They too belong here : Investigating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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They Too Belong Here: Investigating the Relationship Between Catholic Parishes and Parish Schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

SIGNED: 

Colin MacLeod

DATE: 11/01/25

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Where once there were shared understandings of Catholic identity and mission, for many, the parish/school relationship has now become little more than physical proximity and ever more challenging, and often unfulfilled, expectations of individuals and communities. This study addresses a gap in the literature, by naming the key features of the parish/school relationship and proposing theory to enhance understanding and contextualise potential responses.

Using the principles of classic grounded theory, the research draws on constant comparison of unstructured interview data from parish priests and primary school principals in a metropolitan diocese of Aotearoa New Zealand. The purpose is to construct understanding of features which these key participants perceive as enhancing or limiting the parish/school relationship. The study also combines peripheral data from the literature to provide substantive analysis of the interplay between features of identity, leadership, mission, community, and change within the parish/school dynamic. Together, these features inform the development of the Parish/School Relationship Theory (PSRT) which contextualises groups and individuals as missing, longing, participating or belonging within the relationship, as indicated by their faith mission/vision or community/connection stances. Through providing a lens for understanding and navigating the complexities of parish/school interactions, the implications and opportunities for engagement and renewal are identified.

The research highlights the urgent need for a renewed focus on developing a shared sense of belonging, requiring clarity of mission and intentional community building, particularly in the face of declining parish engagement and increasing pressures on Catholic schools. While interview data was limited to the leadership positions of each entity, this research contributes to the discourse on parish formation and Catholic education by offering a framework that supports parishes and schools in fostering deeper connections. By addressing the realities of secularisation and the challenges of contemporary Catholic identity, the PSRT offers practical and theoretical pathways for revitalising the parish-school relationship in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used within the research.

Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa NZ)	A common term, appropriately inclusive of indigenous Māori people, referring to the country of New Zealand.
Catholic special character	A legislative term meaning Catholic beliefs and practices, especially in schools. Often referred to as Catholic character, or special character.
Church	Capitalised use of this term within a sentence refers to the universal Roman Catholic Church; uncapitalised refers to the local church building or community.
Director of Religious Studies	RE curriculum leader and/or Catholic character leader, often responsible for school liturgy and other Catholic school practice.
Education Review Office	The New Zealand government's external education evaluation agency.
Hauora	A te reo Māori term meaning wholistic (physical, mental/emotional, social and spiritual) wellbeing.
Katorika Māori	A te reo term for Maori who also identify as Catholic.
Kete	A te reo Māori term meaning a woven basket or bag.
Mana	A te reo Māori term incorporating status, power, authority, control, influence, spiritual power, and charisma.
Mana whenua	A te reo Māori term for Māori indigenous rights.
National Centre for Religious Studies	An agency of the NZ Bishops' Conference charged with providing and developing the Religious Education curriculum for all Catholic Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.
New Zealand Catholic Education Office	A national office serving the educational requirements of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, assisting them and other proprietors of Catholic state-integrated schools in their mission of providing Catholic education.
Pounamu	A te reo Māori term meaning greenstone or jade.

Preference	Part of the enrolment process where priority to enrol in a Catholic school is determined by meeting certain criteria. Applicants must have a particular or general religious connection with the special [Catholic] character of the school.
Primary school	A school that caters for children 5 to 10, or 5 to 12 years of age.
Proprietor	For all Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic primary schools, this refers to the bishop of the diocese who has ownership of the school's integrated land and buildings.
Proprietor's Appointee	Full members of the school board with all the same rights and obligations of other board members. Appointed by the bishop to assist in preserving the special character and property of the school.
School Board (Board of Trustees)	All Catholic schools in NZ are Crown-based entities governed by a school board (known as a board of trustees before 2023). All members have equal rights on the board. Most members are elected and up to four are appointed by the proprietor, who is usually the bishop, and are referred to as proprietor's representatives or 'prop. Reps'. The principal is always a member of the board.
State-integrated schools	Schools with a special character, which are funded through the Ministry of Education, owned by a proprietor, and governed by a school board.
Tamariki	A te reo Māori term meaning children.
Te reo Māori	The language of the Māori people of Aotearoa NZ, and one of three official languages of the country.
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The formal treaty between Māori and the British Crown signed in 1840 - often referred to as New Zealand's founding document.
Whānau	A te reo Māori term meaning family.

List of Acronyms

The following abbreviations are used within the research.

ACU	Australian Catholic University
BOT	Board of Trustees
BCECCP	Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council and Council of Priests
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CGT	Classic Grounded Theory
DRS	Director of Religious Studies
CLS	Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Canadian Canon Law Society, & Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand
ERO	Education Review Office
FCBCO	Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania
NCRS	National Centre for Religious Studies
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia
NZ	New Zealand
NZCBC	New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference
NZCEO	New Zealand Catholic Education Office
PFA	Local Association of Parents and Friends of the School
PSRT	Parish/School Relationship Theory
SI	Symbolic Interactionism
USCCB	US Conference of Catholic Bishops
XIIISB	XIII Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Context

Catholic schools and parishes co-exist with one another in challenging times. “Educating for faith in our secular age is an uphill battle, the likes of which we have never had before” (Groome, 2014, p. 120). Now more than ever, within this context of challenge, principals and priests, young people and whānau[1], educators and parishioners, need support from one another. This research identifies the problem that: today, Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa NZ[2] have little connection outside of physical proximity, usually a shared name, and independent understandings that they are each Catholic. Thus, the potential of parishes and parish schools to respond effectively to rising secularisation and increasing calls for new evangelisation is hampered by a lack of understanding regarding the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in this land.

Officially, the Catholic parish and parish school do not exist in isolation. They were established to be in relationship with one another. They are bound together under the canonical authority of the diocesan bishop, established in a common geographical area and in a community which falls under the auspices of a parish priest (Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland [CLS], 1983; Macgregor, 2018), and are both meant to share in the evangelising and educating mission of the Church (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019). Yet, at a time when both entities face increasing challenges to survive, let alone flourish, and each struggles to address ever stronger collective calls to live out the mission of the Church in a rising tide of secularisation, there is a growing perception of each feeling unsurported by the other (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 2022; 2013; New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference [NZCBC], 2014; Wilberforce Foundation, 2023). At the same time, there is little literature which speaks directly to the parish/school relationship. This research addresses that gap and need.

1.1.1 Background of the Parish/School Relationship

Historically and globally, the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools was strong and founded on shared understandings of Catholic identity and mission (CLS, 1983, para. 773-776; Green, 2018; MacCormick, 2004), but this is now rarely the case. Despite a clear desire on the part of the New Zealand Catholic bishops for an overt, effective and committed relationship to exist

[1] A te reo Māori term meaning family.
[2] A common term referring to the country of New Zealand which appropriately honours indigenous Māori people.

between the two entities (NZCBC, 2014), there is little evidence of parishes and schools having or establishing such an interdependent relationship in Aotearoa NZ (Owen, 2018).

Furthermore, the context of Catholic schools is such that some are struggling to remain open (Macgregor, 2018), and others are packed to capacity (New Zealand Catholic Education Office [NZCEO], 2019), while parish numbers are in broad decline (Owen, 2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). Common areas of potential, developed later in this study, are shared identity, leadership, mission, and evangelisation (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Green, 2018). Thus, this research responds to various and often obscure issues associated with the parish and parish school community relationship including elements of understanding who they are (identity); ways in which individuals and approaches impact the direction of each entity (leadership); and, determination of Catholic purpose and direction (mission and evangelisation.) The following tentatively contextualises each of these fledgling features from the literature alone.

1.1.1.1 Identity Context.

A recurring theme is that of varied understandings of identity in terms of schools and parishes. For some, the identity of a Catholic school is profoundly grounded in its association with, and support of, the mission of the Church (NZCBC, 2014). For others, the identity of the Catholic school is more closely bound to its function as an effective place of secular learning, with limited value placed on its religious association (Education Review Office [ERO], 2019). Similarly, the perceptions of what a parish is may differ markedly from the perspective of a parish priest, a Catholic school principal, or other members of the wider school and parish communities. This diverse understanding of identity is represented in a range of influences on the relationship between parish and parish school. These are developed later into significant categories (key features), but in this initial contextualisation, literature suggests consideration of two key identity sub-themes: 1) Ecclesial and Community Identity; and 2) Catholic School Identity in Aotearoa NZ.

Ecclesial and Community Identity.

The parish and the parish school have independent but associated ecclesial identities within an established Catholic Church framework. In practice the Catholic Church calls each into being and designates their function, albeit with limited clarity around the details and breadth of this function (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Green, 2018; McDonough, 2011).

At the canonical level, “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop” (CLS, 1983, c. 515). It has certain physical boundaries, formal requirements regarding financial management, and a range of expectations in terms of the spiritual and pastoral care of those who belong to the parish. All of which fall under the responsibility of the parish priest who is tasked with carrying out “the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing” (CLS, 1983, c. 519) within the parish. Specifically, then, in the context of this research, the ecclesial identity of the parish and parish school are tightly bound to the role of the parish priest who, under the auspices of the diocesan bishop, is canonically responsible for the formation of local Catholic young people and children (CLS, 1983, cc. 773-776).

However, experience of what constitutes or defines the parish suggests that it is much more than a legal definition. The parish is deemed central to the life of the Church. It is where the local faithful gather to celebrate the Sacraments, especially Eucharist, and to be community. It is intended to be a place of belonging and connection. Pope Francis writes that the parish is “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters” (Francis, 2013, para. 28). This ‘Church’[3] of Catholic people and practices is referred to as a community of mission, witness, and evangelisation not only within formal church buildings but also in the homes of the people – including children and their families associated with Catholic schools.

The understanding of Church as community is further developed by Mollidor (2014), in researching parish life in the Australian Catholic context, as an ‘ecclesiology of communion’. This is a phrase often used to refer to the wider Catholic Church, but Mollidor argues that it best refers to local parish communities: “If ordinary parishioners are going to experience how the Church enacts that ecclesiology, it will normally, perhaps exclusively, be through their local parish. The concept of community is essential to an understanding of parish” (Mollidor, 2014, p. 281). Thus, a necessary step is inquiry into the communal relationship between the parish and its parish school.

The formal ecclesial identity of the Catholic school in canon law, beyond those links to the bishop and parish priest already stated, focusses more on rights and duties of parents and rights and duties of the Church, rather than on the specific structure of the schools which are established to support them. The prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education summarises the position by advancing

[3] Single quotation marks are occasionally used as an adjunct to strict APA formatting to emphasise particular words or phrases, and to avoid confusion with direct quotations.

that parents have a legal “right and obligation to give a Catholic education to their children” and the Church has a “right and obligation to offer parents the help needed to carry out this task of theirs” (Grocholewski, 2008, p. 151). It is in this ecclesial context, of the Church honouring its right and obligation to support parents, that parish schools have been established. The critical role of building community through pastoral care and education, a responsibility of the Church tasked to the parish priest (CLS, 1983), has been supported by dioceses building Catholic schools to educate young people and placing the school within the parish geographical boundaries and within the parish community.

Historically, Catholic parish schools, established as a part of the parish, have always played a crucial role in the life of the Church (John Paul II, 2001). They not only provide state-endorsed education in subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics, but are established as places of Catholic spiritual formation and pastoral care. The historical reality of establishing parish schools for this purpose is often captured in local publications of parish histories. Bishop Whyte, for instance, in announcing a new parish school in Dunedin in 1931, proclaimed:

> Everything to be done in this church-school, and everything to be said, will be done and said in honour of the sacred name of Jesus… In this school the little ones will be taught to lisp His name, to learn lessons of His divinity, to be told of His parables and His miracles.
> (MacCormick, 2004, p. 4)

The bishops of Aotearoa NZ indicate their belief in the currency of the position that, “The Catholic school is an ecclesial entity, reflecting the ‘deepest nature’ of the Church in its life, and participating fully in the Church’s mission by forming Christ in the lives of others” (NZCBC, 2014, p. 4). This statement is synchronous with the global Catholic Church position which argues, “As an ecclesial entity the Catholic school reflects the nature of the Church. It proclaims the word of God in its programmes and activities; it celebrates the Sacraments and assists parents and parishes in preparing the members of its community for their reception” (CCE, 1998, para. 11).

Thus, it is apparent that the ecclesial identity of the parish school is closely tied to the identity of the parish. They share the parish priest, land, and usually the name of the parish. They share families, as many of the students in these schools also belong to the parish as members of Catholic families, even if many may not claim this connection or be regular participants in Sunday Eucharist (Owen,

2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). Theoretically and tangibly, they share in the mission and nature of the Church even if they are unsure as to what this means.

There is danger in a foundational sense of shared ecclesial and community identity between parish school and parish being taken for granted or assumed to be self-evident. At best, this is a contentious stance in light of declining parish numbers and diminishing individual Catholic engagement (Owen, 2018). At worst, it can be a missed opportunity for renewing, or establishing, a more authentic, lived, shared identity which may better support both entities.

Schools can inadvertently or intentionally position themselves as separate from the parish. A large study in the United States of America discovered that it is common for school leaders to put significant effort into establishing their school's own 'sense of community' in isolation from the parish (Ferrari & Dosen, 2016). The data described how energy and planning can have significant benefits to each particular school, however, the positive impact does not flow over into pulling the wider community together (Ferrari & Dosen, 2016). At the same time, the research notes that building the school sense of community does not divide those families within the community who choose to participate or not to participate in wider parish life. Effectively, then, Ferrari and Dosen (2016) claim the parish can sit outside the parish school community with no positive or negative effects. This may indicate a missed opportunity for growing the larger, shared sense of community should the parish participate in the planning and implementation of strategies to enhance this relationship. It may also indicate a reluctance and/or lack of vision on the part or the wider parish who may simply choose not to engage. The absence of specific data on such factors supports the need for this research seeking to better understand the ecclesial and community relationships involved.

