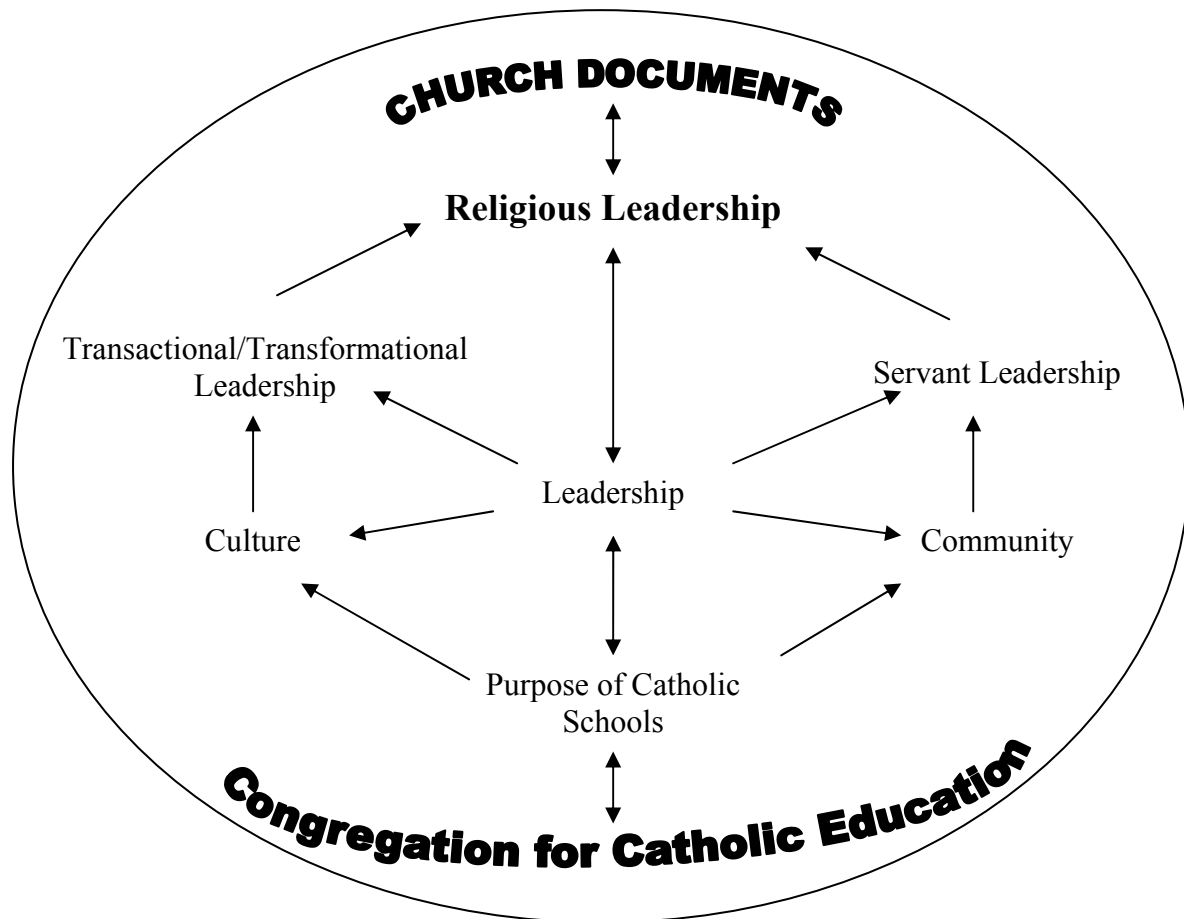
McCreath, 1999; Burns, 1979) and it is not surprising that those in this demanding role at times differ in the way they understand and apply it. When this leadership is constructed as an expression of a religious understanding of life, it is even more complex.

The mission of the Catholic school is to “evangelise, and be the face of Christ to students and parents”, and so the principal of a Catholic school must be seen as “a significant church leader, since the school has been established to assist with the mission of the Church” (McLaughlin, 1998, p. 25). In fact, “it has become almost a truism to say that the school is the only church which many students know (and it) offers ... many of the manifestations of Christian life which have always been recognised as defining church” (D’Orsa, 1999, p. 125).

The official statements of the Church, and in particular, of the Congregation for Catholic Education, provide a sense of the nature and purposes of the Catholic school in the modern world. Read in conjunction with contemporary critiques of their application to local Church (Hansen, 2001; Flynn & Mok, 2002), they provide important insights through which an understanding of the nature of leadership in Catholic schools can be explored. This starting point is reflected in Figure 3.1, which presents the Review of Literature framed within the official Church documents. In the light of these, the purposes and characteristics of the Catholic school are explored. These understandings in turn inform, and are informed by, the general concept of leadership, which is investigated through the literature. The theory related to several approaches

to leadership is then explored and finally, these considerations are brought to the literature in relation to religious leadership.

*Figure 3.1: Framework for the Review of Literature*



### 3.2 Church Documents

In the period since the Second Vatican Council (1960s), a series of statements have been released by the Congregation for Catholic Education which provide the setting and authority for Catholic Schools. They describe the educational and theological purposes of Catholic schools, and provide “an emerging recognition ... of Catholic education as a ministry of the laity” – though they are “largely silent about the role, ministry, and vocation of lay

principals in Catholic schools” (Hansen, 2001 p.28). A brief and selective summary of the key documents, in terms of the focus of this paper, is developed in Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1: Summary of Church Documents*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Main Points</b>	<b>Challenges for principals</b>
1965	<i>Declaration on Christian Education</i>	-Catholic schools are distinctive - Faith throws light on all knowledge	Challenge to create those ‘special’ schools with a philosophical commitment to Gospel values
1977	<i>The Catholic School</i>	- synthesis of faith and life - academic and daily life	Cultural leadership
1982	<i>Lay Catholics in Schools</i>	- teaching as ‘vocation’ - living the faith – ‘spiritual inspiration’	Special responsibility of the lay principal
1988	<i>The Religious Dimension of Education</i>	Religious Dimension depends on - culture of the organisation - sense of purpose and acceptance of Mission	- challenge – are schools succeeding? - responding to the challenge of ‘meaninglessness’ (Grace, 2002)
1997	<i>The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium</i>	- looking forward in hope, but recognizing the complexity - Gospel values in dialogue with culture	Culturally inclusive ways of expressing authentic Gospel values (Welbourne, 1999)
2002	<i>Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools</i>	- evangelizing by educating - witnessing through life - preferential option for the poor	Rediscovering the charism Authenticity of person

*The Declaration on Christian Education* (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 1965) set out to describe what makes a school authentically Catholic and distinctive, and concluded that it lay in “its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love” (par. 8). It focuses on the personal development of individual students, the relationship between the Gospel and the culture in which they live and the manner in which faith can throw light on all knowledge. It also states clearly that “parents must be recognized as the primary and principal educators of their children” (par.3), thereby pointing to the community’s stake in the Catholic school and the relationship of delegated responsibility for their children.

While the document does not mention the Catholic school principal, its expectations of the teachers must equally apply to those appointed to the principalship – a role sometimes described as being the head teacher (Grace, 2002). Hansen (2001) takes this notion further. Those expectations of “training in secular and religious knowledge, appropriate certification, contemporary educational skills, personal witness to Christ in teaching and lifestyle, partnership with parents ... service to the wider community, and an understanding of teaching as ministry” (p. 30) are most appropriately the responsibility of principals in their leadership roles.

*The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977) elaborated on “the nature and distinctive characteristics of a school which would present itself as Catholic” (par.2). The Catholic school’s role was located within the evangelizing mission of the

Church in the context of a new world: “the specific mission of the Catholic school is the critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith ... and the integration of culture with faith and faith with living” (par. 49). The “principles of the Gospel” were to be the schools “abiding point of reference” (par. 71) in this secular community, and the teachers were to be the ‘transmitters’, through education, of the Christian message. The document also recognised the emergence of lay teachers as a reality in Catholic education, but it clearly assumed that governance of the Catholic schools continued in the hands of religious congregations (Hansen 2001).

*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* was published in 1982 by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. It recognised the importance of the women and men teaching in Catholic schools who were not members of Religious congregations, and described their “personal vocation in the Church” (par.37) as complementing the past and present work of those Religious. It posits the concept of teaching as a form of vocation for lay persons – an “ecclesial vocation” (par 43) situated alongside the priests and religious in the mission of the Church.

The Lay Catholic educator ... exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school: with the best possible professional qualifications, with an apostolic intention inspired by faith, for the integral formation of the human person, in a communication of culture, in an exercise of that pedagogy which will give emphasis to direct and personal contact with students,

giving spiritual inspiration to the educational community of which he or she is a member. (LCS, 1982, par. 24)

This is a discourse which “constructs an ideal model of the lay Catholic educator which is daunting in its expectations” (Grace, 2002, p.20). It is both a recognition of the reality of the lay presence in Catholic schools, and a challenge to them. The document also expresses a real ‘regret’ at the withdrawal of religious from the apostolate of Catholic education: “Lay Catholic educators must be very aware of the real impoverishment which will result if priests and Religious disappear from the Catholic schools, or noticeably decline in number. This is to be avoided as far as possible” (LCS, par. 45).

In this environment, although the document does acknowledge the possibility of roles for the laity other than simply that of teacher (par. 15), one cannot help but feel that the ‘ideal’ Catholic school teacher – and certainly principal – remained, in the minds and hearts of the Congregation for Catholic Education, a Religious woman or man.

This preference found expression in practice in Australia, where Hansen (2001, p.35) noted the distinction in Queensland, between “Principals by Appointment” and “Principals by Application.” The institutionally preferred option for leadership of the Catholic school was clearly for the ‘appointment’ of a member of a Religious Order or Congregation.

*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (CCE, 1988) challenged educators to reflect on the day-to-day operation of Catholic schools (Dwyer, 1993) and to “examine whether or not the words of the Council have become reality” (par.2). This exhortation was made in the context of the “struggle for the soul of the contemporary world” (Grace, 2002, p.21) and Catholic schools were reminded “that the effectiveness and vitality of their religious cultures and the outcomes of this for Catholic youth (were) crucial” in responding to the challenge of meaninglessness in modern society (Grace, 2002, p.21).

In this struggle, leadership is critical to the success of the mission, and yet the Congregation persisted in the belief that “most Catholic schools are under the direction of Religious Congregations” (par. 35), which was clearly not the case in Australia, either in terms of staffing or of leadership (Hansen 2001, p. 32). However, the document later conceded that “the Church ... is willing to give lay people charge of schools it has established, and (have) the laity themselves establish schools” (par. 38).

This possibility of lay leadership recognised that ‘the religious dimension of education’ within the life of the school was not necessarily dependent on the presence of dedicated Religious women and men as leaders, or even teachers, but rather on the culture of the organization and the sense of purpose and acceptance of mission in particular of those who lead it. It confirmed that what made the Catholic school distinctive was “its religious dimension, which is found in the educational climate, the personal

development of each student, the relationship between culture and the Gospel, and the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith” (Ryan et al., 1996, p. iv).

This “religious dimension” permeates all aspects of the school, and is captured by the notion of synthesis: the bringing together of faith and the broad culture of the community, to compose a new personal meaning (Grace, 2002). It is embedded in the life of the school as its culture – “an historically rooted, socially transmitted set of deep patterns of thinking and ways of acting that give meaning to human experience, that unconsciously dictate how experience is seen, assessed, and acted on” (Deal & Peterson, 1990, p. 8, quoted in Cook, 2002). The religious leader is a key person in the development and nurturing of culture as a living reality within the school community.

Garanzini (1999) reinforced the priority that the RDE document placed on the development of a Catholic culture in schools, and emphasized the responsibility that teachers and principals have in that endeavour:

Unless the Catholic culture of every school community is of the highest priority, the future of Catholic education is in jeopardy. Consequently those who are on the front line, our teachers and principals, must develop their faith lives through catechetical and theological updates and other spiritual development opportunities. The ongoing religious formation of Catholic school educators is



crucial for the future of our schools. Shared ownership of the religious mission of the school is essential. (p. 331)

*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1997) was presented as a “brief, outward looking, hope-ful and realistic” document (Hansen, 2001, p.33), which also addressed the idea of school culture. It reflected on the challenges of the modern world (par 1), speaking about multiculturalism, a crisis of values, moral relativism, and the increased marginalisation of the Christian faith – “the new socio-political and cultural context” of the community (Welbourne, 1999, p.1). The challenge it identified for schools and their leaders was to find “culturally inclusive ways of expressing authentic Gospel values where there is room for dialogue so that the culture is enhanced by the truth of the Gospel” (Welbourne, 1999, p.2).

In the face of the growing emphasis upon technical and utilitarian outcomes of education, and indifference and apathy towards religious and spiritual formation (Grace 2002, p. 23), the “interaction and collaboration of ... students, parents, teachers, directors and non-teaching staff” (par. 18) was essential in fostering an understanding of the school as a place of complete human formation. In this task, “the presence of consecrated Religious within the educating community is indispensable” (CSTM, par 13) – even though, by the time this document was composed, the “passing of the old order (was) all but complete. In spite of this reality, the document makes only passing reference to the presence of lay teachers in schools, and none to lay principals” (Hansen, 2001, p.33).

Though the numbers of religious women and men remaining in the schools continued to fall during this period, one impact of their presence remained. The world of the convent and the monastery, “with an individual at its head controlling a hierarchically structured organization using a top-down approach” (Hansen, 2001, p.34) had translated to the organisation of the Catholic school, leaving as a legacy a model of leadership which Grace, writing in the UK context, describes as a distortion of “the authentic characteristics of Christian living and leadership” (Grace, 2002, p. 142).

The most recent document, *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools* (CCE, 2002) expressly focused on the contribution of ‘consecrated persons’ – religious women and men – active in schools in the service of the Church. Given that this is a document specifically celebrating the Consecrated life, it is not surprising that neither laity nor leadership are discussed. It does, however, give added emphasis to the question raised by Hansen in relation to the role of the laity in schools, of the need for “an unequivocal statement on this important ministry within the Church from the Congregation for Catholic Education” (Hansen, 2001, p. 35).

Across the forty years covered by these documents, clear themes and emphases recur. The first is an understanding of the purposes of education, and the role of the Catholic school as an organisation seeking to provide an authentic educational environment for the young people of the time. The holistic and integral understanding of the relationship between faith and learning is beautifully expressed in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of*

*the Third Millennium*, which describes a culture of learning where there is that “synthesis between culture and faith ... (which envisions) ... no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom” (CCE, 1997, par.14). This essentially religious understanding of the education process must bear upon the nature of the learning institutions themselves, and the mindsets and actions of their leadership. However, at no stage is that dimension of the leadership of such schools addressed, and this lacuna in the foundational documents of the Church is one of the indicators of the need for research in the area of religious leadership, both in terms of how Principals and Systems have interpreted these documents, and in how they bring to reality the ideals of the Catholic school expressed within them.

### **3.3 The Purpose of Catholic Schools**

"Today the challenge of clarifying the purpose of Catholic schools is surely one of the most urgent issues to be addressed by the Catholic school community" (Treston, 1997, p.9). Guerra (2000) explored that very challenge as the new millennium broke, and focused on the core issues that it evoked: "What are Catholic schools about, whom do they serve, and who will lead them? ... these are the most important issues for the future of Catholic schools" (p. 88). And, almost a decade after Treston's concern, and returning to the Australian setting, Brien and Hack declared that, "in an educational era of school reviews, audits ... development plans ... strategic management

plans ... and standardised testing” Catholic schools need more than ever to define and keep “their core business ... clearly in mind” (2005, p. 73).

In this time of educational change, and of challenge and crisis in the Church itself, Catholic schools must look to their foundation documents, and to the theology underpinning them, to clarify their true purposes. And while those documents may be lacking in specific statements about leadership, they are clear about the purposes of Catholic schools.

The *Declaration on Christian Education* stated that it was “the special function of the Catholic school to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel” (DCE, 1965, par. 8). *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (SCCE, 1988, par 22) described the Catholic school as being “not simply a place where lessons are taught; rather it has an operative educational philosophy illuminated by the Gospel message, a philosophy which is attentive to the needs of its students in their search for meaning and life.” This is the “inspirational ideology” (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 301) which makes Catholic schools “qualitatively different from public (state) schools”. It focuses education on the development of a spiritual and moral life in students; celebrates the dignity of person; and emphasises the importance of community and the moral call to justice and the pursuit of the common good.

Pope John Paul II (March 17th, 2000: Stadium Australia: Pope John Paul II, quoted by Moylan, 2002, p. 20) expressed this ideal in simple, straightforward,

yet confronting terms: "Catholic schools ... are to be above all schools of holiness. They exist primarily to give saints to the world."

This 'holiness' was explained by Quillinan (2002) as the

interrelationship between intellectual development, religious faith, and personal growth (which) is central to the Catholic philosophy of education. The very purpose of (Catholic) education is this synthesis of faith and culture, that is, the integration of religious meaning and the way a person chooses to live their life ... what is believed should find its expression in how it is lived. (p.5)

Confusion about the purposes of Catholic schools, and their capacity to achieve their real purposes, has the potential to destroy these schools as an expression of an authentic Catholic spirit. The document, *The Catholic School* (1977), suggests that "often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realization of the identity of the Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness" (par. 66). However, "despite the rhetoric of fundamental differences between a Catholic philosophy of education and that proposed by governments, the practice of both kinds of school has often been identical" (Ryan, M., 1997, p. 135). This is an issue which must impinge upon the role of leaders, having implications for formation, both for leadership itself, and for the school communities.

A further issue raised in both Congregation documents and in commentaries on Catholic schools (Jacobs, in Cook, 2002, p. vi) was the declining number of Religious women and men on the staffs of those schools. Treston (1997, p. 10) wondered whether this loss of a "core ethos symbol ... (the) mystique of the religious habit (which) conveyed a symbolic assurance about the authenticity of a Catholic school" – had been balanced by the growth of new symbols expressive of the key purposes of the schools for this new generation of students. This is a challenge to the Catholic schools of the new millennium: however, though the Congregation for Catholic Education might regret the loss of 'Consecrated Persons' in the schools, this reality has now become institutionalised, and there is generally "an essentially positive" view of the lay domination of staffing and leadership in Catholic schools as a realistic "attempt to utilise the combined talents of lay people and religious to serve Catholic students and their families as effectively as possible" (Stoney, 1997, p. 7).

The documents of the Church contain a well-developed understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school. They provide a clear framework for this research which explores how principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia address these purposes in their role as the key religious leaders.

### 3.4 Catholic Schools and Community

The phrase “school community” has become a cliché when speaking about Catholic schools. In the introduction to *Leading the Catholic School* (McMahon, Neidhart & Chapman, 1997), for example, it is used no less than ten times! This, however, could also be seen as an indication of the absolute centrality of this concept to Catholic education (Grace, 1995). The ethos of a Catholic school “should be characterized by a sense of community, belonging, trust and acceptance, (where) there is a culture of shared beliefs and values” (Lorenz, 2005, p. 66). The *Declaration on Christian Education* (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 1965) described a school community “permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love” as a distinctive feature of the Catholic school (quoted in RDE, 1988, par.1).

The Catholic school, “far more than any other, must be a community whose aim is the transmission of values for living ... faith, in fact, is born and grows inside a community” (CS, 1977, par. 53). This is the purpose of the Catholic school – the transmission of a faith culture, the bringing about of the Kingdom of God. The school

derives all the energy necessary for its educational work from (Christ) and thus “creates in the school community an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.” In this setting, the pupil experiences his (sic) dignity as a person before he (sic) knows its definition. (CS, 1977, par.55)

When the school community gathers together “it is a powerful statement about its members’ shared humanity and their connections with one another” (Brien & Hack, 2005, p. 73). The Catholic school is an expression of its community in the context of faith, and it exists *within* a wider community of faith (Dwyer, 1993). McLaughlin (1997, p. 14) likens it to a ‘family’, based on Gospel values, and points out that leadership of such a community resides in the community, and in itself represents a communal relationship. For the principal of the Catholic school, this requires a conscious effort to maintain and develop relationships.

The leader of a Catholic school is therefore a community builder, sensitive to the nuances of the school climate and able to foster that sense of community among all facets of the school. The leader is also a collaborator, working with the community itself, stimulating the involvement of students, parents and faculty in service to the wider community within which it exists. School leadership, Fullan suggests, “is a collective enterprise (2003, p.xv). In this enterprise, the leader is challenged to be “a person of compassion and justice whose decisions respond to the needs of the individual, as well as to the good of the entire community” (Travis & Shimabukuro, 1999, p.338).

Principals “play a crucial role in developing the faith community” (Hunt, 2000, p.48). They must be “creators of energy, responsible for the communal dynamic which is the touchstone to judge the authenticity of leadership in a Catholic school” (McLaughlin, 1997, 18). They must nurture this “loving, worshipping community ... permeated by the Holy Spirit” (Grace 1995, p.



167), and be committed to promoting the Gospel values upon which they are founded. In this research project, principals were invited to explore the 'community leadership' dimension of their role, and articulate how, as religious leaders, the theological imperative of community informed and assisted their decision making in the more contentious areas of school life.

### **3.5 The Culture of Catholic Schools**

Flynn (1993) posited that "the most distinctive feature of *effective Catholic schools* is their outstanding culture which gives them a special ethos or spirit" (p.33). Described simply, this 'culture' is 'the way we do things around here' (Cook, 2002, Flynn and Mok, 2002). It encompasses the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour which provide meaning to the school community and which help to shape the lives of students, teachers and parents (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996; Grace, 2002), and "acts as a 'lens' through which the world is viewed. It defines reality for those within a social organisation, gives them support and identity, and 'forms a framework for organisational learning'." (Hargreaves 1994a, p. 165, quoted in Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996, p. 82).

All organizations, and certainly all schools, speak of their culture. But Treston (1997, p. 10) asked whether the culture of Catholic schools was "essentially and intentionally different from the culture of state schools?" This was a deliberate confronting of the authenticity of the prevailing culture, challenging

“whether or not some Catholic schools are becoming private schools with a religious memory but a secular presence” (Wallace, 2000, p. 191).

A culture based upon scripture, Church teaching and tradition (Guerra, 2000; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Lynch, 2002) is the central column around which the Catholic school is built. From this, the vision of life and education emerges, and finds expression in the life and mission of the school (Sultmann & McLaughlin, 2000). It is that culture that sets the Catholic school apart.

Unless the Catholic culture of every school community is of the highest priority, the future of Catholic education is in jeopardy. Consequently those who are on the front line, our teachers and principals, must develop their faith lives through catechetical and theological updates and other spiritual development opportunities. The ongoing religious formation of Catholic school educators is crucial for the future of our schools. Shared ownership of the religious mission of the school is essential. (Garanzini, 1999, p.331)

Perhaps the "only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture"(Schein, 1985, p.2). Catholic educational leaders recognize that fostering the development of their school's Catholic culture is key to building a spiritual capital (Grace, 2002; Zohar & Marshall, 2004) and developing the faith of its students. In a world often at odds with those Gospel values and the teachings of the Church (Brien & Hack, 2005), "Catholic educational leaders must confront the pervasive influence of the mainstream

culture, deal with the many demands and expectations placed upon them, as well as recognize and seek to heal human frailty and sin" (Schuttloffel, 1999, p.3). It is through such an approach that "the countercultural dynamic of the faith tradition (is) institutionalized in Catholic schooling" (Cook, 2002, p.8).

Sashkin and Rosenbach, (1996, p. 17) suggest three strategies to assist leaders to define and inculcate values, and build culture. First, the principal must develop a clear value-based philosophy with the community – a statement of organisational purpose or mission that everyone understands. Next, others are empowered to define organizational policies and develop programs based on the values and beliefs contained in the philosophy. Lastly, the principal works to inculcate values and beliefs through his/her own individual behaviours and practices - modeling organizational values and beliefs by living them constantly and consistently. It is this consistent 'modeling' that constitutes the "stream of leadership activities which induce in the organization's membership clarity and consensus about the organization's fundamental beliefs, goals and aspirations" that Vaill (1986, p. 91) described as "purposing." In schools, this translates to the deliberate and consistent actions of the principal in leading the community to focus thoughts and actions, and in particular the curriculum, on the core mission of the school.

Starratt (1990a) used the metaphor of drama to convey this deliberate and intentional focusing of the community on that core mission.

The principal facilitates the intentional focus on the dramatic elements within the school. The principal is the one who reminds

the coaches and the players what the drama is for. Using metaphors describing the social drama and its challenges, the principal can constantly clothe even mundane classes on basic learnings with dramatic significance. (p. 114)

The consequences of a strong, Catholic culture are significant on several levels. 'Catholic,' it must be remembered, is not just a 'religious label'. It is also, in this context, an adjective modifying the noun 'school.' Catholic schools are first and foremost 'schools', and must be effective schools. In this context, the school culture is seen as "a crucial factor in school effectiveness ... (and) attentiveness to building culture characterizes principals in effective schools" (Cook, 2002, p. xvi).

Effective schools with strong cultures and community support draw on the 'social capital' (Grace, 2002; Veel, 2003) of that community. A parent group whose vision of education and hopes for their children resonate with those of the school, helps create a climate of aspiration and success (Cook, 2002). The "indispensable collaboration" (CSTM, 1998, par.20) of parent, student and school makes alive the possibility of developing this unique Christian school culture in which the "integral education of the human person" (par. 4) is the primary goal.

This research explores the way principals (and system authorities) perceive the notion of a "Catholic school culture' in their own schools; how this is expressed and promoted in their activities as leaders of that community, and

what the principal's understanding is of the link between this culture, the community and the purposes of their schools.

### **3.6 Leadership**

Sergiovanni (1984) posited five dimensions of a Principal's leadership. These are presented as a hierarchy of leadership forces, which he describes as technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural forces.

The most basic levels in this hierarchy were those of technical and human leadership, incorporating those task related skills of planning, managing and building morale and a sense of community. Azzara, (2001, p. 62), writing about "The Heart of School Leadership," declared that "if school leaders don't have skills in human relations they will perish!" But Sergiovanni's schema suggested that effective leaders needed to be much more than this. The educational leader (the third level of the hierarchy) was expert in the professional areas of teaching and learning, specifically related to the core business of being school and to the principal as 'head teacher' and (less often!), head learner (Gurr, 2001).

All of the forces are essential elements of leadership with each level providing the scaffolding for the next. The first three levels are associated with competence and good management of the educational process. However, the real heart of leadership (Flynn, 1993: McCreath, 1999, Tuohy, 2005) lies in the next levels: the 'symbolic leader' who makes 'the vision' part of the

everyday essence of the school; and the 'cultural leader' whose guidance gives rise to, and consolidates a strong, authentic school culture. It is

in the realms of the cultural and symbolic that the main differences (between Catholic school leadership and that of other institutions) may be found and where the awesome challenge lies ... To be judged successful the Catholic school leader must integrate Gospel values and moral ethics not only in the curriculum but in the policies and very life of the school. (McCreath, 1999, p.338)

Cultural and symbolic leadership represents that inspirational level of leadership which touches every part of the community's being, drawing it towards excellence (Tuohy, 2005). It provides the life force which, in the Catholic school, focuses the community on the mission and the core purposes of the school.

Through symbolic leadership activities, the (school principal) helps create a purpose which is embodied in the vision for the school. Through living out the vision the leader breathes a sense of purpose and excitement into the routines of daily life in the school. People in the school – teachers, parents, students – are challenged by this vision with the expectation that they will become committed to it. (Duignan, 1997, p. 54)

Flynn (1993, p. 54) critiqued Sergiovanni's model as lacking reference to Religious Leadership. He discussed amending the schema to add this religious aspect as a new level, at the apex of the pyramid, but concluded

that, “in the light of the Incarnation of Jesus, Christian leadership should permeate each level of the model.” Religious leadership should not be considered an added dimension in a hierarchy of leadership forces, but rather, it would permeate every aspect of the school’s life, and therefore every level of the principal’s activity. Fullan (2001, 2003) similarly weaves the notion of ‘moral purpose’ through all aspects of leadership, providing the underlying motive for all the principal’s actions, from the most mundane to the pivotal.

There have been a number of other conceptual deconstructions of leadership (much less complicated than Sergiovanni’s, such as the description by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) which effectively reduced leadership to two functions, “providing direction and exercising influence” (p. 2). This understanding grounded leadership in the community, providing a framework within which effective religious leadership might well flourish. Spry (2003) proposed six dimensions of leadership which bear some resemblance to the Sergiovanni framework and echoed the four dimensions of leadership described by CESA and outlined in Appendix A. The Spry model describes leadership, by focussing on the Catholic school’s needs and expectations of principalship. It identifies the dimensions of leadership as

- ‘Inner’ leadership
- ‘Interpersonal’ leadership
- ‘Organisational’ leadership
- ‘Educative’ leadership
- ‘Community’ leadership

- 'Faith' leadership

That the principal's role is a complex one can be seen by the variety of descriptions offered by writers and the number of categories used in their attempts to describe it. The principal is "teacher, advisor, coach, mentor, counselor, disciplinarian, reconciler, strategist, leader, manager, conserver, recruiter, and spokesperson" (Bryk et al., 1993, p.151). In a Catholic school roles such as liturgist and homilist might well be added to this already daunting array.

In a Catholic school leadership resides in, and relates to, that community of believers (McLaughlin, 1997). Leadership is essentially a relationship - between "those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 23). It is shared with that community from which it derives authority. In any community, McLaughlin argued (1997) there is an interdependence between leader and community implicit in this understanding of leadership. In this, there was an awareness that the leadership exists "only because of the relationship attained with followers (which) allows followers to assume leadership, and leaders in turn, to become followers" (p.17).

Sergiovanni (1990, 1995) described this leadership potential within communities as 'leadership density'. Dwyer (1993, p. 70) explained it as "the extent to which leadership roles are shared and the extent to which leadership is broadly exercised" in that community. He believed that an authentic



Catholic school should be characterized by a high level of leadership density amongst particularly the staff – a collaborative and collegial community.

The concept of authenticity (Terry, 1993; Duignan, 2005) is a further dimension of leadership practice. It defines the quality of relationships within the organization, and creates an effective context for the carrying out its core business. In reflecting on the drama of 9/11 in New York, and the leadership of its mayor in that crisis, Fitzgerald (2003) concluded that,

to be effective, leadership must be credible, trustworthy, and accountable. Leadership must listen to its people. Leadership is not about personal power but about empowering others. Leadership is consultative and collegial, embracing the gifts of others in an open, caring, comforting way. (p. 290)

There is in our society a cynicism about the integrity of those in power in public life (Fitzgerald, 2003). Politicians and other leaders are seen as having lost connection with those they serve, as having become self-seeking and profit-driven. In the aftermath of the crisis in New York, people witnessed authentic leadership, characterised by courage, empathy, honesty, and a real, unashamed and emotional connection with that suffering community. It is critical to their very nature that Catholic schools are served by such authentic leaders.

Starratt (2004) recognized a commitment to authenticity as the first of three 'ethics' of leadership: the ethic of authenticity; the ethic of responsibility; and

the ethic of presence. Authenticity in leadership engages the 'self' with others, being present to them, and having the courage to stand up for what is right.

Duignan described authentic leaders as being "a moral presence and model for others in a world that frequently lacks a commitment to values and ethical standards and may be bereft of spiritual considerations" (2002, p. 172-173).

As an organization whose mission is that of educating the young, Catholic schools require authentic leaders who will provide that model of probity and adherence to Gospel values which has the power to change the world. This is a "leadership that serves, and service that leads" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 289).

Authentic leaders "take action to bring change" (Duignan, 2002, p.183), to move the community closer to its ideal form, the vision which inspires it. They motivate themselves and their followers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), raising them and their activities to a higher ethical and moral level, thus "having a transforming effect on both" (Duignan, 2002, p. 183). This 'transformation' is key to the Catholic schools', and the Church's mission: a "commitment to transformation of the whole person" (Flynn, 1993, p. 20), as well as the wider community.

"Taking action" occurs within a philosophy and a set of values which contain a vision of a future for the community, and for the world (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). In a Catholic school, this vision is the "building up (of) the kingdom of God" (CS, 1977, par 36). To be truly authentic, the principal of a Catholic school must promote, encourage and support the core values of the school (Duignan, 2005). This requires strategic thinking and planning, but also

recognition that the future, in “this turbulent environment” is not always predictable! A key to strategic planning is to “know where you want to go” (the vision); to make creative choices “without the necessity to engage in obsessive detail in the planning process”; and to allow room for the Spirit in the process (Davies, 2003, p. 299).

A critical partner to “taking action” is reflective (Treston, 2005) or ‘contemplative’ (Schuttloffel, 1999) practice. In the Catholic school, this practice brings to decision making the leaders’ “beliefs and values about educational leadership, their professional knowledge and skills, as well as their experiences, along with those beliefs and values that transcend Catholic schooling” (Schuttloffel, 1999, p. 3). It is a way of allowing the Spirit to enter into the many moments of decision in the everyday, as well as into the process of looking ahead, so safeguarding and affirming the authentic Catholic culture of the school.

There are many challenges for principals of Catholic schools in this understanding of leadership in a Catholic school community. This study aims to explore the areas of authenticity and reflective practice, community leadership and shared leadership, and service, as they affect principals’ understanding of what it means to be a religious leader.

### 3.7 Transactional/Transformational Leadership

Lakomski (1995) pointed out that change was the norm in Australian schools, and the leadership of the principal was seen as central to this. The impulse for change can have a variety of causes – political, financial, ethical – and at times the need to realign the community with its charter, its vision. Whatever the cause, it involves a contract between the leader and the followers.

Leadership is not a neutral position. The actions, intentions and suggestions of the leader impact on the lives of followers to some degree. Leaders act to transform organizations, but they also transform followers “because they accept and internalize the key values and beliefs that leaders have identified as the basis of the organisation's culture” (Sashkin & Rosenbach, 1996, p. 4).

In a Catholic school, this ‘transformation’ is institutionalized in the vision: the “commitment to *transformation of the whole person*” (Flynn, 1993, p. 20). It seeks the “promotion of the human person” (CSTM, 1998, par. 9) through the “critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith ... and the integration of culture with faith and faith with living” (CS, 1977, par. 49), radically transforming the minds and hearts of students and the community.

Burns (1978), in his study of political leaders, identified two forms of leadership for change, essentially at the opposite ends of the spectrum of leadership models. These were ‘Transactional Leadership’ and ‘Transformational Leadership’.

Transactional leadership is characterised by an exchange of effort for rewards, without any consideration of the values, ethics or ideals underpinning the transaction. Essentially, it is a simple 'pay off' for work done, with no personal involvement required from the follower (Burns, 1979). The dispassionate nature of the contract would seem to be at odds with the Catholic school's focus on valuing the individual, but the supposition that the reward for effort is purely extrinsic may not always hold true: many people get great internal satisfaction in a job well done, and are not totally available to be bought and sold as a source of unquestioning labour.

Transformational leadership involves the leader motivating the community (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) towards "a commitment to transcendental goals which incorporate notions of achievement, risk, and self-actualisation over and above safety and security concerns" (McLaughlin, 1997, p. 18). "The leader defines direction, inspires, motivates, challenges and develops those around them" (Gurr, 2001, p. 1) – rather like the 'great man' theory of leadership, and at some variance with the community approach to leadership that is a characteristic of Catholic schools.

McLaughlin (1997, p. 18) is critical of transformational leadership as "just transactional leadership dressed up." The follower does the job – in return for a sense of satisfaction or fulfillment – but there is still an exchange of effort for (internal) rewards. Lakomski (1995) offers much the same critique, suggesting that transformational leadership promises more than it can deliver! However,

she does also point out that this model is predicated on the premise that knowledge is concentrated at the top of hierarchy and 'flows downhill', an important criticism in the context of a Catholic school, with its understanding of leadership as embedded in the community.

Gurr (2001, p.2) critiques transformational leadership as leader centred, "with little knowledge of both the context in which leadership is exercised and other personal dimensions that may be important." The followers may be seen, from this argument, as much 'tools of management' as those in the transactional model.

However, "the Catholic school, far more than any other, must be a community whose aim is the transmission of values for living ... faith, in fact, is born and grows inside a community" (CS, 1977, par. 53). This vision of the school is the basis for transformation in the community. The leader who shares with followers the vitality of this vision, while generating a sense of mission through "a continuous stream of actions ... which have the effect of inducing clarity, consensus and commitment regarding the organisation's basic purposes" (Vaill, 1986, p. 91) is engaging in transformative leadership at the level of the cultural and symbolic forces of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984).

In this study, Principals were invited to explore their understanding of the 'transformative' nature of their role, and the place this had in their understanding of their roles as religious leaders.

### 3.8 Servant Leadership

In scripture, we encounter the model of Jesus as leader – as one who lived amongst His people and served them (Nuzzi, 2000). Jesus washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:12-15); fed the multitudes (Mt. 15:32-39); and healed and forgave those in need.

In Catholic schools, this model is presented in terms of 'servant leadership', a phrase much used, but one which stirs questions as to the apparent contradiction in its terms. Robert Greenleaf (1977) described the concept thus:

The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead ... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test ... is: do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived? (p. 13)

Servant leadership is in essence written in the heart, not imposed from without. "The power to cultivate servant leadership comes from the individual. It's an inside-out approach" (Covey, in Spears, 1998, p. xvii). It emphasises the

connectedness of humans in an organisation, and leadership in this context can be partly explained by the synonym “Primus inter pares” – first among equals. Both the leader and followers “are community members - they and their talents are invited to participate fully in the work of the community for the good of the community and not for the aggrandisement of the leader” (McLaughlin, 1997, p.23).