Catholic School Identity in Aotearoa NZ.

Catholic schools in this land have a unique formal relationship with the state which adds additional complexity to the challenge of understanding who they are in relationship to the parish. The Private Schools Conditional Integration Act formalised a partnership between the Church and the State (Government of New Zealand, 1975). As a result, salaries of teachers and the regular running costs and maintenance of Catholic schools became state funded. Now incorporated into the Education and Training Act (Government of New Zealand, 2020), Catholic schools are actually required to maintain their 'special character' and provide associated religious education (Government of New Zealand, 1989; Wanden & Birch, 2007). Referred to as state-integrated schools, each Catholic school

has a legal integration agreement with the state which requires them to have an overt Catholic character. This is the case even though the secular state has little or no interest in the content or quality of Catholic programmes or practices, as evidenced by religious education, as a subject, being omitted from any national monitoring (ERO, 2019). This creates a strange dualism between state and Church expectations of the Catholic parish school which must be managed largely by the principal.

A formal link to the parish occurs through the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' agreements with the state setting in law a system of 'preferential entry' (preference[4]) whereby most Catholic schools are required to ensure that 95% of enrolling students can demonstrate a "particular or general religious connection" with the special character of the school (NZCEO, 2016, p. 42). Preference of enrolment is usually determined on behalf of the bishop by the parish priest, who in his ecclesial position of authority signs the preference form which must be presented to the school by parents as part of the enrolment process.

Preference is intended to ensure that almost all students in Catholic parish schools are Catholic, and/or have a proven link to the Catholic community. However, in practice, diocesan Mass count numbers indicate increasingly fewer students and their families are choosing to belong to their parish community. Despite very clear criteria (NZCEO, 2016, p. 145), this process is not without its complications and is a major challenge for leaders of New Zealand parishes and parish schools.

The power of the priest to admit or refuse entry to the parish school can be a point of contention between the school and parish, especially if the school is experiencing declining numbers and the priest requires regular Mass attendance before granting preference. Similarly, principals who choose to flout this legal requirement put at risk the Catholic identity of the school and can raise the ire of the local Catholic Education Office and Ministry of Education. While situations such as these are routinely raised at local and diocesan levels, there is an absence of robust national literature which considers contexts, causes, and possible solutions to issues around the preference system. Such data is prevalent in this research, particularly regarding leadership of each entity.

[4] A legal interpretation by the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference of the NZ Education and Training Act (Government of New Zealand, 2020) requiring a particular or general religious connection, where the parish priest must 'sign off' a child's formal link to the Catholic Church as part of the enrolment process. Most Catholic schools are only permitted by New Zealand law to have 5% or fewer non-preference enrolments. See section 5.1.2.2 for more detail.

The existence of integration agreements supports the financial viability of Catholic schools and ensures that fiscal pressure is not placed on the parish to keep the school operational. This is in stark contrast to the United States of America, for example, where financial factors are closing Catholic schools at an alarming rate and many parishes are trying to find means to keep them alive (Macgregor, 2018; Simonds et al., 2017). However, this level of financial security in New Zealand creates a complex dynamic in terms of how the school identifies with the Church and the State. This is particularly so for the principal of the Catholic school who falls under the ecclesial authority of the parish priest, the state authority of the Ministry of Education, and bears professional and social responsibility toward her/his students and their family/whānau who may or may not value a connection to the local Church.

1.1.1.2 Leadership Context.

Quality leadership emerges from the literature as a crucial requirement for establishing and maintaining an effective relationship between parish and parish school (NZCEO, 2020c; Simonds et al., 2021; Sultmann et al., 2022). A key aspect within this is the potential conflict with exercising authority between priest and principal, both of whom have interrelated but quite distinct roles in terms of the Catholic school.

An historical literature review into parishes and the role of principals draws on 120 years' experience of religious sisters being principals of Catholic schools in Aotearoa NZ. The research uncovers a consistent attitude of negative superiority on the part of local priests, usually involving "issues of authority, gender and money" (Collins, 2014, p. 82). The research is limited to the perspective of Dominican sisters and is undertaken and written by a current member of that religious order. Notwithstanding the potential of researcher bias, the historical evidence consistently outlines instances where the canonical status of the local priest trumped the professional experience and capacity of trained teachers and educational leaders, particularly women, in terms of decision-making in parish schools. The same researcher asserts that this has been to the regular detriment of schools and their communities (Collins, 2014, 2015).

While Collins (2014) references the experiences of religious sisters as committed, professed, Catholic principals over many decades, McDonough (2017) considers the broader role of lay teachers in leading Catholic character in schools today. His findings show similar examples of discord while also revealing 'internal renewal' and an overt desire to seek positive change for the better, particularly from the perspective of lay involvement and leadership.

Attributes and skills of non-clerical educators are also found to remain subservient to the will of the parish priest, even in the light of the imperative of Vatican II advancing "clergy and laity cooperating and allocating their energies based on presumed competencies" (McDonough, 2011, p. 69). Similarly, the encyclical, *Christifideles Laici,* while encouraging diversity and complementarity within Church leadership, reminds the reader that "no charism dispenses a person from reference and submission to the Pastors of the Church" (John Paul II, 1988, para. 24). In the context of this study, such a stance is evident in the parish priest retaining higher formal ecclesial authority than the principal over the parish Catholic school, especially in terms of roll admission. McDonough (2017) critically reflects, "John Paul certainly recognises the laity as capable, but always in need of close supervision" (p. 250).

The place of ecclesial authority highlights the importance of the parish priest's role regarding the Catholic school and suggests a current need for complementarity and mutual support of priest and principal, especially in their leadership roles. Boyle and Dosen (2017) highlighted the impact of ecclesial leadership and the understandings clerics hold about the significance of their role. They find "the teaching ministry of the priest impacts the entirety of his ministry" (Boyle & Dosen, 2017, p. 111). They also make clear that the *attitudes* of bishops and priests play an important role in whether Catholic schools are effective or not. Their research points to the importance of priests not just having the responsibility for pastoral care and education but also having the capacity to lead effectively in this area.

Regrettably, conclusions regarding the authority of clergy, emerging from a robust mixed-method study of the curriculum in United States' seminaries, reveal that priests are usually ordained with little specific knowledge or training for working effectively with modern Catholic schools (Boyle & Dosen, 2017). The study includes analysis of documentary evidence from seminaries, deriving and posing specific questions from the data, then applying qualitative theory to discussion data to deepen understanding. The primary findings reveal a dearth of preparation given to this aspect of training for future priests. In line with the later findings of this research, the article highlights the need for good communication and support between priest and principal, and for the priest to understand "the daily operation of the school to be the primary role of the principal" (Boyle & Dosen, 2017, p. 117).

Another mixed method study focused on the identity of Catholic schools as seen by teachers in Catholic schools in Queensland (Gleeson et al., 2020). The authors found that to create and maintain

what they call a “Gospel Culture” (p. 45) the principal must have appropriate faith formation and religious education qualifications to lead the school’s Catholic character. They indicate that this is ideally backed up by a staff who also have proven competence and enthusiasm for this work.

While the capacity of laity in Catholic school leadership is conveyed as critical, an additional complication and challenge is that, even if well-formed and qualified, the falling numbers of priests in Western countries is putting more stress on lay leaders and greater responsibilities onto the schools (Owen, 2018; Spesia, 2016; Wolsonovich et al., 2018). The resulting expectations, such as being required to lead sacramental programmes for young people in state schools, while offering opportunities for schools to effectively engage in the life of the parish, tend to create lines of separation rather than shared leadership, and can add significant extra workload to principals and other staff (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). The perception that the school must provide the workforce because the parish no longer can is not a concept which warms the hearts of either side.

It is important to acknowledge, in this contextualisation of the research, that there are positive examples of priests and principals working together. One rare example in the literature describes the potential of shared understanding and vision between the parish priest and principal/s. The author, Harris (2012), explores benefits that come from three Catholic school principals and their parish priest working effectively with one another during challenging times. While focusing on a very small sample and not directed towards the relationship with parish as such, the significance of the role of the parish priest is expounded. The research particularly refers to a shared vision as something that “kept the parish priest and principals focused throughout the times of rapid change and challenge” (Harris, 2012, p. 115). However, the shared vision is described in the context of the three schools with no reference to the vision of the parish.

Such shared vision, when present and effective, can have positive effects that are unitive for the whole community. As one principal states, in an American study, “I feel that the parishioners feel we are their partner; we are definitely a ministry of the Church, we aren’t a separate entity” (Killeen, 2017, p. 59). This seems in stark contrast with those who Harris (2012) suggests feel ‘dumped on’ because of the lack of parish personnel. Further data introduced how “pastors and principals of suburban Catholic elementary schools perceive the key areas of mission and need within the parish school” (Killeen, 2017, p. 9) when the roles of each leader in the parish school and parish are addressed in the context of the sustainability of the Catholic school. However, the primary focus is

unidirectional – aimed at the survival of schools – and does not consider the mutual possibilities of the parish/parish school relationship.

Similarly, rare literature on priest/principal relationships concerns aspects which are not focused on Catholic identity or building a shared community between parish and school, but rather on considering the viability or day-to-day running of the school itself, and/or building the school community. Catholic religiosity is "usually an omitted variable in studies on Catholic school effects" (Killeen, 2017, p. 19). Macgregor (2018) goes so far as to describe the parish as the "missing middle unit of analysis in the study of contemporary Catholicism" (p. 21). Indeed, this seems to further identify a problem by indicating a gap in the literature regarding description of challenges and opportunities for identity and community building which might emerge through a strong parish/parish school relationship.

Researchers are rightly concerned with issues of identity and leadership in Catholic schools and parishes. However, there is little written about shared approaches to addressing these issues within parish school and parish. This context is particularly identified and developed later in this research through gathering and categorising data from priests and principals in the Aotearoa NZ context.

1.1.1.3 Mission and Evangelisation Context.

The final contextualisation theme supporting this research is that of mission and evangelisation. A core responsibility of both parish school and parish is participation in the Church's mission to share the good news of the Gospel. In recent times, responding to a growing need to also reach out to those who are non-practicing, non-confessional, 'drifting' Catholics, the term 'new evangelisation' has been coined and used widely (Brown & O' Reilly, 2017; Francis, 2013; Rymarz, 2011). The rising call for evangelisation suggests a missionary outreach perspective, shared across the parish school and parish, of being "geared to witness; to live as Christ lived" (Sultmann & Brown, 2014, p. 4).

The Church claims that "Catholic schools are at once places of evangelisation, of complete formation, of inculturation, of apprenticeship in a lively dialogue..." (CCE, 1998, par 11). Sharing in this mission poses a major challenge for parish schools and parishes (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). In describing how to create a Catholic curriculum which reaches to the hearts of young people, D'Orsa & D'Orsa (2012) draw from a wealth of international peer-reviewed material to deconstruct some of the complexity around this issue. They outline how the roles tend to have swapped in terms of the mission orientation of Catholic schools and parishes during the time since Vatican II: where once it

was the parish which held a clear mission focus, now it is more likely to be the school. “Thirty years ago, few Catholic schools had any clear sense of what their mission was. That is no longer the case” (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012, p. 229).

Contemporary Catholic schools, including those in Aotearoa NZ, typically have annual plans containing strategic goals linked to a mission statement and a set of named and claimed core Gospel values or virtues (NZCEO, 2018b). However, D’Orsa & D’Orsa (2012) signal that most parishes have no formal articulation of their mission. The result, in terms of the parish/parish school relationship, is that “a difficulty now lies in being paired with a parish that has little sense of its own identity because it has little sense of its mission” (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012, p. 229).

Today, the stated hope of parishes lacking a sense of mission is that if Catholic schools have effective leadership and are secure in a rich Catholic identity, they will play a major role in the new evangelisation. This is particularly so in terms of re-orientating parishes away from maintenance to a more missionary stance. “‘Missionary parishes’ require schools imbued with a vision of what the Church can be, not schools whose leaders are bogged down and distracted by where the vision and skills of the local Church are currently” (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012, p. 232). This vision, of rising to the challenge of becoming what the Church can be, imagines a potentially powerful relationship between parish and parish school. However, without research to discover what factors may be at play in the relationship between them, it is difficult to determine how such a powerful relationship may be realised.

Other international research challenges the claim that the schools have clarity around their sense of mission (Killeen, 2017). When researching approaches taken by schools to maintain their viability and avoid closure, the data revealed that mission statements can be meaningless if they are simply following a formulaic model that looks good but are not meaningfully grounded in the school community which, in the Catholic school context, includes the wider Church community. Therefore, the argument is made that although schools claim a mission there is often a lack of clarity around just what that mission is. Killeen (2017) believes that rather than point the finger of blame, no one can be held accountable because this lack of clarity comes from the reality that Catholics all over the world lack a clear mission in postmodern society.

While ranging from highly optimistic (NZCBC, 2014) to deeply confronting (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012), none of the literature claims that clarity of mission is an easy goal. However, a qualitative study

focused on the identity of Catholic schools in relation to the new evangelisation, involving surveys and eight focus groups across Australia, suggests a practical approach can be beneficial (Sultmann & Brown, 2014). A means of addressing the challenge, conscious of varied levels of wealth, faith, spiritual practices, and levels of connection to religion, is to respond with mission outreach in the form of praxis. An example is school leadership creating contexts where students and their families participate in areas of social justice associated with Catholic social teaching, which enhances their awareness of being connected to the wider Catholic community. In so doing, the theory of mission is developed through the practice of missioning and becomes, in itself, an expression of living Catholic life. The idea is that "the call to mission invites an ever-deepening appreciation of the spiritual, ecclesial, social and wider communitarian life of the Catholic school" (Sultmann & Brown, 2014, p. 9). This effectively means that people can learn and belong through doing and participating together.

The Sultmann & Brown (2014) proposal supports a recurring element in the literature of addressing evangelisation within schools as an opportunity for schools and parishes to benefit from a shared participation in, and articulation of, mission. It was because of the Church losing its vitality, particularly in terms of community identity and shared mission, that the new evangelisation concept emerged (Francis, 2013; John Paul II, 1983, 1990). Success is likely, then, to depend on the vibrancy of local communities empowering one another (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). Pope Francis (2013) adds that people are wanting to belong to life-giving, authentic, joyful, and purposeful communities and recognises that if Church communities, such as Catholic parishes and parish schools, do not exhibit these qualities then many people are choosing simply to belong elsewhere.

People choosing not to belong to or participate in the parish community presents another evangelisation challenge evident in the literature. Several research articles highlight a reality that most students who are part of the parish school community do not regularly participate in Sunday Mass. This is certainly the case in Australia (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019) and New Zealand (Duthie-Jung, 2012; NZCBC, 2014; Owen, 2018; Wanden & Birch, 2007). A myriad of writers comment on why this might be: a lack of vibrancy (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012); no desire to belong (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017); lack of relevance (Rossiter, 2018); reduction in religiosity (Killeen, 2017); and a lack of joy (Francis, 2013); to name a few.

Several researchers make the point that Mass attendance is not the responsibility of the Catholic school, and that non-attendance is not indicative of poor-quality religious education, or weak

experience of Catholic culture, in the Catholic school (Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Owen, 2018; Rossiter, 2018). It is common for young people and their families to have a strong sense of connection and belonging as part of the parish school community, and simply choose not to participate outside the school context (Duthie-Jung, 2012).

One response to this non-participation is to direct the challenge back to the Church itself. Rossiter (2018), drawing on extensive experience and knowledge from within the Australian and wider international religious education field, synthesises a substantial body of research to conclude that the Church itself needs to change. He states that making the Church more meaningful and relevant to students is simply not possible: "Only the Church can do this" (Rossiter, 2018, p. 5). It is a call for reform, and one which is supported by Pope Francis to varying degrees through-out *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2013).

One approach to parish school families' lack of participation in religious observances is to accept that religious education and faith formation may not be the reason for attending Catholic schools (Bott, 2017; Groome, 2014; Sultmann & Brown, 2014). However, a parish that reflects how vitally important students and their families are to the parish (Killeen, 2017), that shares with them a sense of mission (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012), that is authentic in engaging with the wider dimensions of being community (Green, 2018), and is dynamic and welcoming (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017), may provide an environment where families may wish to belong. Simply put, "Communities like a parish or school should offer possibilities for experiencing openness and love, affirmation and growth" (Francis, 2019a, par 216). The New Zealand Catholic Bishops, in unison with the formal teaching of the Catholic Church, are very clear on the Eucharist being the source and summit of the Christian life (NZCBC, 2014; Paul VI, 1964a).

Lack of attendance at Eucharist may not mean lack of faith, or even lack of a sense of belonging. The literature suggests hesitancy in determining faith commitment or levels of belonging solely by the Mass count (Owen, 2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017; Whittle, 2014). Many students, families and staff of Catholic schools claim a level of Catholic identity, even though they do not belong to a community of faith other than that of the Catholic school. Further, it is argued that the evidence of participation in and enthusiasm for rite of passage liturgies, such as the sacrament of Confirmation, indicates a level of engagement with parish life through the school and a desire not to be cut off from the formal Church (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). Reasons behind this complex reality of partial

or erratic participation come to the fore in addressing the research problem and recognising features which impact on the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools.

1.1.2 The Researcher's Background

The researcher's professional experience, as a long-term local and national leader in Catholic education in Aotearoa NZ, has included first-hand encounters with recurring challenges and frustrations between parish and parish school communities. He has served on school boards for Catholic primary schools, and on various parish and pastoral area councils. Additionally, his role as the director of the National Centre for Religious Studies, leading religious education curriculum development and resourcing for all Catholic schools in the country, along with over two decades of teaching and leading in a Catholic secondary school, provides considerable experience and awareness that all is not well within most parish/school relationships. National work with bishops, priests, principals and DRSs[5] provides regular reception of comments from either parish or school contexts that the other is at best not doing enough, or at worst, actively undermining the intent and work of the other. Such experience supported the need for better understanding, particularly of the Aotearoa NZ context, through quality research in this area.

1.2 Research Design

The aim of this research is to explain the complexities of relationships that exist between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. This aim responds to a gap in the literature, and addresses the problem that contemporary Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa NZ have little connection outside of physical proximity, usually a shared name, and independent understandings that they are each Catholic. The following section outlines stances and approaches to addressing this aim through the research design.

1.2.1 Epistemology

The lack of literature addressing the parish/school relationship, associated with the researcher's professional experience, supports a relativist ontology and a constructivist understanding of the way things may be known. Thus, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered and quantified are considered not to exist, but rather multiple meanings and understandings may be uncovered and explored through qualitative research seeking and engaging with experience and meanings offered by research participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Levers, 2013).

[5] Director of Religious Studies - refers to the RE curriculum leader and/or Catholic character leader, often responsible for school liturgy and other Catholic school practice.

The associated epistemological stance of constructivism creates a context where individual participants are understood as human beings in-the-world engaging with objects, including other people, and making sense of them (Crotty, 1998). In the case of this research into the parish/school relationship, those interviewed engaged in a process of developing shared new understandings from individual personal relationship experience (Glaser & Holton, 2007), which emerged as complex but grounded and identifiable key features of those substantive relationships.

1.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Data was viewed and justified through an interpretivist paradigm which facilitated rich interpretation of participants' lived experiences. The alignment of this perspective with seeking to explore beliefs, understandings, values, and attitudes, as they influence people's actions, is well documented (Andrews, 2012; Chowdhury, 2014; Oliver, 2012).

In addition, symbolic interactionism (SI) was utilised to hone the interpretivist perspective within this research. SI is a sociological theory of how individuals create and interpret meanings through social interactions, emphasising the role of symbols and language in shaping human behaviour and society (Blumer, 1980; Mead, 1934). In particular, the SI understanding that individuals and the contexts within which they exist are inseparable (Handberg et al., 2015) forms a strong element for this research. Priests and principals were chosen as interview participants specifically because in their most salient roles, as leaders of parishes or schools, they were able to define, describe, and contextualise objects and their meanings, as lived realities, from their experiences and perspectives within this research context (Bowers, 1989).

1.2.3 Research Methodology

The relativist ontological stance and constructivist epistemology of the researcher led to recognition of synergy with and adoption of the principles of classic grounded theory (CGT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a structured but highly flexible methodology (Glaser & Holton, 2007), CGT proved eminently appropriate for qualitative research which sought to better understand the parish/school relationship and to develop associated substantive theory.

1.2.3.1 Principles of Classic Ground Theory.

The initial CGT approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has developed into many distinct iterations (Charmaz, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1998). The researcher chose to align most closely

with classic grounded theory by utilising its principles of: systematic constant comparison; categorisation; development of theory; limiting of researcher bias; and not forcing the data by accessing the literature only after interview data had been fully categorised (Glaser, 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research intentionally utilises these key principles, which align with this relativist constructivist research, rather than completely apply Glaser's original method. Hereafter, the term "the principles of classic ground theory" refers to these five principles within the original CGT.

The principles of CGT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) required minimal consultation with extant research at the initial stages of the study. Detailed interrogation of the literature occurred only after the categorisation phase to determine resonance or contrast with emergent categories, and to avoid establishing bias prior to completing this process. Pre-categorisation reading only occurred at the level of determining if research already existed in this area, to establish the worthiness of this research proposal. Such reading revealed a dearth of international or Aotearoa NZ academic research, or formal Catholic Church documents, with the relationship rarely referenced and parishes and parish schools usually being considered as independent from each other. Engagement with the literature after the categorisation phase was critical in supporting articulation of the varied facets of each key feature, and in developing the final theory.

1.2.3.2 Method.

This research was undertaken within a metropolitan area of a Catholic diocese in Aotearoa New Zealand. The researcher chose to place the locus of study in this country because it is the context within which he lives and works, and while like other countries it presents a distinct Catholic educational landscape. The metropolitan area from which participants were interviewed offers a microcosm of the broader diocesan context, encompassing many of its key cultural, social, and ecclesial dynamics

The diocese comprises a mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural communities across a large geographical area. Its Catholic parishes and parish schools reflect a wide range of socio-economic realities, ethnic diversity, and expressions of Catholic identity. Like other dioceses across the country, it faces significant challenges posed by increasing secularisation, declining parish engagement, and shifting patterns of Catholic participation. These factors contribute to a complex and often under-explored relationship between parishes and parish schools.

Aotearoa New Zealand presents a distinctive national context for this research. Catholic schools operate within a globally unique state-integrated system, receiving government funding while being legally required to preserve their special Catholic character. Though not a focus of this research due to participants not raising it, the cultural landscape is further shaped by a formal bicultural partnership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi[6], and by increasing recognition of Māori spirituality, values, and language in Catholic settings. In addition, the Catholic community has changed in recent decades through migrant communities from the Pacific Islands, the Philippines, India, and other regions, contributing to a vibrant cultural and devotional diversity within parishes and schools.

The context for this research is Catholic parishes with one or more affiliated Catholic primary schools. Such schools in Aotearoa NZ, having children aged between five and 12, are usually linked to a single parish (NZCEO, 2016). Chosen parishes and schools were within an eight-kilometre radius of a metropolitan area, in a single diocese within Aotearoa NZ. This appropriately narrowed the focus of the research to parishes and schools who were aware of their parish/school relationship, and who had an awareness of other such relationships within the wider research participatory group.

Parish priests and Catholic primary school principals were chosen as the interview participants. In their salient leadership roles these two groups of individuals brought a significant range of experience and perspective to the interview process.

Unstructured interviews were used within the framework of CGT (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), because they go deeper than ordinary conversations and are not restricted by external criteria which may otherwise limit the potential for the interviewee to drive the direction of the interview themselves. To ensure the professional conversation remained focused on the research aim, the primary research question was, “What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa NZ?” Two guiding questions further supported constructing key features of the relationship by asking, “What features do parish priests and principals perceive as enhancing the relationship between parish and parish school?”, and “What features do parish priests and principals perceive as limiting the relationship?”.

[6] The formal treaty between Māori and the British Crown signed in 1840 - often referred to as New Zealand’s founding document.

Interviews with priests and principals were conducted individually, with memos made during and after the research conversations. Transcripts were recorded and line-by-line coding occurred with codes being recorded in NVivo, then affirmed, revised, or discarded as subsequent coding of each individual interview took place. Through the process of constant comparison, initial categories coalesced into sub-categories (unrefined features) and eventually into key features. On completion of naming the key features the researcher extensively engaged with the literature as associated data in its own right (Glaser, 2002b) to further support contextualising and describing these features and developing authentic substantive theory (Glaser, 1998; Rakhmawati, 2019). This process resulted in the Parish/School Relationship Theory.

Throughout the qualitative research process, careful attention was paid to ensuring the establishment of the trustworthiness of the study in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Care was taken by the researcher to limit personal bias throughout the interview and categorisation phases of this research. Some personal and professional experience was only introduced to data presentation, and formulation of theory, after the key features had been identified, and literature incorporated. Ethical considerations were also prioritised as per the National Health and Medical Research Council code for responsible conduct of research and associated ethical guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007, 2018). Support included active supervision from ACU doctoral supervisors, and involved interview participants having opportunity to clarify, change, or delete contributions after interviews. Interviewees were also invited to respond to findings as presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 when full drafts of these were shared with them prior to writing Chapter 6.

1.2.3.3 Clarifying Definitions and Understandings.

The final chapters of this research determine meanings associated with the terms parish and parish school. Applying the principles of CGT and incorporating SI, the researcher deemed it important to introduce rather than define both these concepts in this chapter to allow the research process itself to present and outline the richness and complexity of each term. The same approach applies to associated understandings of identity, leadership, mission, and evangelisation within the communities.

Seeking to draw out new understandings of parish and parish school, through distilling and outlining key features of this relationship, possessed synergy with Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic Approach (Archer, 1995). Archer's theoretical insight supported awareness that cultural and

structural understandings of parish and school, with associated varied human agency and reflexivity, can change over time so that embedded understandings may no longer reflect the lived reality in each entity. Thus, there was a need to investigate the nature of the current situation – what is happening now – in the Catholic parish/parish school relationship, to define what many of the terms used actually mean in the research context. Reliance on prior, formal definitions could otherwise be distracting or misleading.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis presents six chapters which sequentially outline the research context, methodology, presentation of interview data, review of literature, key features, and emerging theory and implications for better understanding the parish/school relationship in Aotearoa NZ.

Chapter 1 contextualises the background and approach of the research. It presents awareness of a gap in the literature and the need for research into the parish/school relationship. It introduces fledgling concepts of identity, leadership, and mission and evangelisation as present but complex contexts within the relationship, in need of deeper consideration and understanding. It also provides an overview of research design and thesis structure.