Servant -Leaders focus on meeting the needs of others. But is the notion of servant leadership a contradiction in terms? Most of the mis-understanding comes from the way the phrase is read. If one understands it as ‘Servant *or* leader’ the one limits and defines the other and leadership can at best be passive. ‘Servant *and* leader’ on the other hand, presents two equal concepts joined in paradox (<http://www.sbcollege.mb.ca/SL/stanpl.htm>).

Catholic school leadership exists within the community, and is characterised by such values as collaboration and subsidiarity in its actions (RDE, 1988, par 39). It is a relational community, and the leader serves both the community and the vision.

Servant leadership should be the distinctive characteristic of the Catholic leader. Servant leadership recognises that all members of the community and organisation are capable of making valuable contributions which can enhance Catholic systems and organisations. Indeed, the insightful Catholic leader knows that true leadership is given imprimatur not by position but by followers. (Collins, 1998, p. 79)



Servant leadership has been part of the rhetoric of leadership for some time, and this study sought to explore how current Principals understood the concept, and how (if) they employed any of the ideas inherent in it in their exercise of religious leadership in the school.

### **3.9 Religious Leadership**

Catholic schools are at the heart of the Church's mission, and in this, authentic religious leadership is central to their success (Bezzina & Wilson, 1999). That mission is the faith formation of the students (Grace 2002), and so Catholic school leaders bear a significant leadership responsibility not borne by others – “to act to insure that students learn what it means to be Catholic - both morally and intellectually” (Schuttloffel, 1999, p. 2).

This is a complex challenge: those charged with the responsibility have to deal with the normal expectations of educational leaders, and they must embody the religious mission of Catholic schooling and oversee the faith formation of the school community - especially the students.

Although much of the work of Catholic school principals is similar to that of their public school counterparts, we conclude that the nature of school leadership has a distinctive character here. Both public and Catholic school principals value academic excellence and students' educational attainment. For principals in Catholic schools, however, there is also an important spiritual dimension to

leadership that is apt to be absent from the concerns of public school administrators. (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 156)

The leader of a Catholic school – the religious leader – must have a vision of education that is congruent with that expressed in the major Catholic Church documents on Catholic schooling. This is a vision that is concerned with the development of the whole person - the integral education of the human person (CS, 1977, par.21; CSTM, 1998, par.4). “It is a vision in which the sacredness of the human person is upheld, a vision that flows from the Gospels of Jesus and the Christian experience of people who have attempted to live that Gospel throughout Christian history” (D’Orsa, 1999, p. 130).

The religious leader in a Catholic school therefore, should be

- A person who has an understanding of Catholic education as an integral part of the Church's teaching mission;
- A person of faith who is able to communicate this faith with others;
- A person whose lifestyle is founded upon Gospel values and who is a role model for students, parents and faculty;
- A moral educator and leader.

(Travis & Shimabukuro, 1999. p. 338)

In 'Catholic' leadership that commitment to Gospel values “should be evidenced in all leadership transactions” (Duignan & D’Arbon, 1998, p. 79). It is the integrity of this commitment which is the basis of authentic leadership,

and those Gospel values provide the lens through which to “shine a light on every aspect of administration; staff selection, curriculum, teaching, school life, language, policy, planning, cultural symbols, events and celebrations” in the life of that school community (Benjamin, 2002, p. 82).

However, "values and faith are never lived out in splendid and clinically clean isolation, but in the reality of the world where often the messiness is the most sacred" (Duignan, 1998, p.12). What does faith mean to those students and families who are not affiliated with the Eucharistic church, or are not Catholic? "The biggest challenge facing Catholic leaders today is ensuring relevance. Who cares about being Catholic today? Is it important?" (D'Arbon, 1998, p.22) These are issues which religious leaders, the principals of Catholic schools, have to respond to, in compassion and with empathy – but still, as (by proxy) the voice of the church.

Treston (1997, p. 9) pointed out that, in an educated and articulate community “most Catholics today do not accept church teaching simply because church authorities tell them, but tend to test these teachings against the experience of their own lived Christianity.” Hansen also notes these tensions: "post-Vatican II, post-modern Catholics, ... often found themselves at odds with aspects of Church teaching, and privately found themselves adopting positions of loyal dissent on some moral ecclesiological and gender-related issues within Church" (2000, p.32).

The dilemmas arising from a disjuncture between official Catholic moral teaching and the mores of contemporary society (Grace, 1995) affect not only the outside community, but also the staff of schools, and even the principals themselves. Issues such as the gap between traditional Catholic images of 'family' and the reality of children's experience of single parents; violence, abuse and crime; the reality of divorce and separation; sexual activity outside marriage; promiscuity, contraception and abortion; and not the least the double standards of parents – are all part of the life of the community of the Catholic school. Bezzina also raises as a challenge to principals and to the authenticity of Catholic schools, "the dangers of access to Catholic schools becoming limited to the wealthier classes, thereby contributing to a society which is unjust" (1999, p.21). Catholic social teaching challenges schools and principals to pursue the common good, and to institute a preferential option for the poor, yet the cost of education in many contemporary Catholic schools is already beyond the practical reach of many, and not only the traditional 'poor.'

'Inclusion' challenges Catholic schools to open their doors to the disabled, the disadvantaged, and the disobedient! But concerns such as competition for enrolments, the cost of uniforms, and maintaining 'academic standards' and discipline stand in the way of Christ's open arms (Bezzina, 1999, p. 32).

Cook (2002) explored the response of Catholic leaders to problems such as these and pondered what sort of formation the lay staff in Catholic schools, and principals in particular, might need in order to nurture an authentic Catholic spirit in the schools.

Catholic schools need Principals who can lead their faculty and students to embrace and be animated by the Catholic vision of life. This requirement assumes, however, that Catholic principals have received training in the philosophical and theological purposes at the heart of this apostolate. (p. vi)

However, the current focus on management and accountability at times distracts from these purposes - and the integrity of the school as Catholic is eroded. In the busy-ness of the principal's crowded day, situations which appear to require quick decisions are a normal occurrence. Catholic educational leaders, however, have a responsibility to assess the degree to which solutions to these problems reflect the perspective of the Gospel, and foster faith formation in the community (Schuttloffel, 1999). Reflective practice provides a mechanism with which to critique the processes and outcomes of decision making, and to make decisions that "communicate to every member of the school community the fundamental purpose – the Gospel values – animating life in the Catholic school" (Schuttloffel, 1999, p.84).

To create a successful Catholic school, the principal must integrate Gospel values and moral ethics not only in the curriculum but in the policies and very life of the school (McCreath, 1999). The most substantial part of this research has focused on this responsibility in the principal's role. It has explored the implications of Catholic religious leadership for professional practice in the day to day life of practitioners in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. The practical questions such as how principals model and promote the religious values of the school in the every day life of the school; how the

principal, as religious leader, deals with the moral and ethical problems of the community; what factors enable or hinder practical action to make 'religious leadership' a reality of their practice; and what the key formation and selection issues facing principals are, form the framework for this research into the practical realities of religious leadership in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

Grace suggested that “the greatest ‘sin’ of the institutional Church has been to create and project a model of leadership, represented by the papacy, which has been characterised by a form of papal monarchism, absolute and infallible” (2002, p.142). This traditional model of leadership in Catholic schools certainly presents challenges to system authorities and principals seeking to exercise authentic religious leadership in a complex environment.

The themes explored in the Review of Literature each illustrate a dimension of religious leadership which has, by various writers and commentators, been applied to the leadership of Catholic schools. In light of this conceptual framework, the following chapter outlines the research design adopted for the study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Design**

In the previous chapter, the relevant elements of the literature pertaining to Religious Leadership in schools was described, and lacunae, or 'gaps' (Clark & Causer, 1991) in the field were highlighted. This research – how religious leadership is understood and practised by principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia – is designed to further the professional conversation concerning this dimension of leadership. This chapter describes the theoretical perspectives that have informed the design of the research project, and the methods used to gather and analyse the data upon which the investigation rests.

#### **4.1 Theoretical Framework**

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applied to the role and practice of principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia, the research design was concerned with tapping into, and recording the understandings and actions of individuals operating within that value laden system, the Catholic School.

This project has been a qualitative undertaking. The idea of 'Religious Leadership' and its expression in the lives and actions of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools is not one that "can be established by using natural science methods" (Robson, 2002, p.24). Its subject is people, and

they, “unlike the objects of the natural world, are conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them. In particular, their behaviour depends crucially on these ideas and meanings” (Robson, 2002, p.24). The intention of this Qualitative Research project then, was to tease out, with a group of practitioners, not only their understandings of what the theory and literature says about religious leadership, but also how it was practiced.

Punch (1998) describes the process of qualitative research as being sensitive to context and process, to lived experience and to local grounded-ness, and the researcher tries to get closer to what is being studied. It aims for in-depth and holistic understanding, in order to do justice to the complexity of social life. (p.243)

This has been an "inquiry from the inside" (Allan 1991, p. 178), rather than a dispassionate or clinical "inquiry from the outside," looking in. The most significant data was gathered from personal communications, largely in the form of interviews, surveys and an expert reference group - but in all of these "the primary instrument for (that) data collection and analysis" has been the researcher - myself (Punch 2000, p. 57).

As a practitioner in the field of Leadership in Catholic Education, I recognise that I have brought certain assumptions to the research. Amongst these were that ...



- there is a religious imperative in the role of principal of a Catholic Secondary School;
- Principals have an understanding of this, and accept it;
- there are some clear, conscious actions that people will readily recognise as belonging to that sphere of action identified as 'Religious Leadership' - but that there will also be a 'well' of 'hidden' or 'sub-conscious' aspects to practice;
- Catholic schools exist in a world context often at variance with their core operational values.

Recognising these assumptions, the strategies for data collection and examination were designed to reduce the impact of the intrusion of researcher “bias into analysis while retaining sensitivity to what is being said in the data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.43). To this end, a systematic approach using three distinct means of data collection was developed, the third form specifically established to reflect on and to respond to the themes emerging from the earlier data – an ‘Expert Reference Group’ with acknowledged experience in religious leadership and in Church matters, especially education. However, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted,

a state of complete objectivity is impossible and ... in every piece of research – quantitative or qualitative – there is an element of subjectivity. What is important is to recognise that subjectivity is an issue and researchers should take appropriate measures to minimise its intrusion into their analyses. (p.43)

#### **4.1.1 Paradigms in Qualitative Research**

Religious leadership is not a concrete 'thing' that can be objectively measured, or even described, as this research certainly discovered. It 'looks' different to different people; it finds different expression in different contexts. This study has sought an understanding of the concept, through the eyes of the practitioners. It is essentially Interpretive, and Critical - in the sense of critiquing practice.

As an Interpretivist enquiry, it is also practical. The study is about how people acting in a particular role live out a core aspect of that role. It interprets actions, intuiting meaning and context to them. How these principals, the participants in the research project, create and maintain their world - the symbolic interactions of time, faith, culture, and place that make meaning - is of great importance to the Church, to these Catholic Secondary Schools, and to all who make up their communities. The study gives voice to those working in the complex role of the principal in the changing world of the Third Millennium. In the process, it aims to affirm Catholic Secondary School Principals in their role as religious leaders; and, based on the practical experiences of those involved, it is intended to provide ideas and support for those Principals who struggle with the concept and in the role.

Within the enquiry, an hermeneutical approach has been taken to text, including conversation (Robson, 2002, p.196), interpreting the expressions of everyday life with a view to 'getting inside' them, to critique and celebrate them as life giving to that Catholic School. In view of the researcher's own

involvement in this area, it is relevant to note Robson's further comment in this matter: "hermeneutics would maintain that the closer one is to the source of the text the more valid one's interpretation is likely to be" (Robson, 2002, p.197). This study represents a process of making sense of 'the world' of the subject, and that very closeness to the subject can be a source of insight and discernment of meaning, which might elude a more distant appraisal.

Religious leadership will have different meanings, implications and expectations - for the Church, for Catholic Education Systems, for the individual principals - and the different ways of expressing this understanding contribute to the uniqueness of each school. This attempt at seeking understanding, at critically questioning the content of actions, and reflecting on practice with these principals represents an potential contribution to understanding and shaping the culture of these Catholic schools into the future.

#### **4.1.2 Epistemology**

Reality is socially constructed. Crotty (1998) suggested that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). This understanding of knowledge, known as Constructionism, holds that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world ... meaning ... is constructed ...

and different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9).

This study has accessed the realities of a group of principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. It has sought to make meaning of the term ‘Religious Leadership’, by exploring the ways different people have interpreted it, made it real, and have acted in relation to it. However, as the observer, I acknowledge that I may not have always been totally objective, and may have ‘heard’ particular responses and perhaps ‘missed’ others. In this sense, I have been a participant observer. ‘My reality’ will have interacted with my understanding of ‘their reality’. This issue has been canvassed earlier in the chapter, but in this context, Maxwell (1996, p. 27) observes, “traditionally, what you bring to the research from your background and identity has been treated as *bias*, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than as a valuable component of it.” My own stake in this area is significant, but I believe it complements the worldview and contexts of the participants, and so should be seen as a strength in this investigation. It has, however, been important to me to ‘honour’ and safeguard the understandings of those who have been the focus of this study.

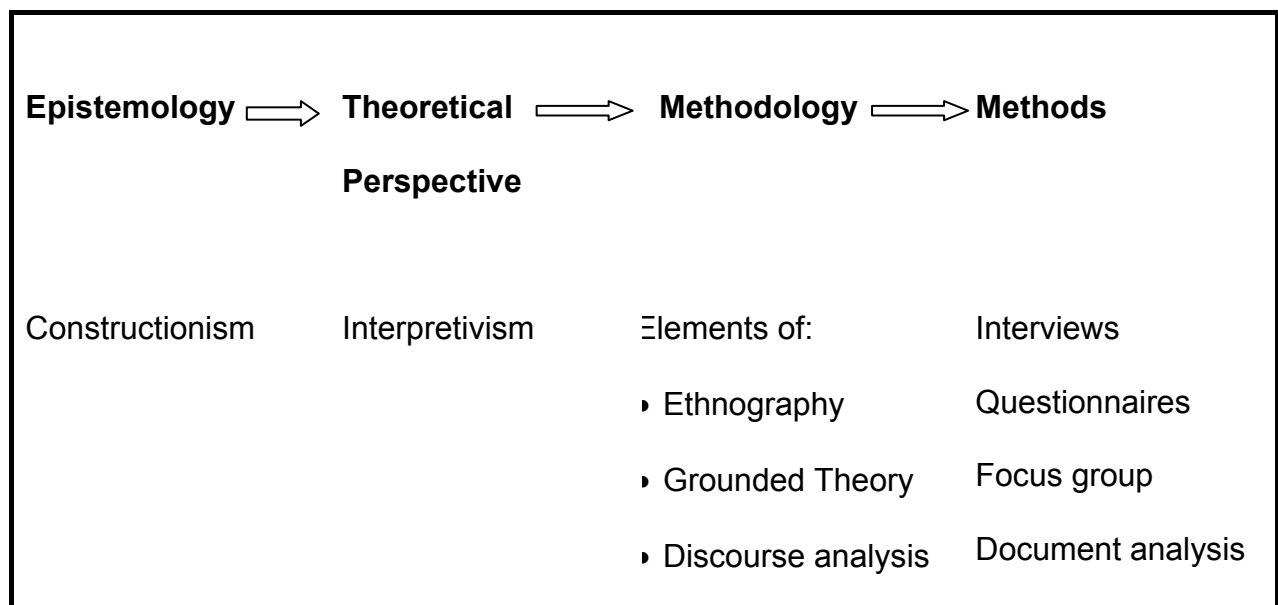
There is no single answer to the question ‘What does Religious Leadership mean/look like?’ “We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 197). The concept has been, and continues to be,

shaped by political, cultural and economic realities, and the ethnic and gender values that have crystallised over time. It is the concatenation of these factors that has formed the crux of this study, as an attempt to ‘construct’ and describe this key operating concept in leadership practice in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia.

### 4.1.3 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical framework of this research is summarised in **Figure 4.1** below.

*Figure 4.1. Theoretical Framework for Research Design*



## 4.2 Research Methodology

Gough (2002) suggests that there is no 'objective truth' out there awaiting discovery. 'Meaning' is not *discovered*, but *constructed*: it comes into existence in and out of our engagement with our world realities. There certainly is not one definitive, true in all circumstances, answer to any of the questions posed in this research. As a consequence of this, the purpose of this project has been two-fold: firstly, to explore the meanings and perceptions held by the principals about the concept of religious leadership in practice; and secondly, to invite the perceptions and expectations of the local Church and Catholic Education System authorities in relationship to that leadership.

A wide range of strategies and methods are available to the researcher within the field of qualitative research, but the methods used in this investigation were chosen particularly to enable the researcher to 'see' from the point of view of the participants. A semi-structured approach in interviews, with non-directive questioning styles, was undertaken, allowing the participants to follow their own trains of thought and to enjoy the encounter. Surveys were constructed to provide a range of ways of responding, from ticking boxes to free responses to challenging propositions. A Focus Group, involving experts in the field, provided the opportunity for a lively and positive discussion, in which the participants explored themes from the research and challenged assumptions – and each other.

This research taps into the 'practice knowledge' of the participants - that which has been learnt along the way - and into their reflective practice (McLaughlin, 2003). There was an element of the Case Study method in this approach, in that it involved the collection of information about a particular and limited condition via a range of data collection techniques and documentary analysis. Similarly there were certainly elements of Ethnographic inquiry involved in the process - "in the spirit of symbolic interactionism (the method) seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions on behalf of the people participating in the research, viewing those people's overall worldview or 'culture' " (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). The reality of the researcher's immersion in the setting (Robson, 2002) and the expressed purpose of capturing, interpreting and explaining how this group of Principals "live, experience and make sense of their lives and their world" (Robson, 2002, p.89) in the crucible of leadership in Catholic Schools is typical of this type of approach. These Principals were asked to reflect on how they translated and integrated personal values and Church expectations into the managing and leading of significant institutions in our society – the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia.

In following this path, this research has looked into an area of practice about which little has been written. It explores the understandings and lived reality of the group of people who exercise this religious leadership. It is concerned with "seeking evidence about what actually goes on out there!" (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 18). It also exhibits, in technical terms, aspects of a Grounded Theory approach, in that the researcher is working from the data towards

explanations. O'Donoghue and Haynes (1997) encapsulated the essence of this approach when they stated that Grounded Theory

does not set out by articulating a theory, forming a hypothesis within that theory and then testing to see whether it is true or not. Rather, it very broadly raises questions about a general area on which little research has been done. The researcher collects as much 'raw data' as possible from a varied range of sources and analyses it to detect patterns or salient features that appear to emerge. Those patterns may then generate further questions which are presented either to the same participants or to a different group. An analysis is then made to see if the proto-theory still holds. This iterative process of constructing and refining a theory is repeated until the data is said to be 'saturated'. (p. 61)

A sense of 'groundedness' was built up during the data gathering stage through a sequential process of interviews with individual practitioners in the field, followed by a survey of the entire principal group. based on the observations gleaned from the first process. Finally an 'expert reference group' interview. The "saturated" data from these sources formed the basis for the analysis and critical examination of the beliefs, norms and strategies of the principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia, acting in their capacity as religious leaders, and in the light of the key questions of the research project. It was not, however, anticipated that a 'theory' would necessarily be generated from this activity; rather, it was hoped that a greater



understanding of the concept would be developed, and a series of recommendations to inform practice would emerge from this.

Patton (2002, p. 454) describes this process as “being immersed in the data,” in the ‘real’ world of the subjects. In analysis, this allowed the underlying meanings to be brought closer to the surface and examined in three layers of critique, inductively drawing out themes and relationships, and leading to a series of conclusions and recommendations, which are described in the final chapter.

### **4.3 Data Collecting Strategies**

Table 4.1 describes the links between the Research Questions, the data sources and data collection strategies. It identifies an ‘Area of Focus’ for each Research Question and the Data Sources explored in relation to these. The key contributors in each section of the research are identified in bold text in the table. The data gathering strategies are also briefly described and linked back to the ‘area of focus’.

*Table 4.1: Schematic Representation of the Link between Research Questions, Data Sources and Data Gathering Strategies*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Data Gathering Strategies</b>
<p>RQ 1</p> <p>What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?</p>	<p><b>Expectations of Church and System</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Documents</b> of the Congregation for Catholic Education</li> <li>• <b>Archbishop</b> of Adelaide</li> <li>• <b>Bishop</b> of Port Pirie</li> <li>• <b>Directors</b>, CEO (Adelaide and Port Pirie)</li> <li>• Assistant Director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Document</b> analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Policy Documents</li> <li>✓ Church Documents</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Interviews</b></li> </ul>
<p>RQ 2</p> <p>How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?</p>	<p><b>The Mindset of the Practitioners</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Principals</b></li> <li>• Expert Reference Group</li> <li>• System authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interviews</b></li> <li>• <b>Survey</b></li> <li>• Focus Group interview</li> </ul>
<p>RQ 3</p> <p>What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?</p>	<p><b>Implications for Practice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Principals</b></li> <li>• Expert Reference Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interviews</b></li> <li>• <b>Survey</b></li> <li>• Focus Group</li> </ul>

The data gathering strategies, as indicated in the Table above, and earlier, in Figure 4.1 were:

#### **4.3.1: Interviews**

These first stages of data gathering were used as exploratory, descriptive and explanatory tools (Robson, 2002) to gain insight into the understandings and meanings constructed by individuals and groups regarding the events and experiences of their lives. In conversation with the Catholic Archbishop of Adelaide, the Catholic Bishop of the Pirie Diocese, CESA personnel, and individual principals, interviews were used to gain insights into that part of leadership practice which practitioners saw as having a religious intent, or which was consciously motivated by some dimension of religious being. Questions were open ended, and the approach was essentially conversational – an interactive interviewing style.

#### **4.3.2: Surveys**

These formed the second stage of the process and the themes, ideas and concerns that had emerged from the interviews were used to generate the instrument. This approach offered the broader Principal group the opportunity to explore the extent to which the images and understandings built up in the interview process had wider currency, and whether there were areas of meaning yet to be tapped.

#### **4.3.3: Expert Reference Group**

This final phase of the data gathering was a focus group involving a specially selected group of senior educationalists in reflecting on themes drawn from the earlier stages of the research. The members of the group were a Director of Education; a religious sister, who had recently served as Congregational Leader; a retired Principal; and a currently serving principal. This group took the themes and explored them further, testing the ideas amongst themselves to develop a sense of how much support there might be for them, and using each other as springboards to highlight alternative understandings or areas of significance not raised in the earlier instruments. The researcher's role in this process was to create a relaxed and positive environment within which the conversation could flourish; to facilitate the movement of the discussion, so that themes emerging from the principal interviews and surveys could be considered; and to ensure that a record was maintained of the content shared there.

#### **4.3.4: Document Analysis**

A study of key documents from the CEO and SACCS was central to the research. These indicated the expectations of the System in relation to the religious role of the principal, and provided data relation to selection and appointment of principals. These documents included

- Extracts from the generic contract/Conditions of Employment document for a Catholic School Principal in South Australia (see Appendix E)
- Selection of Principal, Essential Criteria document, SA (see Appendix A)
- Details of current Principal preparation courses (Leadership Programs 2005) (see Appendix F)

In addition, copies of School Newsletters published from the end of October to early November 2004 were collected from each school following the principal interviews. The purpose of this collection was to assess the ways in which the Religious Leadership of the Principal might be evident in the official and public written communications of the school.

## **4.4 Participants**

### **4.4.1 Data Collection Stage 1: The Interviews**

Interviews were initially conducted with the Archbishop of Adelaide, the Bishop of Port Pirie, the Director (CEO) and one of the Assistant Directors, primarily to establish what the Church and System authorities understood by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how this might shape the role of the principal in a Catholic Secondary School. All made themselves readily available, and the interviews were conducted and taped, with permission, in their respective offices. Appendix G provides the "Interview Schedule for Church and System Authorities", a template for the range and general form of

questions employed in these interviews. Transcripts were returned to the subjects, and all verified the accuracy of the recordings – though several indicated areas from which they did not wish to be quoted, or made clarifications to their original comments. These were duly noted and their reservations have been honoured in the study.

These interviews with the Church and System authorities were followed by interviews with six principals from Catholic Secondary Schools across both Dioceses. In order to obtain as rich a data response as possible, the sample of principals for interview was deliberately structured to cover the range of different types of Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia (see criteria below). Robson (2002) describes this as purposive sampling, where the researcher uses judgement to achieve a particular purpose.

The criteria for selection of these interview subjects required

- that they had been established in the role of principal in a Catholic Secondary School in SA for three or more years – to ensure enough time in the role to provide responses informed by practice; and
- that those selected would represent the range of different types of school - co-educational, all-boys, all-girls, metropolitan and rural.

Letters requesting interviews were sent to the selected principals (Appendix H: Request for Interview) explaining the research project and seeking their willingness to be involved in the process (Appendix I: Consent Form). Four

principals accepted and arrangements for interview were made. Two declined – one because of a perceived conflict of interest, and the second because of lack of time. Two others who met the criteria and covering those particular school types were contacted and agreed to participate. All interviews were conducted in the schools, and taped for transcription, verification and study. Appendix J provides a schedule of the sample interview questions used with the principals.

#### **4.4.2: Data Collection Stage 2: the Survey**

The Survey was developed from insights gathered in the interview process, and from the current writings in the area of religious leadership in schools. It tested the degree to which the thoughts expressed by the interviewees, both the Church and System authorities and the principal group, were in accord with those of the wider Principal group in SA; to develop these insights further, through more specific questioning; and to explore areas of relevance that may have been overlooked or omitted in the interview process. The Survey was framed to address the three key research questions:

##### **Research Question 1:**

What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?

**Research Question 2:**

How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in selected Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

**Research Question 3:**

What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

The Survey Instrument (see Appendix K), along with a copy of the explanatory 'Letter of Introduction' (Appendix L) was sent to all principals. The letter described the project, setting out such conditions as the anonymity of the respondents and the confidentiality of data, and inviting them to take part in the exercise. These documents were sent individually by post, addressed personally, to all principals in South Australian Catholic Secondary Schools. This post-out was followed up by a reminder through the CEO email service (see Appendix M), and finally by a more direct prompt at a meeting of the Principals' Association, courtesy of one of its members, who provided additional copies of the both the Letter of Introduction and the Survey Instrument.

The survey group – that is, the total cohort of principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in SA in 2005 - numbered 33, grouped according to gender as shown in Table 4.2 below.



*Table 4.2 Gender of Survey Group: April 2005*

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total Group</b>
Potential Survey group	13	20	33
Respondents	2	10	12

A total of twelve Principals - nine Lay Principals under Contract, one Religious Principal of a Systemic School and two Lay Principals (Acting) - responded to the survey, again shown according to gender in Table 4.3.

*Table 4.3 Appointment Status of Respondents*

<b>Appointment Status</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Lay Principals under Contract	1	8
Religious Principal of a Systemic School	1	
Other: Lay Principal (Acting)		2

Question 1.3 sought information on the length of time the respondents had experienced in the role. Only one who returned the survey had been a Principal for more than ten years – possibly a reflection of the usual provisions of a principal’s contract in the South Australian situation, which allow normally for a five year term, renewable once (see Appendix E). The balance of the group ranged in the length of their experience up to six years (Table 4.4 below). No one from the 6-10 year experience range responded.

*Table 4.4 Time in Role – Respondents*

<b>Time in Role</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Less than 3 Years		7
3 – 6 Years	2	2
6 – 10 Years	0	0
More than 10 years		1

Surveys were received from Principals representing a variety of Secondary Schools, as shown in Table 4.5. One (male) respondent did not specify the type of school he represented, but apart from this possibility, only Single Sex Girls' schools were not represented in the responses.

*Table 4.5 Type of Schools Represented by Respondents*

	Female	Male
Metropolitan		8
Country	2	1
Unspecified		1
Co-Educational	2	6
Single-Sex (boys)		4

#### **4.4.3: Data Collection Stage 3: The Expert Reference Group**

The response to the survey was both disappointing and too small to warrant basing the substance of the findings of the research on it alone, so the decision was made to refer the data, in aggregated form, to an Expert Reference Group for further development. This group was convened in August 2005, and met for two hours at the CEO in Adelaide.

The Criteria for Selection for the Expert Reference Group participants included that they each be people who had expertise in a variety of aspects of leadership at System and Church levels in South Australia, who had been Principals at some stage in their careers, and who were still active in Catholic Education and/or Church in a field related to Religious Leadership. Participants were chosen in order to bring to the table “a variety of perspectives” (Patton, 2002, p.385), and it was hoped that the “interactions among participants (would) enhance data quality” (Robson, 2002, p.386) and highlight any areas of omission in the material collected to that point. As previously indicated, final membership of the group consisted of a Director of Education; a religious sister, who had recently served as Congregational Leader; a retired Principal; and a currently serving principal. A fifth member, part of the CEO Leadership Development group, was unable to attend when the group actually met.

Their discussion was framed around a document sent beforehand to all members (see Appendix N) broadly listing the main themes that had emerged through the interview and survey stages. As Robson observed, “focus groups tap a different realm of social reality from that revealed by the one-to-one interviews or questionnaire studies” (Robson, 2002, p.289), and this proved to be the case, with this group providing significant insights beyond the data collected to that point.

## 4.5 Analysis of Data

Miles and Hubermann's list of analytic moves (1994) provided a useful guide to a sequence of analysis of the field results in this qualitative project. Their essentially "realist" approach to data analysis may be somewhat "at odds" (Robson, 2002, p. 474) with the Constructionist approach tapping into the personal and subjective 'meanings' and 'understandings' of the different principals, but the steps they suggested for the handling of large amounts of data proved very useful in this study. In their highly structured methodology, 'real events' are catalogued and described through "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification" (Miles and Hubermann, 1994, p. 9). In this study, such a "continuous iterative process" (Robson, 2002, p. 476) was particularly useful in working with a stream of qualitative data from a multiplicity of sources, reducing it to a form that permitted clearer analysis and the drawing of relevant conclusions.

The data processing followed these stages:

- Identification of key words and allocation of codes in the material from the different sources
- Addition of comments to these as the data developed
- Identification of themes and relationships from and within these
- The use of these to help focus subsequent stages of data collection

- Derivation of a small set of generalisations that covered these themes and relationships in the data
- Linking these to the literature to further develop the existing knowledge, and to highlight new insights.

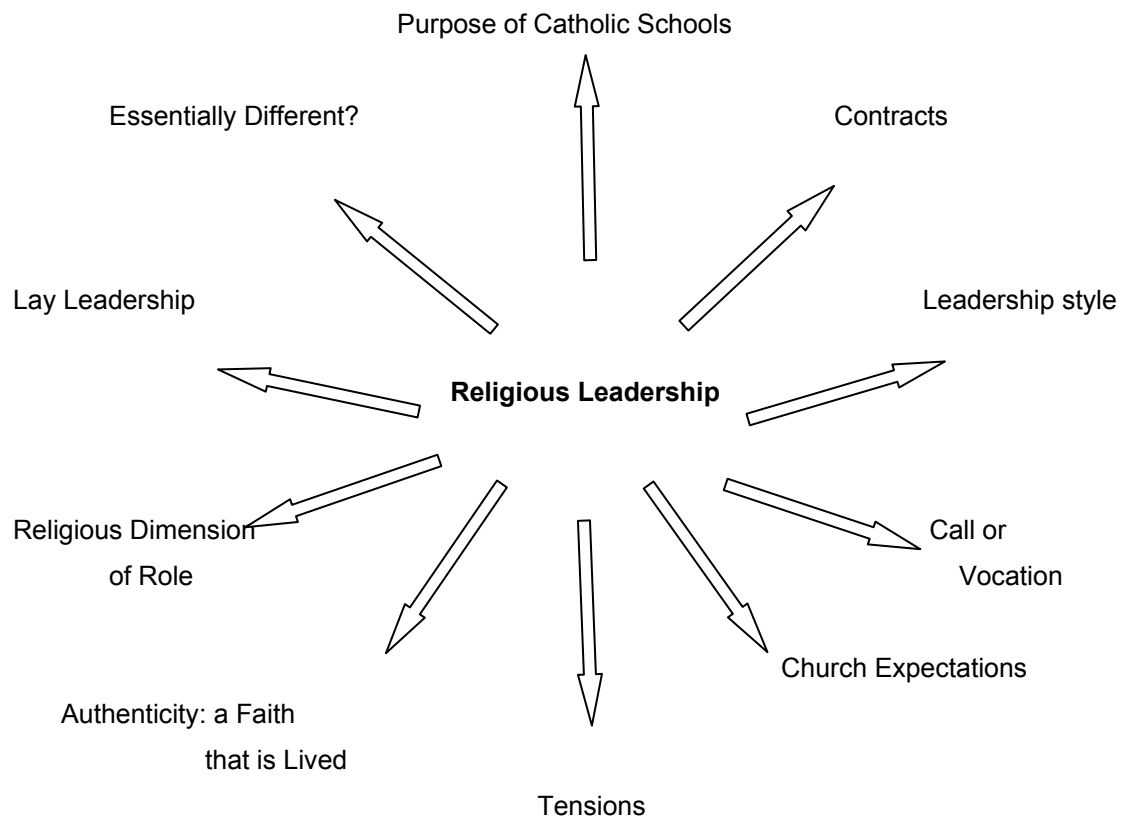
(Adapted from Miles and Hubermann, 1994, p. 9)

Dedicated computer software programs such as N-Vivo were considered for the analysis, but in the course of transcription the intimate level of involvement with the data meant that I felt most comfortable working in a more directly visual way, and drawing the threads together manually. Consequently, the data was analysed 'by hand'. The key-words and themes derived from the data reduction processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) applied to stages one and two, are presented in schematic form, associated with the apposite Research Questions, in Figures 4.3 to 4.5 below. The material from Stage 1 (the interviews) was used to generate the Survey instrument (Stage 2), and data from both sources formed the basis for the Expert Reference Group interview (Stage 3). Further details regarding generalisations derived in the next stages, the linkages to the literature and the conclusions from this process appear in the subsequent chapters of this work.

Figure 4.3 shows the ten themes around the concept of religious leadership that emerged in the analysis relevant to Research Question 1.

*Figure 4.2: Themes from the First Research Question*

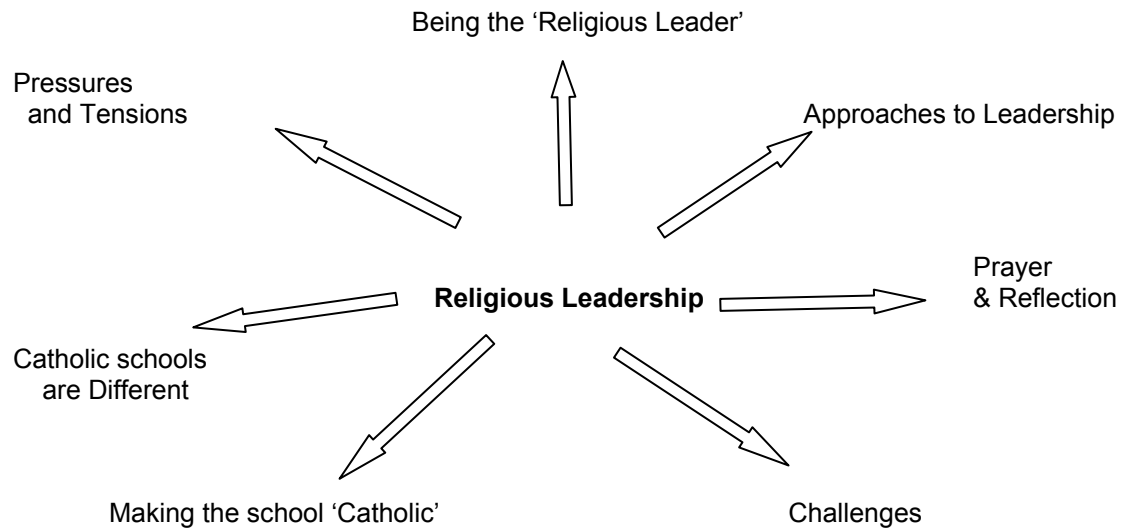
***What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?***



The seven themes that emerged from an analysis of the interviews with principals about the religious leadership dimension of their role are shown in Figure 4.4. Figure 4.5 reflects the eight themes from the data about the formation and selection of principal in the Catholic Secondary Schools in SA.