Chapter 2 presents insights from the literature as broader understandings and contexts associated with the key features of identity, community/connection, mission and leadership with regard to the parish/school relationship. It also introduces the theoretical insight of the Morphogenetic Approach (Archer, 1995) as a lens for further understanding elements of change, reflexivity and agency within these key features. Though placed as the second chapter for cohesion with international research trends, the literature was consulted and the literature review chapter written after key features had been identified through analysis of interviews.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design of this thesis. Detailed ontological and epistemological understandings are presented, along with reasons and approaches for gathering and interpreting data throughout the research. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also outlined and contextualised.

Chapter 4 presents 'unrefined' features as distilled from interviews and the process of constant comparison. These concepts emerge as worthy of inclusion in their own right as participant, community, functional, sacramental participation, symbolic, and unresolved features within and

across the final key features. Questions from these unresolved features help frame presentation and discussion of key features in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the findings of this thesis as fully formed key features of the parish/school relationship. Constructed from robust application of CGT principles, including synergy and contrast with extant literature, the centrality of identity, evangelisation and mission, being community, leadership, and recognising and participating in change, emerge as critical features of this relationship. Each is explained and contextualised in detail.

Chapter 6 presents the substantive Parish/School Relationship Theory associated with these key features, and states implications for the Aotearoa NZ Catholic context. Limitations and delimitations, along with recommendations for further research, are also included.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This study presents theory with implications for the effectiveness, and possibly even survival, of parishes and parish schools. It is clear that the old order is changing, and at present there are few resources for navigating the change. At a time when many Catholic schools are packed to capacity while others struggle to remain open, and when parish numbers are in broad decline, little research exists to explain what is happening within the parish/school relationship. To survive and flourish in today's context, Catholic educators and parish leaders require research which addresses the context, reality, and potential of more effective relationships between parishes and parish schools. This research speaks into that space.

1.5 Conclusion

The capacity of faith formation in Catholic education prompts some to go so far as to say that, since Vatican II, the hope of the Catholic Church sits with the school, not the parish: "In the modern age, it is largely in the contexts of Catholic education, in its schools, colleges and universities, that the future of the Catholic Church will be renewed or weakened in the next generation" (Whittle & Grace, 2017, p. 1). For a range of reasons, largely focusing on relevance, quality religious education, connection, and capacity, Whittle (2017) believes the parish is an outmoded model that will eventually be subsumed by Catholic education institutions. Effectively, he proposes that the school will become, or perhaps already is, the parish. However, with a 'the school is the parish' model, how does a young person and their family continue to belong to a school faith community after their schooling has ended? Alternatively, if the relationship between the Catholic parish school and the

parish is strong, might the connection continue indefinitely? This, of course, is the intended nature of parish. Rather than replace parishes, there is a genuine need for schools to reinvigorate them in a reciprocal relationship. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops choose to see the school as an opportunity to turn around the declining engagement with parishes. Their hope lies in the schools (NZCBC, 2014) establishing creative and new ways to strengthen the relationship for a shared mission.

Hope, however, is not enough. The problem, that the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools was historically strong and founded on shared understanding of Catholic identity and mission, but now involves little commitment to each other outside of physical proximity, a shared name and independent understandings that they are each Catholic, requires research. With each entity often existing alongside the other in what might jarringly be described as a type of "parallel play" (Holmes et al., 2015), that is to say, parish school and parish doing similar things but with little or no reference to the other, there is need and opportunity for deeper understanding and growth. In this context, with scant academic support for determining how communities might envision and plan for a more effective, productive relationship, this research outlines key features, and proposes theory, to support communities to look at themselves, as individuals and groups, and better understand ways in which more and more school and parish community members might recognise that, 'I too belong here'.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The literature review, in accord with the principles of classic grounded theory, is situated as 'data' not to be included before or during the interview and categorisation phases, lest the power of previous academic research influence the researcher and "restrict the freedom needed to discover a theory" (Rakhmawati, 2019, p. 113). From the perspective of "all is data" (Glaser, 2002b, p. 1) this chapter follows Glaser's (1998) recommendation to read widely after the interview and categorisation phases to further inform the study. Hence, this chapter provides a review of literature which further explores the established categories beyond the interview data themselves.

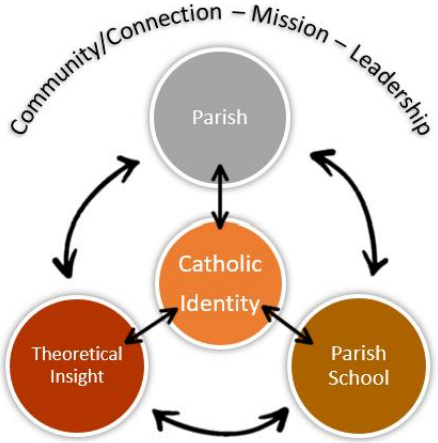
There is a gap in the literature which directly describes the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools. Those literatures which touched on the interaction of these two entities tended to focus on one and obliquely reference the other (Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council and Council of Priests, 2014; McDonough, 2016; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2023; Reinhart, 2021; Rossiter, 2018), or they reinforced the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church in the relationship (CLS, 1983; CCE, 1982, 2022) or overtly challenged it (Bruce, 2017; Watling, 2001; Whittle, 2016, 2022). Furthermore, literature which directly addresses the Aotearoa NZ context in terms of Catholic education (NZCBC, 2014; NZCEO, 2009, 2020b) or parish mission (NZCBC, 2022a) consistently generalise rather than detail the specific dimensions of this important relationship. Viewed collectively, there exists an insufficient pool of findings which clearly outlines key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools.

However, while not directly addressing the parish/school relationship, a substantial body of literature explores the key themes that emerged in this study, albeit from either a parish or a parish school perspective. This reflects the gap in research concerning how parishes and schools identify with one another and engage in community building and mission support. Responding to that gap, this study identifies four major categories emerging from the data: Catholic identity**,** community/connection, mission, and leadership. Of these, *Catholic identity* is the central tenet, with the remaining three serving as overarching concepts that both shape and are shaped by the dynamic interplay between parish and parish school. Additionally, the literature review process drew attention to Margaret Archer's Morphogenetic Approach (1995) as providing an advantageous theoretical perspective for better understanding the interaction between each entity in terms of the emergent categories.

The structure of this literature review is thus represented as conceptual elements in Figure 2.1. Catholic identity, as the central concept, is considered first, after which its significance is considered in terms of parish and parish school, with the resonance of the overarching categories examined in relation to each entity. All elements are considered as being in a dynamic interrelationship with one another, with the Morphogenetic Approach providing equally integrated theoretical insight in the last section of the chapter.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Elements of Literature Review



2.1 Catholic Identity

Complexity around identity, or lack of identity, is the central category to have emerged in this research. The search for knowing who we are is a necessary endeavour and is not only an element of religious understanding but also exists as a positive aspect of secular culture (Taylor, 2007). "It leads individuals to seek authentic ways of being human and to search for what is right for them in every sphere of human life, including religion and spirituality" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 7). As this is the case for secular culture, it is even more important for Catholic organisations, including parishes and parish schools, and those holding leadership roles within them to have a clearer sense of their own Catholic identity in the face of rising secularism in their communities (XIII Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops [XIIISB], 2012, para. 13). At the core of this research is the acknowledgement that "a more fully developed Catholic identity strengthens the ministry of the school in its parish context" (Nuzzi et al., 2009, p. 12).

The literature reveals that Catholic identity is dynamic and complex. It often involves 'religious agency' as elements of faith are passed down by family and community groups, which can become "action fuelled by memory and a vision for the future" (Leming, 2007, p. 76). In many respects,

Catholic parish and parish school identities have unique memories and vision. Notwithstanding, there are a range of universal identity traits which exist in diverse ways among all Catholic individuals and entities purely by virtue of them recognising themselves as Catholic. Common identity traits, such as beliefs, behavioural expectations, and the structure of the Catholic Church, are formally evidenced in Scripture, the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism (CLS, 1983; Catholic Church, 1994). At the same time, there is a need for all people and organisations to continually reflect on just what the Church is and who they are within it (Branson et al., 2019; Green, 2018; O'Loughlin, 2019).

Vatican II defines the Church as the "People of God" and the "Body of Christ" (Paul VI, 1964a, Cpt. II & III). McDonough (2016) argues that this formal, constitutional identification of all Catholics within these two paradigms provides a counterpoint to seeing the Church as a hierarchical entity because these a priori statements form the basis from which to conclude, "All Catholic identity belongs to all Catholics and cannot be reduced to the clergy, bishops, pope, and other institutionalised features" (McDonough, 2016, p. 164). In a similar context, Pope Francis encourages the whole Church to reflect on its identity in terms of being, to name a few: saints (2018), siblings (2020), wary of clericalism (2019a, para. 98), merciful (2015b), and even trees with deep roots (2019a, para. 179). Yet, while clearly aiming to acknowledge and encourage a 'sharing of the load', the recent document from the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) makes it very clear that lay ministry in education within the Church must also be "in line with her hierarchical nature" (CCE, 2022). In light of this, it is important to firstly determine what the literature reveals about Catholic identity in general, and then what it reveals about the identity of Catholic parishes and parish schools in more specific contexts.

2.1.1 The Concept of Catholic Identity

The literature indicates caution against oversimplification of identity and poses the concept of multiple authentic identities as a means of considering Catholic identity. Arbuckle (2013, 2024) outlines how Catholic identities are always contextual and can include a range of stances and reactions based on cultural or environmental factors. These may include pre-1960s "immigrant understandings influenced by a stigmatizing society" or a "fortress Church" identity; or a post Vatican II postmodern "self-choosing" identity involving a spectrum of hierarchical or lay reactions ranging from "fundamentalist to disengaged" identities (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 52). Furthermore, Arbuckle believes that such identities are a process of the "self or group engaging with context" (p. 51) by living day by day within a particular cultural context or environment. Thus, who we are, both

as Catholic individuals and as Catholic organisations, is as diverse as our individual and collective experiences. This has significant implications for explaining relationships between varied parishes and parish schools.

An understanding that identity is not only diverse but subject to variation, irrespective of what the Church may formally claim, is important "specifically as personnel vary or the organisation takes on new expressions of its being in response to changing times and needs" (Sultmann & Brown, 2011, p. 73). In the face of changing understandings of what it means to 'be Church', Sultmann and Brown (2011) believe there are aspects which are fundamental to identity which continue while others radically change or discontinue within Church organisations as individuals and communities engage with their contexts and experiences. In effect, the Church can authentically be many things at the one time, and the lenses one uses to view it or participate within it can vary greatly but still ring true (Arbuckle, 2024). For instance,in the early 1970s, following a self-proclaimed desire by the Church to move beyond its previous primary institutional identity of "visible structures" and "especially the rights and powers of its officers" (Dulles, 2002, p. 74), Catholic and protestant ecclesiology gave rise to five identity models of the Church in the post-Vatican II climate. These were later expanded to include a sixth identity (Dulles, 2002). The intent of this still popular approach was not for people to choose one over the other, but to exercise more dynamic ways of thinking about what – or who – the Church is (Komonchak, 2008; Reinhart, 2021). Dulles' six identities may be summarised as:

1. *Mystical Communion* – Emphasising community and connection through the Spirit, so that while including aspects of familial warmth and welcome one is also aware that the Church community is much more than that.
2. *Sacrament* – That Church is a visible sign in the world today that Christ is alive. She is an active instrument of God's grace, and that Church has both a human (visible) and divine (invisible) nature.
3. *Servant* – Because of its faith in Jesus, the Church lives out Jesus' call to serve those in need. It is active in the world in terms of living and proclaiming social justice.
4. *Herald* – The Church is the announcer and messenger of God's Good News in Jesus Christ. She participates in sharing God's saving love and calling people to hear, accept and live the Gospels.
5. *Institution* – The Church as a hierarchical organisation descendent from Peter, with clear guidelines, roles and responsibilities for everyone.

6. *Community of Disciples* (added later by Dulles) – The Church is a community founded in discipleship of Jesus, to which people belong and choose to act, speak and pray as he taught. (Dulles, 2002)

The identities generated by Dulles, while not without scholarly criticism then and now, highlight a post-Vatican II intention to look at the Church anew, and the ability for Church identity to be seen in a variety of valid ways. They are presented here as examples rather than exemplars because these models "cannot capture the totality of the Church's experience" (Jacoba, 2025, p. 262). Following publication of Dulles works it became apparent that they also could be misunderstood. Komonchak (2008) comments on these identities being misinterpreted as if Dulles' initial models were, "mutually exclusive, or even as if they described, not five ways of thinking and speaking about the Church, but five ways of being the Church" (Komonchak, 2008, pp. 21-22).

The identity models developed by Dulles are not the only proposed identities of Church in the literature. Others include: scriptural identity (Brueggemann, 1991); economic identity (Bullivant, 2022); mission identity (Mayer, 2012; Provost, 1984); community identity (Plekon, 2021); or even identity terms such as creative minority (Brumfield, 2020); dynamic life system (Bracken, 2019); or field hospital (Brigham, 2022). All of which have their critics, and none claim to fully encapsulate the identity of the Church. The key understanding to be gained here is that there is a plethora of identities to interest and challenge people and organisations to see the Church as more than a single identity. Each provides insight into reality and possibilities, and all fall short of fully articulating the Church's identity.

This literature highlights a need for dynamic thinking and questioning to better understand the identity of the Church to which parishes and parish schools belong. Holding on to static, exclusive, or one-dimensional identities can negatively impact the development of shared understandings of parishes and schools in terms of their roles and functions within the universal Catholic Church (Andrejek, 2014; Dulles & McGinley, 2008; Francis & Campbell, 2017). Answering the ever-present question of how to strengthen Catholic identity (Raith, 2021) necessarily begins with first understanding what Catholic identity is. Catholic teaching formally identifies that the Church itself "should be a place of encounter, a tool promoting the convergence of ideas and actions" (CCE, 2022, para. 84). Hence, encountering others (with God), and their ideas and actions, is at the heart of the Church's mission.

2.1.2 Linking Catholic Identity to Mission

The primary mission of the Church is that of evangelisation (Benedict XVI, 2008b). Evangelisation is the Church's "deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise" (Paul VI, 1975, para. 14). Thus, in theory and in practice, "the term 'evangelisation' refers to every aspect of the Church's activity" (XIIISB, 2011, Preface), and it follows that an essential area of synergy with formal global Church identity and local Catholic parish and parish school identity, is that of evangelising mission (Catholic Education South Australia, 2023). A major challenge lies in understanding just what this means.

Pope Paul VI contextualises evangelisation as not just an internal mission but a task of the Church within global society, "to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass" (Paul VI, 1975, para. 14). Additionally, contemporary authors extend the ecclesial goals to include justice, peace, stewardship of creation, inculturation, and interreligious, secular, and ecumenical dialogue (Bevans, 2024; Francis, 2020; Gleeson & Goldburg, 2020; Sultmann et al., 2022). Thus, while Catholics are certainly called to participate in the great commission of Jesus, "baptising in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19), the contemporary evangelising nuance is focused on invitation, witness, and authentic cultural and religious dialogue, rather than on a blinkered quest for outright conversion. Arbuckle (2013) also argues that, even with broad parameters for Catholic parishes and schools, the demands of mission can often be usurped by the challenges of the business side of an organisation, such as finances or professional standards, because the mission is seen as "unimportant, soft, unrealistic or unworldly" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 85). In other words, mission can be viewed as a priority in theory but potentially ignored in practice.

To efficiently focus on this extensive and complex area, the following discussion first outlines new evangelisation and social justice as two critical areas of mission arising from participant interviews and the literature. It then addresses declining faith-based participation and societal change as major challenges for the Church's mission (Plekon, 2021). Following this, discussion will address how these areas specifically pertain to parishes and parish schools.

2.1.2.1 New Evangelisation.

Evangelisation, sharing the Good News and participating overtly in the call of the Gospels as Catholic people, has always been central to the mission of the Church (Francis, 2013, 2024). The term new evangelisation is "primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally

Christian countries" (XIIISB, 2011, Preface). In essence it is sharing the Gospel with those who, at some time in the past and to varying degrees, have already received but not embraced it.

For over half a century, the Church has been concerned by the growing number of Catholics who claim little religious affiliation with the practice and teaching of the Church. In the face of this emerging reality, Pope John Paul II began calling for a "new evangelisation" (1983) as a means of invitation and reconnection for Catholics who "live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (John Paul II, 1990, para. 33). Reflecting on this much later, the Synod of Bishops recognised that "initially, the new evangelisation was primarily viewed as a necessity, then as a work of discernment, and finally as an impetus for the Church in our times" (XIIISB, 2012, para. 44).

Within the West, the new evangelisation still struggles to gain traction and concern still grows. Rymarz (2010) succinctly states, "In practical terms any religious group which cannot point to a substantial number of highly committed members faces a problematic future" (pp. 300-301).

In this context, the literature reveals ongoing reflection regarding the importance and complexity of the new evangelisation in terms of the whole Church, especially as clear understandings and details behind documents from the Vatican calling for comprehensive and committed action in this regard "remain vague" (Sultmann & Brown, 2014, p. 3). It is useful to highlight three perspectives as examples of the discourse in this complex area.

First, the 2012 Synod of Bishops, in their preparatory and final synodal documents, outline particular aspects of the new evangelisation as: responding to postmodern challenges, particularly secularism and relativism; a call for Catholics to seek new approaches and show boldness in the sharing of faith; an openness to new models of being Church; the need for ongoing pastoral care of Catholics who live their faith; and targeting those Catholics in the West who have little knowledge of, and maintain tenuous links with, the faith (XIIISB, 2011, 2012).

Second, five similar but differently nuanced significant developments regarding the new evangelisation are proposed by Groome (2018) and summarised as: 1) At core, encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ; 2) The focus on helping Catholics to engage with and live Christian lives rather than convert non-Christians into Catholicism; 3) Reviving and maturing the faith of those who already acknowledge some level of affiliation; 4) Not just a component of ministry but "every way that the Church continues the mission and ministry of Jesus in the world" (Groome & Horell,

2018, p. 10); and, 5). Not centred on an exclusive Catholic identity, but sensitive to ecumenical possibilities and open to interreligious dialogue (Groome & Horell, 2018).

As a final example, Sultmann and Brown (2014) signal witness, formation of the heart, and service, as three critical dimensions of evangelisation which impact the individual and culture as, "the Gospel seeks to convert the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu in which they live" (p. 4). These authors add that being a witness to the Gospel – living as Christ calls people to live – is the key component of new evangelisation and that it is imperative that this witnessing activity "finds expression in the home, school, parish, community and virtual communities where values are lived in the day-to-day and ordinary experiences of life" (Sultmann & Brown, 2014, p. 4).

Examples in the literature such as these serve to highlight the significant diversity of challenges, yet common ground, in which Catholic schools and parishes share as key contributors to the new evangelisation mission of the Church (ACU, 2023; CCE, 2022). In this endeavour, the parish relationship with its school is critical because "Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelisation of culture' (Francis, 2013, para. 134) and, as the crisis deepens, "parishes realise that Catholic schools are often the only places where young people encounter the bearers of Good News" (CCE, 2014, section III 1g). Thus, local efforts to effect the new evangelisation are best served by a healthy, positive relationship between these two entities.

2.1.2.2 Social Justice.

Another fundamental element of the Church's identity and mission, frequently raised in the research interviews, is outlined in a diverse body of writing and practice referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) (US Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2004). Living out the principles of CST has long been considered a constitutive dimension in the life of the Church (Synod of Bishops, 1971). Succinctly stated, "the Church's theology – indeed, its very self-understanding as an institution and as a people rooted in the Gospel – starts with the task of hearing the cry of the poor and contributing to liberative efforts" (Massaro, 2021, p. 181). This is central to Pope Francis' leadership of the Church as exemplified in his comment that, "none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (Francis, 2013, para. 201).

Social justice is a practical dimension of being Church where some argue parishes struggle and parish schools excel (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012), yet action for justice is not necessarily based on Catholic

understandings because secular society is also increasingly committed to supporting those in need (Gleeson, 2020). Teachers and pre-service teachers in Catholic schools can endorse generic values in place of values more explicitly linked to faith. This stance causes CST principles to be reinterpreted without reference to their Christian foundations and therefore end up resembling "ethics, citizenship and political education rather than the expression of faith-based school identity" (Gleeson, 2020, p. 282). Hence, the literature highlights that the reasons for acting justly in society, more than just what people do, are critical to Catholic identity.

Some articles suggested a lack of action in the area of social justice in Catholic education (Baggett, 2006; Gambescia & Paolucci, 2011), however, most researchers writing on this theme indicate a drive to include quality learning of Catholic Social Teaching in schools (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017; Gleeson, 2020; Hall et al., 2019). Rare literature in the New Zealand context highlights that Catholic school students develop a social consciousness, and positive attitudes towards social justice, when CST is an important aspect of religious education programmes, even though most young people are "at best neutral towards Religious Education" (Wanden & Birch, 2007, p. 866), the subject in which it is taught. A later independent review of Christian praxis in New Zealand also credits the link between knowing about Jesus and social action, "For both Generation X and Baby Boomers, the most positive impact of Christianity in New Zealand's society has been the social justice work of Christians in the community helping those in need" (Wilberforce Foundation, 2018, p. 40).

In parishes and schools in New Zealand, support and education in CST is led by Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' agency for justice, peace, and development. They distil CST into nine key principles: human dignity, common good, solidarity, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, participation, distributive justice, stewardship, subsidiarity, and promotion of peace (2022). While placing a particular emphasis on Catholic schools, Caritas also provides diverse and engaging on-line and printable materials which include posters and resources designed for parishes (Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, 2022). There is little evidence of research indicating how effective the materials are with either group, or with both together.

Significant mixed-methods research in the USA (Baggett, 2006) revealed that parishioners were not as engaged in social justice as expected. The study indicates substantial buy-in to following Jesus' teachings, and participation in Church teaching and the sacraments, but only six percent of parishioners saw their Catholic identity as requiring action to help "change unjust social structures'' (Baggett, 2006, p. 291). Findings indicate that this 'civic underachievement' is influenced by a poor

sense of Catholic identity, coupled with a lack of education and dialogue in the parish around social justice issues:

> By facilitating Catholic identities that are loosely defined and delimiting the prospects for extended discourse on social and political concerns, local parish cultures actually, and somewhat ironically, reduce parishioners' capacity for discerning the political and civic ramifications of their own Church's teachings. (Baggett, 2006, p. 291)

Education in understanding CST is critical in the mission of both parishes and parish schools internationally and in Aotearoa NZ. However, a summative comment from the literature indicates the necessity for schools to not only educate about social justice, but also to welcome and care for the poor in their own communities (CCE, 1977, 2017, 2022). This is especially vital in emerging and challenging contexts, such as socio-economic differentiation and high levels of school competition for pupils (Gleeson, 2020), limited cultural responsiveness to Indigenous peoples (Tate, 2012), and imposed criteria for Catholic school admittance (NZCEO, 2016). This requirement was summarised in one article as three 'cardinal' characteristics: "commitment to individual personhood, social justice, and inclusion" (Hall et al., 2019, p. 34). Thus, it is critical that parish schools, and their associated parishes, work to establish an active, social justice-oriented identity which is authentically Catholic, both inwardly and externally.

In its most profound Catholic context, Engebretson (2014) describes this shared commitment to social justice as fundamentally eucharistic because, when a school gathers at Mass, they are together as members of the Catholic Church, united with the local parish, diocese and the whole universal Church. The point is that this "assembly acknowledges its union with Christ as the source of its life. All of the social justice activities in which teachers and students engage are directly related to and flow from the Eucharist" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 45). Here, the parish and parish school are situated in a justice-oriented relationship around the eucharistic table, even if they are unaware that this is the case.

2.1.2.3 Declining Participation and Societal Change

The need for justice and new evangelisation, as critical dimensions of the Church's mission, arises in a context of declining participation in the West (Lam, 2023) as the world experiences rapid societal change. Arbuckle observes that the Church in the West is 'tired' as: "we wrestle with scandals; trust in episcopal authority is disintegrating; people are leaving the Church; priestly and religious

vocations are in rapid decline; [and] restorationist reactions to the chaos add daily to our sadness" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 12). 'Crisis' is a word often used to describe the contemporary state of the Church (Cashen, 2010; Gaillardetz, 2015; Rossiter, 2018). Corroborating data in the literature are undeniable: Mass attendance has been dropping for decades (Gleeson et al., 2018; Treanor, 2017), particularly in terms of youth (Engebretson, 2014; McDonough, 2015); vocations to the priesthood have significantly fallen (Arbuckle, 2019; Zech et al., 2017); clerical sexual abuse is horrific, scandalous, and erratically addressed (Arbuckle, 2019; Lam, 2021); there is a decline in religious affiliation with groups (Conway & Spruyt, 2018; Rymarz, 2019); Australian Catholic schools have increasingly fewer Catholic students enrolling, and those Catholics who do enrol tend to have a weak connection to Catholic faith (Croke, 2007; D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Shields, 2018). The situation is comparable in Aotearoa NZ Catholic schools (Duthie-Jung, 2012; Owen, 2018).

It is in the face of this contemporary reality of decline and change that the literature also reveals a consistent, hope-filled call for a renewal of Catholic identity and mission. As the world changes, the Church too is invited to change, though not at the whim of society. Structural change within the Church must be deeply founded in the Gospels and happen at a 'heart' level, because: "changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual" (Francis, 2013, para. 189).

To address the crisis and outline possibilities for such positive change, a range of responses emerge from the literature. There needs to be opportunity to enter into a more dialogical, inclusive 'synodal process' (Arbuckle, 2024; Francis, 2021; Osheim, 2019), which includes becoming more joyful and compassionate (Francis, 2013, 2015b, 2024). There is also need to recognise that despite growing discontent and declining formal engagement many "still value and retain Catholic identity, using it as a base to negotiate new economic, political, social, and technological developments" (Nouwen & Lazarus, 2021, p. 15). Some call for overhauling the structure and purpose of parish (Whittle, 2016; Zech et al., 2017), while others place hope in nurturing Catholic hearts in schools even if students choose not to formally participate (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Engebretson, 2014; Rossiter, 2018). There is also a call to look less at statistics and more at formation in faith of young people and leaders (Benedict XVI, 2008a; NZCEO, 2018b; Simonds et al., 2017). While by no means an exhaustive list, these examples exemplify the attitudes of renewal, revisioning, and change of perspective which are common in the literature.

It is evident then, that as abundant as the data is on outlining elements of a crisis, there are also voices offering approaches for hope, often within the same articles. The expressions of crisis and the expressions of hope both reflect an awareness of the need to develop a clear understanding of Catholic identity as a foundation for understanding the mission of parishes and parish schools as part of the universal Catholic Church in these challenging times. Such a collaborative vision being a strategy for intention and hope in activating the joy of the Gospel (Francis, 2013).

Finally, in this context of crisis and hope, it is important to acknowledge two recurring phenomena in the literature which significantly impact on the global and local mission of the Church: postmodernism and secularisation. This chapter does not have the scope to fully detail the myriad permutations with which these concepts are represented in the literature, but it is able to briefly outline how they are regularly presented as reasons for decline, or opportunities for development, regarding Catholic practice and identity today.