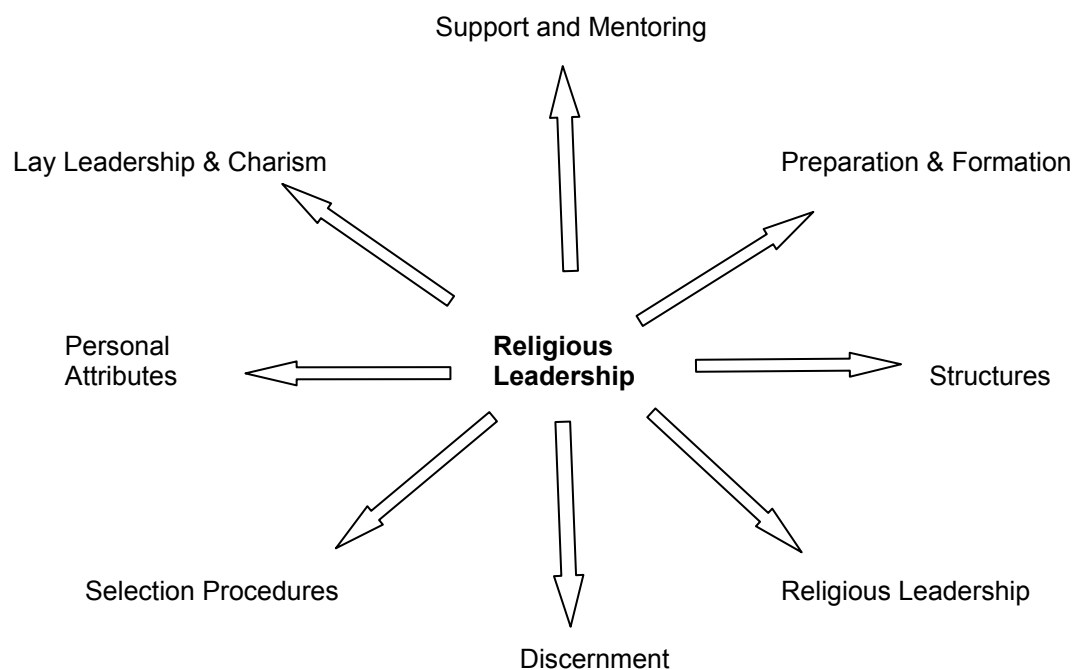
*Figure 4.3: Themes from the Second Research Question*

**How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?**



*Figure 4.4: Themes from the Third Research Question*

**What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?**



## **4.6 Critiquing the Data**

This research is not intended to provide a definitive answer to a problem. It is a description, an exploration and an analysis of a key dimension of Leadership in Catholic Schools in SA. The results have been presented in such a way as to invite readers to use "their own interpretive and sense making capacities (to) derive their own unique meanings or 'readings' of the text" (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p. 486). The conclusions and recommendations contained in the final chapter relate specifically to the South Australian context, and to the period of the research.

### **4.6.1 Verification**

Traditionally, verification means that the findings can be verified by both the researcher and by others (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Crotty, 1998). One way this might be achieved is through replication of the study. However, in a case such as this, while the method can certainly be re-used, the situation in which it might be applied, the persons who might respond, and the interpretations and emphases that may be placed on those responses can never be completely replicated (Allan, 1991). This is a study of a particular situation – that of the Religious Leadership of Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia - and the findings are tied to that context. None-the-less, the topic of Religious Leadership is a concern in Catholic Education Systems across Australia (Dwyer, 1993; Ryan et al., 1996; Duignan, 1997; Engebretson, 1997; Sultmann & McLaughlin, 2000; Flynn & Mok, 2002), and



replication in a different context could be a valid exercise for another researcher who was interested to find out if similar findings would emerge in other settings.

#### **4.6.2 Generalisability**

In an interpretivist study such as this, because the data is tied to a particular set of circumstances, there can be no explicit generalisability of the findings. They represent the response of that group of people to that world at that time. However, these findings may be of interest to both those already in the position of principal in a Religious School, and to those aspiring to the role. It is certainly hoped that understandings gained from the research will provide insights that may assist in defining the concept of religious leadership more clearly, and examples of how this happens in a practical sense. If leaders find this helpful and affirming, then that will be a positive, but personal, response.

#### **4.6.3 Validity and Dependability**

In view of the methodological approach that has driven this research, the validity of both its process and its findings lies in the degree to which "it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (Hammersley, quoted in both Silverman, 2000, p. 175; and Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p. 487). However, from a constructionist point of view, the social world is "an interpreted world. It is interpreted by the subjects we study. It is interpreted by the qualitative

researcher. It is based on the value of trying to represent faithfully and accurately the social worlds or phenomena studied" (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p. 489). In order to honour the spirit and intent of the contributors to the study, and the processes of collection, participant 'feedback' and reflection during the process have been essential in this research. This has been achieved by several means:

- Certification of the accuracy of all transcripts of interview by the subjects;
- Confirmation of data from interviews in stages one and two of the research against the Survey and the discussion processes of the Expert Reference Group; and
- Verification of attributed quotes in the text (chapters 6 and 7) with the subjects, both for accuracy of the words and for the context in which they have been placed.

The research builds upon the understandings of a variety of individuals, engaged in different ways in the practice of a nebulous concept, that of Religious Leadership. Rather than using the term 'reliability' in the case of such qualitative data, Punch (1998) offers the term 'dependability' as more appropriate to the constructionist approach. It recognises that 'truth' is a construction of the individual, and may in fact be not only personal to that person's world, but possibly even unique. This, however, does not make it 'incorrect'. This study has sought to tap into several people's understandings (constructions) of a difficult concept, Religious Leadership. The issue then is

the degree to which I, as researcher, have been able to honour the meaning conveyed by that person. As indicated above, I have sought and obtained respondent verification of the reporting of individual's contribution to the project, thus ensuring that the material presented can be depended upon as truly representing their reality in the situations described. The final analysis, conclusions and recommendations are based on these understandings.

#### **4.6.4 Triangulation**

As Miles and Huberman point out, “conclusions are *verified* as the analyst proceeds” (1994, p.11). This has been a continual process during the period of this research, of reviewing and questioning, of observing consistencies – and differences – between the data sets, becoming increasingly focused and personal as the period of research drew to a close (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The issue of perceived bias was discussed earlier in this chapter, but as an added foil to this, a conventional measure of verification of data and conclusions is provided in the triangulation of the data sources themselves. Clark and Causer (1991, p. 72) describe cross checking results across different methods of collection as a way of providing an internal verification of the data: “in essence, what is discovered (in one form of data collection) may be verified by going back to the world under study and examining the extent to which the emergent analysis *fits* the phenomenon and *works to explain* what has been observed” (Patton, 2002, p.67).

In approaching the concept of Religious Leadership, parallel data sets representing the considerations of the principals (information from interviews, material from the surveys) provided a level of triangulation of the data. This material, in turn was measured against the insights obtained from the Expert Reference group. Documentary evidence and the contributions of the Church and System authorities, represented a different perspective on the topic, allowing a comparison of the different view-points, and enabling a further check of the consistency of material from these different data sources. Of course, “each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality” (Patton, 2002, p.555), and so through this use of multiple methods and different interest perspectives, the integrity of the results and the internal consistency in the conclusions of the study do find strong support. Beyond the commonalities in the data sets, however, the Expert Reference Group, in their reflection on the themes provided (Appendix N), added a dimension of interpretation to the data which the methodologies using directed questioning had not previously allowed. The contribution of this group was significant in the process of analysis for this thesis.

#### **4.7 Ethical Issues**

As this research proposal has explored matters of both professional and personal import with the participants, it has been important to observe the protocols set down by the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee, as well as the corresponding requirements of the CEO, South Australia.

Permission to conduct the research, regarded as being of minimal risk to the participants, was granted by The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University (HREC Register Number V2004.05-11, dated 24/09/04: Appendix O), and by the Director of Catholic Education South Australia in 2004 (Appendix P). The University, in particular, required that attention be given to the rights of participants, as well as setting out the responsibility for the secure storage of all confidential research data sources, specifically tapes and transcripts of interviews.

Participants in the Research Project engaged in the processes by invitation, and on a voluntary basis. Letters of invitation were sent to those chosen for interview, and to all principals in relation to the Survey (see Appendices H and L), informing participants of their rights in the process, including the right to decline the invitation. As already noted, two of the original invitees availed themselves of this right.

Confidentiality of information has been an important consideration throughout the study, particularly as respondents were being invited to share personal insights into a subject that touched on their deepest beliefs. This subject is currently a matter of attention within the professional sphere of Catholic Schooling in South Australia, and so it potentially touched upon the careers of those intending to respond. This, and the relatively small world of Catholic Education in South Australia, has meant that, apart from direct quotations from Church and System leaders used with their express permission, most of the data reported in the study is presented anonymously.

## **4.8 Limitations and Delimitations**

### **4.8.1 Limitations of the Research Project**

This study refers to a particular context - a set of Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia in the years 2004-2005. It takes place at a time when the issue of Religious Leadership has been firmly placed on the local agenda, with the release of the "Religious Leadership in a Catholic School" (SACCS, 2004) policy, and this may have affected the political context of the enquiry. Patton (2002, p.306) noted that "participants may behave in some atypical fashion when they know they are being observed, and the selective perception of the observer may distort the data." Whilst the methods involved in this study did not literally involve observation of practice, the principle of people being aware that they were being questioned (in interview) on such a sensitive area of their practice may well have distorted reality in their responses. Recognising this, the research used multiple data sources, and, in the case of interviews, matched the spoken word with the Principal's written commentary from the Newsletters that make up a vital aspect of their public pronouncements. In addition, the study is seen as representing one interpretation of the stories and reflections of a group of practitioners in the described situation, and does not, except in situating the problem, purport to deal with the broader problems of Leadership in Catholic Schools. This may well be a subject for further research.

Similarly, the research is undertaken from the perspective of the Principal practitioners themselves. A different approach, looking at leadership practice, and Religious Leadership itself, from the point of view of members of the wider community – parish priests, parents, students or staff members - would be a useful addition to this study. For practical reasons, however, this avenue remains outside the scope of this investigation.

#### **4.8.2 Delimitations of the Research Project**

Punch (2000, p. 75) describes delimitations as “defining the limits or drawing the boundaries around a study, and showing clearly what is and what is not included.” There are twenty-six Catholic Secondary Schools within the metropolitan area of Adelaide, and a further four widely spread across country regions of South Australia. It has been impractical in the time available for this research, to interview the Principal in every one of these schools, but the survey instrument was offered in order to involve as many of those Principals as possible at least indirectly in the project, and to obtain a broad consensus on the findings.

Religious Leadership is also acknowledged as a significant dimension of the role of the Primary Principal, but the constraints of time, the sheer number of schools, and my own lack of familiarity with this aspect of Catholic Education have meant restricting this study to selected Secondary Schools.

#### 4.9 Timeline for the Conduct of the Study

The timeline for the completion of this study has been determined by two key factors: the proposal process and the formal approval of the University and its Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct research, and the slow process of arranging, conducting, transcribing and verifying of interviews!

Table 4.6 describes this timeline.

*Table 4.6: Timeline for the Conduct of the Study*

Event	Dates
Proposal Hearing	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2004
Ethics Clearance Obtained	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2004
Data Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interviews</li><li>• Surveys</li><li>• Reference Group</li></ul>	November 2004 – January 2005  April/May 2005  August 2005
Data Analysis/Writing	April to October, 2005
Completion and Submission	January 2006

The General Research Question guiding this study is: “How is Religious Leadership understood and practised by Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?” This chapter has described the research design in detail, including the methodology that underpins the study; the methods used in pursuing it; and some of the considerations that have impacted upon it. In the following three chapters the data related to each of the three Research Questions is described and analysed.



## Chapter Five

### The Church and System Authorities on 'Religious Leadership'

In Chapter 4, the research design for this study was outlined, and the methods by which the study was conducted were described.

In this chapter, the research data obtained in response to the first Research Question, **“What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?”** is described. It consists mainly of material from the interviews and from the discussion with the Expert Reference Group, that panel of senior educationalists and school leaders in the South Australian Catholic schooling sector.

The interviews with the Church authorities involved the Archbishop of Adelaide, The Most Rev. Philip Wilson and the Bishop of Port Pirie, The Most Rev. Eugene Hurley. The 'System Authorities' were represented by the Director of Catholic Education in South Australia, Mr. Alan Dooley; one of the Assistant Directors, Dr. Paul Sharkey; and the Director of the Pirie Diocese, Ms. Kathy McEvoy, who was a member of the Expert Reference Group. In all cases, where used in this chapter, quotations attributed to any of these people by name have been verified with and approved by that person, in the context in which they are used.

The first questions in all interviews focussed on the purpose of Catholic schools in South Australia, and whether they were in any essential way different from the Government schools, especially those in similar socio-geographic areas. Discussions then explored the Church's expectations of principals as religious leaders in those Catholic schools, particularly within the emerging paradigm of lay leadership in South Australian Catholic Secondary Schools. Perhaps because of this development, these authorities placed an added emphasis on the role as a 'vocation', and on the way that leadership would ideally be exercised (Leadership Style). 'Tensions' arising from the "new challenges which are a result of a new socio-political and cultural context" (CSTM, 1997, par. 1) of Catholic schools and the reality of principalship as a formal contractual relationship between the Church, the School or System and the individual, are other important themes developed in this chapter. These issues have important implications for the religious leadership dimension of the principal's role.

The information presented in this chapter is considered thematically, as described in the previous chapter (Figure 4.2). These ten themes form the basis of the organisation of the data in this chapter and Table 5.1 illustrates the sub-themes that were identified within each theme.

*Table 5.1: Key Themes identified in response to Research Question 1*

Theme	Sub-Theme
5.1 Purpose of Catholic Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union of faith and culture</li> <li>• Preparation for a wider world</li> <li>• Making of Church</li> <li>• Critical moments that challenge</li> </ul>
5.2 Essentially Different?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faithful to the tradition</li> <li>• Defining 'Catholic'</li> <li>• Commitment to essential purposes</li> </ul>
5.3 Church Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic commitment</li> <li>• Being a 'religious leader'</li> <li>• challenges</li> </ul>
5.4 Authenticity: A Faith that is Lived	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic view of life</li> <li>• Critical influence of the Principal</li> </ul>
5.5 Call or Vocation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocation through baptism</li> <li>• Ministry in education</li> <li>• Emergence of lay leadership</li> <li>• Congruence of values and life</li> </ul>
5.6 Emergence of Lay Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New moment in Catholic Education</li> <li>• Lay principals <i>are</i> the new religious leaders</li> </ul>
5.7 Leadership Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To lead as Jesus did</li> <li>• Reflection on core values</li> <li>• Public nature of role</li> <li>• Understandings of God's presence</li> <li>• Relationships with community</li> </ul>
5.8 Religious Dimension of the Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a separate dimension</li> <li>• Immersion in the community</li> <li>• The new model of religious life</li> </ul>
5.9 Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upholding the Church's teachings</li> <li>• The image of the Church</li> <li>• Formation</li> <li>• Mediating authentic Church</li> <li>• The pastoral imperative</li> </ul>
5.10 Formal Contractual Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process of appointment</li> <li>• Assertion of the religious dimension</li> </ul>

## 5.1 Purpose of Catholic Schools

Principals in Catholic schools are expected by their employing authorities (Church, Congregation and/or System) to operate as 'Religious, Educational, Community and Administrative' leaders in their schools (see Appendix A).

Whilst the principal in any school is expected to carry out the duties associated with the latter three elements of this mandate, it is the first stated requirement, that of religious leadership, which places upon the principal of a Catholic school a particular, and extra responsibility. At the heart of the rationale for this 'Religious Leadership' is an understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school (Sultmann and McLaughlin, 2000), and it was this area of definition that was taken up first by the Bishops, both of whom concurred in their expectations of this matter. The Archbishop of Adelaide, Archbishop Wilson, declared his vision at the beginning of his interview:

The fundamental responsibility of Catholic schools is to develop the union between culture and faith, that's a really important central work of the school. You are trying to give people ... associated with school the chance to see that all that we know about the world and all that we have discerned about humanity and life has a very close linkage with what we believe and what we understand. (Wilson)

His statement echoes the words of the Vatican document, *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977), and invests, in the everyday life of the school, a sacred and "dramatic consciousness" (Starratt, 1990b, p. 58) concerning its purpose:

“the ultimate union of faith and culture is actually to prepare people for the end of their life on this earth and that there is more than we understand in this world” (Wilson). This is the salvific mission of the Church (CS, 1977), and “the Catholic school forms part of (that) mission ... especially for education in the faith” (CS, 1977, par.9). Grace (2002, p. 223) suggests they are not only part of that saving mission, but “in contemporary conditions, (schools are) an essential part,” addressing a community which often knows no other form of Church (ERG).

This is a faith that is lived and experienced in the wider community, and so the Catholic school has to “prepare students to be able to survive and work in that other, wider secular world” (Wilson). Educationally Catholic schools have to “prepare students so that they can actually fulfil the bench marks which are required by the State with its controlling educational climate” (Wilson). They must present “a scholastic enterprise that is as good as, if not better than the State schools - but one to which is added that aspect of religion and faith” (Wilson).

Despite earlier references to the “integration of faith and culture” (CS, 1977, par. 38), the Archbishop’s description suggests a duality of the spiritual and the secular purposes of Catholic schools, and creates a sense of the separateness of these two dimensions. Although not ‘alien’ to each other, nonetheless these spiritual purposes are presented in a way at odds with the prevailing secular culture, and perhaps different from the purposes of other (specifically Government) schools:

We are involved in another world and another work that is vastly different, because our view ultimately is not the view promoted by the secular education view of the human person. Our view of the human person is one which is defined and oriented from what we believe about what God has taught us, what Christ has taught us, what he represents, and how we understand humanity in the light of that. (Wilson)

This understanding of Catholic schools provides an insight for South Australian principals regarding their role as religious leaders. It encompasses a responsibility “in partnership with parents, in union with Christ's saving mission and communities, (to) educate young people for participation in the Church and world communities today” (SACCS Vision for Catholic Schools, 1991 – see Appendix D) - all within the community of a school that meets all of the statutory educational requirements of the State – a considerable challenge.

It is the “added aspect” of religion and faith that distinguishes the Catholic school. At its best, it is

a community of persons animated by the beliefs of the Catholic faith, by the values of the Catholic faith, that is characterised by a Catholic practice of prayer and worship and ... dominated by the Christian principles of loving God and loving one's neighbour. (Wilson)

In such a description, the line between Church and school becomes blurred – one could be describing either institution. So, is school, Church? There is a perception that, “for most people the school is Church - you know, they just don’t darken the doorstep of parishes” (ERG). This nexus between Church and school was put into perspective by one of the members of that Group: “you don’t have a Catholic school if you don’t have a Catholic church” (ERG). Such a direct statement about the relationship places the principals of Catholic schools themselves in relationship with the Church, as religious leaders in their school communities. “If the Catholic school is inherently in existence only because of its church identity” then, when that church “is struggling for identity” (ERG) the school too will struggle with what it stands for, and this uncertainty as to what it is to be Catholic is one of the major challenges for the principals of Catholic schools in contemporary South Australian society.

The Expert Reference Group took a pragmatic approach to the purpose of the Catholic school, and ultimately to the role of the principal in that religious structure. The Catholic school was seen to be “about the making of Church. To the degree that it fails to do that, it fails to be Catholic schooling” (ERG). It “provides not only knowledge but experience and an ethical framework that leads to the formation of character and personality” (ERG). If the Catholic school does not do that, “then Catholic schooling is a waste of time, money and effort - but if it does it, and it does it well, then it’s all worth while” (ERG). In this understanding, the principal is not only responsible, but also accountable, for the development of both the knowledge and faith dimensions

of the school's curriculum, and the overall formation of the students as ethical persons.

How one measures the success of that responsibility, especially in the faith domain, is problematic, but a recent local document, "Evaluation in the Religious Domain" emphasised the importance of such an assessment, specifying that "religious schools share in the mission of the religious communities that built them and they are expected to deliver a variety of outcomes in the religious domain" (SACCS, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2005, p. 4). Factors such as the school ethos, policies and procedures, staff selection and formation policies, pastoral care and justice strategies are some of the major elements indicated in the paper, all key to the expression of the religious leadership of the principal.

These factors are also indicators of the culture of the school, and Director of Catholic Education (Mr. Dooley), in considering the purposes of the Catholic school, spoke of the students in the schools. This description refers to the culture and curriculum of schools more than to any grand 'purposes', finding its meaning in the outcomes for the students themselves.

I'd like to see ... children knowing how to pray: prayer is important in their lives. I'd like them knowing about love and fidelity, and how critical love is to the well being of the individual and to family and to groups. And ... I'd like to see them value and adopt our faith in their lives, taking it into their work, and into how they interact with society in whatever ways they go - so I think in prayer and love and



in communion with the Church we have an aspiration to inspire all our young people. (Dooley)

This approach envisions students interacting with society and living out their values in the community. It takes the discussion of the purposes of Catholic schools into the domain of the “common good” (Grace, 2002, p. 125) and “service to society” (CSTM, 1997, par. 4), a practical consequence of that inner spiritual growth envisioned by the Archbishop. The Director’s measure of the success of Catholic schooling lay in its transformative effects (Flynn, 1993, McLaughlin, 1997), and he believed that “if the heart of the student is not touched by their experience in a Catholic school then their education is diminished” (Dooley).

It is difficult to measure the degree to which a heart is touched, or to which the Catholic school meets such specifically religious goals. The true measure is only found in the difficult moments when the strength and authenticity of the culture of the school and its structures is tested. For much of its time the Catholic school “just gets on with its mission” because “for 80 or 90% (of the time) our boundaries aren’t pushed,” (Dooley). But in the critical moments the wonderful statements of purpose, mission and vision are put to the test.

When you get the 10-15% of critical decisions in a school community, particularly those that relate to families, and where the boundaries are pushed, it (is) in these critical moments that we go to an understanding of who we are and what we stand for, and ... we respond out of that. (Dooley)

The way the school, and particularly the principal, responds to the practical issues that test the true 'Catholic' spirit in the organisation, provides the real measure of the authenticity of the organization, and of the leader.

If the school is not doing the things (described in the vision statements), and it's not striving to address them ... then it's not being as authentic as it can be. So, if you're sending the debt collector in to take the poor family's furniture because they can't pay the fees, I have some very serious questions as to how you are interpreting the gospel message about this family. *Full stop!* I don't know that there's *anything* that can justify that decision.

(Dooley)

This strong statement highlights another characteristic of the Catholic school, that of the preferential option for the poor. The school's purpose is to be "a school for all" (CSTM, 1997, par 7) with a special responsibility for the struggling and poor in the community (Bezzina, 1997; CPMS, 2002). The challenge to strive for such ideals might appear daunting, but "it's in the aspiration and in the understanding of the challenges that come with that, that make who we are and what the school stands for, authentic" (Dooley). The extent to which these purposes are realised in a school is directly related to the principal's consciousness and understanding of this religious mandate, and his/her role as the religious leader in that community.

Being 'school' and being 'Catholic' cannot be seen as two separate dimensions of the Catholic school. The divine purpose informs and transforms

the secular, and this makes the education enterprise of the Catholic school, and the role of the principal in such a school, distinctive.

## **5.2 Distinctive Qualities**

This distinctiveness stems from the Catholic school's core commitment to "another world, another place" (Wilson) which generates a very particular educational agenda. This statement about the foundational values of Catholic schools points to the core purpose of the Catholic school, and therefore has implications for the way in which leadership in those schools is framed. In essence, "the task of leadership in a Catholic school is to be faithful to the tradition" (Sharkey).

Recognising and maintaining the principles that gave rise to that 'distinctiveness' was seen as imperative. "There is a vast difference between the principles and models of secular universal education and what we are attempting to do in Catholic education," Archbishop Wilson asserted. Bishop Hurley also focused on the difference as the "core question" at issue and stressed the need to understand what it actually means, as a school or a person, to be 'Catholic':

One would have thought (it) would have been fairly easy (to define), and fairly primitive, but when you begin to think, well, that's the Catholic tennis club and that's the Catholic hall and this is the Catholic Church and that's the Catholic school and that's the

Catholic Bishop – (in) the way we use Catholic, what is quintessentially that which makes the thing Catholic? (Hurley)

If a school is to 'be Catholic', its culture, its curriculum, its practices and its outcomes (Flynn, 1993) must stem from an understanding of that core concept. What makes a school 'Catholic' – and therefore, 'distinctive'? The Bishop suggested it had to do with

the substance and accidents. What makes an apple an apple, even when it looks a bit like a pear? But you say, it's not a pear, it just looks like one - but it's an apple. ... what is the 'appleness' of it? It's not the colour, because the pear is the same colour; it's not the shape either. It's in some way or another what we would call the substance or the essence of it, the *essential* element. Take away some aspect of that '*appleness*' and it is no longer an apple, it becomes something else. (Hurley)

This struggle to define the essential element at the heart of 'being Catholic' is central to the understanding of a Catholic school, but it is more than a philosophical question to the principals of Catholic schools charged with developing and nurturing an authentic Catholic character and culture in their schools.

We basically know what a school is ... but we are not so sure about the Catholic thing, so we need to spend time in really struggling and agonising over what is it that makes anything Catholic, as opposed to Christian (or) Anglo-Catholic (or) Russian

Orthodox, Greek Orthodox ... what is it that, once you take *this* away then it is no longer Catholic? (Hurley)

It is “this Catholic thing” (Hurley) that makes Catholic schools different. Their mission is to provide an “education in faith” (Grace, 2002, p. 125), to be the vital nexus between that faith, the prevailing social culture and the lives of the students (CS 1977). It is not enough to simply “have Gospel values – wouldn’t the good private school across the road have Gospel values as well? If they haven’t, they ought to have, they should get another principal if they haven’t!” (Hurley). The difference is in that spark, the essence that defines the school as Catholic: “so I ask, *are these people being formed in the Catholic faith in their school?*” (Hurley).

This language of faith is “a challenge for a religious leadership - we’re not a society that likes mystery” (ERG). Our world is now “more educated, more demanding, more disjointed, more individualistic and more complex” (Thomas, 1997, p. 100) - and “less religious” (ERG) than at any time over the past decades (CSTM, 1997). In that context, to explicitly name “the mystery that we see in our relationship with God” (ERG) as the foundation of the school is indeed a challenge! The commitment of the principal, as religious leader, to this challenge and to the essential purposes of the school institutionalises that difference and that maintains the school as authentically Catholic.

### 5.3 Church Expectations

Given this understanding of the purposes and unique character of Catholic schools, the starting point for appointment to the position of principal was obvious to the authorities: that person must be Catholic. “I would take that as a given, for sure. It has to be somebody who is ... actively involved in the life of the Church, and a Catholic who lives out their Catholic faith” (Wilson). The professional status and experience of prospective principals was also vital, but over and above the issue of competence,

there has to be a deep understanding and commitment to being a principal of a *Catholic* school. I think that entails ... a personal faith, and commitment to being a Catholic, to being a witness in the community, the worshipping community. (Hurley)

This is, from the Bishops, a clear expectation that persons appointed to be principals in Catholic schools would be religious leaders not only in the school, but also in the wider community. From their points of view, candidates for the principalship of a Catholic school should be selected with such expectations clearly in mind.

They have to demonstrate active participation in the Eucharistic community, so they are required to supply a referee who is the leader of that community. They are also, in selection panels, asked questions like ... how (they) feel about being Catholic at this time? ... And if (the selection panel) doesn't see a religious vision being

opened up in the soul of the answers, then that person is not going to be put forward (for the position). (Sharkey)

Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools must give “clear witness in their leadership to the Catholic values that they live by” (Wilson), and there has to be a deep

personal belief in, and commitment to, Christianity and to the Catholic tradition, in terms of the teachings of the Church and how we publicly take those into our work and how we live to them and model them to young people and staff. (Dooley)

This modelling of the principal is powerful, and must be authentic: those “young people and staff will immediately know if the person leading the Catholic school is not in their heart and in their spirit, at one with the beliefs and traditions of the Church” (Dooley).

In rural areas, this expectation is even more pronounced. Bishop Hurley’s Diocese is essentially a rural one, with three major towns and a number of service centres spread over approximately 980,000 sq. km. The principal of the Catholic Secondary School in this Diocese holds a very public position, and is expected to be a religious leader with a clear profile in the Parish community ...

They have a commitment to almost being the prime religious educator in the school, and they would have the overarching role of formation of their executive and all teaching staff and they would

be very aware of, and committed to, building the community between Parish and school. (Hurley)

The breadth and depth of this role presents a daunting challenge. At this time, when society generally is challenging this Church and the faith (CSTM, 1997), Archbishop Wilson predicted that

the major challenge for principals is that they are going to have to be very strong in their faith because they are going to be surrounded by people who don't see it as being terribly important, so at times they may find themselves alienated or ridiculed by people who are associated with their schools and that might put them right off. (Wilson)

#### **5.4 Authenticity: a Faith that is Lived**

The characteristics of the Catholic school "ought to be unambiguous and identifiable" (Dooley), and those "who have chosen to work in that environment" (Dooley) - leaders and staff - carry that responsibility. This calls for an authentic commitment to that Catholic view of life and way of living, and if it is the school's mission to bring about a "synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life" (CS, 1977, par. 38) then equally the principal is called to this in her/his own life.

When you see 'integration of faith and culture', and if you can't do it within the work you're doing yourself, in terms of God's presence,



and the issues around that, I think it would be very difficult to do it in the broader scheme of the school. (ERG)

Principals are particularly “charged with leading the school in that environment in faith,” (Dooley), but everyone in the school community carries some responsibility for the climate and culture of the school.

We know that the principal, if (she/he is) authentic, can actually change the nature of the school. We know that if a teacher is authentic the child may remember that teacher all their life, who they were - and that's had an influence. *We never quite know when we touch the soul of a child in our relationship*, and it might be the most unexpected moment that's reported back to us 10 years later. (Dooley)

It is the principal however who is most influential in establishing and nurturing the Catholicity of the school, and

the really big influence comes from their quality as a person. What it is that drives them as a person? The principal's subscription to Catholic values and openness to the teachings of the Church, living a full Catholic life - that dimension I believe is the most important part of the way that they influence the Catholic school. (Wilson)

This understanding, that the principal, as religious leader, is the key to the authentic Catholic nature of the school, was echoed by the Director, who believed that “good schools have good leaders, and if a principal is faith filled

and knowledgeable, (has) good leadership skills and competencies and leads by example, then ... we have an environment which is likely to be highly successful" (Dooley).

## **5.5 Call or Vocation**

The Church, the Catholic Education authorities and the school communities expect that the person in the role of principal in a Catholic Secondary School must be faith filled, competent as a professional, authentic in her/himself, and dedicated to the position both in and outside of the school. Given these requirements, it is hardly surprising that the numbers applying for such demanding positions are declining around Australia (VSAT, 2003). Neither is it surprising that the language of 'call' or 'vocation', in the sense of "being people of God in service to others" (Grace, 2002, p. 223) is becoming more common in relation to the position. Indeed the concept was part of the language used by all those interviewed in discussing the role and its demands.

The Archbishop situated 'vocation' in a wider Catholic vision of life:

All of us are given a vocation at the moment of our baptism, so every member of the Church who is ... carrying out that way of life in fidelity to their baptismal consecration and striving to do God's will is acting out of that vocation. (Wilson)

He indicated a concern about the loose way in which language about call, vocation, mission and ministry is employed in the wider Church community, but was very specific and affirming about their use in the education context:

They say that everything is a ministry, but I would suggest that it's a legitimate term to say that people who are involved in Catholic education, whether on the level of administration or teaching, are really deeply involved in the ministry; and it's a very specific one that provides the opportunity for young people to grow in their wisdom and in their faith, and it would seem to me that there are very few other tasks in the Church that are as important or as ministerial as that. (Wilson)

Bishop Hurley focussed specifically on the principalship as vocation, saying that "if it's only a job, then they ought not to be doing it, because you can get that sort of job elsewhere." The principal is "called to that work by God", and it was the Bishop's contention that we need to be more and more aware of

what it is that's different about the Catholic school, rather than what makes it like the other schools: and one of the things that should make it different is that the principal is not there for the same reason as another principal is, or at least one should be able to presume that. I am not suggesting that principals in state schools are any less good principals, or that they may not see it as a vocation, but *they don't have to*: whereas in the Catholic school system, if you don't have a sense of vocation, if you don't have a sense of God calling you to do this and live out your life in

accordance with His will in this role, then you're probably in it for the wrong reason. (Hurley)

Through most of the last century, members of Religious Congregations staffed and led the Catholic schools in South Australia (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). This represented a direct association between Church and the schools. These principals were subject, to a greater or lesser degree, directly to the authority of the local Bishop (Thomas, 2005, p. 4), and their loyalties were to their Congregation and to the Church. In the present era, the connection appears to be less personal and direct, and more legal and distant: "responsibility for education is generally from the bishop through the education commission to the Catholic Education Office" (Thomas, 1997, p. 102), and finally to the principals in their schools. The difficulty for principals as religious leaders in the current system of Catholic Education in South Australia is that they need to be

part of the institution which is education, and everything that comes along with that; and part of the institution that is Church and everything that comes along with that – (whereas) at one time they may have been one and the same. So religious leadership is about bringing all of that knowledge and experience which has come out of being Church into the educational field - and how you do that is a challenge. (ERG)

School leaders in the past, as members of Religious Congregations, expressed in their lives as consecrated persons a particular and dedicated

vocation of service to God. They, as educators, were also identifiably part of the clerical Church. Today, in many ways, lay teachers, and especially lay leaders, are being expected to take on some of that “selfless devotion” (Jacobs, 1998, p. vi) and personal sacrifice in the service of youth and Church that those Brothers, Nuns and Priests offered in the past (ERG).

Where once, vocation might have been defined as “divine call” (Jacobs, 1998, p. 3), the Assistant Director, Dr. Sharkey, explained it in terms of a lay person’s life as “an act of non-violence to yourself, so part of the gift of vocation is discovering that way of life and that set of commitments that accords with who I really am.” This understanding of vocation challenges principals in Catholic Secondary Schools to authenticity in their lives, responding to that which is essential within her/himself. Work and person are then “in congruence ... with who they are and how they engage in the world” (Sharkey). In this holistic view of the role,

if the heart’s not in it, it is very obvious. If the intellectual worldview is not there, if the beliefs are not understood, grasped (and) enacted intelligently, then any element that is missing in the equation will detract (from) and diminish the leadership that that person can then exercise. (Sharkey)

The leaders of Catholic Secondary Schools are all “on their own journeys in faith” (Dooley), and “who they are” is not a fixed position. New principals generally grow in wisdom and understanding as they mature in that role (see Chapters 6 and 7), and some “would be ... struggling with their own journeys

and that struggle (has been) evident in their leadership and yet they come through that, and the strength and vitality in the community is almost stronger because of the struggle” (Dooley).

The Expert Reference Group echoed this image of “journey”, and the struggle that some principals experience in their evolution in the role. This they saw as a positive in the dynamic of leadership: “Sometimes the person who may in some way not be ‘in law’ with the Church may be the very person who understands deeply the human condition” (ERG).

Perhaps this is what the Archbishop meant when he spoke of bringing that “spirituality which comes from the experience of the person” to the role. In this sense, this spirituality of the lay religious leader, tested in the midst of the same joys and difficulties of life as those experienced by the broader community of the school, is well suited to the current role of the principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia.

## **5.6 Emergence of Lay Leadership**

In chapter 2, Table 2.2 demonstrated the change, from the situation in 1970, with every school led by a member of a Religious Congregation, to the present preponderance of lay leaders. Wallace suggested (2000, p.191) that this “dramatic shift from religious to lay personnel raises the question of whether or not some Catholic schools are becoming private schools with a religious memory but a secular presence.”

This reflection on the circumstances of Catholic schools in the United States dramatizes the situation there, but it could also serve as a warning to the Catholic Education community in South Australia. “We’ve arrived at a new moment in Catholic education in Australia that’s very different from the one fifty years ago when schools were staffed entirely by the religious” (Wilson). There is “a new world surrounding our educational enterprises” he went on, and it will be important to “activate the potential in all of those who are associated with Catholic education, the teachers, the administrators and the kids as well” (Wilson)

Bishop Hurley also reflected on this “new world” and recounted his experience speaking at a recent gathering of the principals of the Catholic schools in his Diocese.

Perhaps 35, 30 years ago, at a gathering of religious leaders in a diocese, there would be 95% religious and perhaps 5% lay people; whereas now the opposite is true and ... in many ways (the lay group) now are that body of religious leaders. What I asked them to do was to stand outside, mentally, to look back at that group 35 years ago and to name the conclusions they would make about them. They would say that they were committed, that they were prayerful, that they were probably holy, that they were well formed and that they were pretty professional. They were the religious leaders of the diocese, and what I was saying to (these lay principals) was, now you need to write all those down for

yourselves - because you are that group, *you are that group*.

(Hurley)

Such comments reflect and support the statistics about the changing paradigm of religious leadership in South Australian schools – and particularly in the Secondary Schools. They also frame the challenge - to continue the tradition, to take up the mantle, to know that they are the new leadership. But Archbishop Wilson's comment that "one of the things we have to work our way through is how a Catholic lay principal can be a religious person and live out that religious dimension without aping the life of the religious" is particularly pertinent in light of the demands made by the role on the life of the principal of a Catholic Secondary School. The Director acknowledged this, commenting that

there is an added responsibility in being a principal of a Catholic school or a leader in a Catholic setting which is both personal and professional in its demands upon you, and ... some people would say ... that its like being 'Captain Catholic' 24 hours a day!

(Dooley)

It is critical that those accepting the role of principal in the Catholic Secondary Schools clearly understand this nexus between Catholic leadership and their personal lives.



## 5.7 Leadership Style

If one is “called to the work by God” (ERG), how is this reflected in the way leadership is expressed and practised? “To lead as Jesus led” (Nuzzi, 2000, p.259) is a challenge that touches on the leader’s life in community, the way power is used, and the way the community is involved in the school (ERG). In the interviews, all of the authorities – Bishops and Directors – speculated about whether there was a way of leading, a ‘style’ of being principal, that best reflected this sense of spirituality and vocation.

While writers such as Tuohy (2005), Treston (2005), Nuzzi (2000), Thomas (1997) and Fitzgerald (1990) have discussed this question, Bolman and Deal (1995, p.21) captured its essence with their statement that “the heart of leadership is in the heart of leaders.” In the actions, and particularly the decisions and the decision making processes of the principal, “values and understandings about the dignity of the human person, the place of rationality, the presence of grace in the world, and redemption ... (should) filter through into all sorts of cogent ways in school life” (Sharkey). In this, the core values of the tradition find expression in the policies and practices of the school in a conscious and purposeful integration of faith, culture and life (CS, 1977).