2.1.2.3.1 Postmodernism.

Most authors addressing postmodernism, while readily commenting on its unfolding evolution and impact, step back from strictly defining the term. Reasons for this include: "the complexity of the phenomenon" (Weintraub, 2019, p. 45); its "shifting boundaries" (Peloso, 2012, p. 235); or it still being in the process of establishing itself (Strzelecki, 2019). One ambitious definition lists a range of concepts and describes postmodernism's destabilising dimension as, "a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilise other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Aylesworth, 2005). In terms of this research, postmodernism seems best captured by the phrase, "to be 'postmodern' means to live in a world of radical pluralism, with many diverse creeds and commitments competing for human allegiance" (Johnson, 2020, p. 143). It is also from this stance of inherent and enduring postmodern complexity that competing terms such as 'post-postmodernism', 'aftermodernism', and 'metamodernism' are set aside in this research as articulating "intensification and mutation within postmodernism" (Nealon, 2012, p. ix) rather than distinct alternatives to it.

It is in this context of instability, credal diversity, and competition for allegiance that several authors draw attention to postmodernism as impacting Catholic identity by challenging its claims of authority, knowledge, metanarratives, and traditions (Pierre, 2017; Rossiter, 2018; Sajed, 2010). While those within the Church have a responsibility to clarify contemporary Catholic identity, it is

also true that the historical and evolving environment of change in which Catholic identity finds itself is relatively new and significantly different from pre-Vatican II, or even from post-Vatican II until the end of the Pope John Paul II era. Regarding pre-Vatican II, "The great, overarching ideologies of the past – certainly Christendom, but equally the age of Enlightenment – no longer hold sway in the way they once did" (Johnson, 2020, p. 143). Post-Vatican II, even with a revitalised emphasis on People of God and Body of Christ (Paul VI, 1964a), the Church is still projecting a spirituality of obedience "as outlined in the Catechism reflecting the priorities of John Paul II more than those of Vatican II itself" (Pierre, 2017, p. 64). Times have changed, and old responses of reassertion of ancient authority have little impact today (Rosemann, 2021).

Families and wider communities within Catholic parishes and parish schools are being swept up in this increasingly influential postmodern wave, and the impact is very real. There is recurring mistrust of teaching, sacred texts and revelation associated with religion due to "detraditionalized, demythologized, pluralized, and individualized societies" (Horner, 2020, p. 69). Assumptions are made that "there are no absolutes and there is no totally objective knowledge", meaning Facebook and X are deemed as important as the Gospels (Pierre, 2017, p. 64). The argument is also made that there is an associated "decline of hope" which emerges from depriving "the human being of the dignity belonging to him or her as a person" (Strzelecki, 2019, p. 112). Rejection of "traditional developmental notions of the self as something to be discovered" leads to people being "at a loss to explain faith development" (Peloso, 2012, p. 235), and there is even "fear of indoctrinating" those who hold differing religious beliefs resulting in less sharing of information about what people believe (Thouki, 2019, p. 8). Thus, the literature reveals a bleak situation for Church organisations intent on retaining or re-establishing an ecclesial status quo, and similarly so for missioning and evangelising efforts.

An alternative stance is for the Church to embrace postmodernism as an ally, as a "catalyst for an immense surge of faith inspired evangelisation because it can force us to look for radically new ways to preach the Good News" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 92). Smith (2006) suggests a number of responses to postmodernist concepts. People could, for instance, respond to the deconstructionist claim of nothing being outside the text by rediscovering the centrality of Scripture as mediating understandings of God, the world and people, and reclaiming the role of community in the interpretation of Scripture. Response to a lack of belief in metanarratives could re-focus on a recovery of the narrative character of Christian faith rather than adherence to a collection of ideas and recommit to that narrative in a world of competing narratives. Similarly, the claim that power is

knowledge could orient people to understanding the cultural power of formation and the need for the Church to enact faith-based counter-formation (Smith, 2006). Such perspectives highlight potential for issues such as secularisation, climate change, and world poverty to be dynamically linked with the Gospel message in a contemporary way, as with Pope Francis' approach of writing about contemporary issues and crafting his message beyond just the faithful to all people of the world (Francis, 2015a, 2020; Luby, 2021).

The point being made is that current experience of decline and disengagement provides opportunity for necessary redefinition of what it means to be Catholic. A mono-chrome interpretation of postmodernism as only negative can belie that it is also "full of genuine insights" (Rosemann, 2021, p. 104). Postmodern communities often "express a search for the good and true in diverse and manifold ways" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 7). There is opportunity, for example, to incorporate the postmodern concept of a relationally constructed self within a communal understanding "that can account for faith development as both immanent and transcendental" (Peloso, 2012, p. 235). Indeed, some argue that, with a Trinitarian understanding of God at the core of Catholic teaching and identity, the relational dimension of what it is to be Catholic is very close to being philosophically postmodern (Rosemann, 2021).

The challenge that comes with postmodernism is that "from one side, we can call our world pluralistic and full of possibility; from another side, we can call our world chaotic and incoherent" (Johnson, 2020, p. 143). Either way, the mission of the Church requires a response, and whether or not they have clarity regarding Catholic identity and mission, effective and ineffective responses are currently being made and/or experienced in our parishes and parish schools.

2.1.2.3.1 Secularisation.

The other term, with which the literature consistently aligns evidence of crisis and response within the Church, is that of increasing secularisation, the level of which is "unparalleled in human history" (Collier, 2013, p. 85), and is particularly evident in Aoteaora NZ (Wilberforce, 2018, 2023). The oft conflated concept of secularism often intrudes as "separation of state and religion and/or state neutrality in relation to religion" (Modood, 2021, p. 120). However, writers also indicate increasing complexity associated with that term including: that it incorporates a wide range of models (Colorado & Selby, 2020); it increasingly blurs with multiculturalism and pluralism (Boeve, 2016; Modood, 2021); it is open to links with 'religious people' who hold "positive attachments to secular beliefs and identities" (Layman et al., 2021, p. 80); and is even being redefined in contrast to

emerging post-secularism, which indicates a ”breakdown of the modern divide within liberalism that assigns religion to a private sphere of belief that is separate from political-civil reason” (Crockett, 2021, p. 631). In this context, secularism is increasingly described in the literature as multi-faceted and culturally fluid, and even as an unrealisable myth, with the idea of post-secularism being equally “problematic since it presupposes that secularism is an aspirational goal” intent on eliminating or taming religious beliefs in favour of secular goals, which is clearly not what is being proposed in modern societies (Hendrix, 2019, pp. 105-106).

Secularisation, on the other hand, refers to the process where people increasingly disengage from religious affiliation and practice. Manouchehrifar & Forester (2021) summarise that secularism is about “exclusion or management of religion” (p. 271), which does not arise from the interviews for this research, and secularisation is about an experience of “declining religious involvement” (p. 271) which is a common perception in the study. Secularisation is very much part of Catholic experience, and Hendrix (2019) goes so far as to say that secularisation theory has “anti-Catholic roots” (p. 106).

Formal Catholic documents acknowledge experience of secularisation in Church and society as a progressive societal “contagion” (CCE, 1982, para. 26) and the reason Catholic schools find “themselves in a missionary situation, even in countries with an ancient Christian tradition” (CCE, 2014, para. 57; 2022, para. 28). In the postmodern context of this research, Engebretson (2014), framing the term with declining levels of Catholic background, and diminishing engagement with the practicing faith community, especially regarding young people in Catholic schools, describes secularisation in this way:

> As Catholics moved into every part of society, assimilating the values of the wider culture, Catholic identity was diluted in an historical shift that has particularly affected the generations of Catholics who were born after the Second Vatican Council. (p. 13)

It is in this societal context that Catholic parishes and parish schools function. Priests and principals, with various levels of support, expectation, and participation lead and help build Catholic identity, connections, and community. While posing significant challenges, rising secularisation is also not without hope, as there is of course value in the secular “as the locus of God’s care and concern, and the sphere of God’s activity” (Horner, 2020, p. 69). The postmodern wave and its growing disenchantment with modernist secularism also suggests possibilities around pluralist acceptance supporting a new but different status for religious understandings within society (Weintraub, 2019).

The literature clearly supports the key elements of Catholic identity and mission, within a global context of diverse and challenging connection between Church leadership/teaching and Catholic people and society, as foundational for understanding the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools. The following sections of this chapter focus on parish and parish school identity, before drawing on Archer's (1995) theoretical approach to further support explanation of this complex relationship.

2.2 Parish Identity

The parish has existed almost unchanged in its juridical form as a Catholic entity since the Council of Trent (Hoover, 2017, p. 825). In canon law the Catholic parish is identified within a clear hierarchical structure: "A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (CLS, 1983, c. 515). It is established as a physical entity within a global network of Catholic dioceses, under the auspices of a diocesan bishop, and is intended, with the leadership of the parish priest, to support the local Catholic faith community regarding worship, education, and governance (CLS, 1983, c. 519). It is with this intent to support Catholic education for families and the wider Church that many parishes established parish schools. However, while they are clearly connected, the literature indicates that parish and parish school identity require independent consideration.

The parish is fully identified with, and expected to function as, being wholly Catholic, unlike Catholic schools which share their identity and function with governmental education agencies which have distinct educational expectations and usually little interest in Church belief or practice (NZCEO, 2018a). In terms of its Catholic identity, the parish is first an entity which reflects the presence of Jesus Christ (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 830-833) in its people and actions, including social justice (USCCB, 2004), celebration of the Eucharist, and Jesus being fully present in the parish church tabernacle (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1379). Second, the parish participates in the universal evangelising mission of the Church "making disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28: 18–20), while also interacting in friendship and compassion with those who are part of other Christian denominations and religions other than Christianity which together make up the universal Church of Christ (Engebretson, 2014, pp. 14-15; Francis, 2020; John Paul II, 1990).

Literature which speaks to a theology of parish is scarce. Karl Rahner (1958) refers to parish as the place where the Church event is manifested, particularly in terms of the celebration of Eucharist. However, Rahner's implied simplicity regarding a 'place' disguises the more complex reality of parish being "a web of ecclesial relationships – with its own people, with its pastor, its bishop and diocese, with other Christian faith communities near and far, even with those who have departed from this world" (Hoover, 2017, p. 826). Despite a renewed focus on particular churches, and a sense of resonance between the early Church communities and local parish church communities, even Vatican II only alludes to parish identity as "each altar community" (Paul VI, 1964a, para. 26) in the context of the eucharistic link to the local bishop. It is not until 1988 that the formal Church speaks with some ecclesial clarity saying, "The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather the family of God … a welcoming home, the community of the faithful" (John Paul II, 1988, para. 26). More recently, the Congregation for the Clergy (2020) similarly symbolically described the parish as a "house among houses… envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the people through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments" (2020, para. 7).

The literature highlights that this seeming apathy towards a formal ecclesiology of parish from Church documents is not intended to undermine the importance of local parishes – as faith filled, functioning, eucharistic communities within the Church – but rather to ensure their significance is never placed above that of the Church of which they are only small parts (Hoover, 2017; Macgregor, 2018; Zech et al., 2017). Olha summarises, "the essence of the parish can only be acknowledged within the context of the Universal Church. A particular parish is not an isolated institution" (Olha, 2016, p. 41). Parishes need to know their place, and there is ample literature which outlines their place as community.

2.2.1 Parish Community

It is important to see the parish as "a community within a wider community" (Hawley, 2015, p. 48), in terms of its existence within the Church, and within national and provincial regions, cities, and towns. Just as the literature describes significant change in Catholic engagement and participation so, in the face of postmodernist destabilising and disengaging tendencies, it reflects major change in the nature of communities in general. With increased availability of communications technology, through diverse local and global networks, via phones, computers, apps, and websites, people are more connected than ever before (Putnam, 2015), yet with the demise of many old community support structures such as sports clubs, parent centres, working bees, and familiarity with

neighbours, many people have never been more lonely or disconnected (Arbuckle, 2013; Archer, 2015; Stern & Buchanan, 2020). “Community, it seems, is everywhere – and nowhere” (Plekon, 2021, p. 13).

Despite significant change, the concept of community has deep roots and remains strong. For example, before even starting school, children are taught about community by adults, including a plethora of audio-visual media, toys, games and books. They learn to recognise and engage with the concept that:

> communities can be big or small. From our family members to our friends; from the classroom to the entire school; from the street where we live to the city we live in. Some communities we choose to be a part of, while others are thrust upon us. They can play an important and influential role in our lives. (Brambles, 2018, introduction)

Community is fundamental to our existence in human society, including communities within the Church. Each of Brambles’ (2018) points above could refer to parishes. The key extension for parish community being that it is fundamentally eucharistic: “The parish is the eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 2226). For generations this was taught to Catholic children by Catholic parents because the significance of this reality was deeply embedded in a shared Catholic identity (Green, 2018). The centrality of the Eucharist within parish identity remains so even as Sunday Mass numbers decline. Reaffirming Vatican II’s statement of the Eucharist as “source and summit” of Christian life (Paul VI, 1964a, para. 11), and its central place (Rahner, 1958) within communities of the faithful (John Paul II, 1988), Treanor (2017) reflects on the ‘tendrils’ of the eucharistic nature of parish life reaching into all areas of the community – families, schools, hospitals, rest homes etc. So that even in the face of changing pastoral area boundaries and amalgamation of parishes we “find that the actual community the Eucharist effects will protect and perfect that root instinct for belonging we so cherish and call ‘the parish’” (p. 1178).

This form of connection is occurring even with an increasingly common “silent restructuring” (Reed, 2018, p. 8) of parish communities due to constant change. This change includes declining numbers of priests, amalgamation of parishes, and either declining or increasing Mass attendance numbers due to families disconnecting, or immigration of practicing Catholic families connecting with parishes. Evidence clearly indicates that establishing or retaining a sense of community around the Eucharist is

a high priority for parishioners (Zech et al., 2017, p. 127), but the make-up of the Catholic parish community is much more fluid than it was in the past.

This sense of the parish being a functioning Church community is a common element in the literature. Benedict XVI (2008b) describes the communal move from 'I' to 'we' as critical within a Christian community. Wenger (1998) acknowledges a vital need for parish identity and practice to be connected with "formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants" (p. 178). In effect, as a local representation of the wider Church, as a human community of people bound in faith, hope and love, the parish is reflected in individuals' "co-intentionalities, whose co-intentionality is their community" (Komonchak, 2008, p. 38).

The sense of intention to connect, as a significant element of being parish, has been evidenced in new ways through the Covid-19 pandemic with many people being satisfied to 'participate' in Eucharist "without leaving their lounge rooms" (Lam, 2021, p. 55). The practice further highlights reinforcement of needs, along with a sense of "membership, influence and shared emotional connection" (Ferrari & Dosen, 2016, p. 396) as being critical. It is in this context that the literature again reflects on Dulles (2002) 'models of Church' as examples of differentiated yet unified ways in which the "idea of [Church] community" can take multiple forms and develop unique ways of communicating its mission "via aspirational calls to action" (Reinhart, 2021, p. 385). Shared, reflective, intentional, living out of the Gospel not only forms the parish community but is its purpose, and the absence of this awareness leaves a parish adrift with little meaningful sense of identity or mission (Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council and Council of Priests [BCECCP], 2014).

A secular perspective of the local Church community, which resonates with participant comments in this Aotearoa NZ study, may be glimpsed in an American body of research indicating that while the nature of community is changing, many communities are also reforming in new and vital ways (Putnam, 2015). The research highlights the communal impact of education coalitions, unions, healthcare leaders, librarians, and occasionally local politicians, and "omnipresent in the restoration and maintenance of community are churches" (Plekon, 2021, p. 14). Such churches include other religious denominations, as lines within and across faith communities, who support people through housing, food, education and childcare. A significant aspect of parish identity is the ability, and need, to reach out as community to the wider community.

Much of the literature on parish community is overtly aspirational. However, it is also consistent in recognising that in a climate of defensiveness, competitiveness and fragility (Plekon, 2021), the positive reality eventuates only when we "relate to each other according to our true identity" and take care "not to limit too soon our concept of community" (Nouwen & Lazarus, 2021, p. 35). It highlights again the significance of research investigating the parish and parish school relationship, and the centrality of having greater clarity in terms of understanding Catholic identity.

2.2.1.1 Clergy and Laity.

The term 'laity' is commonly used to describe those members of the Church who are not priests or religious. However, the word is not without controversy in the literature. While it is still by far the most used term in formal writing (CCE, 2022; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019; Shirley, 2019), and in the research interviews for this study, it is also fraught by being fundamentally dualistic and, arguably, exclusive. The researcher acknowledges this complexity, and the decision to use the term is based on representation within the research rather than personal affirmation.

The Catholic Church's organisational structure is hierarchical (CLS, 1983; Catholic Church, 1994), and in various ways an 'ordering' of the faithful has always existed since the time of Jesus (McBrien, 1994). Vatican II, in an overt intention to move from "triumphalism, juridicism and clericalism" (Rush, 2017, p. 301), reoriented the place of laity as fully participating in the mission of the Church, stating that by Baptism they "are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ" (Paul VI, 1964a, para. 31). However, progress in effecting real power sharing has been erratic, and there is a rising call for better "collaboration of church people in the life of the Church and the decisions of authority" (Rahner, 1981, p. 123), to rectify the gap between "theological rhetoric" and effective lay involvement in decision-making at the diocesan and parish levels (Arbuckle, 2019, p. 101).

The Code of Canon Law (1983) still situates the parish under the authority of the priest as appointed for the task by the bishop (c. 515). If needed, due to a lack of priests, the bishop can entrust the pastoral care of a parish to someone who is not a priest, but the bishop must appoint "some priest" to direct that pastoral care (c. 517). Within the context of parish administration, the laity are expected to support the priest in his teaching, sanctifying and governing functions (c. 519), and this may involve a pastoral council being established which requires the permission of the bishop and is presided over by the parish priest. However, where the pastoral council is optional and "consultative

vote only" (c. 536), the parish must have a finance council so the faithful can help ensure the money is manged well (c. 537). While by no means an exhaustive list of the priest/parishioner relationship within canon law, the intent is clear that in terms of the parish community the priest is in charge.

In practice, the attitudes and behaviours of priests and bishops are often more inclusive than canon law describes, bearing in mind that this waxes or wanes with a change of priest or bishop (O'Laughlin, 2019; Pendergast, 2019; Zech et al., 2017). There is a long history of delegating operational decision-making within parishes which has "been accelerated by wider societal trends fostering greater involvement of lay members, including women" (Zigan et al., 2021, p. 2). There is evidence that experiences of lay people being invited to participate in parish is "supporting personal relationships and individual connection" (Rymarz, 2019, p. 454). Certainly, Pope Francis in his changes to the Roman Curia (Francis, 2022) and call for a fully Synodal Church (Francis, 2021; Pendergast, 2019; Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, 2017), is attempting to put into action the inclusion of both laity and clergy as partners in fulfilling the mission of the Church.

In terms of this research into the relationship between parish and parish school, the literature reveals that dualism between each entity can either be reinforced or replaced. Synergy between community members, including priests and principals, is likely when grounded in shared Catholic identity and mission. As such, it would be a mistake to infer a distinct line between ordained ministry in the Church and ministry of all the baptised:

> Ours is not a time for rivalry between clergy and laity, or between lay ministers and apostles to the world, as if what was given to the one were taken away from the other. Only through cooperation among all her members can the Church live up to her divine calling. (Dulles & McGinley, 2008, p. 495)

2.2.2 Parish and Mission

The Catholic parish is an entity which shares in the universal evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. It is a central place for the community to participate together in Eucharist (Paul VI, 1964a; Treanor, 2017), where the Gospel of Jesus is present and proclaimed within the community, including many parishes ensuring communion is shared with the sick or elderly who are unable to come to Mass (O'Laughlin, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2011). There is also ample evidence in the literature that the mission element of social justice, as reflected in Catholic Social Teaching (USCCB,

2004), including significant formal Church aspirational and invitational writing (Francis, 2013, 2020; John Paul II, 1990; Leo XIII, 1891; Paul VI, 1967), is connected with parish identity as practical participation in mission. However, commitment to social justice is often claimed by parishes but lived out by individuals rather than the whole community (Baggett, 2006; Zech et al., 2017). Social action tends to be motived by a sense of personal call rather than parish identity (Pierre, 2017). This is further evidenced in individuals and small groups within the parish supporting groups such as St Vincent de Paul, responding to global or national crisis events (Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, 2022), or championing other local causes (NZCBC, 2022e) rather than social justice being preached and lived as "a constitutive dimension" (Synod of Bishops, 1971, para. 6) of preaching the Gospel as parish.

This challenge of widening the level of participation is reflected in the literature, which addresses a range of concerns regarding the absence of parishes in practical engagement with mission. For example, parishes are seen as not providing the right social settings, opportunities or education for the community to participate in service to others (Baggett, 2006; Reinhart, 2021, p. 382). Over time, many parishes have lost the capacity and motivation to reach out (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). This can occur with changes of parish priest, involving one value set being replaced with another, leading to erratic practice and understandings of mission (Zigan et al., 2021). As well, while many parish communities understand the need to participate in the evangelising mission outside of participating in Eucharist, individuals struggle to do so effectively in a digital world (Lam, 2021). Frustration and weariness are also factors in modern times, with local parish decisions often attempting to re-establish 'that which has been lost', which can have the effect of discouraging young people and families from wanting to belong now (Leonard, 2019). The situation can also be exacerbated by weary parishioners wishing to hand over the work and responsibility to younger people, as others had done to them, but the younger people are either not there or are too busy with other priorities (Darragh, 2019b; Mollidor, 2014).

Thus, in terms of the parish identifying and claiming an integral and increased sense of mission, through which the parish school can connect and be inspired, the literature acknowledges a blend of awareness and ignorance, success and failure, aspiration and apathy. Consistently, effectiveness of parish understanding and action is determined by the quality of leadership.

2.2.3 Parish Leadership

The parish priest is appointed leader of the parish by the diocesan bishop without need of any local parish appointment process, skill-set consideration, or parishioner approval (CLS, 1983). Canon law establishes sacramental ordination as the means by which the priest presides at the central celebration of Eucharist and lay parishioners do not. It also outlines the rubrics for him being able to decide how much to include – or exclude – laity, in sharing the leadership of the parish. While this practice is long-established (McBrien, 1994), the leadership autonomy of the parish priest is not without its challenges for both priests and laity (Bruce, 2017; Cashen, 2010; Collins, 2014; Darragh, 2019a; Waters, 1999).

The issue of clericalism is raised as a multi-faceted obstacle to effective parish leadership in several documents: Pope Francis (2019a) indicates concern that priests are tempted to "see the ministry they have received as a power to be exercised, rather than a free and generous service to be offered" (para. 98). Similarly, Dulles (2008) recognises that it is a two-pronged problem arising "either when the clergy usurp the competence of the laity or when the laity shirk their responsibilities and foist them on the clergy" (p. 153). This dual-layered awareness of clericalism as problematic is also evidenced in the Aotearoa New Zealand synodal synthesis documents (NZCBC, 2022e), which call for greater lay leadership while also recognising the increasing importance of the priest's clerical position in the face of declining numbers of parishioners and priests. Lam (2021), argues that from the Church perspective there is no need to fear clericalism because "canon law also contains processes and conditions that oblige and countercheck the authority of bishops" (p. 95).

The Synod of Bishops (2018) recognises the perception of clericalism as "an insurmountable problem at times" (para. 199). Linked with exclusion of women, they reflect that it is a problem to be eradicated because many young people believe "that the Church consists only of the ordained ministers" (para. 199). Moreover, Arbuckle (2019) goes so far as to associate serious abuse, occurring in the past and not being addressed, with the leadership authority of the priest being accepted by lay people, largely without question. In summarising the issue, Aotearoa NZ parish priest Neil Darragh (2019a) highlights the need for "this clerical culture… which exaggerates the priest's role as 'another Christ'" to recalibrate its focus from the ordained priesthood to the priesthood of all the baptised" (Darragh, 2019a, p. 13).

Also linked with the experience of priestly autonomy, in parishes which have more than one priest there is evidence of "stark contrasts in discourse and even competition" between priests (Foucault

et al., 2007). A lack of shared identity and mission reflected in "different values and belief systems about the role of individual followers within the institutional system and about the way institutional values should be interpreted" can cause power struggles between them and prevent "the establishment of in-depth relationships" with parishioners (Zigan et al., 2021, pp. 2-3). Even when shared parish leadership and lay empowerment is positively envisioned by the priest and people, with the best of intentions, the parish reality is that the priest holds the formal power through his role and identity as priest. McGrail (2007) captures this in a pastor's reflection:

> I also begin to understand that – and I'm trying to work through for myself in person the kind of journey through the years – it's a part of, for me, I was arriving with the whole dominant – I was arriving with a blueprint idea: this is how they should be; all they need is the opportunity to react like this and they'll see it clearly. And they'll all learn new wisdom, which is, of course, my wisdom – I'll give it to them. And it's a load of bunkum really – it doesn't work. (p. 118)

In a climate of priestly autonomy and absence of shared leadership, many Catholics are leaving the Church because they are tired of vying for a share in power and they are resigned to petitions for reform going unheard (McDonough, 2013). This is exacerbated by a lack of Western priestly vocations: weary priests aging and retiring, parishes being merged or closed, and dioceses recruiting priests from overseas who have little cultural connection with the parish they are required to lead (Arbuckle, 2019, p. 101). Baggett (2006) refers to a civic toll emerging from a "generalised habit of deference to priestly authority that, in turn, has frequently deterred lay initiative and participation" and has resulted in "a leadership vacuum within many parishes" (p. 296).

Parish leadership does connect with lay leadership in the context of the parish school. While rarely mentioned in the literature, priests and school principals share a range of leadership roles along a spectrum of understandings and expectations regarding Catholic identity and mission. Priestly leadership finds itself alongside principalship (Hawley, 2015) and, whether intentional or not, as one study states, it is "critical for the school to be a parish ministry… we are supporting the ministry needs of the parish" (Arthur, 2011, p. 91). The parish and parish school are in relationship, and to better understand this relationship, having considered the universal Church and the local parish, it is necessary to carefully consider the identity of the parish school.

2.3 Parish School Identity

The Catholic parish school is by definition a part of the parish itself (CLS, 1983; NZCBC, 2014; Waters, 1999), and thus shares with the parish a "distinct Catholic culture" (Convey, 2012, p. 190) and a Catholic identity which "serves as the foundation and guiding force" (Cook, 2008, p. 3) for educational and faith-based practice within the school. Concurrently in Aotearoa New Zealand, it identifies as a 'state-integrated school' which is bound by secular educational legislation and accountable to state reviewers and auditors who hold little interest in Catholic identity or practice (ERO, 2019; Government of New Zealand, 2020). In this regard, the Catholic parish school is required to develop, honour and balance two distinct identities which each hold significant claims on the school's purpose and function (NZCEO, 2020b). With this duality in play, it is useful to historically and ecclesially contextualise the parish school before elaborating on community, mission and leadership.