Reflection on those core values and understandings, and the ways in which they shape the environment and curriculum of the school is an important aspect of leadership (Hurley) and part of the individual’s leadership style. Making Catholic values relevant to the contemporary world of the students is

“the challenge to religious leadership, particularly at this time, in a world that could easily turn to oppression in order to justify human rights, but might in fact be doing the exact opposite” (ERG). With society becoming increasingly secular, it is especially important “for religious leadership to really keep dignity, hope and freedom at the core and the heart of the school” (ERG), as touchstones of authenticity in its processes. This requires a deliberate consciousness on the part of all stakeholders “and that would come out of the spirituality of the principal, as the key religious leader in that community” (ERG).

The challenge to remain faithful to the Church’s tradition of justice and human dignity applies to the way Catholic schools operate, in the curriculum, in their structures and in the principal’s priorities, especially at the pragmatic level of expenditures. In the end, it is the leaders who,

through their own belief and faith and then through their knowledge of leadership, translate into the world of young people, the relevance of the gospel message now, in their time - and yet also to be able to do that with teachers who are quite young to quite old. I think it’s a fairly daunting task. (Dooley)

As religious leader in the school community, the principal is placed in a very public position, open to the judgement of that community. In rural schools, this scrutiny is even more intrusive and personal. Bishop Hurley provided an insight into its impact in his Diocese:

One of the things about rural, remote and isolated Australia is that we don't live in anonymity, and it is a thing of great joy and it also can be quite frustrating for people as well, because the fact is that the Catholic school is 'on show' 24 hours a day, the staff and students are 'on show' 24 hours a day. (Hurley)

In particular, such considerations affected the principals of the Catholic Secondary Schools in the rural regions. Bishop Hurley likened their position to that of a "high profile sportsman: people can say that its unfair that we judge them apart from their sporting ability! That's what they're good at, that's what they're paid for, so why would we then judge them" for the way they lead their lives away from that arena? The reality is that the community does judge them for their morality and their public actions – they are seen as "models in the community" (Hurley). Like the sportsperson,

the fact is that in a community such as those in our (rural) diocese, the principals will be observed as to whether they practise their faith - at school, at home, at the sporting clubs, at the hotel, when they are out for dinner, when they out walking, what sort of community involvement they have apart from the strictly 'Catholic thing' ... and to some degree their faith in the Church and even in God is judged by how well or badly that role is carried out. (Hurley)

The intensity of this situation is a challenge, not just to the 'leadership style' of principals, but to their lifestyle: "there is an absolute, a unique dimension to being involved in Catholic education in a diocese such as this, and it's one

that people need to understand” (Hurley). It is akin to living in a fishbowl, so intense is this demand and scrutiny, and it calls on great strengths and authenticity to meet it.

In another perspective, this all-embracing lifestyle was also a recognition of the integral presence of God in the total life of the community, rather than just in discrete ‘convenient’ parts, like Mass on Sunday or (in schools) morning prayer – or when the principal was “on show” (ERG). If (in this case) a principal’s prevailing theology places “God on the mountain top,” (ERG) then that faith will always be separate, and reserved for those sacred inner moments of retreat and reflection, moments of serenity – which in truth are rather unusual in school life, and perhaps therefore somewhat remote and occasional. The obverse image, of a “God of the market place” (ERG) situates God in the living of each day, incarnate in the circumstances of each moment (McLaughlin, 1997), immanent in the everyday things of our world (Treston, 1990). The real challenge in being a religious leader is to realise this ultimate fulfilment of “the integration of faith and culture which makes sacred the everyday” (ERG), and to act in accordance as person and leader.

In the face of such intense expectations, being in touch with the community of the school is “very, very important” (ERG). Leadership is situated in community (Starratt, 1990a), and a leadership style that sets the principal apart from, or somehow ‘above’ the community negates the “authentic partnership” (Wilson) which should characterise the role of the principal in a Catholic school. Leadership is relational (McLaughlin, 1997), and in a Catholic

school this relationship involves the trinity of Church, school and community intimately in the growth of young people. In this partnership, it is that “collaboration around issues that brings wisdom” (ERG) to process, policy and practice, and in this the principal demonstrates a style congruent with the religious dimension of the role.

## **5.8 Religious Dimension of the Role**

That the leadership of a Catholic School in South Australia involves a religious dimension is clearly documented (see Appendix A), but the notion that this religious dimension of leadership is somehow distinct from the overall leadership practice of the principal, a subset of leadership practice itself, was rejected by the both the Church and System authorities. In the Expert Reference Group the religious leadership imperative was considered as “both intrinsic and specific, and articulated in practice” - a dimension of the role so integrated into the person of the principal that it would be a natural part of any action or communication. Positing it as somehow a ‘separate dimension’ made it like

the icing on the cake rather than the substance that permeates the cake: and if it’s only the icing on the cake then sometimes the cake’s not cooked, and lots of other things are not contributing to that religious dimension of the school ... because it’s seen as a layer rather than the substance. (ERG)

The Director also raised this concern, though using a different analogy:

Occasionally we'll sit down with somebody who can fragment – so, 'when I go to the footy I'm a different person but you can be absolutely sure that when I'm in a school, I'm faith-filled' - and I wonder ... if you switch off from who you are, from the school to a footy game, then I think you've missed the point! (Dooley)

It is the changing structure of Catholic schools – particularly in the growing number of lay staff and leaders – that has brought about this concentration on the religious dimension as a distinct element of the principal's role. The social and political reality of schools has changed, from being "functional communities" (Flynn, 1993, p. 89) with shared religious and familial values, to an understanding of schools as being communities engaged in and vitally present to the wider, multifaceted community, and having a prophetic role in that society (Dwyer, 1993).

If you went back 10 or 15 years the Catholic school principal was that, was primarily captured in the school environment. More and more, the school as a social institution is becoming more critical in its association with families, parishes and communities and so the role of the principal in being a model for what we believe and who we are ... is becoming more embracing of the social dimensions of interaction with families and it does draw more deeply personally and professionally, and if the person isn't fully integrated in those understandings of self, then the vocation's a lot harder. (Dooley)

The public dimension of the role of principal is, as has been noted earlier in this chapter, even more public and demanding in rural schools. However this reality can become a strong point, even an asset to the principal in carrying out the role more authentically in that community.

Immersion in the community really gives a human dimension to what could otherwise be a (purely) professional approach and (principals) begin to love the people in that community, to suffer with them, to worry about them, all those things that you don't have to do in the city in a way. (Hurley)

The principal's position might be "infinitely more difficult and infinitely more demanding" (Hurley) given this understanding, but with the level of investment of self required, it is also "probably much more rewarding as well. There is a beautiful part of that, that people see you as a person and ... you become part of the community, as does the local GP, as does the priest" (Hurley).

In the local context, with the increasing shortage of ordained priests, the position of principal, the key religious and educational leader in the community, carries considerable responsibility. It is "a unique dimension to being involved in Catholic education, and it's one that people need to understand ... because ... it will impinge on their life quite dramatically" (Hurley). In the schools specifically, the general absence of members of Religious Congregations – the religious sisters, brothers and priests – means that the model of an authentic religious life now centres on the principal, and "we can be worried, scared or excited by that" (Dooley) but it is reality, and it

is a vital aspect of the role of the principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia.

## **5.9 Tensions**

As significant agents of the Catholic Church through their personal calling and as a consequence of the expectations they take on with their role, principals in the Catholic Schools have a primary responsibility to support and promote the Church and its core beliefs. However, the increasing secularisation of our society and changing moral standards in the community (CSTM, 1997) can create tension between the perceived teachings of the Church and the conscience of the individual – be that person principal, staff member, student or parent!

The Bishops were both clear and unequivocal as to the responsibility of the principal of a Catholic school in matters such as this, and Bishop Hurley stated the position directly: “I would not countenance people taking a public stand against the Church’s teaching, to take a contra position to the Church in a public way.” He pointed to the importance of talking through difficulties with various authorities, including himself, but the ultimate responsibility of the principal to the teachings of the Church remains absolute.

If a (principal) had some conscientious difficulty with some aspect of the Church’s teaching, I would expect, just from their professional point of view, that they would discuss that, perhaps firstly with their parish priest and/or the Director ... or myself. I



would be happy if it was primarily myself, that we would work our way through that conscientious difficulty, but as religious leaders in a Catholic school, principals have an absolute responsibility to espouse and to promote and to defend the Catholic faith. (Hurley)

Archbishop Wilson placed the responsibility on principals, as leaders, to be informed, to actively seek knowledge as part of their personal and professional formation, and ideally to be wisdom people for their communities:

Principals of schools have to steep themselves in the teachings of the Church and its history and traditions, so that they have a profound understanding of what was said, what is believed, how it has been arrived at and how it all fits together; and then to be patient with people who are younger, to try and just get them to see the picture. (Wilson)

These words reflect an implicit understanding of the principal as a person of wisdom, whose faith is deeply embedded, and who acts as an almost maternal/paternal presence in the school, an authentic witness to the faith in their lives. However, each principal is a product of her/his own story, and will be at a different stage in his/her personal faith journey. In South Australia too, many of the current principals are still in the early years of their principalship (see Table 4.4: Time in Role – Respondents). Not only may they still have to consolidate their own sense of the role, but they are also part of the wider community of the faithful, and as such may not yet have that “profound understanding” of Church from which to offer wisdom.

One of the problems that the Church contends with is its image in the wider community (CSTM, 1997). The Catholic Church has suffered greatly from the press over the years as a result of events in some of its institutions and the actions of those who staffed them. Public disquiet about issues of sexuality and the abuse of children has led to a loss of confidence in, and at times rejection of, the institution. As a result, it is assuming a lot to think that even the most faithful would never question its customs or teachings. However, the Archbishop stressed the responsibility of principals, as religious leaders, to take the traditions and beliefs of the Church into their own selves, and to act with authenticity in that framework. Catholics have

a responsibility to allow their life to be imbued by what we believe and teach in the Catholic church; to be really open in their lives to understanding what it means in allowing that to take root in their life and to really influence them. That's true about people who are involved in the life of the Church in general; it's especially true for people who have a role like principals of schools. (Wilson)

The Archbishop was, however, concerned that not enough was being done to provide school leaders with the support to reach this stage of development, and so “we have to do all we can to strengthen our formation programs for people entering Catholic education and people taking up principalships” (Wilson).

The Catholic School is essentially the interface between the Church and young people. In its mission of mediating this Church and its understanding of life to the young people in the schools, the Director stressed how important it

was to provide a connection between the Church's teachings and 'their world'. Real concerns about ethics and morality – both personal and in relation to the wider community – needed to be addressed compassionately and with respect for persons, and “within the culture and environment of the school ... talking through with young (people) the reasons why we believe this life is here now, with (them), and then how we work that through in their lives” (Dooley).

The adult community of the school – staff and parents – provide a further dimension of the school and consequently of the principal's sphere of influence. The religious leadership role amidst such a disparate group of people is an important one. Faith is an individual matter, though it draws from the community, and such a group may represent a broad spectrum of understanding and acceptance of the Church's position on many issues – including the issues that they live out in the circumstances of their own lives. “If the model of the principal is authentic, then that has to have an influence on the staff around him or her” (Dooley). The Director's hope was that, with the modelling of the principal, and through the various programs of religious and professional development offered through the CEO and its associated bodies, “understandings about Church teaching and beliefs would come through, so that there is both at the cognitive and personal level, an understanding of the beliefs and teachings of the Church” (Dooley).

This need for a clear understanding of the Church's teachings was also addressed by one of the Assistant Directors, who focused on the 'real life'

situation of the school, and the various stages of faith in the school community. He stressed the relational and pastoral tradition of the Church and Catholic schools, and pointed out that,

at the end of the day, we are dealing with real people whose lives may or may not align with every facet of (Church doctrine) and that's the art of religious leadership! Its working with real people, real circumstances in a way that's faithful to what the tradition is asking. But the tradition has always been understood to be a pastoral endeavour, I suppose we called it 'pastoral nous' in years past - what might be called religious leadership these days.  
(Sharkey)

In situating the pastoral endeavor of the school within that of the Church, Dr. Sharkey was responding to the dominant tradition of love and reaching out to 'sinners' in the way of Jesus, and taking up the model of Jesus as leader (McLaughlin, 1997). Ultimately however, as mandated religious leaders in their individual school communities, there is no doubt about the requirement of the principal to know and to support the Catholic Church in all its teachings.

#### **5.10 Formal Contractual Relationship**

The expectation that principals in Catholic schools assume a religious as well as educational role is part of the formal contract between principals and the respective employing authorities. In the process of interview, selection and employment, the religious dimension of the role "is made unequivocally clear"

(Hurley). Bishop Hurley undoubtedly maintains a personal involvement throughout the process in his Diocese:

I would oversee the panel that is to interview, to short list and to recommend to me people for appointment. For people like Directors, Deputy Directors, Principals and RECs, I do the appointing, so, with principals, recommendations are made to me from the panel of who is eminently appointable, who might be appointable and people who (are) at this point perhaps as not suitable for a particular position. I maintain the right to reinterview if I feel I should, or to question the chair of the panel and then I make the appointment. (Hurley)

This description mirrors the template for selection of staff established by the CEO in the Adelaide Archdiocese (see Appendix C: Selection of CEO Staff: Flow Chart). The Bishop's statement, however, highlights the direct involvement of the Church authority in the process of the selection of principals, as people who will necessarily impact on the religious character of the schools to which they are appointed.

In the Survey of Principals (bearing in mind the relatively low return on the questionnaire – 36%) the formal requirement for Religious Leadership in the role was highlighted in Section 1, Questions 5, 6 and 7. Principals were asked if they had a Contract of Employment which explicitly set out the religious context of the role. All of the respondents, with one exception, reported that they had a formal Contract which stated the expectation that Religious

Leadership was a central part of their role as principal. This can be seen in Appendix E. The person who did not have such a contract was a female 'Religious Principal of a Systemic School,' who was, however, in no doubt about the importance of this aspect in her role as principal:

The expectation is implicit in 'the mandate' given by my own Religious Congregation through deliberations at provincial chapter. The expectation is also implicit in viewing the role statement/person specification generally used in Catholic Schools in South Australia.

(Survey)

### **5.11 Summary of Emerging Issues**

In this chapter, the issues which emerged from interviews with the Bishops and the Directors have been described. These system authorities provided insights into their views concerning the religious leadership of the principals of the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. Collectively they emphasised that the religious dimension of the principal's role was paramount to the authenticity of the Catholic Education System, and that it was incumbent upon the principals to develop a distinctively Catholic culture in the schools which would assist in achieving the key goals of Catholic schooling, education in the faith and the growth of persons (Dwyer, 1993; Grace, 2002). It was considered essential that principals, in their role as religious leaders, brought a sound knowledge and deep understanding of the Catholic tradition and the living theology of Church into the service of the Church in their schools. That these schools were seen to be different from Government

schools was also important: not for the sake of difference, but because their core purposes were different. The principals were seen as central to the Catholic character of the schools and the way in which they realised this mission of the Church. They were expected to be persons of exceptional quality, and to lead their schools and their communities authentically in ways congruent with their beliefs and those of the Catholic Church and its System of Schools.

In the following chapter, those areas identified by the Church and System authorities are explored by the principals, in answer to the second research question, “How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?”

## Chapter Six

### The Principal as 'Religious Leader'

The previous Chapter documented the thoughts of the Church and System authorities on the purposes of Catholic schools in a changing world; on the persons entrusted, as principals, with realising those purposes; and on the essential religious character of their role in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia. This chapter addresses the second Research Question: **“How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?”** The material is derived from the interviews with six principals, drawn from a cross section of the Catholic Secondary Schools; from the Survey distributed to all principals; and from the focus group interview with the Expert Reference Group.

Sergiovanni (1991, p.6) suggested that “professional knowledge is *created in use* as principals ... think, reflect, decide and do”. The insights of the principals explored in this chapter represent that ‘professional knowledge’ within the System. The reflections of these principals from the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia on their professional practice, and in particular on the religious dimension of their leadership, bring the role to life in all its complexities. The chapter explores the way principals see themselves in this role, how it impacts upon their practice, and how it extends into their life ‘beyond the school gate’. This ‘professional knowledge’ has emerged as a series of themes and sub-themes shown in Table 6.1, which forms the framework for the development of this chapter.



*Table 6.1: Key Themes identified in response to Research Question 2.*

Themes	Sub-Themes
6.1 Being the 'Religious Leader'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role description</li> <li>• Call or vocation</li> <li>• Beyond the school gate</li> <li>• Stresses</li> <li>• Applying for the role</li> <li>• Impact</li> </ul>
6.2 Approaches to Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of personality</li> <li>• Wisdom</li> <li>• Modelling</li> <li>• Supports in the role</li> </ul>
6.3 Distinctive Characteristics of the Catholic School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• God's love</li> <li>• Beyond school age</li> <li>• Priorities</li> <li>• Justice</li> </ul>
6.4 Making a School 'Catholic'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principal's role</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• School as Church</li> <li>• Practical Strategies</li> </ul>
6.5 Pressures and Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope and demands of the job</li> <li>• Relationships with Church</li> <li>• Staffing</li> </ul>
6.6 Time for Prayer and Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the busy-ness</li> <li>• Reflecting on/reflecting in</li> <li>• Prayer</li> </ul>
6.7 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do we serve?</li> <li>• Fostering hope</li> </ul>

## **6.1 Being the 'Religious Leader'**

All the principals interviewed were well aware of the four dimensions of leadership set out by the Catholic Education Office in the role description for a principal of a Catholic school in South Australia: "first and foremost (is) the religious dimension, then the curriculum dimension, community dimension and administrative dimension - so your performance is really based around those four generic areas" (female principal, rural school).

This "first and foremost" dimension was especially emphasised by one principal, who was very clear in his appreciation of these four areas of activity, but who focussed specifically on his position as a religious leader in the community of his school as an integral, rather than separate part of his role:

There is no doubt I am (religious leader), and there is no doubt the paper work would say I am ... everything says that that is what I'm supposed to be, so at that level I know I am a religious leader. But I also know it at another level. I think of it sometimes, when I sit back or reflect on what I've said or why I've done what I've done or a decision I've made. I'll say I was exercising religious leadership at the time, so its something I don't see as an extra, that today I'm a religious leader, tomorrow I'll be the curriculum leader - I just think its rather who I am than how I do my job, but its always there. (male principal, co-ed school)

This sense that the dimensions could not, in real leadership practice, be separated from each other was echoed in the Expert Reference Group, who argued that religious dimension was not just 'the most important' of the four, but in fact was the aspect which "enlivened" (ERG) every aspect of the life of the school and the practice of the principal.

I struggle with it (religious leadership) when it is identified as one of those dimensions, because I see it more as a life force that permeates the lot, and so in a sense (it is) what motivates you, what influences you. If I just take finance – what motivates you, what influences your process, what outcomes you hope for - even in finances, these are part of that religious dimension of the school, which you then pick up in specific ways. (ERG)

Another principal also avoided the notion of 'dimensions of leadership' and spoke of a personal investment in the process of the leadership of a Catholic school. The religious commitment was not something that one took on at appointment, but was, rather, part of the person's essential make-up, which translated into authentic action as principal.

It's absolutely integral to everything that's done. It would be like leaving the stones out of a cement mix. For me it's as integral as that. If you don't have that mixture in you from the very beginning, your foundations crumble. It's so very clear to me that it's about who you are and it's about a deep belief that people hold and it's about their relationship with one another and with God, and that has

to be their every dimension, it's not an added extra. (female principal, co-ed school)

This is an understanding that "life isn't secular, life is intrinsically religious" (ERG). In using the 'four dimensions' approach to defining the role of the principal in a Catholic school, the "sacred-secular" (ERG) dichotomy becomes institutionalised and "problematic" (ERG).

Some of those interviewed expressed their principalship as "a call to vocation - it's a call to expressing a faith commitment" (male principal, rural school). This was a very personal commitment, which at times had the potential to expose the principal to comment and criticism from the community and in this sense as well, it was certainly seen as far more than 'a job'!

I think it is a call, because there are so many challenges in the role that if you didn't perceive it as more than a 'job' you potentially might not stay in there! In terms of the satisfaction from it, you really have to make yourself quite vulnerable as a leader, and in doing that, you could say, well look, I don't need to put myself through (that), there are other jobs as such that you could choose without making yourself so vulnerable. (male principal, rural school)

Another principal reflected further on the extent of engagement with the community of the school that the role of principal in a Catholic school required, suggesting that perhaps "we're expecting too much from people in leadership positions in Catholic schools" (male principal, boys' school). He went on to

describe the intensive “engagement with the community” the role involved, far beyond “just doing a job, running the school”.

Whilst these principals may not have been speaking specifically in terms of their ‘religious leadership’, they certainly saw this extended responsibility as the way the principal of a Catholic school should be acting as leader in that community. This is an approach to leadership, an understanding of leadership which they saw as consonant with the religious nature of their roles, and with the notion of ‘vocation’.

*Table 6.2: Responses to Selected Statements from the Survey, Section 2*

<b>Statement from Survey</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
The position of the Principal ... is a personal vocation	9	3	0	0	0
Religious Leadership ... is the sole responsibility of the Principal	0	0	0	3	9
The only thing of real importance that principals do is to create and manage the culture of the school	6	2	2	2	0
The fundamental purpose of the Catholic school is the faith formation of its community.	2	9	0	1	0
The Religious Aspect of the role is significant for me.	9	3	0	0	0
The Principal ... must uphold the position of the Catholic Church in all matters	5	5	2	0	0
In exercising their pastoral responsibilities ... Principals ... often experience conflict or tension with Church or System	0	6	3	3	0

The survey explored the concept of vocation further in Section 2, Question 9. This question invited the wider principal group to respond to the statement that “the position of the Principal as the designated Religious Leader in a Catholic school is a personal vocation” (Survey). On a Lickert scale response, this premise drew an emphatically positive response from most of those principals who returned the Survey, who ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement (see Table 6.2). The one ‘Religious Principal’ in that group was slightly less emphatic in her response, simply ‘agreeing’ with the idea. This perhaps reflects some differentiation around the concept of vocation between lay and consecrated persons. None-the-less, the total response indicated a very strong acceptance of this use of an essentially religious term to describe perceptions of the role of the principal in a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia.

Perhaps this differentiation between formal Church and schools was also in the mind of one female principal, who saw the essentially male structures of the Church as encapsulating religious leadership, and so for her, the term ‘religious leadership’ applied to her position of principal was itself a problem.

The mandated ‘religious leaders’ are the parish priest and the assistant parish priest and probably the parish religious education coordinator. I think I am a mechanism for taking that next step down and distributing that, so that the church is the distribution centre of that. So I think I have a role in religious leadership but I don’t think I’m a religious leader. I’m a woman. (female principal, rural school)

The framing of the principal's role within Church language (see Chapter 2), as vocation or call, was recognised as a difficulty in another context: "you can't always get that kind of language from people, because it's not them" (male principal, boys' school). However, the understanding that the principal was a significant religious leader in the community of the school was widespread through the three data collection instruments. On a pragmatic level, as another principal remarked: "if we weren't (religious leaders), we would be at (government high school) or somewhere, wouldn't we?" (female principal, girls' school).

As religious leaders, several principals had an understanding of the role that extended beyond the "presiding at school ceremonies" (female principal, rural school), and being the religious voice in public occasions (female principal, girls' school). One principal spoke of a sacredness of the office itself, in its pastoral role, reaching out to help, responding to the wider community of the school. He spoke of the privilege of entering people's lives, and the responsibility that placed upon him as leader in an organisation of the Church.

Conversations that you have with people in your office really sometimes astound you in terms of what people are prepared to confide about and it's - sometimes confiding in a person, sometimes there's the sense of them confiding in the role, or the perception of that role. And it's important to confide because if I'm, in my role, caring for them, trying to give them the opportunity to be the best they can be, student, parent or teacher, they have that sense that

it's important to confide for that to happen and so, it is a vocation.

(male principal, rural school)

Other principals also spoke of this need to help as part of their understanding of the vocation, and in some cases of a deep seated personal spirituality of outreach: "I certainly would have had a sense leaving uni that I was going to change the world" (female principal, girls' school). "You *are* called, you know – it's a goodness that's been thrust upon one" (female principal, girls' school).

The principalship of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia is a demanding position, and the idea that the principalship of a Catholic secondary school could be anything but a vocation was almost a matter of amusement for a number of the principals! "I assume it must be, isn't it? You know, just in terms of time and energy and those things - I wouldn't have thought it was do-able unless it was (a vocation)!" (female principal, girls' school). Another principal, who had served in that role in several different schools, had ambivalent feelings about the pressure faced in the role, and the intrinsic rewards of the position:

I do find the job rewarding. That might sound strange, because the hours are very long, but I recognise the importance of what we are doing and I'm happy to commit myself to that. I really do feel that for each of those jobs I've had, it's been a call, that God's inviting me to go somewhere else and take another challenge. (male principal, boys' school)



This call to 'goodness' and commitment to the ideal of vocation had its personal consequences. The pressures inherent in the role were regularly noted by those interviewed, and in the surveys. In this respect, the Survey identified the personal demands of the role as especially difficult, particularly in relation to family and health. The issue of "keeping work/family balance" (Survey) was raised as a concern by five Principals – and all listed it as the most significant of the difficulties associated with the role. Broadly, it was reflected in

the amount and breadth of things that you need to contend with, the effect that this has on you personally (stress levels and health) and the time it all takes away from other important things in your life, notably family. (Survey)

A similar observation was made by Carlin et al. (April 2003), and in the same vein, Starratt commented that

Principals and teachers, like their students, are themselves involved in the drama of living. In their personal lives they face the everyday joys and challenges of living. Their involvement in the drama of schooling does not exhaust their lives. They are spouse, parent, son or daughter, friend or relative, voter, consumer, neighbor, hiker, volunteer, church member and a host of other things. As unique human beings, they have their song to sing, their story to write, their ways of being heroes. (Starratt, 1990, p.115)

This drama of life presents the real problem for principals of finding a balance between professional and private lives, but many felt that was problematic: “all this nonsense about having a life in balance is just nonsense” (female principal, girls’ school). “To balance work and family I think – it’s almost impossible now” (male principal, boys’ school). The overwhelming demands and responsibilities, both of the role itself and of the school community, meant that most felt that they - and their families – had to make considerable sacrifices in order to meet expectations associated with their leadership vocation in a Catholic school.

I always say that when my family life is running well, my school life isn’t; and when my school life is running well I’m usually having arguments at home. I could write a book on that because I think that’s the conclusion I’ve come to after all these years in this job. I just don’t think it is possible to find a happy medium. It’s creative tension between one and the other. (male principal, boys’ school)

The impact on personal life was even more marked for principals in rural schools. One, the first lay principal at his school, spoke of “the expectations of community and the lack of anonymity in the community” which he experienced, and how “so much emphasis was placed on the role of Catholic school principal in a country town” (male principal, rural school). This was not just about “being at the functions, but also to be seen to be nurturing the spiritual life of the community ... because that’s what had been done by the (members of the Religious Congregations).” In view of this, and the earlier comments about the demands on time, self and family, the comment by

another Principal is particularly significant: it may be a case that the “expectations previously met by incredible religious/avowed leaders are not able to be fully met by lay married persons” (Survey).

For rural principals, their reality as religious and community leaders involved being present to “not just the liturgical celebrations but those (events) that followed” in the wider Catholic community such as “funerals and the celebrations of life and so forth” (male principal, rural school). The principal of another rural school also reflected on this reality: “I think there is an expectation that I will be available, committed. If I turn up at particular functions it’s highly valued and noted” (female principal, rural school). She recognised in this extended role a “community outreach” responsibility, a concern about “identifying the poor, the marginalised, those who dropped out of school, and bringing them in as part of that journey.”

This priority for the marginalised in the principal’s conscious outreach expresses both practical religious leadership in the community and the Church’s mandate for a “preferential option for the poor” (RDE, 1988, par. 87; CPMS, 2002, par. 69). It exemplifies religious leadership that is not confined to “pious thoughts” (male principal, co-ed school) or “presiding at the assembly” (female principal, girls’ school), but is manifest in the actions and priorities of the person as witness to “the core values of the tradition” (Survey).

For those taking on the principal’s role, this is a challenging and possibly confronting understanding of religious leadership as an integral expression of

the religious character of the principal. When the physical strains on time and energy are added to this picture, the principalship of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia is clearly a demanding vocation. There was a strong feeling amongst the principals that those applying for the role should have a realistic appreciation of that fact:

I think one of the most important things that you have got to tell people is that it is hard work and it is lots of hours ... that is the nature of the job. It is a demanding job ... but it's not compulsory to be a principal ... I'm not forced to be principal of (school), I do have other choices. (male principal, co-ed school)

Many potential candidates do in fact exercise those 'other choices', and this was noted in studies such as the VSAT Report (Carlin et al., 1999). Those who did take on the role in South Australia did so for a variety of reasons. For some, a personal vision or hope drove them:

I think you take it on because you think you have got a couple of ideas that might actually work or are worth trying. I don't think you take it on because you've got all the answers, you take it on because you might have some ideas. (male principal, co-ed school)

For others, a 'career' in Catholic Education, carefully prepared for, was the motivating force:

I suppose for me principalship was a goal I had in mind and I worked towards that. It wasn't falling into it, it was something that I decided I wanted to do and so, knowing that leadership in Catholic schools (was) about religious leadership, it was important to do

things (such as the) Graduate Diploma in Religious Education. I wanted to have credibility in terms of what I brought to religious leadership, and the understanding that that was a principal's most vital role in the school. (female principal, co-ed school)

This acknowledgement by a principal of the need for theological and scriptural preparation for the role of principal in a Catholic school is significant, given its recognised religious dimension. As this group of principals have indicated however, training on this cognitive level needs to be complemented at the affective level – the leadership of a Catholic school comes from the heart or soul (Bolman and Deal, 1995), is based on a deep sense of values (Zohar & Marshall, 2001), and must be authentic to the person and to the Church (Terry, 1993; McLaughlin, 1997; Duignan, 2002).

One principal vividly demonstrated that the religious leadership of the principal of a Catholic Secondary School was not just a matter of theory or policy, but rather, a matter of real impact and substance. He recalled the devastating tsunami in South East Asia (January 2005), and the attendant overwhelming news coverage, lost amidst which was a statement about Catholic relief efforts by the Archbishop of Adelaide. In contrast, the principal's voice in the school community had an immediacy, a relevance and a practical impact amongst those families, resulting in a significant donation to the Catholic charity organisation, Caritas, to help the victims:

When I get up in assembly, or say something in a newsletter or to a parent who rings in, I've got to be having more impact than the

Archbishop. I thought of that last night when I was writing *my* little bit about the tsunami - who's read what the Archbishop said? And yet most parents will read what I say ... so it was just a reminder that you really are the religious leader (and that) you do have a chance to speak out about things that others with leadership in the Church don't have, even the priests and the Archbishop. (male principal, co-ed school)

In this context, as a significant voice in matters of faith, morality and Christian values, the principal's approach to leadership is particularly important.

## **6.2 Approaches to Leadership**

This understanding of leadership, and particularly of the religious leadership of the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia, as a presence in and for the community, influences the way those principals lead. "The Catholic leader should lead in a certain sort of way" (male principal, co-ed school), a way reflecting the values of the Catholic tradition. The principal should be

someone who is forgiving and loving and inclusive, all those sorts of things that you should be! You're not being very faithful if you're not - that's 'the should be'! But I think you just bring yourself to it. And no, that's not going to be perfect, but I can only do it my way. (male principal, co-ed school)

It is important that the things that “should be” are integral to leaders in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. This clearly has implications for the sort of person chosen for that role, as well as their style of leadership.

You really can't be a principal of a Catholic school and - to put it crassly ... be (overbearing and autocratic) - you can't, it doesn't go.

If you think you need to be like that in order to get things done, then it's a mis-use of power. (male principal, boys' school)

A reliance on power and position as the basis for leadership was not seen as an appropriate approach to leadership by this principal. Another principal, reflecting on the connection between power and leadership, observed that the traditional “hierarchical leadership model” (female principal, rural school) of the Church itself has hardly been a good exemplar for those engaged in its service. In this context, Grace (2002, p. 143) commented that “it is not surprising that leadership in many Catholic schools has, in the past, reproduced a sense of hierarchy and authoritarianism characterising the institutional Church.”

For most principals, however, leadership style was seen largely as a matter of personality, and the way one worked with people. As one principal observed: “I think there are certain personality traits that put people into certain ways of acting. I don't think we step out of those comfortably” (female principal, co-ed school). She suggested that a person would always act out of that paradigm, perhaps even regardless of their knowledge of theories of leadership or other factors.

I don't think leopards can change spots, and I think with all the best theories, best practice, consultative leadership, transactional leadership - ultimately it comes down to people, and this might be an over simplification, it tends to come down to people's personalities and I think if a person is basically a positive person, they will seek out and try to find a positive in situations. I think it's very difficult to change that. (female principal, co-ed school)

For some however, the theories were important, and eight principals commented positively on the value of formal studies for their leadership practice. A number were also conscious of the need to update in this area: and one principal, reflecting on his leadership practice, and perhaps his leadership style remarked: "I want to be a better leader. I keep thinking about that. I'm not entirely happy with the leader I am, and I can make some changes perhaps - but I will still be shaped or restricted by my own leadership style, my own personality" (male principal, co-ed school).

The individual's approach to leadership (the principals themselves called it leadership 'style') is essentially about the way he or she relates to people: as was noted in Chapter 5, leadership is a relational activity. It concerns the way power is used. Duignan, reflecting on some traditional leadership 'styles', asserted that "it is appropriate that the type of leadership exercised in the Catholic school reflects the Vatican 11's evolving participatory and communal emphasis" (1997, p. 13). This 'participatory and communal' approach to leadership was reflected in the way one principal recalled his appointment to



the position, and the confidence that the community of the school had in selecting him, with his particular attributes and qualities, and particularly, with his approach to leadership:

there's something in the way I (lead) that was attractive to the people who decided to make the appointment. They weren't looking for another person, who might do it another way: they were saying something about the way *this person* does it - we like, or are attracted to it, and think that's what (this school) needs at the moment. (male principal, co-ed school)

This affirmation of the successful applicant legitimises that understanding of leadership being an expression of a particular personality, but places it in a singular context, that of the particular school, its community, and its own understanding of its needs. Given this context, it is important that the principal is "really authentic with what (he/she) believes about people" (male principal, boys' school), and that he or she undertakes leadership in that particular community in that spirit.

A number of principals also spoke of the way they, or at least, their approach to leadership, had changed, as they grew more experienced in the role - "you grow with the people that you are ministering to" (male principal, rural school). There was a consensus, expressed by one female principal, that "life has a funny way of changing you, you know; and I think as you get older and experience more, perhaps some of your more bombastic, youthful ways disappear ... I just think life changes people" (female principal, co-ed school).

The male principal of one rural school reinforced this idea, suggesting that the impetuosity and idealism of the youthful leader becomes the “wisdom” of the more mature principal – as Treston commented, “we are not born wise” (2005, p. 71). Wisdom in leadership comes as a result of living and responding “reflectively and authentically” (male principal, co-ed school) in the complex environment of the community of the school. It ensures that the principal, as the religious leader, is safeguarding and protecting “the core values of the tradition” (Survey).

Principals were also aware that their actions, particularly as religious leaders, provided the school community with a clear indication of their priorities. One took the opportunity, as “head-teacher”, to continue a role in the classroom, in touch with the core business of the school: “I teach RE still and I teach RE very well” (female principal, girls’ school). This was a statement not only about her professional competence in terms of the ‘core business’ of the school, but also about the importance of that subject for the religious identity of the school – “so that’s not bad modelling!”

Others made a special point of encouraging a culture of prayer in the staff community (male principal, boys’ school; female principal, co-ed school); of ensuring that decisions about budgets and expenditure reflected a sense of justice and equity in the community (female principal, co-ed school); and of ensuring that whenever “they would hear me speak it would have that Catholic and religious underpinning” (female principal, girls’ school; male principal, co-ed school).

In rural schools, scrutiny of the principal is more direct and intense than that experienced by their counterparts in the city: “in terms of the role of symbolic religious leader, I think you are called to get better at it very quickly in the country!” (male principal, rural school). When the principal lives in the midst of the community served by the school, his or her every action, from shopping, to going to the football, to being in Church (or not) is noted (male principal, rural school), and conclusions are drawn about the person and their real values, which impact on their “credibility, especially as religious leader” (female principal, rural school).

What it means to be a Catholic leader is made obvious pretty quickly and pretty early: there is very little anonymity in a country town and just as in the city you would be asked to really model and to reflect what is dear to us in a Catholic school context, in a country school it is exactly the same - *but* people will know you, and will know when you haven't done it! (male principal, rural school)

This level of accountability, not just for the school but for the faithfulness of the principal him/her-self, places the leader in a potentially vulnerable position, one which principals felt should be supported and shared by others in that school community. In the Survey (Section 2, Question 5)., principals emphatically stated that the responsibility for religious leadership in the school should not be seen solely as theirs (see Table 6.2). Several of the Principals, while being careful not to abrogate their ultimate personal responsibility in this respect, referred to the significance of the Religious Education Coordinator

(REC) as a key person in this context. “While an REC has this (religious leadership) as their explicit mandate, the importance of making a vital tradition contemporary and relevant in the eyes of the school community is extremely challenging” – and remained the final responsibility of the Principal (Survey).

This approach to leadership, embracing the supports present to the school community, emphasises the understanding of the school as community (RDE 1988, par. 31, 32) and of the principal’s commitment to serving that community. Question 8 in Section 3 of the Survey reinforced this theme, exploring the principals’ perceptions about sources of support from within the community of the school for the Religious Leadership dimension of their role. The responses are shown in Table 6.3.

*Table 6.3: Support People – Frequency of Nomination*

<b>Person</b>	<b>Number of Times Nominated</b>
REC	9
Deputy Principal	6
Parish Priest, chaplain	6
Mentors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>from the Religious Congregation associated with the school</li> <li>from CEO – Principal Consultants</li> <li>from among friends</li> </ul>	5 4 2
School Staff	7
Leadership Team	4
School Board	4
Family	2

(source: survey of Principals, 2005)

The REC was a significant support, but others such as Deputy Principals, Parish Priests, a variety of mentors and the members of School Boards (in particular the Chairperson) were also considered important supports. Mentors were also very significant, supporting the principals and acting as sounding boards (male principal, boys' school) in the exercise of their leadership responsibilities, especially in the religious dimension of that role. Prominent mentors identified in the Survey were members of the Religious Congregations traditionally associated with particular schools (see Table 6.3). In South Australia, for many schools the current principal is the first layperson in that role. The support of mentors for these lay principals was particularly important in shaping the principal's approach to leadership in those communities.

The purposes of Catholic schools, the underlying values associated with them, the personal faith and integrity of the principal, and way he/she leads in their school communities, all help to define the Catholic school as different from other schools. The next section of this chapter explores that notion.

### **6.3 Distinctive Characteristics of the Catholic School**

The principals believed that, though "schools are schools, on about similar things" (male principal, co-ed school), there were some essential points which characterised the good Catholic school. These characteristics relate to the rationale for having a Catholic school and to its mission in the world, "the fundamental duty to evangelise" (CSTM, 1997, par. 3): "this place exists for a

purpose, and as principal I think I've got to keep that alive the whole time, keep that in front of people, that this place exists for a purpose" (male principal, co-ed school).

This purpose was "at the heart of what we want to teach our young people," one principal acknowledged. She went on to describe it as follows:

I hope that people here would have a deep sense of what it truly means to be a Christian person on mission: that we are not just a good school (and I think we are that), and that we are not just a good humanist school, but we are deep believers in Jesus and his message. (female principal, co-ed school)

Parents enrol their children in a Catholic school for many different reasons, but the principal in particular must work to maintain that core purpose and to give it meaning within the life experience of that community. "Some (parents) are saying they want a private school, some are saying we value a Catholic education and all that entails, so I think as principal you've got to keep teasing out what that means" (male principal, co-ed school). One principal explained that she wanted "children here in some way to experience God's love and call for them, and ... to encourage them to respond to that" (female principal, co-ed school).

In such ways, the Catholic school seeks to draw its community to a synthesis between faith and life (CS, 1977, par.45), building "multiple intelligences" (female principal, girls' school) - not just IQ, or even EQ, but especially a

Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) - that encouraged students to locate their actions and lives “in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context” (Zohar and Marshall, 2001, p. 3). The principal of one school, reflecting on her understanding of the core purposes of that Catholic school, believed that

if I’ve never challenged them with the thought that life is bigger for them than what they do, what they wear, what they eat, where they live and what they drive, then I don’t think my religious leadership has been in faith. (female principal, co-ed school)

This suggestion that schools prepared students for a greater vision of life echoed Archbishop Wilson’s comment that “the ultimate union of faith and culture is actually to prepare people for the end of their life on this earth and to prepare them to see that there is more than what we understand in this world” (Wilson). One principal spoke of this ideal, but suggested that attending to the “here and now” was vitally important in achieving this end. The way in which this struggle to make faith alive and relevant in this secular world (CSTM, 1997) was conducted was one characteristic of the Catholic school which made it different from others. As one principal commented:

There is much more than the ‘here and now’ - but the here and now is certainly important. It’s about how we treat each other and what’s important in life and what we value, what gives it meaning, what’s transient – it’s sorting all those sorts of things out. As a Catholic school, that’s our job, to help to sort some of that out. If you don’t sort it out then, you won’t sort it out as adults. If you are wrestling with that and trying to sort that out, then I think you’ve done a good

job of preparing yourself for the next life. (male principal, co-ed school)

It was noted, however, that other religious-based schools might well share such a goal. One principal suggested that other Christian schools, at least, might have much in common with these purposes, and that the differences were more about the individual cultures, communities or even principals in the different schools.

I think there is very little difference between a Catholic school and an Anglican school and a Lutheran school that are all trying to do the same thing. Now the ways in which they do that might differ, just as much as the way three Catholic schools might differ in the way they do it, but we all have a calling, a strong calling, to bring these young people into a greater sense of what it means to be a Christian. (male principal, boys' school)

As in everything, the reality test of this is in the practical dimension: what things are done differently, how are the challenging moments handled, how is that understanding of 'being Christian' managed? "I think in the long run" one principal suggested,

it comes down to the quality of people's relationships, in terms of students really thinking that they've got something here (in this school), and if we can help them to understand that that exists because of who we are in relation to God, and vice versa, then hopefully that may be caught by students rather than taught by teachers. (female principal, co-ed school)



Such an outlook echoes the tenets of the Vision for Catholic Schools, which invites students into relationship with God and recognises “the unique presence of God in all people” (SACCS, 1991 - see Appendix D). At times, however, students test those relationships and challenge the way in which the individual Catholic schools, and their religious leaders, interpret and live those beliefs. Those “hard decisions” that affected the future of individual students and the school community caused principals great stress and much soul searching as they strove to reconcile their responses to each situation with the values and purposes of their schools. One principal commented

that’s not to say that we don’t make hard decisions and move people or children on if we need to, but it’s about that quality of relationships that says we are here for you - but we are also here for the whole, and as a religious leader I think it is always balancing out the needs of an individual as opposed to the needs of the community and looking at how there is justice in that for people.

(female principal, co-ed school)

One principal spoke of her distress in having to make one such “hard decision”: “I really had to expel her, you know. She’d done everything, she’d lied, she’d been violent” - and she (the principal) “sobbed” when it reached that moment (female principal, girls’ school). But for another principal, the real “hard decision” was very different, stemming from a commitment to the belief that “you can’t expel a child!” (female principal, rural school). Keeping difficult students ‘in the fold’ was not always popular with, or understood by, staff and

the wider community, but in spite of the tension this at times caused, for her it was a matter of Christian principle, and not negotiable.

In Christian terms it's contradictory, so how do you bring everyone along on the journey including the child? And when you get the SACCS policy that (says that) teachers have a right to teach and children have a right to learn, and you marry that up with troublemakers climbing up the walls and trying to set fire to the toilets, or whatever other exciting things for the week - how do you marry that? Well, for me it's your faith, it's your gospel values and it's the centred-ness of Christ in each child, and I think that that gives us such a special dimension of the human-ness in all of us to work from, that you can't do in a secular school: you start from Christ, and as soon as you start from Christ, where else can you go except into relationships that are life-giving, fulfilling, challenging and painful - but non-negotiable! For me that transforms everything.

(female principal, rural school)

Similarly, another principal spoke of operating out of a paradigm of hope – “in the end, they are going to grow up to be good kids and adults - if we treat them like that!” Even when all the options for the child seem to have been exhausted, and “you have to look further afield for that child, I think as long as the options are hope filled – it's not that we've written (the child) off” (male principal, rural school).

In a Catholic school, these core principles of a Christ-centred view of the person (Sultmann & McLaughlin, 2000) and “caring and social justice” (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 303) underpin every action of the principal, defining his or her religious leadership. Several principals spoke of these values as the framework out of which their decisions were made in staffing (female principal, rural school), industrial matters (female principal, co-ed school) and budgeting (male principal, co-ed school; female principal, girls’ school). Their priorities in such matters created “the hidden curriculum of the school” (Traviss, 2000, p. 142), and they indicated where the true values of the decision makers lay, ultimately defining the nature of that community.

One principal spoke with passion about being able to determine the priorities of her own school’s budget. This gave her the ability “to create” a truly Catholic school, using resources of money, personnel and plant in ways which enhanced the key purposes of the school and the needs of her community:

In terms of power it’s extraordinary! You can do your staffing, you can spend the money exactly how you like. We are so free, with an incredible ability to put money into different subjects or different buildings or employ certain sorts of people or undertake certain initiatives – it’s just lovely! You can do what you like! (female principal, girls’ school)

Another principal thought of those key values as a “lens” through which issues such as “the latest bit of equipment that all schools should be taking up” could be assessed, in terms of what those decisions “added to what we are trying to

do at this place” (male principal, co-ed school). It was the process of reflection, through this Catholic “lens” which protected the essential Catholic character of the school.

The distinctiveness of these characteristics define the Catholic Secondary School, a body grounded in “the Gospel spirit of freedom and love” (RDE, 1988, par. 1). The realisation of these values in practice create the Catholic school.

#### **6.4 Making a School ‘Catholic’**

The Catholic school system in South Australia has changed greatly since the mid 1960s (see Chapter 2), presenting a challenge to both the schools and their leadership. The lay leaders who succeeded the members of Religious Congregations in leadership of Catholic schools took on not only the role of principals, but also of religious leaders. The Expert Reference Group commented on this situation, and highlighted the need for training in preparation for this sensitive role.

Schools have expanded, and the system has expanded quite rapidly, and it has drawn for its staff and its leadership - with the shrinking group of religious - on a group of lay people who, apart from perhaps the odd seminar or conference, and perhaps study through ACU or something like that, has never really come full up against any depth of theology, any depth of spirituality, any depth of scripture scholarship. So, how would you be able to formulate for

yourself what it means to be a religious leader serving a Catholic community? (ERG)

The challenge to keep the “denominational character of the school” alive, and to make it “relevant to staff and students” (Survey) was a central concern of those principals. “Articulating a coherent and consistent vision for the school” (Survey) in this new paradigm was seen by a number of Principals as a specific challenge requiring clear religious leadership from them.

Several principals spoke of “Gospel values” as significant in this vision. Such a phrase can be viewed as a cliché within Catholic education, however these Principals developed the concept, writing about aspiring to “animate” those values “in the lived experiences of our families and students,” and commenting on how it “is truly inspiring “ when they witness

students, staff and parents who demonstrate, by the way they treat each other, by the way they speak about national and international events, that they have internalised the teaching of Jesus and try to live out Gospel values by being kind, tolerant, empathetic, etc. They do this, not from a humanist philosophy but for reasons that are underpinned by religious belief. (Survey)

This was particularly inspiring, another Principal observed, in the context where these young people and staff are “being challenged to live out beliefs in a world that constantly challenged and is at odds with Gospel values.”

There was also a clear awareness of “the very real difference that a principal makes in the lives of so many people – humbling really” (male principal, rural school). It is “a position of privilege but one of service to others”: as principal in a Catholic Secondary School, one is able “to impact in a constructive way on the lives of other human beings (and) in the context of a Christian education this impact is magnified” (Survey).

Several principals found the possibility of “putting vision into reality” inspiring, and most recognised that shaping a school community was something that one did “not on one’s own, but through consultation and contemplation – harnessing collective wisdom” (male principal, co-ed school) The opportunity to work closely with Parish priests, and to contribute “to the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese” was also mentioned by one principal (Survey).

Leadership of the Catholic school at this time was recognised as a demanding responsibility. Faced with increasing accountability, liability and responsibility, time for the principal was a precious commodity. Questions 8 and 9 in section 1 of the Survey identified the way principals saw their time being taken across the four mandated areas of the principal’s responsibility. One principal suggested that this was a “difficult question, considering the infrastructure that exists in schools to support each of these different dimensions” (Survey). The collation of their estimates is presented in Table 6.4 below.

*Table 6.4: Estimates of Time spent (as % of total time) in Each of the Mandated Dimensions of the Principal's Role*

<b>Time in Role</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Administrative</b>	<b>Financial</b>	<b>Curricular</b>
< 3 Years	23	35	14	28
3 – 6 years	32	27	13	28
> 10 years	30	40	10	20

(Source: Survey of Principals, 2005)

Overall, the responses indicated that Administrative and Financial matters took up 53% of working time; Curricular and Religious responsibilities 27% each.

The large amount of time spent on management matters (technical, human and educational - Sergiovanni, 1984) reflects that accountability and responsibility which devolves to the principal. One principal pragmatically explained it as “give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s” (female principal, rural school). For her, however,

the branding of Catholic education (involved) providing a particular kind of education and that if you are serious about that then you have to be very clear about what that means. So to be a Catholic school and get your funding from the Australian Government means you have to meet certain criteria so in terms of the Catholic branding, religious is a far more complex issue. (female principal, rural school)

It is the principal who is responsible for this ‘Catholic branding’. It is brought about through a conscious presence of the religious dimension in forums such

as Newsletters and public and community occasions where the values of the school and the school's community are proclaimed

I would make it my business to ensure that something of who we are is at every one of those events. I would see it my role as religious leader to ensure that I have something to say about where God is in all of this. So it's about - and for me it's very important in this community because it's about always highlighting the fact that God is not separate from us, He's part of our lives. It's who we are, God's not the added extra. (female principal, co-ed school)

Another principal shared this approach, and used such avenues to make connections between the world of the students, and the traditions and beliefs of the Church:

I didn't sit down to write the newsletter and say I'll show off and be a religious leader, but when I read back and looked at it, I mean that was me being a religious leader, saying significant things in my role as principal. (male principal, co-ed school)

Participation in the religious celebrations and rites of the school community was also a significant part of the role of the religious leader, though one principal warned of the danger of superficial engagement – “tokenism”.

At masses I tend not to (take too prominent a role) – I'll be a Eucharistic minister but I really want the energy of the faith to be explicit in everything we do as staff rather than just the tokenism



because you can be a tokenistic leader. (female principal, rural school)

Several principals maintained a role in the classroom, taking the notion of 'head-teacher' seriously. Most typically this teaching was in the religious education area, providing both a statement of the importance of this subject in the context of the Catholic school, and modelling good practice for the staff: "for the last four years I've taught religion at various levels, this (female principal, rural school); "I teach RE still and I teach RE very well" (female principal, girls' school).

Another area in which the religious character of the school is emphasised is in the enrolment process for new students. This was an important opportunity to underline the Catholic purpose of the school, its values and traditions, and to invite parents to articulate and share their hopes within that context:

every time a new parent comes into the school I see primarily myself as a significant person in religious leadership, because for me one of the questions is 'what do you know about the Catholic faith tradition and what would you like to know about your child being educated in that tradition? (female principal, rural school)

All of these activities and strategies are examples of the principal's action as religious leader. They are the public face of the Catholic character of the school, and taken together they are significant influences on the culture of the organisation.

Schein suggested that “the one thing of real importance that principals do is to create and manage the culture of the school” (1992, p.2). Presented with this statement in the Survey (section 2, Question11) the reaction of the principals was mixed. Most agreed with the premise, but several were unsure and two disagreed with the bluntness of it (see Table 6.2). Given the diverse nature of the many responsibilities the principal has in a Catholic school, to single this one aspect out was provocative, yet the Conditions of Employment for Principals statement (Appendix E) requires them to “nurture and enhance” a Catholic school culture.

A ‘Catholic school culture’ encompasses more than the RE classes: it touches on the quality of relationships within the whole school.

(It) is not just religious education lessons, it’s about ensuring that there is a culture within the school that embraces that ‘glib thing’ of gospel values – but in the long run it comes down to the quality of people’s relationships in terms of students really thinking that they’ve got something here. If we can help them to understand that exists because of who we are in relation to God and vice versa, then hopefully that may be caught by students rather than taught by teachers. (female principal, co-ed school)

The culture of a school is inherent in the living of the organisation and so this principal’s image of the spirit being ‘caught, not taught’ is apt. Another principal used the ‘standard definition’ - “the way we do things” (female principal, girls’

school) to further describe culture, but creating a Catholic culture in the midst of a wider community in which Christianity is being increasingly marginalised (CSTM, 1997) was for some principals “a struggle” (Survey).

In this context, the reality for many students was that the school was the main, and indeed in some cases, the only point of contact for students and families with Church (Survey). One principal reported that “the majority of our students and their families have no contact whatsoever with the formal church in any way, shape or form. Maybe food parcels through ‘the Vinnies’ (St. Vincent de Paul Society) - but they don’t necessarily even see that as church” (female principal, co-ed school). “Promoting the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of God to the College Community, which largely has school as its only connection,” (Survey) was what another Principal described as the greatest challenge in his role as a Religious Leader. “Nurturing and developing faith, given that most have no other formal contact with the institutional church” (Survey) was seen as a significant responsibility, on top of the normal financial, curricular and administrative dimensions of this demanding role. Confirming this, most of the principals ‘strongly agreed’ with the proposition put in Section 2 question 10 of the Survey that the “fundamental purpose of the Catholic school (was) the faith formation of its community” (see Table 6.2).

The effectiveness of this ‘faith formation’ in the community of the school is often difficult to assess. One principal described a very concrete example of faith formation in action, recounting an experience that followed the school’s end of year liturgy in the Cathedral:

One of the parents came up who hadn't been in church for years and years and just said she wanted to make connections with her parish again, and (asked) who could she talk to. She was a Catholic, but hadn't been (to Church) for years, and somehow or other, the smells and the bells of the cathedral just touched her. It brought her to a sense of who she was as a spiritual person again, a Catholic spiritual person, and from that she and all her family were baptised. (female principal, co-ed school)

Given the mandate of the Catholic school as part of the "salvific mission of the Church" (CS, 1977, par. 5) this lack of contact with the Catholic Church, and even with any form of "organised religious community" (male principal, boys' school) brings the school into the arena of evangelisation as the primary contact with faith for many of its community: "it's something that we have to be very aware of - how we evangelise, what sort of things we do to lay the foundations, the disposition, for a relationship with God" (male principal, rural school).

In the culture of the school, normalising this relationship in the life of the community was "about staff prayer, about (students') prayer, and for me it's a lot about pictures as well, it's about a lot of art work, all over the school" (female principal, girls' school). It was particularly about modelling, the "staff coming together every morning for prayers - the children know that. There is a sense of gathering and I think that's a powerful image" to put before the school community (female principal, co-ed school). Symbols also played an important

role in articulating the values and beliefs of the school in the midst of the working life of its community: “symbols of the spirit being with us, like candles being lit or the sign of the cross” in classroom prayer and when the school gathered for any purpose (female principal, co-ed school). The principal of one boys’ school placed a high priority on the public representation of images around the school, especially in public places, evoking the life and mission of the religious Congregation associated with the school (male principal, boys’ school). The principal’s role in initiating, promoting and celebrating such connections with the mission and spirit of the school were essential to its character as a Catholic community, and to promoting a “Gospel oriented culture” (female principal, co-ed school).

Question 6 in Section 3 of the Survey enquired about practical strategies to create a ‘Gospel oriented culture’ in schools. The principals’ responses fell broadly into three categories:

- Religious Practices – being those strategies which directly involve the Principal and staff in Prayer, Masses, Liturgies or Community Service activities as expressions of the Faith Outreach of the school;
- Public Expressions – being the ways in which the Principal deliberately communicates the essential religious values which underlie the school and its purposes to its constituent groups; and
- Professional Life – being the multitude of ways in which the Principal engages and supports the staff in their functioning as integral parts of an organization which is both ‘school’ and ‘church.’

In religious practices, such activities as “institutionalising morning prayer on a regular basis,” and “formally writing and inviting staff, parents and students to attend religious celebrations” in order that they be “inclusive” of all in the community were mentioned as common practice (Survey). It may well be a reflection of the reduced availability of priests in South Australia, but the “provision of quality liturgies” was seen as vital to the Catholic life of the schools; though the presence of Eucharistic celebrations – masses to begin and end the year, for example, were an important part of the culture (Survey).

Public expressions of the “Gospel oriented culture” of the school most commonly took the form of the “use of normal school communication mediums to emphasise the Gospel orientation – newsletters, assemblies etc.” One principal described these “reflection pieces” as “snippets of faith” which kept the values of the school to the fore (Survey).

A further dimension of these ‘public expressions’ involved principals “relating to the Religious nature of the school during enrolment interviews with students and parents” and “reference to Gospel values in all decision making.” “School policies and rules” in areas such as “Bullying and Harassment Policies” or “Behaviour Management Programs” were “reviewed in the light of the dignity and respect of each person”, so institutionalising the core values and purposes of the school and its Catholic beliefs (Survey).

In the category of 'Professional Life', there were many individual statements about strategies which collectively described the way a good Catholic school might run. Some of these were almost mandatory:

- that "all teachers have to teach RE, not just Catholics";
- that the events and life of the school should run around those important religious cultural moments – "get everything on the calendar – make it non-negotiable!"
- that there must be "active support of *all* religious initiatives on campus."

(Survey)

Others sought to "involve the whole community" in a shared responsibility for the religious nature of the school, using the "Mission Statement of the school (and) the SACCS Vision Statement with the staff and the school Board" (Survey) to educate and include them in the process. This community approach also involved a "focus on the type of relationships" implicit in a school which professed to be Catholic, and the support each group might need – especially in the country. One Principal praised the "rural mentoring project conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph – providing professional counselling/mentoring" in the country schools" (Survey).

Most recognised that the principal alone could not 'make a school Catholic', and all rejected the notion posed in Question 5 of Section 2 of the Survey, that "religious leadership was the sole responsibility of the principal" (Survey).

However, it was a "significant" aspect of the role (Section 2, Question 1 -

Survey), and given the understanding that the “fundamental purpose of the Catholic school is the faith formation of its community” (Section 2, Question 10 - Survey) it was a responsibility that the principals took seriously (see Table 6.2).

## **6.5 Pressures, Struggles and Tensions**

One principal’s colourful analogy summed up what many of those interviewed and surveyed found to be the most difficult thing about being the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia: it was “the day to day distraction of minutiae. It’s like a centipede! If I stopped to ponder what each foot needs to do I would be in suspended animation for life!” (Survey). Too often this led to the Principal “being distracted from the opportunities of real education benefits by bureaucratic requirements (acknowledging that many of these requirements are unfortunately necessary in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century society)” (Survey). So much valuable time was taken by the need to balance “the multitude of expectations from system, parents, staff, State and National bodies – clarifying what is essential and core, whilst discerning the distractions and political nuances that impact on schools” (Survey). As one principal added, and all that in “an increasingly litigious industrial environment.” Some sense of this demand was indicated in Table 6.4, which revealed the disproportionate percentage of the principal’s time spent on essentially management level tasks – administrative and financial – at the expense of some of the higher order functions in the cultural and symbolic realms of leadership practice (Sergiovanni, 1984).



Other difficulties highlighted in the Survey included ...

- Confrontations – “with staff, students or parents“
- trying to manage - “without the wisdom of Solomon”
- loneliness: “pastoral care can be very lonely at times”
- “taking on every issue and problem that arises”
- how to deal with “people who undermine”
- “angry parents/staff”
- “staff not performing duties”
- “the breadth of people who call on you from outside of the College.”

Several difficulties were connected specifically to relationships with staff and others in the school community. One principal commented that some of the “stuff that I get caught up with actually detracts from my capacity to have positive and meaningful relationships with people. I’m not so sure that’s the most productive use of the role of principal” (male principal, boys’ school).

This problem of ‘busy-ness’ in the principal’s life was previously recognised by Fullan (1991, p. 146), who reported research that showed that “principals’ workdays were sporadic, characterized simultaneously by brevity, variety and fragmentation ... secondary school principals perform an average of 149 tasks a day, with constant interruptions – over 59% of their observed activities were interrupted” (quoting Martin & Willower, 1981). His comments suggested that principals “demonstrated a tendency to engage themselves in the most current

and pressing situation. They invested little time in reflective planning” (Fullan, 1991, p. 146).

Interviewed at the end of a long year (December 2004), one principal spoke of her tiredness, the result of the constant and diverse demands which at times had kept her from some of the “joys” of the role, and perhaps from some of the more important aspects of her principalship:

I think leadership is both a joy and a burden - a huge responsibility. I get very tired of making decisions all day every day: that's a tiring thing to do. I think there's immense legal constraints that you have to attend to, and rightly so, but they are huge and they are worrying. I think leadership now is incredibly diverse from occupational health to curriculum to crucial issues like child protection, staffing, and industrial issues. Often, in a very large school like this, I end up at the end of the line with people's frustrations and arguments - and often they're not with me but with others - but they always end up with me. That's very tiring, and if they come on top of one another, VERY tiring! It prevents you sometimes from doing the other things that you would love to be able to do. (female principal, co-ed school)

Another principal also recognised that it was a demanding job, but pointed out that it was the individual's choice to take it on! “It's not compulsory to be a principal ... I'm not forced to be principal of (school), you know, I do have other choices, so if I want to do it, then I do cop the hard work and lots of hours and

stuff like that” (male principal, co-ed school). In the face of these pressures however, and perhaps especially the loneliness, it was important to principals “that we are ‘loved and appreciated’” by the wider church, and one Principal regretted that “I, personally, don’t receive too much affirmation from the formal Church” (Survey).

These issues are not, per se, problems of the religious leadership of the principal – they are inherent to the role generally. However, they do provide the framework within which religious leadership is exercised – given the premise that “life is intrinsically religious” (ERG). This is the faith that “underpins” (male principal, co-ed school) the actions and decisions of the principal and life of the school, expressed in its culture.

Beyond the ‘busy-ness’, most principals expressed an awareness that “it’s more than just academic results and more than just good pastoral care that we’re on about from a humanitarian point of view. It’s actually developing a religious community” (male principal, boys’ school).

Leading and nurturing this religious community – as distinct from a “humanist school” (female principal, rural school) which might share some of the core values of the Catholic school – was a significant challenge. Some, however, were uncomfortable with the appropriateness of the term “a faith community” (male principal, boys’ school), with one principal pointing out that the reality was often a community considerably separated from any practice of faith:

You now have a generation of parents who haven't been to church and don't know, rather than just the student generation, and they don't know about parish life at all. If you want to rise to that challenge, then it's a real challenge. (female principal, girls' school)

Principals saw this as a complex time in which to exercise this mandate to religious leadership. "The church itself is struggling with theology, modernization, priestly ministry (and) public relations. Our parents are not 'Churched' in the traditional sense. Our staff have much faith and spirituality - but not always in the traditional sense" (Survey). At times, principals felt that they did not have "the complete support of the parent body in encouraging the religious dimensions of the school, (and this was) mirrored at times by some of the staff and students" (Survey). "Twenty years ago" one principal suggested, "it might have only been the students who were challenging the Church, not the parents, but a generation later we have got the parents *and* their students challenging the institutional Church" (female principal, rural school). In this context, a common concern among the Principals was their responsibility, as religious leaders, for making "a vital tradition contemporary and relevant in the eyes of the school community" (Survey).

The responsibility to bring students into "a closer relationship with God" (Survey) through that "vital tradition" was ideally shared in the school by all staff. However, in the reality of the Catholic secondary school, caught up in the pressures of a subject based curriculum and extensive accountability provisions (Dwyer, 1993), this responsibility falls most heavily on the RE

teacher. In this challenging work, principals felt very strongly that “supporting the work of the RE teachers, especially when they meet indifference from the students” (Survey) was particularly important.

The Survey indicated that principals found the most challenging aspect of their religious role lay in the experience of tensions with institutional Church, and occasionally with a sense of conflict concerning the perceived position of the Catholic Church on some pastoral issues. Half of the respondent group in the Survey identified their relationship with the Church as an area of concern in the exercise of their role as Principal in a Catholic Secondary School.

Most of the respondents to the Survey agreed with the statement that “The Principal of a Catholic Secondary School must uphold the position of the Catholic Church in all matters” (Survey, Section 2 Question 6), though one was ‘unsure’. Three quarters of those same respondents, however, felt that “in exercising their pastoral responsibilities towards their communities, Principals of Catholic schools often experience conflict or tension with Church or System expectations or teachings” (Survey, Section 2 Question 7) – see Table 6.2.

The difficulties lay, in part, with linking “Canon Law and its cumbersome interpretations with the lived experiences of being Catholic in a contemporary Australian society” (Survey). The formal structures of the Church at times seemed out of touch with the lives of those in the school community – staff, students and parents. There was also concern from principals about “personal difficulties with some of the stances taken by the human side of the Catholic

Church in recent times” (Survey). One Principal highlighted the need to ensure that no Church “protocols are breached” (Survey) in what the school might do or say, and another struggled “with the prescriptions – eg – the loss of the Third Rite of Reconciliation (which) means that none of our students experience this sacrament at all” (Survey).

In a society which is constantly changing and basically secular, “it would be fair to say that any religious leader occasionally will stumble across a challenge between the party line and people’s lives” (female principal, co-ed school). In this situation, the principal needed to be very conscious of his or her position as a formally designated religious leader in that community. “You are entitled to your personal views - but when you are representing a greater body there is a balance to be had between those personal views and the party line” (female principal, co-ed school). For another principal, such situations challenged the authenticity of the person in the role: if “I didn’t have faith then I wouldn’t deserve to be a religious leader. I shouldn’t be operating in the name of the Church as a leader” (male principal, co-ed school).

Several principals believed that it was important for principals in Catholic schools to have a strong grounding in scripture and theology to support them in their religious leadership role. One commented on the sound intellectual core to the beliefs of the Church, represented in documents such as the Papal Encyclicals (female principal, rural school). An understanding of these was seen as being especially incumbent on religious leaders to whom others look for that wisdom:

I think it's our intellectual ability to actually understand the richness of what's being said and I think that the core values - the sacredness of human life, the centrality of the family in faith formation, what I call guiding principles of Catholicism - are absolutely inspirational and absolutely right. (female principal, rural school)

The authenticity and the wisdom of Principals was also tested by the hurt and anger directed towards the Church that was at times felt in their communities. Acknowledging this was important, but it was also part of the religious leader's role to show the beauty of the Church, and to help heal and reconcile the community.

This is the Church, it's beautiful and you know, we can be so proud of it and so at home in it. (But) it's a Church which alienates people, does terrible things, has done and still does to people. Admitting that is the first step and I think it's helpful to young people and families to acknowledge that the Church is not perfect and if you know that, then you (can) live with that - not accept its imperfection, but be prepared to try and effect change and do what you can to live with it. (male principal, co-ed school)

The dualistic nature of the Catholic school itself (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993; Thomas, 1997; CSTM 1997; Grace, 2002), operating in a secular world and professing a sacred faith, is a source of tension, challenging the religious leadership of the principal. However, as one principal commented, "life exists

between tension and ease and life is lived between that, so you just live with it” (female principal, co-ed school). All principals, however, had a vision of shared leadership in relation to the religious character of the school, so special emphasis was placed on staffing in the schools.

“Finding and recruiting quality teachers who have a strong commitment to vision and ideals of Catholic education” (Survey) was increasingly difficult in the Secondary schools. As well, within the established staff group, enthusing teachers about their “religious responsibilities” (Survey) represented a significant challenge. Staff in Catholic Secondary schools “do need to have a connection with the faith tradition and a deep belief in it and a belief that they can make a difference in other people’s lives” (female principal, co-ed school) if the Catholic school is to be successful in fulfilling its purposes as a Catholic school. Emphasising this aspect, principals encouraged staff to take up the “responsibility to develop their (own) faith” in order to build that authentic Catholic community in the secondary school.

The problem of recruitment, in particular recruitment for leadership in relation to the Catholic nature of the school, was even more pronounced in country areas. One principal commented that “good people are sometimes uncomfortable with stepping up to be highly visible big ‘C’ Catholics in their often small rural communities when they may not support the ‘whole deal’ of Catholic teachings” (male principal, rural school). Another observed that “it has been significantly challenging over the past years to establish an effective co-ordination of RE and Spirituality, and Faith Development, recognising the



limitations of staffing in a rural area” (Survey). These issues affected the very nature of the rural schools, and presented a challenge not only to those communities, but also to both Church and System.

These pressures, stresses and tensions reflect the intensity of the principal's role in the Catholic school, especially as its key religious leader. The principals certainly regarded their responsibility to mediate Church in that community, set amidst a secular environment which often saw the Catholic school simply as a “cheap private school” (male principal, co-ed school), as a significant challenge. For leadership in this context to be effective, principals all spoke of the importance of being authentic, true to the heart. “I think it’s about being clear about who we are, who your school is, and being absolutely true to that mission” as religious leader in the Catholic school (female principal, co-ed school). In the busy-ness of the principal’s life, the need for moments of reflection, and for “time out” (male principal, co-ed school) to connect with those essential values and purposes was vital.

## **6.6 Prayer and Reflection**

It was an indicator of that busy-ness and the pressure of the position, that many of those interviewed specifically expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to talk with someone about this (the religious) aspect of their calling/role. They highlighted the lack of such opportunities, and stressed the value and importance of time for reflection in both their personal and

professional practice: “I enjoyed reflecting on the role,” reported one principal (male principal, boys’ school).

That busy-ness, dealing with those 149 tasks, mostly interrupted before being finished (Fullan, 1991) meant that, unless it was deliberately planned for, there was very little time in the principal’s day – or even week – in which to step back from the position and to reflect on “the big picture” (male principal, co-ed school). One principal observed that

the most difficult thing is having time for quiet prayer and reflection.

There’s a lot of emphasis on doing. I’d like to have more opportunity for just being, because (my) world gets very cluttered, and the minutiae sometimes gets in the way of the grand scheme.

(female principal, rural school)

For her, time out, for “just being”, was clearly important, at the very least for ‘mental health’ reasons. For some principals however, reflection had a more specific purpose. “What light could we shine on that (situation)?” asked one principal: “is there anything we can look for from scripture in that?” (female principal, co-ed school). As religious leader, she was reaching into scripture as a source of the traditional wisdom and insight of the Church, and as a result engaged principles of justice and reconciliation in her action processes.

When it comes to working through issues that might be related to (for instance) industrial issues with staff, it’s taking it from the justice perspective, taking an opportunity to honour the individual, to find opportunities for true reconciliation to occur. I think that’s always a huge challenge, the biggest challenge - how people have time to

reflect and reconcile with one another. (female principal, co-ed school)

The Expert Reference Group suggested that such commitment to reflection was an indication of ‘maturity of leadership’, the principal having gone beyond simply ‘dealing with things as they came up’, to measuring his or her responses for validity against those core values of the tradition. This was ‘reflection *on* practice’, a conscious stepping back from the busy-ness to find space in which to consider what had been done or what needed to be done in a particular situation. This conscious process of reflection and measuring, away from the moment, in its ideal, would eventually lead to an internalisation of the process, to the point where reflection would become an integral part of every decision and action – reflection *in* practice, which is an expression of the authentic action of the principal as religious leader.

Reflection (is) crucial, but it’s not only my reflection from withdrawal - I hope that eventually by reflecting *away from* the situation, I build my skill to be reflective *in it*, so I reflect *on* something, but eventually I become reflective in it. That’s the presence of God. (ERG)

Reflection was also seen as a form of self-critique or self-discernment, answering a need to reflect on life and to “set things into perspective” (male principal, co-ed school). For some, again, this involved the process of withdrawal and the opportunity for prayer:

I haven’t done a formal retreat for quite some time. I think I need to. I need to block out everything else to allow myself time to formally

reflect on life. We've got a beach shack that faces the water and it's very therapeutic, very spiritual. It makes you realise that you're just part of the picture, only a small part of it. I find that very useful.

(male principal, boys' school)

Others sought more structured experiences, citing formal retreats or seminars which offered "new insights" into the theological and scriptural basis of leadership (male principal, co-ed school). Others simply sought an "an intellectual conversation about theology" (female principal, rural school)! One principal expressed an interest in "establishing a 'professional' relationship with a spiritual advisor to help direct my reflections, reading etc" (Survey).

Most principals, both in interviews and through the Survey, also spoke about prayer. It was part of the fabric of the school, and preceded meetings and gatherings in the school as a matter of course. Principals spoke of leading or presiding on these occasions, as an expression of their religious leadership. Very little however was specified about the place and practice of personal prayer as part of the lives of the principals.

One principal spoke of a favourite song, played regularly in the car as an aid to reflection. He was reluctant to call this prayer, but it provided a moment in the day to let his mind wander in the mystery of God amidst the messiness of life in the school.

I wouldn't call it praying - I just listen to it, and it just talks about getting glimpses of God in different ways. Somehow it's almost letting go, not needing to box God or fully understand or be fully on

top of things, but to live with the mystery. Maybe that's what the mystery of God means. Since I've got that I can live with the ambiguity a bit more, or the messiness - even as being principal where there's lots of messiness. It doesn't always end up right; you're not always on top of things - but that's something to do with the mystery as well. It makes it alright, not to always be the expert and always on top of things. (male principal, co-ed school)

Given the level of accountability demanded of the role by Church, State and System authorities, to acknowledge as principal that you might not be "always on top of things" suggests a maturity in the role and an understanding that the alternative, the 'heroic' model of leadership (Burns, 1979) might not be the most effective approach to leadership in the community of the Catholic school. In reality, however, principals do take a lot onto themselves. Table 6.4 shows how the principals in this study, and especially the new principals, were dominated by material matters when arguably the time might better have been used in establishing a presence in their schools, engaging in the symbolic and cultural dimensions (Sergiovanni 1984) of their leadership. This preoccupation with 'things' in leadership represented yet another challenge for principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia.

## **6.7 Challenges**

Those symbolic and cultural forces of leadership "bring meaning and energy to the day-to-day technical processes of the school" (Tuohy, 2005, p. 30).

Through them, the community is focussed upon the spirit and purposes of the school, and everyday activities become invested with particular meanings in the context of the school's culture. Most of the principals had an appreciation of these purposes, but several raised a further consideration: they were interested not just in 'what' their school stood for, but also in 'who' did it serve? One recalled the "preferential option for the poor" (CPMS, 2002, par. 69) as a particular challenge, but one she felt was not well met:

Anyone can run a school for the others, for the non-marginalised, the ones who aren't poor in good manners or you know, aren't poor in all sorts of areas; but we are here to run a school for them ... and I think we do that very badly. (female principal, girls' school)

One of the distinguishing features of the Catholic school is that it should be "a school for all" (CSTM 1997 par. 7), and the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia, by virtue of their histories and their geography, do serve a wide cross section of that community. Many of them are in areas categorised as 'lower socio-economic communities' but there are still concerns about "access" for the really poor in the community (female principal, girls' school), concerns particularly related to physical and material matters such as fees, uniforms and transport.

Poverty however was not restricted to material conditions, the principal of one school commented, and Jesus himself spoke of the "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:2). This was a theme which that principal applied to his own school: "I think the more affluent and comfortable people become

materially, the more they tend to be taken to the margins spiritually, in their religiousness” (male principal, boys’ school). In that sense, he felt that they were “very much on the margins” with their student group, in a comparatively wealthy school. However, the principal’s hope was that with the focus on core values, and the emphasis on developing a truly Catholic culture in a school, perhaps “the next Edmund Rice will come from a school like this ... so Catholic schools are needed for boys whose parents pay higher school fees just as much as lower school fees” (male principal, boys’ school).

Whether the “next Edmund Rice” comes from any of the current schools will depend on the way the Church is presented in the schools. In a world where “more and more there is a sense that the Church as it stands now ‘is not for me’ in the young ones and even in our teaching staff,” the toughest challenge of all was “fostering a hopefulness in the institution of the Church” (male principal, rural school). The task of “fostering” this hopefulness and building a culture in which the Church and matters religious were seen by young people as relevant, “joyous” and life-giving is a significant challenge for the principal of any Catholic Secondary School. The key to responding to this challenge lies in the personal authenticity of the principal: “you can’t build a joyful Catholic community unless your own faith is life giving” (female principal, girls’ school).

This chapter has explored the concept of religious leadership through the thoughts and words of the principals, in the context of their practical experience as leaders in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia.

They have reflected on their practice and some challenges they have encountered in this demanding role. These ranged from conceptualising the role as being a vocation or a call to ministry in the context of the mission of the Church, to bringing to reality the purposes of the Catholic schools in a secular world. In Chapter 7, the “key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia” (RQ 3) are considered.



## Chapter Seven

### Principal Selection and Formation

Chapter 6 charted the “mindscape” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p.3) of the Principals themselves, the practitioners in the schools, outlining how the concept of Religious Leadership was understood and practised in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. This chapter focuses on the third Research Question: **“What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?”** Data from the interviews and the Expert Reference Group has been used to explore the problems facing principals currently in the role, and their concerns regarding the general area of leadership development, formation and succession in the schools. The information collected also provided insights into ways in which potential leaders might be identified and nurtured in their journey towards principalship and for their development as religious leaders.

The themes which emerged from the data collection are listed in Table 7.1, as are the sub-themes developed in each.

*Table 7.1: Key Themes identified in response to Research Question 3.*

Theme	Sub-Theme
7.9 Personal Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• Professional competence</li> <li>• 'Fit'</li> <li>• Needs of the community</li> <li>• 'Growth' into the role</li> </ul>
7.10 Religious Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An evolving concept</li> <li>• Time/action priorities</li> <li>• Charismatic leadership</li> </ul>
7.11 Lay Leadership and Charism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sense of loss</li> <li>• Understanding charism</li> <li>• Contemporary relevance</li> <li>• Formation</li> </ul>
7.12 Preparation and Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning by doing</li> <li>• Underpinning the practical</li> <li>• Deficiencies in preparation for Religious Leadership</li> </ul>
7.13 Selection Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current procedures</li> <li>• Discernment</li> <li>• Investing in people</li> <li>• Priority for Religious Leadership</li> </ul>
7.14 Discernment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal reluctance</li> <li>• Ambition</li> <li>• An aspect of personal formation</li> </ul>
7.15 Support and Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community role</li> <li>• Sources of professional support</li> <li>• Specific to Religious Leadership</li> <li>• Time issues</li> </ul>
7.16 Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity and loneliness</li> <li>• Relational dimension</li> <li>• Alternative structures</li> <li>• Local Church</li> </ul>

The most frequently mentioned topic raised in the data concerned the personal attributes and professional qualifications required of principals as religious leaders in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia. Appendix A provides a template of the qualities and qualifications currently used as the basis for advertisement, application and selection for officially notified principal positions. The Church and System authorities and the principals considered these, and identified further insights as they explored the role in the interviews and through the survey instrument. Their experiences and reflections about religious leadership and the principalship of a contemporary Catholic Secondary School have formed the basis of the discussion in this chapter.

## **7.1 Personal Attributes**

The comments of the Bishops and the CEO authorities discussed in Chapter 5 indicated the complexities involved in appointing a person to the role of principal in a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia. This difficulty was seen by all groups in the study to have significant implications in terms of the personal attributes expected of applicants for the principal's role. Both the principals themselves, and the Authorities, believed that the ideal person for religious leadership must integrate a deep personal spirituality with a love of the Church, and have a strong sense of the role as a vocation, a ministry of the Catholic Church. One principal described the spiritual requirement as having a "spirituality of the heart: you can't build a joyful Catholic community unless your own faith is life giving" (female principal, girls' school). The

practical world of the Catholic school requires “a spirituality that is expressive in the reality of (the principals’) lives that God’s redemptive point is present ... in life as it is - and that the finances and every other dimension at school are part of that reality” (ERG).

This understanding of the spirituality of leadership ensures that all the processes of the school, from the seemingly mundane and even trivial, to the most public and symbolic, are imbued with a religious context. However, the Director’s warning that spirituality on its own in a person might not be a sufficient qualification to lead a school, is important: “I might be a faith-filled person, but I might actually not be able to lead forty or fifty or sixty people with a thousand kids into an experience with Jesus, to come to know God” (Dooley).

Clearly, some demonstration of professional competence and experience as well as a spiritual maturity is required of potential leaders at this level. “You can’t have a good Catholic school unless you’ve got a good school first” (male principal, boys’ school). Each person coming to the role is different. Each brings his or her own special qualities, and comes on his or her own unique path to leadership, enriching the role. As one male principal commented, “I think my role as principal has just been my story – it’s just one person’s story” (male principal, co-ed school).

The second concern raised was about ‘fit’. The principals interviewed very clearly felt that the key to finding the ‘right person’ for the role in any particular

school lay in matching person to position. The Principal of one school described his serendipitous experience in this respect in relation to the schools in which he had held leadership positions:

I'm in a lucky position whereby what I've got to offer naturally, and what comes easiest and most naturally to me, happens also to be things that for whatever reasons, those communities have wanted, so it's been a good fit – God's calling. The right person in the right place at the right time. (male principal, boys' school)

Another Principal expressed similar thoughts, suggesting that the real key to selection lay in the panel's appreciation of the essential qualities and characteristics of the applicant. He went on to indicate how important it was that the person be authentic, true to their innermost values in the service of the community.

Ultimately I think you have to end up being who you are, and whether that's right for the community or not is for the community to decide ... I don't think you can change when you are under so much pressure for so many hours a week. I think, in the end, that what you see is what you get. (male principal, boys' school)

This comment identified a third issue in considering appointments to principalship: that of the needs of the community. It is these that ideally determine the person selected to lead that community, although once in the role, "the increasing expectations and reliance of the community on schools to be all things to all people" (Survey) could at times lead to considerable frustration for some principals in their relationship with that community!

In contemplating the needs of his particular community (at the time of the interview in the midst of dealing with devastating bushfires) the principal of a rural school reflected that, on first going to that school,

there were certain expectations I had about how I would go about things, how I would 'teach' about life and about faith and witnessing to that through the situation of the moment. (And now, in) the bushfires - what's my call in that situation? In essence, my choice is to be with the people and then see what evolves and then to discern the needs ... just to live with the dynamic and then discern where the growth points are. (male principal, rural school)

His was a pastoral response, a need to be with the people of that wider community in their suffering – a dimension of his role as community and religious leader. He recognised, in that action, and within that community, some growth in his leadership.

The community's role in defining both the person of the leader and the way the role would be exercised was recognised by another principal.

Religious leadership grew from the community for me. I had a vision of it before, but (the interview) helped to cement a picture of who we were, as school, to the local community and from that I think everything else has grown. I think that's a key dimension, that decision on who the school is for. (female principal, co-ed school)

An awareness of the importance of being grounded in the community in this way links with that notion of 'fit', and is an important ingredient for success in the role of principal, in particular as religious leader, in the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. Another principal described his experience in these terms:

I think (the community) would say that my values, my attributes are congruent with Catholicism and Catholic faith and leadership. I think on the whole, the community is happy and pleased with my leadership and certainly my energy and enthusiasm. I think parents feel safe and supported and valued – but whether that translates into having a religious leadership position I'm not sure, probably because I don't actively, publicly position myself (as such)! (male principal, rural school)

An understanding of this relationship with the community has significant implications, both for those seeking leadership, and for those selecting leaders. The character and qualities of the person who takes on principalship in a Catholic Secondary School impact on that community, but equally, the community acts to shape and develop that person. This is the fourth issue of concern in the understanding of the personal attributes of candidates for principalship raised during the study.

The feeling that one "grows into the role" (female Principal, girls' school), and that the role 'does things' to people, has its own formative effect! Heft (2000, p. 204), himself a Principal at various times, laughingly wrote "I hate this job; it

is forcing me to be virtuous!” He could have been the leader of a Catholic school in South Australia! This pressure was acknowledged by one Principal who explained her ‘journey’ and the experience in this way:

I just think life changes people. It really is the water running over the stones and it just takes time. You can’t imagine what you are going to be like in twenty years time because you can’t really imagine the road that life will take you down, the disappointments, the hurt, the joy. I think that all of those things makes the person and the leader is the person and I don’t think they’re two separate things. (female principal, co-ed school)

Sometimes growth comes out of struggle, from the moments which test the authenticity of the Principal’s heart and convictions. In the community, when it comes to the

really tough decisions we have to make, when we have to stand up for something, then we have to represent who we are very strongly ... When the going gets tough, how that sustains you often becomes the mark of a really strong community. The young leader learns about those things as they go through the experience of leadership. (Dooley)

One principal believed that “each interaction is a teaching moment, and a learning moment, and that’s the way I guess I choose to view the paradigm.” He went on to suggest that



a good leader, a good Catholic school leader, will be a person who is open to growth and prepared to take on the feedback no matter how good or bad it is, to grow with the people that you are ministering to. (male principal, rural school)

The use of this religious term, ministering, linked this approach to leadership to the notion of call or vocation, a dimension of the role explored in chapters 5 and 6. Wallace (2000, p. 191) concurred with this understanding, declaring that “Principals in Catholic schools are ‘called’ – they are in fact spiritual persons who *become* Catholic school principals.” The Director of Catholic Education in South Australia was also in broad agreement with this sentiment, but asked:

if vocation is the situating of what is authentic in person, in the mission of the school as Church, in the service of the community and in particular of youth, then how do we bring that person to the Catholic school, and to leadership? (Dooley)

This question, alluding as it does to the complexity of the role, to the demanding ‘essential criteria’ of persons appointed to the role, to the question of ‘fit’ and to the needs of the community, contains the real challenge faced in discerning appropriate candidates for principalship in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia. The essence of the challenge is the requirement for religious leadership.

## 7.2 Religious Leadership

The understanding of principalship in a Catholic school as a religious appointment is not entirely new. In the Australian context, writers such as Flynn implied the concept as far back as 1975 when he suggested that “the school’s overall effectiveness in the transmission of its Christian Message depends ... on the leadership and vision of the principal” (1975, p. 289); it was also an important aspect of his 1993 study, *The Culture of Catholic Schools*. However, this understanding of an emerging “dramatic consciousness” (Starratt, 1990b, p. 58) in the Catholic community in relation to the religious dimension of the role was still an evolving concept to at least one current Principal.

I can see that there is a change happening and part of that is (in) religious leaders themselves, the people charged with religious leadership at principal level needing to think more carefully about it, and formation taking place in that regard. I’m learning and I’m growing in my appreciation of what has to be done in a way that I didn’t have any idea I would be able to five to ten years ago, because (religious) matters just weren’t talked about. You could perhaps have gone for a job without that area of your formation being scrutinised very much at all, but I think it’s changing now.

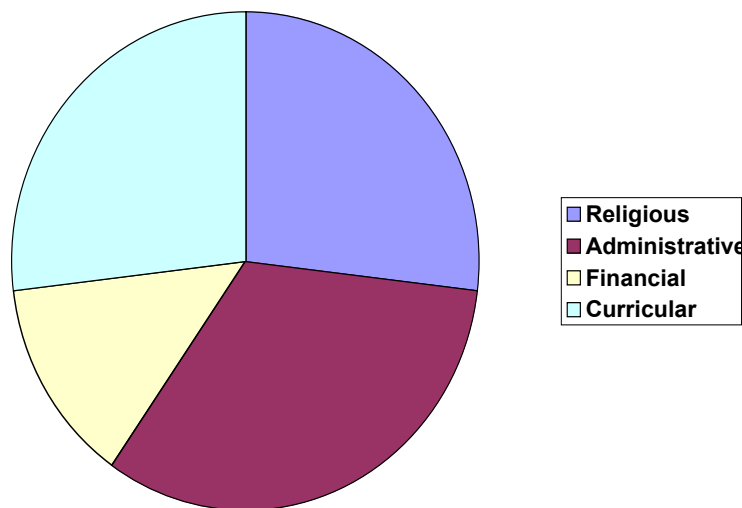
(male principal, co-ed school)

Another principal was not so certain that much had changed in this respect, and she wondered about the priorities of some of her colleagues in the role.

I think a number of principals naturally 'do' finance and see this as their job. There's been quite a hard push recently from the CEO to convince principals that curriculum, for instance, is their job. You know I would perceive a very real readiness to say 'Oh I have a curriculum coordinator. They do that' - whereas you would probably never say, 'Oh I have a bursar, I leave them to it.' (female principal, girls' school)

Finance and Administration are certainly important responsibilities of the principal, and there is a clear accountability for this aspect of the school's performance. The Survey of Principals indicated the proportion of time Principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia believed they actually spent on these functions – see Figure 7.1. Administration and Finance matters absorbed 46% of time available; Curriculum issues accounted for 27%; and Religious matters 27%. In this analysis, and in terms of the Hierarchy of Leadership Forces described by Sergiovanni (1984), the symbolic and cultural forces so important to leadership appear to be swamped by the technical forces! This imbalance represents a challenge to the religious leadership of the principal, and potentially to the focus of Catholic school itself. In the business of running a secondary school, accountability to a multitude of authorities means that those aspects of finance, building, management and maintenance must be respected and attended to, but so must the religious nature of the school.

*Figure 7.1. Time Allocation for the Mandated Dimensions of the Principal's Role.*



(Source: Survey of Principals, 2005)

With the increased numbers of lay persons now occupying the principal's role, this has become particularly important. One principal wondered if this emphasis on accountability was affecting our "image of a good principal" (female principal, girls' school), and she questioned whether, in fact, such demands had reduced the role to "a clerking job" - and commented that people "who think like good clerks don't necessarily (become) charismatic religious leaders" (female principal, girls' school).

Do we want 'charismatic religious leaders' in the Catholic Secondary Schools? MacBeath's suggestion (2004, p.10) that "charismatic leadership is a close relative of heroic leadership" seems to put this model at odds with the desired approach to the role and the 'styles of leadership' discussed in chapter 5. Fullan (2001) critiques charismatic leaders in that they may

inadvertently often do more harm than good, providing at best episodic improvement which is all too often followed by a sense of frustration in subsequent leaders as they try to live up to – or change - the model. Conversely, a number of principals spoke of past leaders who loomed large in their memories: “when we were at school, what incredible characters they were!” (female principal, girls’ school). This, perhaps, was the “magic impact of charismatic personalities” (Heft, 2000, p. 216), those men and women, members of religious congregations, who ran the schools. “Sure they weren’t necessarily (always) good principals” said a male principal from a co-ed school, “and some of those got positions that they might not have copped (writer’s translation: ‘won’ or ‘gained’) in open ranks, but they had other gifts too.”

In particular, amongst these was “the gift of grace” (MacBeath, 2004, p. 11) which influenced not only their schools, but also many of the lay leaders who now lead the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. The challenge of following on from these people of grace as a new generation of leaders provoked much reflection amongst those involved in both the interviews and the survey. It raised questions about the qualities of candidates presenting for selection as principals, and the nature of formation that would be required to develop and nurture their understanding of this dimension of the role.

### 7.3 Lay Leadership and Charism

Principals responded to the challenge of 'taking over from' these members of Religious Congregations in various ways. They recognised these men and women as having been "iconic representations of Catholicism in the schools" (male principal, boys' school), and asked, "how do you replace a religious brother or sister as principal in a school?" (male principal, co-ed school). One principal said simply, "I don't think you can" (male principal, boys' school). This response however did not come from any sense of hopeless comparison, but rather from an assertion of simple difference: "It is quite clear that what the community now have is a committed lay person, and not a committed religious, small 'r' religious or capital 'R' - I can't be the same as they were" (male principal, rural school).

None-the-less, there was some sense of loss in the community, a loss of the presence of 'those icons' whose very garb made a statement about the purpose of the school and their own sacred vocation. That presence, for example, of

some old sisters who had spent 50 years in the Sudan, (or who) had been in New Guinea since, you know 19.. whatever, and you'd just like to bottle them! You have the sense they almost *are* the ethos, *are* the charism - we were breathing (it in) the air! (female principal, girls' school)

This was a culture and a charism almost tangible, and perhaps this was why, in one principal's initiation into leadership as the first lay principal in his new school, the community was so concerned about the new 'arrangement':

there was a bit of 'hoo-hah' in the community – you know, the Parents and Friends (Association) - about why we had to have a lay person. But two years down the track, (following a) recent review where those questions were asked of parents, it wasn't an issue at all. (male principal, boys' school)

For another principal, the issue was not about somehow "aping the religious" (Wilson), but rather, simply about replacing one principal with the next, a natural order of things.

I'm not Sister (name) but I'm sure if you look at each of the (members of the Order) who would have been religious leaders over the years and held the role ... they would all be very different, so there wouldn't be just one sort of (Order) leadership, all the same. Everyone of those principals will have done it differently, yet hopefully there are things that link all of us. I'm not Sister (Name) by default, I'm (Name), the principal, who is principal of this religious place, and I'm religious like all the past principals, different from them but similar in important ways too, I hope. (male principal, co-ed school)

For this principal, it was simply change, a normal process of succession. It is, however, important to recognise that the leadership of laypersons now defines the religious nature and nurtures the charism of many schools.

The interviews revealed differences in the way 'charism' was used and understood by principals. The Expert Reference Group, considering feedback from the surveys, commented that the terms 'tradition' and 'charism' were often used interchangeably in spite of the differences in their meanings.

Tradition is the passing on and celebration of the "customs, beliefs, stories and activities of a group of people, so that these may be preserved for posterity and influence present and future practice" (Flynn, 1993, p. 45).

However, when the preservation of a tradition becomes an end in itself, there is a danger of it becoming meaningless "traditionalism ... the dead faith of the living" rather than the vital "living faith of the dead" (Densley, 1997, p. 64, quoting Pelikan, 1984, p. 6). Charism goes beyond story, and provides foundational principles upon which to build community and Catholic identity. It is a way of being, in faith, that is relevant to the contemporary world; "a lens through which to view the gospel, in the hope that we will be inspired to live this call to discipleship" (Brien and Hack, 2005, p. 70).

Both concepts are important dimensions of school life in their own ways, but sometimes the expression of tradition actually has nothing to do with charism. It can be the colours of the school, it can be what you do with your first eighteen or your first eleven – that's tradition, but it's not actually charism. (ERG)



Whatever their understandings, principals clearly felt the challenge, as religious leaders, to maintain a strong connection with the school's religious roots, and one suggested that bringing this to life in the fabric of the school had "something to do with tradition, but it's more than that, it's living tradition" (male principal, co-ed school). Grace recognised those religious roots when he suggested that "the charism of the founder and the spirit of the order is intended to be a significant influence upon the culture and work of those Catholic schools derived from these traditions and origins" (2002, p. 129).

But how does this spirit, grounded in a time past, "influence ... the culture and work" of the Catholic school now? The relevance of the particular spirituality of the founder of an order – who may in fact have lived centuries ago, in a very different cultural context from the world of the students in the twenty first century - was problematic for a number of the principals, who remained caught up in the realm of story and traditions. However, one of the Expert Reference Group explained that

charism is always relevant, because charism is that spark, that insight into the Gospel that is contemporary. What sometimes is not relevant is the spirituality of (the) founder, because that spirituality belonged to a particular age and era. But charism is actually a gift to the Church of this time, this era, and this way. (ERG)

Another member of the Expert Reference Group put it thus:

when you're talking about charism, I think of it as evident in all schools, but not so much as charism, if you mean the original impulse, but (as) an evolving culture – certainly started off by a charismatic founder – but then added to by the (leaders) of this world, and perhaps even by people that don't stand out, (who) may not be deputed as leaders. They might be the drama teacher, one who weaves a kind of a momentary impulse into the fabric of what is the life of the school, the social reality. (ERG

In “that weaving of charism, people teach each other” (male principal, co-ed school), so that “it is alive in the heart ... the people, in a sense are re-creating it in this life and circumstance” (ERG). It is the principal's task, as the religious leader, to nurture and facilitate this energy in building the culture of the school.

Nurturing the charism and continuing its relevance represented an important challenge for principals. One principal - a Religious principal in a school with a significant and lengthy Congregational history of “having stewardship of the school community” - was particularly aware of this situation and wrote that

I recognise the fact that the ethos needs to be claimed and owned - cared for in a stewardship sense - by future generations. Hence formation of staff and parent community in developing an explicit articulation of the ethos is critical in my current role as leader. (Survey)

Three respondents to the survey indicated that they were the “first lay Principal” in the school, and another two implied this in their responses. Their comments indicated that “the move from congregational to another Governance Structure (was) a complex and long term process.” Its impact was wide reaching – from “different financial and governance structures through to the symbolic presence and leadership of the school.” It involved a “lot of work, a lot of expectations,” but all made it a priority “not to by-pass charism of the order and its heritage at (their) school” (Survey).

The contribution of Religious Orders to the leadership formation and practice of new principals was highlighted by four respondents in the survey, and one specifically acknowledged the support of the Congregation in preparing the community for the change of leadership:

The contribution of educators from within the tradition I belong to (has) been significant in assisting me in developing a theological approach (to leadership), whilst providing expertise in spirituality and faith development. This combination has been in practical ways such as formation and retreat facilitation for staff, charism days for staff (and) attendance at Province and Congregational workshops. (Survey)

However, the exploration of charism has sometimes been left to the newcomers, and one at least felt, at times, “a bit on my own” (male principal, co-ed school). Another reported that although there was “great affection for the order as a whole (within the school community), I don’t know that there (had been) any great articulation about the charism” (female principal, girls’ school).

A complicating factor in articulating and documenting that charism was, in some cases, the dichotomy between a saccharine religious imagery and language, almost romantic in its tenor, of religious tradition, and the practical, even heroic reality of the lives of the men and women of the Orders themselves (female principal, girls' school; male principal, boys' school). In one school, the principal recalled that, in considering the image of Mary, a particular focus of reverence and devotion in the charism of that school and the Order -

if we take Our Lady, then it's a sort of gentle, obedient almost 'sooky' sort of image (that they spoke of), so I don't think our unpacking it (now) is how they would talk about it - but I hope its about how they actually do function! You know, you suddenly hear that twelve of them are imprisoned in the Sudan or Rwanda, and they must be just marvellous women. Occasionally you get a whiff of that and try to translate it to your school. (female principal, girls' school).

It is ironic that the 'unpacking' and articulation of charism has in these instances devolved to the lay principals in the Catholic schools. However, such was not the universal experience. One principal reported that "building our lay/Religious partnership is immensely important" (Survey), and in this, some religious Congregations have been very conscious of the need to put into place support mechanisms for the future which could serve as a template for schools still to move to lay principalship. In one school, the principal described this process:

A deliberate attempt has been made to develop a cycle of formation that will involve all staff, from those who have been in the employ of the school for many years through to those who are new. Induction programs with a particular regard for the tradition have been developed. Staff formation days have also been instituted at strategic points over a three-year cycle. (Survey)

Another principal commented that “the Religious Congregation is very supportive – I have actively sought their continued involvement and adopted strategies to highlight the central place of the charism in the life of the school.” However, the shoes of those principals of the past, members of various Religious Congregations, were often difficult to fill. One respondent, in describing the “significant” impact the departure of the Religious Congregation had had in that community, and in a very practical recognition of their service, wrote that “I have had to put a ‘reality check’ on some expectations (in the community) - for example, I do not live here!”

Jacobs (1996), writing about the “vocation of the Catholic educator,” noted that

the exodus of religious sisters and brothers and priests from Catholic schools ... is not the most significant issue that must be reckoned with. The paramount issue posed by this exodus concerns how the laity will receive the formation they need in order to preserve and advance the identity of the Catholic school. (p. vi)

Important in the success of the transition, according to the respondents in the survey, were ...

- “Building (the) lay/Religious partnership” between the school community collectively, and the Order itself;
- Staff professional development time for the “study of the Order”; and
- Formation for the principal, which “is at the core of ... experience/action”.

However, the real crux of charism, that spirit that animates the being of the school, is in its relationships with the community and the world around it. In concrete terms, it needed to imbue every aspect of school life:

how does (charism) translate into your fee structure, how does it translate into your time table, how does it translate into your curriculum offerings, how does it translate into your staffing, how does it translate into your advertising, how does it translate in your promotion procedures? (female principal, girls' school)

Charism, she implied, must have a practical face: as living spirit, it must inspire action. The challenge to principals, both lay and members of Religious Congregations, was to bring not only spiritual relevance, but also reality to the concept of charism, meeting the lives of the people in the school communities. So this issue of charism, in particular in relation to new lay principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia, is both deep and broad, and is a significant responsibility for the principal exercising religious leadership in

those schools. It calls for specific preparation and formation of leaders and the thoughtful selection of appropriately qualified candidates.

#### **7.4 Preparation and Formation**

Undoubtedly “good study is important” (female principal, co-ed school) in preparation for principalship. This was recognised by the principals who responded to the Survey: eight identified their tertiary study, in particular at Masters level, as significant in their preparation for the role. Several added “continuous professional reading” throughout their career as essential - and two principals (both males) added the personal impact of parenthood on their preparation for the role: “I had my own children – what an insight!” (Survey)

But besides study (and parenting!), all emphasised that some form of practical experience in leadership was a vital pre-requisite for those preparing for the principalship. One suggestion was to ensure that “people moving into those sorts of roles have opportunities in minor leadership roles so that they have opportunities to have some of the rough edges knocked off gently, so they don’t become discouraged” (female principal, co-ed school).

Another principal stressed that “there’s a need for middle management training and development” (male principal, boys’ school) to upgrade the skills of classroom teachers as they aspire to leadership. A principal with some insights into primary school structures noted that “something that doesn’t happen in secondary schools is giving people the chance of acting principalships, which

is artificial but I think in some ways is a very good experience”(male principal, co-ed school)

Collectively, these suggestions represented a strong endorsement of “learning by doing” (male principal, co-ed school), but within a more structured and deliberate approach to preparation. This reflected the philosophy of ‘growing into the job’ described earlier:

I’ve found the most useful thing just doing it and talking to other people and learning by what you didn’t do right and asking other people for advice as you go along: that’s been most helpful to me as principal. (male principal, co-ed school)

These suggestions appear, on the surface at least, primarily directed at the secular and everyday aspect of the principal’s role, the technical, human and educational competencies of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984). They allow for trial and error, a practical ‘doing things’ or ‘hands on’ approach! But the paradigm of the principal in the Catholic School context that has emerged in this exploration is strongly focused on the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the role, recognising that a personal commitment by the principal is necessary to fully realise the purposes of the Catholic school in its community. Leaders, and prospective leaders, must have those technical competencies (Dooley), but they (the competencies) must be informed by, or infused with, an understanding of the essential religious purposes of the school, so that “the religious dimension underpins everything else” (ERG).



A similar understanding was expressed by one of the Survey respondents: “it (the religious understanding) underpins all I do.” However, in the Survey, a number of responses implied that this religious dimension was somehow a separate aspect of leadership, an ‘extra qualification’ for principalship in Catholic schools. Perhaps, as was suggested in the Expert Reference Group, “one of the reasons why (religious leadership) is now being emphasised so much is that it’s been under emphasised and assumed for so long” (ERG), so that now it is spoken of as an entity in itself. One Principal hinted at this conundrum, writing that it was difficult

finding the time to be consciously aware of and involved in Religious Leadership. I am aware that a fair bit of my religious dimension emanates from the way I model relationships, shape policy and practice and apply decision making ... most decisions I make are done within a construct that I consciously try to uphold, but (which) at the same time occur rapidly without my stopping to ‘consciously reflect’ in terms of the Religious dimension. (Survey)

This sense of a separate ‘religious dimension’ of leadership practice was implicit in the comments of other respondents, but for some, religious leadership was “part of (the principal’s) accountability! If you see ‘that’ as secular, and ‘this’ as religious, if you haven’t got a picture of an incarnational God *in your daily life*, (then) you are struggling in apostolic work” (ERG). The understanding of this dimension of the role as being ‘sub-conscious’, but constantly and strongly present, underpinning practice even (or especially) under pressure, is significant, and has important implications for the formation

and selection of principals for the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia.

Most of the respondents to the survey, and all of the principals interviewed, felt that preparation for the religious dimension of their leadership had been at best, haphazard.

A great deal of what I have learnt in my leadership roles has occurred on the job – a necessity in many ways, but I must say that there was never much pressure put on me to prepare formally for my ‘religious’ dimension responsibilities. (Survey)

One principal however highlighted the value of experience and of being immersed in the culture as preparation for the role: “I have had a reasonable preparation given twenty-seven years in the System and having undertaken a broad range of responsibilities before being appointed principal” (Survey).

Another referred to “a lifetime association with the Catholic community and with our schools” (Survey) as preparation. Three, recognising the need to “deepen the level of understanding about theology and spirituality” (Survey), had undertaken courses post-appointment. Whether such courses should be a pre-requisite for the role was not addressed by the respondents.

Working “with a variety of *leaders*” (Survey) in a number of different schools had been a learning experience for one respondent: that modelling and their approach to leadership practice had been an important factor in preparation for the role. Other comments, such as “developing a spiritual life;” “regular prayerful discernment;” and the importance of “continuous spiritual

development” all highlighted the importance of conscious self-development as part of the preparation for that role, but also highlighted the reality that very little formal or substantial preparation or formation had been actually required of principals.

The comparison between the regimen of preparation for religious leadership in the context of priesthood, and that for religious leadership in schools attracted the interest of one principal. The preparation of priests for what was to be a central aspect of their key business, religious leadership, was far more intense, focussed and formal than anything expected of a Catholic school principal.

Priests study for seven years before they become ordained, you know - and what do they study? They study the past, they study the law, they study tradition, ritual, the world systems, and I guess along with that they have time for contemplation and reflection and mentoring and their faith journey - and then they're thrown out into the world, to be Christ in that world. (female principal, rural school)

This principal did not intend to equate 'principal' with 'priest', but she was contrasting the levels of preparation (particularly “at an intellectual level”) for the two roles, both of which involved religious leadership in their communities, and both of which, in the understandings of Church and System, manifest themselves as a 'call' or vocation. As principal “you live out this situation where God is at the heart of your personality, at the heart of your life, at the heart of your relationships, with other people and with the earth about you”

(ERG), and yet very little appears to have been required by way of specific formation or preparation in this.

When asked in the Survey “what have you done (by way of formation) that has been useful” in preparation for the religious dimension of the role, most indicated that there had been “very little explicit preparation.” The “primary source of (their) learning” had been “learning by doing!” (Survey). Despite the fact that “significant and ongoing formation through seminars conducted by the CEO” and tertiary providers was available, for most of the respondents “prior experience was the main source of preparation i.e. experience in Schools and Church in a variety of roles” (Survey).

Archbishop Wilson recognised the vital importance of good formation for leadership in the Catholic schools. He acknowledged the recent increased emphasis on preparation for the religious aspect of the role, but believed that even more needed to be done to strengthen those programs. “I’m not happy with where we’ve arrived at so far. I am happy with the efforts so many people have made and the great things that are going on, but I think that we really have to plough ahead and do more” (Wilson).

This recognition, by both the Archbishop and the principals, that more needs to be done in preparation and formation for the principal's role as religious leader is significant. It is an issue that must be addressed by the Congregations and the CEO in terms of their leadership succession policies. A number of courses, presented by the CEO itself and a variety of tertiary

providers (see Appendix B) are currently available to aspiring leaders, but these need to be reviewed as to their effectiveness in preparing aspirants for the critical religious dimension of the role. As graduates from these courses seek to move into principalships, the mechanisms used for that selection will need to be scrutinised as to their usefulness as mechanisms for placing appropriate leaders into the Catholic Secondary Schools.

## **7.5 Selection Procedures**

There was a wide-ranging discussion in the Expert Reference Group about how best to meet the challenge of firstly attracting, and then appointing, appropriate persons to the role of principal, and by definition, religious leader, for the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. The conversation focussed on whether the current processes of selection and appointment represented the best way of bringing competent, authentic and spiritual persons into the role. The Expert Reference Group and a number of principals themselves felt that “if you really want people with wisdom who are living the intensity that you want, that will translate itself into day to day decisions” (ERG), then the way such people are discerned, selected and supported on their journey to the principalship needed to be re-conceived. At the moment, “there’s not much selection, election, gospel calling forth in the whole process because – (we) are too frightened to be creative!” (ERG).

If the Church wants religious leaders in (its) schools, then it has to go about choosing them differently, and I think part of the process

has got to be a calling and discernment rather than the advertising and application process. (ERG)

The point was also made here that the Religious Education Coordinators in the schools – staff with an established expertise, credibility and authority in the religious domain - were not moving into principalships. This observation was supported by data from a SACCS Committee, (9<sup>th</sup> August 2005) subsequent to these discussions (see Appendix Q), but there was no further development of the point in that discussion at the time.

The ERG advocated a process of active discernment and encouragement of prospective leaders from within the broad Catholic teaching community. It urged that authorities look beyond the personal ambitions of teachers and focus on discerning individuals whose personal qualities and commitment to the purposes of the schools would further the development of truly authentic Catholic schools. Such individuals might not be the most ambitious persons in the teaching body, but they should be people whose special qualities of faith and living draw others to them.

Many of them would simply never ever apply for principalship or deputy principalship: they wouldn't see themselves as that sort of person. (But) I reckon they're the people who should be kind of nudged into this course and that course. (ERG)

In the current climate in South Australia, most principals felt reluctant to take such action: "it's a bit unfair to make too much judgement about other people"

(male principal, co-ed school). And despite the complexity of the role of principal and the pressures associated with it, the Director believed that, in South Australia “we still have plenty of people putting up their hands to be leaders in Catholic schools and there’s not much doubt in my mind ... that they know this is about religious leadership, first and foremost” (Dooley). Given such an assertion, was there a need for principals to have to make judgements about their staff and their potential for leadership?

The path from selection to appointment is well established in South Australia (see Appendix C). In response to advertisement, prospective candidates begin by establishing a Curriculum Vita - which in light of the ideals associated with Catholic principalship envisaged by the Expert Reference Group, might well present a challenge! Indeed, the Director, in contemplating such expectations, wryly quipped that “if Jesus went for the job of Principal he would be lucky to get an interview!” (Dooley). While the virtues set out in those advertisements are critical in defining the requirements of the position, they must be real and achievable! If the applicant does then meet the criteria, and is appropriately qualified, the next step is a ‘shortlisting’ process and then (if successful) an interview for the position.

The interview is the primary tool currently used for the selection of this key person in both school and Church. One principal remembered this experience, and ultimately, his feelings on being appointed:

Looking back, there were two interviews, one of an hour and a half and a second, the next day of another hour and a half. You can

learn a lot about a person in that, and the referees were checked. The panel (also) reserves the right to talk to other people who weren't referees, and based on (all) that they make their judgement. But it's a big call, and I often think about that. It's an awesome responsibility when the (Congregation), through the Board, says to someone (in this case me) we trust you enough to keep this place going ... that's a big responsibility. (male principal, co-ed school)

The Expert Reference Group also highlighted the "awesome responsibility" that devolves upon the person successful in the process – the responsibility for the authenticity of the Catholic school. However, they questioned whether the current selection and interview processes were the best means of choosing the right person into that sensitive position, the principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia:

we put less time into selecting our principals than we do into a getting a government grant for a million dollars - and we will pay a million dollars in principals' salaries within ten years and the impact of that salary will be immeasurable - and we are not prepared to put in more than a few hours time and interview three people (for the position)! (ERG)

And the result of the process might not produce the best person for the particular position – because that person might not even have applied. "There are other people who for whatever reason might never become leaders" one principal (female principal, rural school) recognised. However, another felt that "there must be some sort of ambition there or desire or drive that makes you



apply for jobs ... (but) maybe the people who want it the most aren't necessarily the best leaders" (male principal, boys' school). If, as another suggested, "these young ambitious people mightn't be the best sort of people that we eventually want to end up as leaders" (male principal, boys' school), how do employing bodies identify likely prospects?

Such concerns address the core issue, that the religious aspect of leadership be foremost in the criteria for selection of principals. Formation processes and selection mechanisms need to be sharpened to ensure the 'best fit' candidates are chosen for this vital role. Selection currently hinges upon the ambition of individuals, their decisions to apply for positions, and a subsequent process of sorting and selection. It was with this lock-step approach that the ERG had reservations, believing that there needed to be other possibilities for discerning and preparing the next generation of principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia. While recognising possible difficulties in the industrial arena, they proposed an active process of discernment and call as an alternative approach:

we have to be brave enough in the industrial front to pick up an issue of call and selection rather than say that every position has to be advertised. I believe that we can interface with industrial requirements without being limited by them. (ERG)

The issue at the heart of this challenge to the established way of appointing principals is an assertion that the religious leadership function must be paramount in the process of selection. It is not so much a case of 'who wants

to be a principal?’ as ‘who would be the best fit as principal for the Catholic community of this school’? Dr. Sharkey raised a similar concern, contending that “it’s not so much whether / want to be a leader but (how) does the community in which I exercise the beginnings of leadership ... respond to what they are experiencing?” (Sharkey). This is discernment of leadership, both *in* the individual, and *by* the community, as a prelude to the process of selection for principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia.

## **7.6 Discernment**

In the Expert Reference Group it was felt that potential leaders needed to be identified and initiated into the process of formation “long before the deputy principal or REC level.” Principals have a responsibility to be active in identifying and “supporting people who (they) believe will eventually become very good leaders, hanging in there with them and knowing life will develop!” (male principal, co-ed school)

The Expert Reference Group felt that “what principals should be trained to do is to become very familiar with their staff and (to support) people starting to rise from the ranks to leadership” (ERG), and to encourage them in their careers. However, this presented a problem for many of the principals interviewed. Most were aware of “a number of people that you might say in time could take on significant leadership roles, including principalship ... if they chose to go that way” (male principal, co-ed school), but they were

reluctant to make such judgements among their staff: “I don’t know if I should make that judgement anyway” (male principal, co-ed school).

Other factors also influenced this discernment process. Contrary to the Director’s understanding, principals in the schools sensed that “at the moment there are a lot of people who are saying no, I don’t need that,” in relation to leadership, and especially religious leadership. One principal commented, “the Church has had a fair battering given recent events, with duty of care and misconduct issues, and that’s had an impact on how people want to become involved at that level of leadership” (female principal, rural school). Another principal reported that

I’ve had conversations with staff members that (I am) nurturing or (I) want to encourage to take on promotion, but they like the security of their classroom. That’s something they can control and feel confident with, whereas the uncertainties of leadership are not that appealing to them. And I think mixed with that is a questioning of where things sit with the Church as an institution, and so they are happy to be involved on (the classroom) level but not on (a leadership) level. (male principal, rural school)

There has to be a willingness on the part of the ‘discerned’ to take on the preparation for leadership. If the person has no ambitions for leadership, and prefers to remain in the “certainty of the classroom environment” (male principal, co-ed school), then little is gained through the exercise. If the person has reservations about the very nature of the parent organization, the Catholic

Church, then perhaps the process of ‘discernment’ specifically for the religious leadership of a Catholic school was mis-targeted!

Discernment of leadership potential is an important aspect of the principal’s responsibilities, a way to awaken ambition, or a sense of service. While it does not in itself make a teacher into a principal, and in particular into one who might be a religious leader in a school community, it can be the pointer indicating where formation might best be directed.

Earlier in this chapter, the ambition of aspiring leaders was identified as an issue, almost as a negative quality in one aspiring to leadership in a Catholic school. Ambition somehow suggested a ‘less than worthy’ motive for seeking promotion. But “ambition can be an instrumental motive, a means to an end” (Burns, 1979, p. 107), and without that spark, and the vision that inspires it, principalship would certainly be a function simply of management, in the technical domain (Sergiovanni, 1984). Discernment of leadership potential for a higher order involves “looking at the individual journeys of people, their relationship with their God and how they want to serve” (male principal, rural school), and opening to him/her a particular way of service – that of the principal in a Catholic school.

Ambition, as an expression of that desire ‘to serve’ is supported by CESA through a variety of strategies. Preparation for leadership “is not left to chance; there is a whole regime of programs” (Sharkey) available through the CEO, and those wishing to explore their leadership ambitions have many

opportunities to explore and test their vocation and broaden their understanding of the role.

We try to provide opportunities for people who think that they might like to have a go at leadership and then we say ... here are some interactions with people who are leaders, here are some mentors you can work with, here is some training and professional development that we can offer you and here are some formal courses that you can do at postgraduate levels which can enhance your knowledge and understanding of what leadership is. We would hope that in those courses the lecturer is actually touching something personal in these people which is supporting them in their journey in faith. (Dooley)

This is formation, but it is also presented as a form of personal and internal discernment within the aspirant, challenging the candidate to the community to look for “a confirmation from the community about my own sense about myself, that I am a leader, that I’m called into leadership” (Sharkey).

Discernment in practice has two dimensions: first, from (reluctant) principals in the schools; and second, from within the individuals themselves as they explore that call. Opportunities for discernment need to occur at both levels, and particularly in the latter, which is a form of inner reflection, and an “ongoing” process (Sharkey) in personal as well as professional formation. Once appointed to the role as principal, it remains important that structured opportunities for reflection continue, and that support for the religious

dimension of the role does not cease. Principals had a range of experiences in this respect.

## **7.7 Support and Mentoring**

New principals face “huge expectations” (female principal, co-ed school) as they move into their schools, and many feel they are “stepping into something of a vacuum” (male principal, boys’ school), most particularly in the realm of religious leadership. Another principal commented, “once the interview process was over, there was very little mentoring about my vision of what religious leadership is and what (school) was to be” (female principal, co-ed school).

McMahon et al. (1997, p. 1) asserted that the principal’s “primary responsibility is to serve the school community” an understanding that was strongly supported in this research. Continual reference was made, in both interviews and surveys, to the community’s role in the selection, support and validation of principals in their role as leaders in the school community. Faced with the dilemma of “coming in new” to a school and wondering, “where do I start and what do I do?” one principal remembered turning to that community for support. “I think it’s there (in the community)! With new leaders coming in, I think you have to draw on the story of where you are, the school itself and its religious life” (male principal, co-ed school) for support and insights into the way of being principal and religious leader in that community.

The Survey provided a broad insight from the Principals into the practical supports they had received, specifically in their role as 'Religious Leader' (Question 3.5). The responses identified a range of organisations and persons, and these are shown in Table 7.2.

*Table 7.2 Practical Supports in the Religious Leadership Role*

Source of Support	Number of Times Mentioned
<b>Mentors:</b> Principal Consultant / peers / Professional Associations	11
<b>'Religious' Supports:</b> Retreats / prayer / contemplation / pilgrimage / Eucharist	10
Support from REC	6
Director's Days / CEO provisions	4
Order support	4
Parish Priests	4
Theological/Spiritual inservice	2

(Source: Survey of Principals, 2005)

All respondents indicated a range of sources for their support, but the most significant item mentioned was the importance of Mentors.

Good mentoring, looking back, is very helpful. Having someone who is a wee bit older - not necessarily wiser but certainly having had various experiences in schools, just so people can touch base and say 'what do you think about this?' or 'what do you do about that?' – I think its very valuable. (female principal, co-ed school)

Another principal reported that the greatest support in his role had come from informal networks: “to be able to talk to other people, contact other principals just say what you are thinking, ask the dumb questions that you know you should already know the answer for” (male principal, co-ed school).

The support and mentoring of the Principal Consultants from the CEO was highly valued, although their primary focus was on the practical aspects of leadership. As one principal commented, “I can’t say that it’s on the agenda in terms of a conversation with principal consultant - saying ‘How is your religious leadership going?’” (male principal, rural school)

The survey also asked principals how they might “be further nurtured and supported in their role as religious Leaders.” (Question 3.9). “Good question!” one principal commented, and went on to suggest as valuable ... “further opportunities to leave the office on a periodic (basis), or for more extended periods, to undertake courses in theology, scripture and other aspects of religious formation.”

This need for ‘time out’ was reflected in the importance placed by principals on such activities as retreats, prayer and contemplation (see Table 7.2). Its main purpose was to make space for reflection, and for personal religious formation in some form. This was emphasised in the importance given to RECs, Parish priests and members of Congregations as key supports in that religious leadership role.



The CEO and UniSA offer a range of theology and scripture courses, many of them concerned specifically with preparing for, and supporting, leadership in Catholic schools. This however was not necessarily the style of formation that established principals were seeking. A typical response suggested “I’m not sure it’s for formal courses – I prefer retreats and appropriate time for principal’s Renewal Leave – i.e. personal/informal formation” (Survey).

Another principal took this mentoring preference even further, into a very personal dimension of the role in its religious dimension, writing that “I am interested in establishing a “professional” relationship with a spiritual advisor who has experience in this area, to help direct my reflections, reading etc.” (Survey).

Many principals found it difficult to find “time for reflection, (which) is vital in this role, (and) building this in daily is challenging – however it is vital at some point in a week there is Sabbath time for contemplation” (Survey). It is this reflection that allows for the “sudden in-breaking of insight that leads us to a new mode of operation” (Densley, 1997, p. 72). It is ‘small scale’ formation, intimate and personal rather than formal, a ‘making sense of matters’ that is essential to authentic professional practice (Schon, 1987). The ‘busy-ness’ of the job at times overtakes the deeper responsibilities of the role and a number of principals believed that there was a need to re-structure the principalship to delegate some of the issues and activities that can be handled elsewhere. Such a strategy would allow time for reflection on the core values of the school and the way they impact on the day-to-day life of the school community.

## **7.8 Structures for Leading Catholic Schools**

One principal, when asked how he responded to staff looking towards promotion and leadership, laughed, and reported that “I smile and make out I’m enjoying it!” (male principal, boys’ school). The reality for most principals was that theirs was a demanding vocation: “the complexities of society, the complexities of employment, the complexities of peoples’ lives make principalship an ongoing position that is intrinsically quite complex and I don’t think it’s going to get a whole lot easier” (female principal, co-ed school).

Not only was the principalship seen as a complex and demanding position, but for some principals, particularly in the country schools, it was also a “very lonely role at times” (Survey). Some felt that “a range of structures could be explored (to) make the job less lonely and pressured” (female principal, co-ed school) and ‘shared leadership’ was suggested as one way of dealing with this. However, perhaps the primary issue in ‘loneliness’ for a principal might not be so much about structures as about alternative ways of envisioning leadership, and the need for provision of formation which explores different styles or approaches to being principal in a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia.

“Leadership is a relationship” (Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg & Williamson, 1997, p. 216), and in the case of the principal, the relationship is “embedded in the school community as a whole” (Lambert, 1998, p. 5). Loneliness is a reality for

some principals, but it may be more a consequence of “not thinking of the key relationships, who you are responsible with, to and through” (ERG) in the school, in the community, in the Church and in the System itself. One of the principals in the ERG added that “I’ve never felt lonely, because you’ve got the leadership team all round you all the time” (ERG). If a principal sees “leadership as being on top of the heap, controlling people, then (he/she) has lost it! It’s your leadership team around you, it’s the people you can call on, it’s the group of parents who are closest to you” (ERG) who share the load in the relationship that is leadership, providing support both personally and professionally. This understanding of the role of the principal as situated within and shared with the community is an essential dimension of the religious role of the principal. Such an understanding liberates principals to think creatively, within the limits of their community, about other ways of being leader and the possibilities of shared leadership.

There are ways that schools can structure leadership into the future that will help (with the workload), so that perhaps principals can be a little bit more freed to exert the sorts of religious leadership that they could be exerting if they had the opportunity to step out of their offices. (female principal, co-ed school)

This was recognition that, on the technical level at least, some of the tasks of leadership could be devolved to others, allowing the principal to focus on higher order leadership responsibilities, and in particular, in the case of the Catholic schools, on religious leadership. If structures prevent the principal in a Catholic school from honouring this essence of his/her role, then those

structures may need to be changed. Perhaps others, such as the business manager could take on some of the management tasks, “as opposed to a principal, who is picking up religious leadership and curriculum-ship (sic)” (female principal, co-ed school). However, it should also be recognised that the principal’s religious understanding of life also extends to mundane matters, and even those ‘management’ tasks have outcomes which must reflect the religious character of the school. “It’s what you achieve out of those forms, it’s the people at the end of those processes whose needs are being met – they all count in the community” (ERG).

Developing a sense of what is at the heart of the role, and what can be delegated, is again a matter for formation – in leadership, and especially leadership in a Catholic school. Subsidiarity, which recognises that “there are many leaders in the Catholic school community,” is one of the “guiding principles of decision making in the Catholic school” (McMahon et al., 1997, p. 2). In practice, this means “sharing of leadership and responsibility - really sharing it, and paying people the right salaries to share it - that’s crucial!” (female principal, co-ed school).

A development of this issue, alluded to by several principals, was “joint principalship” (female principal, co-ed school), or a “co-principal structure” (ERG). This represented a further development of the shared leadership approach, a model of school leadership which currently operates in one South Australian Catholic Secondary School. Such alternative models potentially provide a way to more effectively fulfil the demands of the religious dimension

of the role in the midst of increasing complexity and accountability in the overall responsibilities of schools and principals:

I am very interested in the concept of co-principalship as increasingly the role as religious leader within the Principalship will demand more time. Co-Principalship enables a sharing of responsibility and provides a greater source of wisdom, skill and talent to address the complexities experienced by the Principal.

(Survey)

As a model of leadership the co-principalship was seen as having “great merits” (ERG), and being “very much in keeping” with a Catholic theology of leadership” (ERG), but the success of such a structure depends heavily on having very special people in those roles (ERG).

Principals in rural schools were concerned about their expanding roles as religious leaders in the broader community around the school, as well as the structural relationship between Church and Schools. Several respondents to the Survey felt the need to “reconfigure” the roles of Principal, Priests and Parish Associates (Survey) in order that those communities could, ultimately, be better served. One principal suggested a pragmatic structural solution to this issue, proposing that, as the number of priests dwindled (a phenomenon also common in city parishes), communities could develop a central shared enterprise, encompassing Church, school and other related organisations, all serving the Catholic families of the region in common mission. This might be a unified system of Catholicity around Church, parish, school and Catholic services, as an integrated model of service delivery, a bit

like the one stop shop where there isn't this demarcation between - if you step over this boundary you're parish, and if you step over this boundary you're school. These are artificial structures that we have made, but families don't see them as relevant. In this seamless kind of compilation, when a new family comes into a community, there are a whole range of services that are inherently Catholic in nature that could then be given to support that family.

(female principal, rural school)

In the context of the Church in South Australia, this may be a prophetic structure, situating school in the heart of Church, and emphasising the relationship between priests and school principals as key religious leaders in the community. Such a structure, however, has very significant implications for the discernment, formation and selection of persons to take on the role of principal, and would require an active commitment from both authorities (Church and School System) to mentor, nurture and support all parties involved.

In this chapter, the views of principals, the Expert Reference Group and the relevant authorities in relation to the issues of formation and selection critical to the 'Religious Leadership' of principals in the Catholic Secondary Schools of South Australia have been described. All emphasised the importance of the processes of discernment and formation in preparing aspirants for the principal's position, and investing time in appropriate selection processes. The community's part in this process was highlighted, as was the support for

mentoring programs. Issues such as the transition to lay leadership and the animation of an authentic charism of schools in the contemporary world highlighted the importance of the religious dimension of the principal's role in Catholic schools and the importance of appropriate structures in which to effectively exercise that leadership.

The findings of this chapter and chapters 6 and 7 provide the basis for the conclusions and recommendations concerning the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to the role and practice of the principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. These are addressed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions**

In this final chapter, the conclusions and recommendations are presented, in light of the aim of the research and the discussion of the findings previously outlined in chapters 5, 6 and 7 where the three research questions were addressed. Some implications of the study for the profession are also identified.

#### **8.1 The Research Aim and Research Design**

The aim of this research was to investigate the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applied to the role and practice of the Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. To achieve this, the study utilised a series of interviews, a survey and a focus group interview to tap into the understandings and the practice wisdom of the key stakeholders in Catholic schools. As a means of documenting a sensitive subject that had not been previously attempted in this local context, this qualitative approach proved to be both productive and revealing, and well suited to the aim of the study.

Three dimensions of this aim were identified – the different perspectives of the various stakeholders, the impact of practice, and the need to plan for the future. These were expressed in three research questions which framed the research process.



## **8.2 The Research Questions**

### **8.2.1 Research Question 1**

*What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of religious leadership and how does this shape the role of the principal in a Catholic Secondary School?*

This question explored the understandings of the Church authorities, (represented by the Bishops) and the System authorities (the Director of Catholic Education, South Australia, and one of the Assistant Directors) regarding the purposes of the Catholic school and their expectations of those who led it.

Both the Bishops and the System authorities spoke of the purpose of the Catholic school as part of the evangelising mission of the Church. Their emphases however differed. The Bishops spoke of the dual purposes of Catholic schools, and in theological language that suggested a dichotomy that contrasted the purely academic/vocational purposes with deeper religious ones. The System authorities couched their understanding of purpose in terms enculturating faith and preparing students to take into their lives the core values and beliefs of the Catholic faith, and to be witnesses to God in the midst of the wider community.

In the realisation of such purposes, these key stakeholders stressed the absolute importance of the principal, whose influence in shaping the culture of the Catholic Secondary School and in determining its priorities in curriculum and budgets in particular, were recognised as critical to the nature of the school. For the growth of an authentic Catholic culture, the principal's understanding of, and personal commitment to, the core values of that tradition, and the purposes of the Catholic school was essential. It was therefore most important that persons appointed to the position reflected these qualities and had a clear understanding of the Catholic school as a vital part of the Church in the lives of its community.

There was no doubt in the minds of any of the Church or System authorities in this study that the role of principal was essentially a religious one. Amidst all its secular responsibilities, they posited, the Catholic school existed primarily as part of Church, and as such, the principal was expected to be a religious leader in its community. In this context, the life and values modelled by the principal were particularly significant. The promotion of a Catholic understanding of life was a non-negotiable obligation, integral to the role.

The Bishops in particular expressed this all-encompassing religious expectation in religious language, as a call, or a vocation. These are terms which convey significant expectations about the religious nature of the role and of the person in it, and about the level of commitment to the community of the school itself that the role demands. Both the Church and System authorities recognised the pressures of such a commitment, and the need to both find the

right persons for the role of principal in the Catholic Secondary Schools, and to support them in carrying that vocation out in terms of the school's mission as part of Church.

### **8.2.2 Research Question 2**

*How is religious leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?*

Discovering the essence, that spark which defines 'Catholic' and animates the purposes of the Catholic school proved elusive. While it was generally understood amongst the principals that 'being Catholic' involved accepting, promoting, affirming and living by the doctrines of the Catholic Church, some of the principals in this study were searching for deeper meanings of the concept.

For them, the meaning of 'Catholic', and specifically of 'Catholic school', centred on an understanding of the presence of God in the world, and of a humanity 'made in God's image'. However, the awareness of an immanent God, present in all time, in all place, in all persons, was less well developed. Principals spoke of a faith that was an integral part of their personal psyche, but they were aware of the need to develop this theology further, and to bring a more mature theology to their understanding of their leadership role in the Catholic school.

The principal's exercise of this religious leadership in the Catholic Secondary School provided meaning and direction to the community as to its basic purposes and values, and gave life to the culture and curriculum of the school. In this, principals mediated the dichotomy of the sacred and the secular: the demands of the State and the expectations and purposes of the church.

Even within this division however, there existed a deeper conflict of views, a separation between a spiritual and a human view of life. A number of principals suggested that the last thing an adolescent was concerned with was the next world – they felt themselves to be indestructible! Recognising this reality in the students' lives, and using it as a springboard to develop a spiritual relevance was seen as one of the greatest services the school could do in its work as Church. Many principals, as religious leaders, spoke of consciously and constantly drawing the concerns of world of the adolescent to a spiritual context through their addresses at assemblies, through their written commentaries in Newsletters, and through the hidden curriculum of the school, with its emphasis on spiritual and Catholic values.

A number of principals addressed the relationship between school and Church. School, they agreed, was not 'Church' – in the organisational/structural sense. It was noted, however, that it was in schools that 'church', as the people of God, gathered in its greatest numbers every day of the week! Through its liturgy and prayer practices, students found a sacred meaning often missing for them in the parishes or the wider church (male principal, boys' school). The principals felt that, in their role as part of the evangelising mission of the

institutional Church, the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia had a significant responsibility in mediating a meaningful presence of God in young people's lives. Catholic Schools exist because of the Church, and it was recognised that this nexus defined their core purposes. In this difficult mission, principals often felt caught in the tension between the secular and the sacred. Some sensed that the extent of this struggle, and of their contribution to Church, was not sufficiently recognised, affirmed or supported by that Church. The Archbishop however, very clearly affirmed the importance of the principal's role as essential to the ministry of the Church, a statement that perhaps needs to be said more publicly, and to a wider audience.

Many principals expressed a strong concern that Catholic schools were being 'taken over' or distracted from their essential purposes by the demands of compliance with external requirements related to issues of funding, accountability and academic outcomes. The expectation that there should be certain 'outcomes' from schools was recognised by principals as a natural part of society's processes. This was seen as economic rationalism in education, and Catholic schools had to develop strategies for coping with such demands. However, some recognised that these demands did not have to be exclusively serviced by the principal, whose primary role in a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia should be directed towards cultural and symbolic leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984), rather than managerial responsibilities.

For the Catholic schools to maintain their 'mission integrity', their outcomes need to be defined in terms of the school's core purposes, and some of these,

such as faith formation, are difficult to assess. Ultimately however, principals believed it was in the 'doing' that the integrity of the organisation and authenticity of the principal, as religious leader, were revealed. The challenge to principals, in terms of mission integrity, was to ensure that the physical and material conditions of the school - such as the fee policy, the behaviour management/personal responsibility policies, selection of staff procedures and budgeting provisions - reflected these core purposes. Principals also acknowledged that a significant challenge to the establishment and maintenance of a religious culture in secondary schools was the appointment and development of staff who shared this understanding of the Catholic school's essential purposes and were able to share in that community the modelling of a life underpinned by faith. This challenge was even more strongly felt in rural schools, where the principals reported that they in particular, and staff generally, were expected to be part of that extended community around the school, and to give witness to the values they taught.

Principals also identified the need to find time for reflection on their practice, and on the core values and charisms that animated the Catholic community of their schools. This reflection was seen, particularly in the ERG, as an important way in which those core values would eventually become internalised and integrated in authentic leadership practice.

Some principals expressed a sense of loneliness in the role, and most were very aware of the need to develop networks amongst their peers and in the community to support them in the demanding role of being principal, and of

religious leader in particular. It was recognised that the most difficult and contentious issues that principals faced were in those times and events that most deeply challenged the very Catholicity of their schools. In such situations, the presence of a mentor and access to the practice wisdom of others was invaluable. It was particularly noted, however, that in the context specifically of their religious leadership, very few resources and networks existed within which to explore issues or to grow in their own personal spirituality.

### **8.2.3 Research Question 3**

*What are the key principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?*

Many principals saw their leadership as a personal journey, evolving in their understanding and practice of leadership as they travelled further into the role. Their needs, in terms of support and affirmation, differed according to the stage each had reached in that journey. Recognition of these different stages has implications for the forms of support and formation principals might need at any particular time, and for the role they might play in supporting and mentoring others undertaking the journey.

Currently in South Australian Catholic Secondary Schools, the dominant structural model of school leadership is a hierarchical one, with the principal responsible for all matters related to that school. A number of those surveyed commented on the stress and loneliness that this traditional model produced and different models of school leadership were canvassed. However, the

hierarchical model of leadership prevalent in both Church and schools is a difficult one to change, and although many principals raised the possibility and desirability of alternative, more collegial structures, most continued in this traditional paradigm.

Leadership style reflects the theology and personality of the principal, and if the formal structures of schools will not change, a number of principals believed that there was still scope for alternative models of being leader. Schools are renowned for the leadership density held within the staff group (Sergiovanni, 1990) and the principles of subsidiarity and of empowerment through a flatter leadership structure offered both ways of sharing the load and encouraging future leaders in the system.

All parties in the research also expected leaders and emerging leaders to have substantial postgraduate qualifications, including some religious content, as preparation for the role. Principals in particular pointed out that the initiatives of the CEO through Study Incentive Programs and similar supports had been very successful in encouraging formation in the cognitive areas for principals and aspiring leaders. A similar encouragement, it was suggested, was also required for formation in the affective domain, fostering a growth in the spiritual intelligence of leaders and better fitting them for that religious dimension of their role.

All parties agreed that it was vital to have a professionally competent person as principal in a secondary school. In view of this, it was felt that, in selecting



and appointing principals, authorities and panel members must weigh both the organisational skills and the spiritual qualities of candidates. If 'spiritual people' were to be appointed to principalships, then the Church and System Authorities agreed that this had to be a conscious part of the selection process. If that process was dominated by an awareness of the technical requirements and the accountability pressures of the (State) System, and the need to place a 'competent' person in the role to cope with them, then the opportunity, and the responsibility for upholding the religious dimension might be lost. It is this dimension that underpins all aspects of the Catholic school, and without this consciousness, the integrity of the school as Catholic is compromised. Such choices for leadership go to what is deep within person, and these qualities impact upon vision, actions, priorities, and relationships in leadership.

A number of principals indicated an awareness of the leadership ambitions of their staff members, but they were reluctant to actively encourage them to seek principalship. A practical commitment to nurture all religious leaders in their ongoing formation is part of every principal's responsibility, both to the individual and to the System. Support in developing leadership competence and spirituality provides for the future of the Catholic Education, and should not be shirked.

The Director, and principals themselves, recognised the importance of attending to the 'growing' of religious leaders. It was indicative of the pressures felt in relation to this role that staff such as RECs, with specific responsibilities for religious leadership in schools, were generally not taking the path to

principalship. It was regarded as essential, especially by the church authorities, that discernment of leadership potential among spiritually aware staff in the school be encouraged, and that support for this dimension of the role be a central part of the preparation process for principals for the Catholic Secondary schools in South Australia.

### **8.3 Conclusions from the Research**

There was general agreement amongst those involved in this study that the nature of Catholic schools is changing. In South Australia, a system that began in a single chapel within the bounds of the fledgling city of Adelaide over a hundred and sixty years ago has burgeoned into a significant presence in the educational landscape of the State. For much of its history it was staffed and led by members of a number of religious congregations, who established their traditions and inculcated their charisms in the schools, and defined the character and culture of Catholic Education in South Australia.

A new paradigm is now almost fully in place: that of leadership of the Catholic Secondary Schools by lay persons. These new leaders are charged with maintaining the charisms and nurturing the essential Catholic nature and purposes of the school in the midst of a complex, ever-changing secular and often antagonistic culture.

The nature of the student group in the schools has also changed. These young people no longer represent a 'churched' community. They no longer come from a struggling underclass. Schools no longer constitute an homogeneous

Catholic (single-faith) community. Catholic Secondary Schools are now multicultural - and sometimes multi-faith - organisations. The Irish mid twentieth century, 'one-size-fits-all' model of faith no longer serves their many needs. In the light of these changes and challenges, it is now more important than ever for Catholic schools to know deeply and intimately what it means to be Catholic, and what the Catholic school's purpose is. In this context, the way in which the principal exercises that symbolic and cultural leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984) is critical to its authenticity as Catholic.

The South Australian CEO mandates four areas in which principals operate as leaders in Catholic schools (see Appendix A). Religious leadership is first listed, but the very powerful conclusion drawn from the research is that this dimension defines action in all the other areas of the principal's operations. The religious nature and values of the person in the role are not separate parts of functioning in leadership: they underpin all that the principal does. This is a significant aspect of the authenticity of the school as Catholic, and all groups in the research emphasised that it was essential for persons of authentic spirit be attracted to the role, and for appropriate mechanisms to be developed for discerning and selecting such persons.

Most principals spoke of 'learning by doing' in coming to terms with the role and this was an important aspect of the journey of principalship in a Catholic Secondary School. Ideally this begins well before the moment of appointment. In a Catholic school, approaches to leadership that involve the school community in processes such as defining the vision and decision making

potentially provide aspiring leaders with the first experiences of such responsibilities – and model good leadership practice. This may be the best form of succession planning - delegation and job-sharing – which at the same time honours a ‘Catholic’ sense of leadership, takes some of the pressure off the principal and gives more people an experience of supportive leadership.

#### **8.4 Implications for the Profession**

This study did not set out to provide a theory of leadership, let alone religious leadership. However, in its process it has established a scaffolding within which the religious aspect of the principal’s role in Catholic schools can be considered, and it has gone some way towards enhancing a conceptual framework within which religious leadership can be further developed.

In documenting the practice of principals in the religious dimension of their role, the study also represents an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue concerning religious leadership in Catholic schools. The process of the research invited Church and System authorities, and in particular principals, to reflect on that role in the wider contexts of Catholic Education and Church. A number of the principals explicitly recorded their appreciation for this opportunity. Given this positive support, and the involvement of the different stakeholders, this is a strategy that could be institutionalised within the South Australian Catholic Education System as an important aspect of reflective practice.

The study also highlighted an important concern about leadership succession and the maintenance of the mission integrity of the schools, particularly as the members of religious congregations withdraw. It pinpointed as a particular issue the dilemma faced by principals and system authorities in identifying and nurturing potential candidates for the position of principal, particularly when those in the system whose role specifically defines them in religious leadership, such as the RECs, are generally not offering for the position.

The conclusions give rise to a number of policy and practice implications for each of the stakeholders, and these are presented in the following recommendations for consideration by the authorities and the groups indicated.

#### **8.4.1 For Church and System Authorities and principals:**

##### **It is recommended that all stakeholders**

- commit time and resources to further discern together common understandings about what it means to be 'Catholic' and about the purposes of Catholic schools; and that appropriate policies and procedures be established to address the issues which emerge.
- explore ways whereby principals can enhance the theological, scriptural and spiritual bases of their leadership in a Church organisation

#### **8.4.2 For Church Authorities:**

It is recommended that they

- work with the System authorities to clearly affirm and support principals in their role as leaders in the Church's mission amongst youth

#### **8.4.3 For System Authorities:**

It is recommended that they

- consider re-writing the 'Selection of Principal: Essential Criteria' document in a way that presents religious leadership as a philosophy and way of being, integral to leading, rather than as a separate dimension of leadership
- develop mechanisms for documenting and sharing practice wisdom about religious leadership within the System
- develop a process that identifies, supports, develops and mentors potential religious leaders in the school system
- develop strategies and incentives to attract potential (religious) leaders to rural schools in the senior roles of principal, deputy principal and REC.

#### **8.4.4 For those responsible for leadership and formation programs:**

It is recommended that they

- engage with principals and with the Catholic Theological College and the University of SA in designing and presenting courses relevant to leaders in Catholic schools for accreditation in Masters level qualifications

- work with religious congregations in developing appropriate strategies for the transition from religious to lay principals, giving particular consideration to the ongoing nurturing of the founding charism(s).
- liaise with experienced principals
  - to develop an appropriate 'hands-on' program of experiences in leadership to supplement the theory for aspiring principals
  - to act as mentors for those beginning in their principalship and those aspiring to the role

#### **8.4.5 For Principals:**

It is recommended that they

- develop the habit of reflection on practice in order to consolidate and internalise the core values that define the Catholic school
- consider undertaking spiritual direction as a support for the religious dimension of their role
- seek ongoing formation to enhance the theological, scriptural and spiritual bases of their religious leadership
- work with the religious congregations and the school community to ensure that the charism of the school forms a relevant dimension of the contemporary school culture
- identify appropriate mechanisms for the discernment and mentoring of potential religious leaders in the staff group

#### **8.4.6 For Potential and Aspiring Leaders:**

It is recommended that they

- develop a practice of reflection and discernment within their teaching and leadership roles in order to enhance their understanding of the key values and purposes of Catholic education
- ensure that their qualifications include aspects of theology and scripture in relation to Catholic schools and Catholic leadership

#### **8.4.7 For Catholic Secondary Principals' Organisations:**

It is recommended that they

- provide time in gatherings for input in the areas of Theology and Scripture and reflective practice relevant to leadership in a Catholic school
- actively develop and support networks for mentoring of principals at different stages of their career/journey

#### **8.4.8 For Future Research:**

This study was limited to the secondary school sector of Catholic Education, South Australia as a defined and manageable subject for the research project. However, as the study evolved, it was clear that many of the observations and experiences coming out of this context could apply equally in the broader milieu of Catholic Education in South Australia. It was also apparent, given the impact of the principal's religious leadership is felt most strongly in the



community of a particular school, that other perspectives on that leadership would make a valuable addition to the findings of this research.

It is suggested therefore that the following areas be considered for further research:

- An investigation of the perception of the principal's religious leadership role in a single school (Case Study) – from the additional perspectives of staff in the school, the students and the parent community
- Religious leadership – a comparison of the expectations and conditions across the Catholic primary and secondary school sectors

## **8.5 Concluding Remarks**

I feel that I have been privileged in this research to share in the thoughts of a wide range of Church and school people about the underpinnings of Catholic schools, and the importance of religious leadership in the principal's role. The findings have both affirmed and challenged my own practice, and have also opened new possibilities which provide food for personal reflection.

The way in which the lay leaders have taken on the challenge of religious leadership, and of inspiring their schools, has given me a sense of confidence in the strength of the Catholic view of education and its management in those schools. There was a great sense of respect for the tradition of those schools and the leaders and teachers who had been responsible for their story to that

point – but there was also a reassuring awareness of continuing that tradition, and the charism, in the contemporary world.

The challenge also to be authentically Church *and* schools of excellence was clearly a significant part of the principals' struggle. This involved a strong sense of the importance of being present in, and relevant to, the world of that community, and particularly of taking on the responsibility of mediating Church and authentic religious values to young people and the wider school community. The degree to which principals and communities succeed in these challenges will be the measure of the success of the Catholic school.

If this research and the findings in any way assist principals and the Catholic Education System in South Australia and beyond, it will indeed have been worthwhile.

## **Appendix A**

### **Selection of Principal, Essential Criteria document, SA**

## **SELECTION OF PRINCIPAL**

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### **ESSENTIAL CRITERIA**

The successful applicant for the position of Principal at \_\_\_\_\_ School, \_\_\_\_\_, will be an excellent Catholic educator who fulfils the following criteria.

She/he will:

#### **Religious Leader**

- 1.1 demonstrate an active involvement in a Catholic eucharistic community
- 1.2 demonstrate commitment to developing the Catholic ethos and to fostering Christian community
- 1.3 have experience in the teaching of Religious Education and knowledge and understanding of current trends in the RE curriculum
- 1.4 support the REC and other staff in developing and implementing a contemporary Religious Education program

#### **Educational Leader**

- 2.1 possess appropriate expertise, experience and qualifications for leadership of a Catholic school
- 2.2 have demonstrated an on-going commitment to their own personal and professional learning
- 2.3 be a leader in curriculum with a clear understanding of the role of information technology in contemporary education
- 2.4 work collaboratively with staff to devise and implement an effective Professional Development program
- 2.5 employ, monitor and support teaching and school support staff

- 2.6 provide evidence of a critical awareness of issues and trends in education

## **Community Leader**

- 3.1 demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills including a capacity to communicate with and relate to people in a variety of situations
- 3.2 give indications of a commitment to foster liaison with the local Catholic Christian community
- 3.3 foster effective relationships with parents and care givers as partners in the educational process
- 3.4 demonstrate a capacity for nurturing a cohesive and pastorally caring community
- 3.5 demonstrate a commitment to social justice and gender equity in decision making, communication structures and behaviour management
- 3.6 be dedicated to a culture of reconciliation and celebration

## **Administrative Leader**

- 4.1 possess skills in analysis, organisation, delegation and supervision
- 4.2 demonstrate skill in the development of a school development plan, policies and procedures
- 4.3 show an understanding of the structure and role of the school board and the parents and friends association
- 4.4 demonstrate a responsible understanding of how school buildings, grounds and resources are planned, provided and maintained
- 4.5 demonstrate an understanding of responsible financial management
- 4.6 demonstrate an understanding of the role of information technology as an administrative tool
- 4.7 give an indication of an ability to promote Catholic education and implement effective enrolment procedures
- 4.8 capacity to fulfil the role of delegated Responsible Officer for Occupational Health Safety and Welfare for the school

## Appendix B

### Development of Catholic Tertiary Education Courses, SA

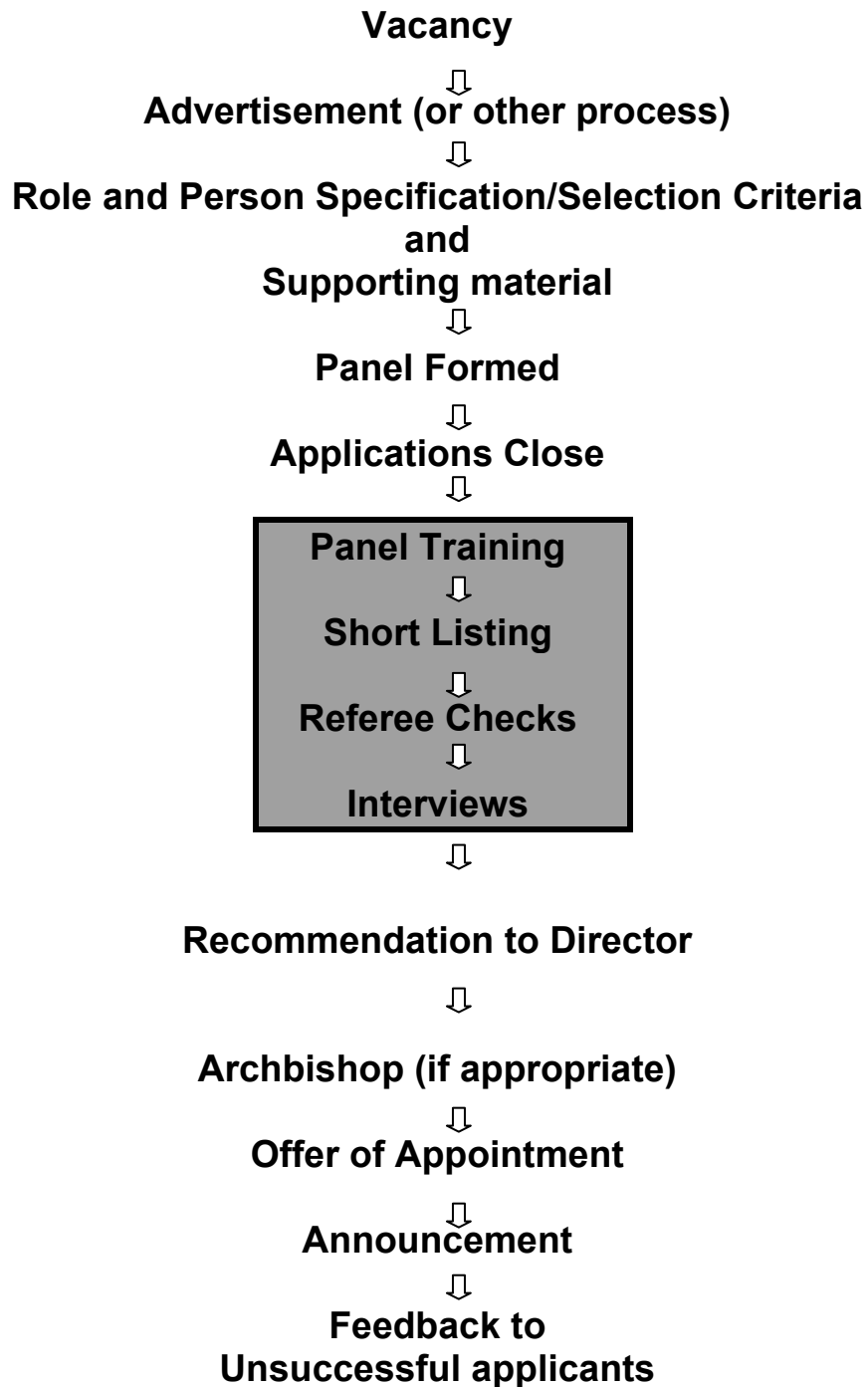
(Source: collated information from CEO personnel, 2005)

Estimated Date	Professional Development	Providing Organisation	Status	Audience
From Late 1970's	* Units in Theology	Theology Institute	No status	Teachers et al
Mid 1980's	* preparation for leadership and slightly more advanced courses	Centre for Catholic Studies	No status	Leaders
Late 80's	*Catholic Studies Units within the undergraduate BEd at UniSA, Underdale	SAICTE/ACU The units from ACU undergrad. courses. Accreditation B	Tertiary status  Status within Catholic Education	Undergraduate Teachers  Teachers in Catholic schools
Very late 80's / early 90's	* M.Ed. (Ed. Admin) - included 1 unit in Theology: * Later ACU RE units offered as options	SAICTE/ACU	Tertiary status	Existing leaders and, in the late 90s, aspiring leaders
1996	* Master of Religious Education	SAICTE/ACU Theology and RE units	Tertiary status	RECs aspiring RECs, Principals and DPs
Late 1990s	* Master of Educational Leadership	SAICTE/ACU Admin, Theology and RE units	Tertiary status	Established and aspiring Leaders
Late 1990s	* Post graduate UniSA awards (RE and Theology)	UniSA	Tertiary status	Teachers, Leaders
2000s	* Master of Catholic Education * Grad Cert (Catholic Studies)	UniSA  UniSA	Tertiary status	Teachers, Leaders

## Appendix C

### Selection of CEO Staff: Flow Chart

#### SELECTION OF CEO STAFF



## Appendix D

### Vision for Catholic Schools, SA

[http://web.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au/SACCS/vision\\_.html](http://web.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au/SACCS/vision_.html)

(accessed 12.10.05)

**Catholic schools, in partnership with parents, in union with Christ's saving mission and communities, educate young people for participation in the Church and world communities today.**

**Catholic schools educate young people in all dimensions of life, by:**

*developing the whole person.*

Catholic schools take into account the student's intellectual, moral, spiritual, religious, physical and social capacities.

Catholic schools are committed to join wholeheartedly with all educators in the search for new methods and more effective ways of passing on the collective wisdom of humankind to subsequent generations.

All students are to be prepared for life in the world, including the rapidly changing technological world.

*encouraging a life long searching for truth.*

*Catholic schools initiate students into the wisdom of the Church and into the collective wisdom of humankind.* This is intended to lead to a thirst for wisdom that continues through life.

*challenging students to servant relationship.*

Students in Catholic schools are the future leaders in the world and in the Church. *In imitation of Jesus, such leadership is understood as service.*

**Catholic schools invite young people to join the church's mission, by:**

*inviting them to journey to personal Christian faith.*

People in Catholic schools are called to follow Jesus, in today's world.

Children's capacity for faith grows with age, as St. Luke said of the child 'Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people.' Lk 2:52.

*reflecting on and applying current theological insights.*

Students and teachers are called to reflect on and apply the renewal of theology, promoted by the Second Vatican Council. The experience of people in Australian Catholic schools and the insights of theologians are to be kept in constant dialogue.

*drawing inspiration from the values of the Gospel.*

The virtues Jesus inspired in the people of first century Palestine are to be reflected in Catholic schools today. Schools provide for students in areas in which families alone cannot provide all the educational resources needed for preparation for life in the world.

**Catholic schools welcome students to a Christian learning community, by:**

*inviting them to grow in responsibility and freedom.*

The Catholic schools' ideal is one of responsibility and self determination, lived out in a community context.

*recognising the unique presence of God in all people.*

Children in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic faith or have parents who enrolled their children in Catholic schools on the understanding they will participate in the total life of the school, as the Second Vatican Council forcibly reminds us that God loves all people. (Church in the Modern World; No. 29.)

*encouraging the pursuit of excellence*

Catholic schools are unequivocally committed to the pursuit of excellence in all areas of school life. This includes striving for academic achievement and building up of community, both civil and religious.

*being places of celebration*

The celebration of God's love in Christian sacraments, especially the Eucharist, is at the heart of the Catholic school life. The human and divine gifts of humour, creativity, tolerance, joy, accomplishment and peace are to be prized and celebrated in many ways.

**Catholic schools prepare young people for life, by:**

*giving Christian witness in the world today.*

Catholic schools participate in the mission of the Church and are privileged places where the values and practices of Catholic Christianity are lived and taught to students as an integral part of life.

*being aware of all the dimensions of creation.*

For Catholics, a complete ecological view incorporates a Christian understanding of God's overall love for every created reality (Genesis 1:1). This view informs school curriculum and school management.



*developing an open and critical attitude to the world today*

Jesus both loved the world and was fiercely critical of abuses in the world. Students need to be educated to develop the capacity for critical thinking, for the ability to discern between what is truly good in Australian culture. Students are to be educated to think and act on the basis of personal reflection.

*promoting mutual relationships and partnerships.*

Students are prepared to live and work in a world that increasingly values equality and solidarity among all people.

**Appendix E**

**Extracts from a generic contract/Conditions of Employment  
document for a Catholic School Principal in South Australia**

**CONDITIONS  
OF  
EMPLOYMENT  
FOR  
PRINCIPALS AND  
DEPUTY PRINCIPALS  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN  
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**OCTOBER 2002**

## **PREAMBLE**

This document sets out the Conditions of Employment for all Principal and Deputy Principals in Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Port Pirie.

Members of the three Associations: APCSS, DEPSLA and SACPPA and the Directors are supportive of an R-12 Agreement that recognises unity and collaboration between leaders in Catholic schools throughout South Australia.

This Agreement between the Directors, Principals and Deputy Principals:

- Is cognisant of the relativities which exist with respect to salaries and conditions for leaders in Catholic schools throughout Australia;
- Accommodates the site-specific complexity of the school;
- Presents a framework for the future;
- Recognises the dialogue between the Directors of Catholic Education and the existing professional Associations;
- Does not minimise existing conditions and salaries.

The ministry of school leadership is one of service to young people and their families. In South Australian Catholic schools this ministry is exercised within the overall context of the Catholic Church and within a changing society. Principals and Deputy Principals need to be in touch with the educational realities of today, the challenges facing families and the emerging ways the Church offers its message to people of today.

Principals and Deputy Principals provide support and direction to their school communities. The Directors recognise this valuable contribution. The Directors undertake responsibility for the pastoral care and support of Principals and Deputy Principals so that their commitment to the ministry of school leadership may be nurtured and strengthened.

## **1. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

As Catholic School Leaders Principals (with the support of Deputy Principals as appropriate) are required to:

- 1.1 Nurture and enhance a Catholic school ethos within the school.
- 1.2 Avoid, whether by word, action or public lifestyle, offending the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.
- 1.3 Be accountable and responsible to the Director
- 1.4 Take such reasonable steps to be aware of all communications to and from the Director.
- 1.5 Implement the Director's and SACCS policies, procedures and decisions.
- 1.6 Observe and carry out the proper directions given by the Director from time to time.
- 1.7 Maintain and develop a sound relationship between the Catholic School, the local Catholic community, and the wider community.

## **BREAK IN DOCUMENT**

- 1.14 participate in appropriate theological professional development programs.

## **BREAK IN DOCUMENT**

- 2.3 The first appointment as a Principal or Deputy Principal will be subject to satisfactory completion of a 12 month period of probation. Principals and Deputy Principals will, following the successful completion of the initial probationary period, normally be appointed for a period of four calendar years.
- 2.4 At the completion of the first period of appointment Principals and Deputy Principals will be reappointed to the same position for a period of five calendar years subject to a successful appraisal based on performance in the local school context.
- 2.5 At the completion of the second period of appointment the position will be advertised and the Principal or Deputy Principal will be eligible to apply for the position.

## **Appendix F**

### **Details of current Principal preparation courses (Leadership Programs 2005)**

#### **Details of programs offered for school leaders in South Australia: Extracts from CEO Leadership Programs 2005 promotional booklet.**

##### **Discernment and Foundation Module, 2004/05**

For participants who commenced in 2004 & have completed sessions 1 & 2:

Session 3 & 4:      *Developing a Vision for Leadership*  
Session 5:         *Surviving and Thriving as a Leader*  
Session 6:         *Learning the Tools of the Trade*

##### **Discernment and Foundation Module, 2005/06**

For those who are considering enrolment in the 2005/06 program

##### **For Women**

Session              *Discover the Leader Within*

##### **For All Intending Participants**

Session 1:           *Discerning Leadership Capacity*  
Session 6:           *Challenges in Leading People*

##### **Induction Program for Newly Appointed Leaders**

This is a compulsory program for newly appointed Principals and Deputy Principals, including those in acting positions.

Religious Education Coordinators and POR 2, 3 and 4 teachers appointed since February 2002 are invited to participate as appropriate.

Session 1:           *Introduction to the Program and input from Directors*  
Session 2:           *A Vision for Religious Leadership*  
Session 3:           *A Vision for Educational Leadership*  
Session 4:           *OHSW Responsible Officer Training*  
Session 5:           *Work Cover Issues*  
Session 6:           *Responsible Financial Management*  
Session 7:           *Schools and the Law*

## **Leaders' Seminars**

For all leaders: Principals, Deputy Principals, RECs and POR

Session 1:	<i>Position Information Documents and Classifications ...</i>
Session 2:	<i>Launch of National Safe Schools Framework</i>
Session 3:	<i>Getting People Talking: an Opportunity to Explore Mentoring</i>
Session 4:	<i>Work Cover Issues</i>
Session 5:	<i>Responsible Financial Management</i>
Session 6:	<i>Schools and the Law</i>
Session 7:	<i>Religious Education SACSA launch</i>

For Women

Session 1:	<i>Professional Supervision for Educational Leaders</i>
Session 2:	<i>Leading People: Women and Leadership</i>

## **Leadership Development Program**

For all Leaders: Principals, Deputy Principals, Religious Education

Coordinators and POR 2, 3 and 4, with a priority given to newly appointed leaders.

Session 1:	<i>Leadership Style</i>
Session 2:	<i>Leading Teams</i>
Session 3:	<i>Managing Performance</i>
Session 4:	<i>Building Constructive, Interpersonal Relationships</i>

## **Appendix G**

### **Interview Schedule: for Church and System authorities**

The following series of questions are indicative of the line to be pursued in interviews. The answer to any question will determine the direction of the conversation, and the form of the next question to be asked.

1. What do you understand by the term 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to people occupying the role of Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?
2. What influences have most contributed to this understanding of the Principal's role? Is this something you see in terms of 'vocation'?
3. What is the role of Church/System authorities in the process of appointment of principals? Is this a formally contracted position? Is there a formal contract? Does it specify this expectation of religious leadership?
4. In a world where globalization, secularism, apathy, racism and materialism seem at times the dominant ethos, how does the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School make the Catholic values and traditions of the Catholic faith relevant in its day to day life?
5. What are the practical difficulties that face the Catholic Secondary School in acting to preserve and perfect the identity of the Catholic school?

6. Is the leadership of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia different from the equivalent role in a State Secondary School? If you so, in what practical ways?
7. Catholic schools are described as having a Gospel oriented culture. They strive to build a better world, and have a particular care for the poor and disadvantaged. How can schools realise this vision?
8. What happens if the principal finds him/her-self 'at odds' with official Church teaching in their own lives, and/or in the life of the school?
9. How can Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia be further nurtured and supported in their role as Religious Leaders?
10. What do you see as the major challenges for Principals exercising their role as Religious Leaders in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?



## **Appendix H**

### **Request for Interview (Principals)**

#### **INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: How is Religious Leadership understood and practised by Principals in selected Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

**NAMES OF STAFF SUPERVISORS:**

Dr. Annette Schneider  
Professor Ron Toomey

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:**

Frank McEvoy

**NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:**

Doctor of Education

(Date)

Dear Principal,

I write to invite you to participate in a study investigating the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to the role and practice of Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia. This will involve an exploration of those actions of Principals which provide meaning and direction to the school community as to its basic purposes, and that give life to the religious culture and values underlying the curriculum of the school.

This first stage to the project takes the form of interviews with up to eight secondary Principals, exploring their understandings and experience of Religious Leadership in the practical field. Next, a focus group will be convened to discuss and to extend the data obtained from the interviews. Finally, a survey of all Catholic Secondary Principals in South Australia is

planned, to gather feedback on selected issues that may emerge from the foregoing process.

Clearly, the subject of this research is a sensitive one, touching on a core area of your practice as a Principal in a Catholic Secondary School. Indeed, the topic is one that is often difficult to put into words, as the project invites you to share personal insights into a subject which is concerned with some very deep beliefs. It is because of this that participants in this Research Project are invited to engage in this processes on a voluntary basis.

In the individual interview, you will be asked to set aside up to an hour and a half for the interview itself, which will be audio-taped, subject to your permission. You will also be asked to provide the researcher with access within the school to a range of documents, in particular published Newsletters and School Magazines. These will be perused for insights beyond the actual interview into each Principal's Religious Leadership practice and style.

It is hoped that the insights gained from Principals such as yourself in this study will help clarify our understandings of the concept of Religious Leadership, and that they will affirm those Principals who participate and provide ideas and support for all working in this complex role. The findings will also contribute in a practical way to the body of knowledge in this area of professional practice, and will have the potential to serve as a guide for the formation and inservice of new Principals, and perhaps even in the development of courses designed for prospective Principals in Catholic Education in South Australia.

You are encouraged to take part in this research: but you are free to decline involvement, without having to justify this decision. You are also free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time, again without giving a reason.

The information derived from each of the research strategies will be confidential, and used only for the purposes of this research. Survey returns

will be anonymous, and your name will not be used in any reporting of the data. Great care will be taken to ensure that, even in the small community of Catholic Education in South Australia, no links will be able to be made between any statement and any person or school.

Questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor, Dr. Annette Schneider at the School of Educational Leadership, Australian Catholic University, P.O. 650, Ballarat, Victoria 3350 (telephone 03 5336 5349).

You will be provided with feedback on both your own input to the project, and on the findings, the conclusions and any recommendations arising from the project at its conclusion.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and the Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee in Victoria:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus)  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065

Tel: 03 9953 3157

Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Supervisor.

Yours sincerely

Frank McEvoy  
(Student Researcher)

Dr. A. Schneider  
(Principal Supervisor)

## Appendix I

### Consent Form

#### CONSENT FORM

(copy to be returned to the student researcher)

**Title of Project:**

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: How is Religious Leadership understood and practised by Principals in selected Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?

**Names of Staff Supervisors:**

Dr. Annette Schneider

Professor Ron Toomey

**Name of Student Researcher:**

Frank McEvoy

**Name of Participant:** .....  
(block letters)

I ..... (*the participant*) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw from the project at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

**Participant's Signature:** ..... **Date:**  
.....

I ..... (the participant) agree/do not agree to my interview being audio-taped as a record of conversation.

**Participant's Signature:** ..... **Date:**  
.....

**Signature of Principal Supervisor:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Signature of Student Researcher:** .....

**Date:** .....

## **Appendix J**

### **Interview Schedule for individual Principal interviews.**

The following series of questions are indicative of the line pursued in interviews. They are open ended, and the answer to any question will determine the direction of the conversation, and the form of the next question to be asked.

#### **Section A:**

The opening remarks will establish the gender of the respondent, and the type of school (see Section A of the Questionnaire form for details). Then the following question pattern will be employed:

1. How many years (including this current year) have you been a Principal in this School?
2. Do you have a formal Contract of Employment, setting out the terms of your appointment as Principal?
3. Is the expectation that Religious Leadership is a central part of the role of the Principal of a Catholic School explicitly stated in this document?

#### **Section B**

1. When you first considered applying for the role of Principal in a Catholic school, did the religious dimension of this role play any part in your considerations?
2. Has the concept of the Principal as 'religious leader' in the school community ever been explored with you? When? By whom? Did this help your understanding of the idea?
3. Is this aspect of the Principal's role discussed in the Principals' Association, or have you had the opportunity to with the Archbishop or with appropriate CEO personnel?
4. In the literature, religious leadership is an integral – even a primary – dimension of the principal's role, and the position is often described as a 'call' or a 'vocation'. How do you feel about such a description?

## Section C

1. Do you consider the leadership of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia to be significantly different to the equivalent role in a State Secondary School? If you do, in what practical ways?
2. How do you, as the leader of this community, make your school 'Catholic'?
3. Do you ever think of yourself specifically as a 'religious leader' in your school community?
4. Is this a 'separate' part of your persona and activity as principal, or is it somehow integrated into a more general approach to the role?
5. How does 'being a religious leader' impact on your leadership practices in your school – in such areas as its
  - ☐ day to day running?
  - ☐ employment of staff?
  - ☐ student discipline policies and procedures?
  - ☐ pastoral care policies and procedures?
  - ☐ community focus?

Can you give some practical insights into how this religious understanding informs your practice in these areas?

7. Are there specific times – such as school assemblies or liturgies - when you stand before the school community clearly as the religious leader? Can you describe how you approach these occasions, how you express this role and how you feel about it?
8. Are there any times when you have felt at odds with official Church teaching in your interactions with the school community? Can you give some examples to illustrate this?
9. As the leader of a Catholic community, how do you deal with those issues and moments when the Church's position is at odds with the general feeling of the wider community?
10. What do you find most inspiring in your role as Religious Leader of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia?
11. What do you find most difficult in your role as Religious Leader of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia?

## **Section D**

1. What do you see as the major challenge for Principals in exercising their role as Religious Leaders in Catholic secondary schools in our current climate?
2. What aspects of your preparation and inservice – either before or after appointment – most helped you to come to grips with the challenge of being the designated Religious Leader in your school community?
3. As a Principal now, do you have any suggestions about preparation for this aspect of the role that may be of value to people preparing themselves for Principalship?
4. What suggestions could you make for the CEO in terms of formal support for people currently in the role, particularly in the area of the religious leadership, and .... Any other ...spiritual, personal and emotional intelligences so critical to leadership capability in this religious context?



## **Appendix K**

### **The Survey Instrument**

## **Survey of the Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia**

The purpose of this survey is to test and validate the data gained from interviews with the Bishops, the Directors and a number of Principals in the Catholic Education System of South Australia.

The data collected through this survey will be aggregated, and will not, in any way or in any forum, be identified with any person or school. The responses are anonymous, and the survey sheets will be destroyed once the data has been processed, and the University's requirements for data storage have been satisfied.

No person, other than the researcher, will have access to this material at any time.

Please complete the survey, and return to the researcher, Frank McEvoy, before May 13<sup>th</sup>. Thank you.

### **Section 1**

- Please check as appropriate.
- You may check more than one box if it is appropriate for your circumstances.

#### **1. Gender**

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

#### **2. Category of Principal**

- ☐ Lay Principal under contract
- ☐ Religious Principal of a Congregation owned school
- ☐ Religious Principal of a Systemic school
- ☐ Other (please specify) .....

3. How many years (including this current year) have you been Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 – 6 years
- ☐ 7 – 10 years
- ☐ more than 10 years

4. What Type of School do you currently lead?

- ☐ Metropolitan
- ☐ Country
- ☐ Co-educational
- ☐ Single sex (girls)
- ☐ Single sex (boys)
- ☐ Senior College only
- ☐ Middle School only
- ☐ R – 12 School
- ☐ Other (please specify) .....

5. What is the enrolment of your current school (secondary component only in the case of schools offering other than Yrs. 8 – 12)?

- ☐ Less than 300
- ☐ 300 – 499
- ☐ 500 – 799
- ☐ 800 or more

6. Do you have a formal Contract of Employment, setting out the terms of your appointment as Principal?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. **If Yes**, is the expectation that Religious Leadership is a central part of your role as Principal *explicitly stated* in that document?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. **If No**, has any expectation that you should take on this role been conveyed to you at any stage? In what way?

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9. The four dimensions of Leadership in a Catholic School most typically used to define the role are ***Religious, Administrative, Financial and Curricular.***

In thinking about your leadership in Term 1 of this year, rank each of these dimensions, on a scale of **1** (most time) to **4** (least time), reflecting the amount of time you consciously spent in each. This will obviously be a very rough estimation, but your 'feeling' about this is what is sought.

#### Time Ranking

- Religious .....
- Administrative .....
- Financial .....
- Curricular .....

10. The most challenging aspect of the Religious dimension of my role as Principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia is

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Section 2 follows ...

## Section 2.

In response to the following statements, please circle the number on the scale which most closely represents your opinion.

	5 strongly agree	4 agree	3 unsure	2 disagree	1 strongly disagree
1. The Religious Aspect of the role is significant for me.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The Administrative Aspect of the role is significant for me.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The Financial Aspect of the role is significant for me.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The Curriculum Aspect of the role is significant for me.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Religious Leadership in the Catholic Secondary School is the sole responsibility of the Principal.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The Principal of a Catholic Secondary School must uphold the position of the Catholic Church in all matters	5	4	3	2	1
7. In exercising their pastoral responsibilities towards their communities, Principals of Catholic schools often experience conflict or tension with Church or System expectations or teachings.	5	4	3	2	1

	5 strongly agree	4 agree	3 unsure	2 disagree	1 strongly disagree
8. The Principal's primary responsibility is to ensure that the school meets the academic and vocational standards of the various SA education authorities	5	4	3	2	1
9. The position of the Principal as the designated Religious Leader in a Catholic school is a personal vocation.	5	4	3	2	1
10. The fundamental purpose of the Catholic school is the faith formation of its community.	5	4	3	2	1
11. The only thing of real importance that principals do is to create and manage the culture of the school	5	4	3	2	1

### Section 3

1. The most inspiring thing about being the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia is ...

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2. The most difficult thing about being the Principal of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia is ...

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3. **In preparation** for your role as Principal, and Religious Leader, of a Catholic Secondary School in South Australia,

- what have you done that has been useful?

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- What gaps (if any) were there in your preparation?

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4. Please indicate what Professional Development activities you have been involved in during this term (Term 1, 2005).  
(mark as appropriate)

- ☐ Undertaken formal education course(s) related to my role
- ☐ Engaged in professional reading
- ☐ Taken part in seminars presented by education authorities
- ☐ Actively contributed to the Principal's Association activities
- ☐ Other (please specify)

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5. What practical support have you received in your role as Religious Leader?

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6. In exercising your role as Religious Leader, what are some practical strategies which you have used in your school to help create a 'Gospel orientated culture?'

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7. The Principal must ensure the Vision and Ethos of the school is effectively nurtured. Many of the Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia have recently changed from being Congregational owned, and having a Religious Principal, to being Systemic, and/or having a lay Principal. Other schools may be preparing for this eventuality. How has this affected your role?

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8. As Religious Leader, the Principal needs the support of others in the school community to undertake this role successfully. Who are the significant people in your community who support you in this role? Please use generic titles, rather than naming individuals.

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9. How can Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia be further nurtured and supported in their role as Religious Leaders?

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10. Are there any other issues you would like to raise in relation to your role as Religious Leader which you feel are important, but which have not been addressed in this survey?

Please specify ...

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Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness in completing this survey. Could you please place it in the envelope provided, and return it to Frank McEvoy at Thomas More College.

Please note the **cut off date for returns in order for the data to be included in the results is May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

## **Appendix L**

### **Letter of Introduction for the Survey**

#### ***Insights into Religious Leadership –***

#### ***exploring the concept with Catholic Secondary School Principals***

#### **Survey for Principals, as part of a Doctoral research project**

### **INFORMATION LETTER**

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Frank McEvoy

**NAMES OF STAFF SUPERVISORS:** Dr. Annette Schneider  
Professor Ron Toomey

Dear Principal,

I would like to invite you to participate in a study to investigate the phenomenon of 'Religious Leadership' as it applies to the role and practice of Principals in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia.

The first stage to the project – a series of interviews with Secondary Principals – has already been completed. This next stage involves a survey of all Catholic Secondary Principals in South Australia, to gather feedback on selected issues that have emerged from the process so far.

Clearly, this is a sensitive subject, touching on a core area of your practice as a Principal in a Catholic Secondary School. Indeed, the topic is one that is often difficult to put into words, as the project invites you to share personal insights into a subject which is concerned with some very deep beliefs. None the less, I hope that you will be able to be part of this investigation, and will complete the survey attached. Surveys should be returned to me as early as possible, but no later than 13 May 2005.

I hope that the insights gained in this study will help clarify our understandings of the concept of Religious Leadership, and that they will affirm those Principals who participate and provide ideas and support for all working in this complex role. The findings will also contribute in a practical way to the body of knowledge in this area of professional practice, and will hopefully serve as a guide for the formation and inservice of new Principals, and in the development of courses designed for prospective Principals in Catholic Education in South Australia.

The information derived from the survey instrument will be confidential, and used only for the purposes of this research. Survey returns will be anonymous, and your name will not be used in any reporting of the data. Great care will be taken to ensure that no links will be able to be made between any statement and any person or school.

Questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor, Dr. Annette Schneider at the School of Educational Leadership, Australian Catholic University, P.O. 650, Ballarat, Victoria 3350 (telephone 03 5336 5349).

Principals will be provided with aggregated feedback on the findings, the conclusions and any recommendations arising from the project at its conclusion.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. If you should have any complaint or concern about any aspect of this study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and the Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee in Victoria:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus)  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3157                      Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

Yours sincerely

Frank McEvoy  
(Student Researcher)

## Appendix M

### Mail Message

**From:** Francis Mcevoy  
**To:** monica.conway@ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au  
**Date:** Thursday - May 5, 2005 4:58 PM  
**Subject:** Principal mailing

Hi Monica.

I would like to send an email through to all the secondary school Principals, and I believe I have to do it through someone at the CEO - and you were nominated as the one to go through!

Last term I sent out a survey out to all the secondary principals about religious leadership. This is part of my research project, and has the approval of the CEO through the Director.

I have received a number of these back already, and the deadline for returns is not here yet, but given that the holidays have interrupted the flow of consciousness on things like this, I would like to send a gentle reminder to everyone to try to complete it and send it to me.

So - the question is, can you organise this (or authorise it) for me please?

The text of the Memo follows:

*Memo to Secondary Principals*

*Do you remember getting a survey about Religious Leadership late last term?*

*If you have returned it already, thank you!*

*If it has just slipped down a bit in the 'for action' file, could I encourage you to have a go at completing it, and sending it off? Address to Frank McEvoy, Thomas More College, PO Box 535, Salisbury 5108.*

*This is part of a Doctoral research project, and the more feedback and response that comes in, the more valid the results of the project will be!*

*If you have misplaced this survey, and would still like to help by completing it, please ring Denise Ritzema at Thomas More College (8250 2677) and she will forward one to you. Closing date for returns is May 13, but May 17, after the public holiday, would be acceptable.*

*Thank you for your support!*

*Frank McEvoy*

## **Appendix N**

### **Themes for the Expert Reference Group**

#### Themes

##### Research Question 1:

***What do Church and System authorities understand by the concept of 'Religious Leadership' and how does this shape the role of the Principal in a Catholic Secondary School?***

- so, where was this in the interview for the job?
- many Principals valued the support of Parish priests
- but a number felt the institutional Church did not 'appreciate' what they were doing – value them as 'a' face of the Church
- all were aware of the Religious dimension of their role, but new Principals in particular found it difficult in the business of school life to give it much attention in the face of accountability for finances and other 'hard' matters
- what does the Church really want of us? Do they believe in us? Do we want the same things?

##### Research Question 2:

***How is Religious Leadership understood and practised in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?***

- Religious Leadership is not always a conscious activity, but it must be the underlying principle that informs every other aspect of the role
- Role of modeling
- Leadership can be a very pressured 'job', and you run the risk of making some decisions 'on the run' – important to have the principles firmly in place, so that one acts automatically from them
- Time for reflection is essential.
- Time for prayer, meditation, very important



- All used the obvious strategies – Newsletters, Assemblies etc as a public statement about the religious nature of the school
- Some spoke of the struggle with indifferent staff, students and the parent body generally.
- Where does the role of ‘religious leader’ finish? At the school gates? In the community?
- How does one ‘take the place’ of professed religious who established the spirit and charism of the schools?
- What are Catholic schools really for? Who says? Who thinks that?

Research Question 3:

***What are the key Principal formation and selection issues that need to be addressed if 'Religious Leadership' is to be nurtured and enhanced in Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?***

- Principals generally felt that they had very little preparation for the specifically Religious dimension of the role
- Principals felt that retreat type activities were vital to effective ongoing leadership of a Catholic community – time out, possibly structured, though not always
- Many felt that the role of mentor, and in this aspect, possibly a ‘spiritual director’ experienced in the world of schools, could be very useful
- At times the Principal, as ‘Religious Leader’ will struggle with aspects of Church: support is very important – input on current theology and the issues facing the contemporary Church, must be put before them
- Scripture and leadership of a Catholic school
- The ‘higher’ levels of leadership of a community – Sergiovanni’s ‘symbolic’ and ‘cultural’ levels of being.
- Time management and setting priorities

- The challenge to remain true to the charism of the school – what is it? - but to make it relevant to the contemporary world of the students.

## Appendix O

### HREC Approval to Conduct Research

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra  
Ballarat Melbourne



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#### Human Research Ethics Committee Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Annette Schneider Ballarat Campus

Co-Investigators: Prof Ron Toomey Melbourne Campus

Student Researcher: Mr Francis McEvoy Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

Religious Leadership: How is the call to Religious Leadership understood and practiced by Principals in selected Catholic Schools in South Australia?

for the period: 24/09/04 - 01/03/05

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V2004.05-11

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators/Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be or more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed:   
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

Date: 24/09/04

(Committee Approval.dot@28.06.2002)

## Appendix P

### Approval to Conduct Research (CESA)



#### Catholic Education Centre

116 George Street Thebarton SA 5031  
PO Box 179 Torrensville Plaza South Australia 5031  
Telephone: (08) 8301 6600  
Facsimile: (08) 8301 6611  
ISD: 61 8 8301 6600  
Email: [director@ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au](mailto:director@ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au)  
[www.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au)

M:\COORDINATION\CURRENT YEAR\EXECUTIVE 2004\HELEN O'BRIEN\RESEARCH\TR F MCEVOY RE RELIG LEADERSHIP RESRCH.DOC

Mr Frank McEvoy  
PO Box 67  
BIRDWOOD SA 5234

Dear Mr McEvoy,

Thank you for your recent letter in which you seek permission to contact selected Catholic Secondary Schools in connection with the research project *"Religious Leadership: How is the call to Religious Leadership understood and practiced by Principals in selected Catholic Secondary Schools in South Australia?"* I note that you propose to conduct interviews with Archbishop Wilson and Mr Allan Dooley and up to eight Principals initially, followed by a survey of all Catholic Secondary Principals in South Australia.

It will be necessary for you to negotiate directly with Archbishop Wilson and Mr Dooley regarding the level of anonymity that they will require in relation to any data and material gathered during your conversations with them.

In the normal course, permission of the Principal in each school to conduct research is required. Research in Catholic schools is granted on the basis that individual Principals, students, schools and the Catholic sector itself is not specifically identified in published research data and conclusions.

Approval is also contingent upon the following conditions, i.e. that:

- the research complies with the ethics proposal of the University
- the research complies with any provisions under the Privacy Act that may require adherence by you as researcher in gathering and reporting data
- no comparison between schooling sectors is made
- sector requirements relating to child protection and police checks are met by researchers:
  - where researchers obtain information in relation to a student which suggests or indicates abuse, this information must be

immediately conveyed to the Director of Catholic Education  
SA

- all researchers and assistants, who in the course of the research interact in any way with students, are required to undertake a police check.

As you indicate that there will be no direct contact with students, a police check will not be required in this instance.

Please accept my very best wishes for the research process. I look forward to hearing of the outcomes in due course.

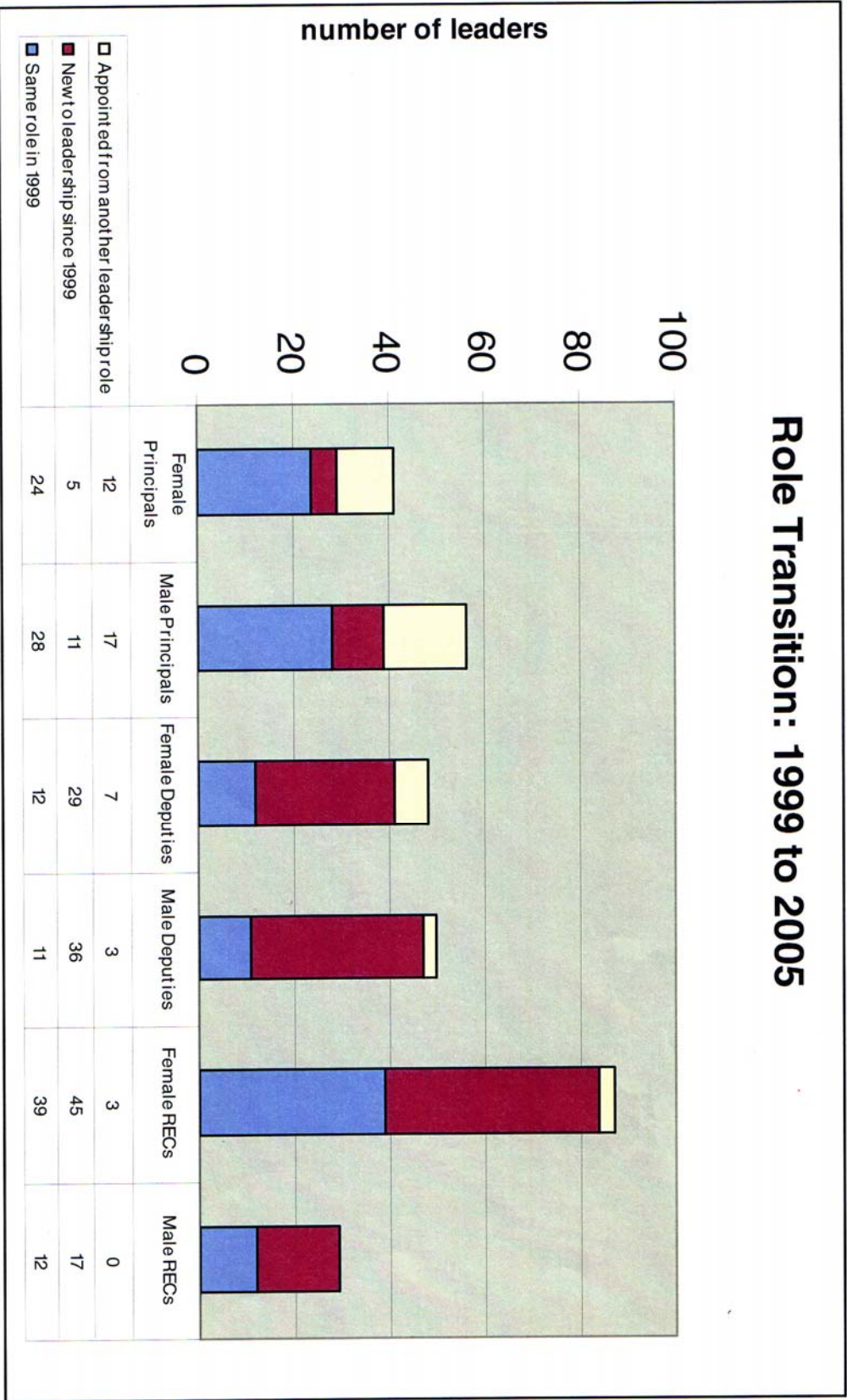
Yours sincerely



HELEN O'BRIEN  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - CATHOLIC EDUCATION SA

11 October 2004

Appendix Q: Role Transition 1999 - 2005



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