From the 1840s until the Vatican II era, parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand were overtly established to support the local Catholic parish, especially parents of Catholic children, in imparting knowledge and practice of the faith, as claimed and lived in the parish and at home by families (Grocholewski, 2008; Groome, 2014; MacCormick, 2004). At the same time, they offered academic education to give Catholic children improved opportunities in the world (Askew & Vermeer, 2021; O'Neill, 2014). Such schools were largely run by religious orders with significant, and often problematic, input from the parish priest to whom they were fully accountable (Collins, 2014, 2015; Wanden & Birch, 2007).

In the decades prior to Vatican II, in response to what seemed an increasingly hostile and changing world, Catholic schools "came to be seen by the Church as one of its instruments for holding on to and re-establishing its control over the faithful at a time when it was rapidly losing its temporal influence" (O'Donoghue & Harford, 2014, p. 412). However, the Second Vatican Council ushered in a new approach of embracing the modern world: through recognising itself as part of the world rather than apart from it (Paul VI, 1965c); through acknowledging the dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit within the Church as a source of faith-filled motivation for change and hope (Paul VI, 1964a, 1965a); through intentional internal renewal and evangelical outreach including introduction of concepts such as religious freedom (Paul VI, 1965b) and interreligious dialogue (Paul VI, 1965e), and updating traditional norms such as the liturgy to make it more accessible to laity (Paul VI, 1963; Pilcher et al., 2013); and, through developing the understanding of the Church as the people of God which included revitalising the role of lay people within the Church (Flannery, 1996; Paul VI, 1964a). All of which have impacted on the changing identity and practice of Catholic parish schools as they

developed their identity as formal and functional ecclesial Catholic communities (Engebretson, 2014).

In the context of secular and religious global change, Catholic schools today bear little resemblance to those prior to Vatican II. Few religious orders now independently own schools and members of religious orders are extremely rare as classroom teachers, having been replaced by lay teachers with varying degrees of Catholic knowledge or faith commitment (Rossiter, 2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017). Concurrently, the norm has also become fewer young people or their families regularly attending Sunday Mass, even if they identify at some level as Catholic (Engebretson, 2014).

Yet Catholic schools remain a significant educational presence on the global stage. The 2023 Global Catholic Education Report (Wodon, 2023) indicates that in 2020 an estimated 34.6 million children attended Catholic primary schools worldwide, with 19.3 million students at Catholic secondary schools. In 2013, it was estimated that the Catholic Church in Australia effectively ran the largest educational system in that country and, worldwide, there were "approximately 92,700 elementary schools and 42,000 secondary schools" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 82). In Aotearoa New Zealand, with a population of approximately five million, over 66,000 young people, 8% of the school population, are in 234 Catholic schools (NZCEO, 2024). Within this provision, it is recognised that often a complex working relationship with the State supports Catholic schools remaining not only viable but able to thrive.

In 1975 in New Zealand, the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (Government of New Zealand, 1975), now part of the Education and Training Act (2020), provided financial security for Catholic education systems experiencing growing financial pressure at the time by removing much of the fiscal burden of operating Catholic schools, such as staff salaries and building maintenance. Individual Integration Agreements with school proprietors – usually diocesan bishops and occasionally leaders of religious orders – entailed a legal requirement that the Catholic special character be maintained and that in nearly all cases, 95% of students on the school roll must have 'preference'. Preference was defined and retained in the most recent review of the act, as "a particular or general… religious connection" (Government of New Zealand, 2020, Sch. 6, Cl. 26) with the school's special character. However, in practice this preference criteria means that while technically effective, most young people in Catholic schools have a tenuous family or sacramental link to the Catholic Church with little or no familial or personal faith practice (Owen, 2018; Wanden & Birch, 2007). The practical result being that, although Catholic schools are well established and

most are financially and educationally secure in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZCEO, 2019), a widespread lack of student and family commitment and experience make it a challenge to establish and maintain an authentic, lived expression of Catholic faith and life within schools (NZCBC, 2014).

While some legal elements of the Catholic school partnership are unique to New Zealand, similar State/Church relationships and adaptations to maintain Catholic schools, including secular pressures and students and staff with varying levels of commitment to Catholic faith, are common internationally (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Franchi, 2014; Gleeson, 2020; Killeen, 2017; McGrail, 2007). These contemporary realities tend to be considered in the literature more as a challenge or opportunity than a failing on the part of Catholic education itself (CCE, 2013; Groome & Horell, 2018; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2023; Rossiter, 2018). Engebretson (2014) summarises the consistent evidence that despite sharing its identity with secular contexts and expectations, and while experiencing declining student commitment to faith, Catholic schools nevertheless claim a "Catholic identity on the grounds that it has been established by the Catholic Church, and that it has an RE curriculum that has a particular (but not exclusive) focus on the Catholic tradition" (p. 13).

Despite the complexity, living out the foundational claim of ecclesial identity, i.e., being part of the Church, is well documented as not optional but a "constitutive characteristic" (Engebretson, 2008, p. 152) of the Catholic school. The congregation for Catholic Education (1998) states "it is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its "structure" as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry" (para. 11). Engebretson (2014) concludes that the school is connected to the Church from the core of the Catholic faith: as a "microcosm of the whole Catholic Church" the Catholic school not only participates in the mission of the Church but through its shared identity is actually representative of the credal 'marks' of faith being fundamentally "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (p. 165). In this regard, just as the challenge to claim and live an authentic ecclesial Catholic identity sits with the whole Church, particularly in complex modern times, the school, too, with varying degrees of success, must participate in recognising and developing its Catholic identity within the wider Church (BCECCP, 2014). From the school's perspective, Cook (2008) summarises this as a fundamental task, "Catholic identity signifies our essence, our distinctive character, and our raison d'être. It is the soul of our schools. Identity does not happen by itself" (p. 2).

In support of the journey of identity recognition and development, many researchers in the field have developed models which highlight the attributes of Catholic school identity. Even from a small

sample of these (Table 2.1), it is evident that a variety of recognised features are held in common. Utilising the principles of classic grounded theory, this research does not aim to choose an established model but rather draws on a range of data to develop substantive theory regarding the relationship between parish and parish school. In terms of this critical emerging category of identity, Table 2.1 serves to summarise a selection of diverse frameworks, revealing common themes, from research in the field to highlight similarities within this context without the need for detailed exposition.

Table 2.1

Models of Catholic School Identity – Four Summarised Frameworks from the Literature

Queensland and Catholic Education Commission (2023)	**Engebretson (2014, p. 42)**	**Convey (2012)**	**Groome (1996)**
Catholic school identity has:	*A Catholic school is:*	*A model of school Catholic identity is:*	*Catholic identity of the school is signified by:*
1) The person and message of Jesus as its cornerstone.	1) A community of faith.	1) People: Communicate the message and create the environment.	1) Positive anthropology of the person.
2a) Vision which is interpreted as mission.	2) Centred on the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ.	2) Content: Communicating Catholic teachings through 2a, or 2b.	2) The sacramentality of life.
2b) Key principles of mission: tradition and purpose.	3) A eucharistic community.	2a) Religion programme.	3) Communal emphasis.
3a) Vision which is implemented as practice.	4) A community which strives for holiness.	2b) General curriculum.	4) Commitment to Catholic tradition as a source of its story and vision.
3b) Key principles of practice: learning and witness.	5) A community which strives and witnesses Catholic values.	3) Culture: creating community through 3a or 3b.	5) Appreciation of rationality and learning as epitomised in education.
4) Community engagement.	6) An inclusive community.	3a) Faith community service.	*Plus 3 cardinal characteristics – commitment to:*
		3b) Rituals and symbols.	a) Individual personhood.
			b) Social justice.
			c) Inclusion.

Note. Examples chosen are from established research in the field of Catholic education. Summarised elements are in the order presented by the authors.

It is readily apparent that themes reflected in the frameworks include community, communication, Catholic tradition, ritual, values, and service. All of which strongly resonate with the emerging categories in this research of community, mission, and leadership, which are considered in the following sections of this chapter.

2.3.1 Parish School Community

A critical dimension of all schools is their inability to exist in isolation because, by their very nature, schools are communal. They hold an intrinsic mandate to be part of and serve their local and wider community by meeting the educational and pastoral needs of the young people in their care. Hence, for a school, "relationships are at the core of all activities" (Branson & Marra, 2021, p. 26).

An even wider range of relationships through Catholic connections supports the Catholic parish school being understood as a community within communities. Each parish school community is in partnership to varying degrees with a national secular education system and is situated within local towns or cities with a range of cultural relationships and administrative and parental educational expectations (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). Parish schools hold a shared claim of being part of the global Catholic Church community, which includes formal but varied links to the local parish. Thus, the Catholic school is "a community with education as its mission and Church as its context" (Hall et al., 2019, p. 27).

Research consistently highlights awareness and valuing of the faith dimension of the Catholic school community (Catholic Education South Australia, 2023; Hawley, 2015; Schuttloffel, 2012). A 2011 survey of 3,300 Catholic elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators in the United States of America revealed their belief that the faith community was one of the most important indicators of Catholic identity within the school (Convey, 2012). Similar findings arose from a 2017 study in Queensland, Australia, where 93% of respondents acknowledged that Catholic schools are different or very different from other school communities and that the faith-based identity of Catholic schools is important or very important (Gleeson, 2017, p. 1). While often dissociated with Catholic beliefs, and conflated with a secular understanding of disparate positive values or a "safe and nurturing environment" (Gleeson, 2017, p. 2), it is well established that being Catholic distinguishes Catholic schools from other schools and is foundational to its lived identity as a faith community. As Cook (2008) neatly summarises, for Catholic schools "Catholic is an adjective" (p. 2) and, the literature also suggests, a verb.

2.3.1.1 A Faith Community

Recognition of the Catholic school as a community of faith is firmly emphasised by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) in recognising the alignment of this communal identity with the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* (Paul VI, 1964a, 1965d) which "considers the school not so much as an institution but as a community" (CCE, 2022, para. 16) being "animated by the Gospel spirit of

freedom and charity" (Paul VI, 1965d, para. 8). In this way, the faith community dimension of a Catholic school is more than an institutional affiliation with a global Church, it is about functioning in an "ethos of Christian love" with an "intentional, active attitude of goodwill, kindness and compassion towards others in the community" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 43).

Through this Church relationship, in addition to being a community within a community, the parish school is a school faith community within a parish faith community. This is more than just geographical congruity and is deemed integral to the Catholic school's identity as a "functional community that produces social capital and is a major contributor to the effectiveness of the school" (Convey, 2012, p. 190). The faith context of the parish school within the faith context of the parish is intended then to be productive not just symbolic. It is called to support faith, culture and life being brought into harmony (CCE, 1977) through "an enriching exchange in a more extensive communion with the parish" (CCE, 2007, para. 50) as a key element of the wider Church. However, Engebretson (2014) draws attention to the limited connection most Catholic young people have with their local parish and cites overwhelming evidence that Catholic schools "have replaced the local parish as the point of contact with the Church for most Catholic youth" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 163).

Resonating with this context of disconnection and yet acknowledging the invitation to be in stronger relationship with the local Church faith community, the CCE advises Catholic schools to communicate a culture of faith in a "creative context, constantly being perfected" (CCE, 1982, para. 20), which is organic, critical, evaluative, historical and dynamic, so that it may speak to the hearts and minds of young people today. The aim is for the school's Catholic identity, as part of building the Church, to frame a contemporary school culture which provides opportunity for young people to integrate "faith and reason with the person of Christ at the centre of all that is done" (McVey & Poyo, 2019, p. 108). At the same time, the call is made for educators and parents belonging to the school faith community "to take a meaningful part, even outside the walls of the Catholic school, in the life of the local Church" (CCE, 2007, para. 50), so as to model the necessary awareness and practice of integrating faith and culture (CCE, 1977).

The school is clearly a faith community through its formal affiliation with the universal Catholic Church and local parish, and through its commitment to associated Gospel principles (Gleeson et al., 2020). However, actual Catholic faith practice across community members ranges from high to approaching zero practical engagement. This is particularly evident in the Catholic practice of participating in Sunday Eucharist. For a Catholic faith community, the Eucharist remains the "source

and summit of Christian life" (Catholic Church, 1994, #1324; Paul VI, 1964a, para. 11), and "in the Eucharist this life is constantly renewed" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 45) so that community celebration of the Eucharist is central to the Catholic parish school. Yet, even when identifying as Catholic, it is common that "most of the Catholic students and some teachers would not attend Sunday Mass" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 13).

The decline in Mass attendance is regularly cited in research regarding Catholic school communities on a spectrum including: failing on the part of the parish (Whittle, 2016); failing on the part of the school (Rossiter, 2018); perceived incompatibility of the Catholic message with modern society (NZCBC, 2014; 2022b); and even, being a flawed misdirection of focus because the parish primary school's Catholic identity should not be "predicated upon regular participation in formal Church worship" (McGrail, 2007, p. 98) because familial continuity "with the formal structures of parish life" (McGrail, 2007, p. 98) is considered more effectively experienced through the school and its staff. Sound arguments are made that Mass attendance numbers are more "minimal and external markers of institutional affiliation" (McDonough, 2016a, p. 66) than indicators of Catholic identity, especially when coupled with numerous claims of people believing they can be a good Catholic without attending Sunday Mass (Engebretson, 2014). Research also indicates that young people in schools can hold firm Catholic beliefs and value their spiritual formation with limited connection to the wider faith community's formal religious practice (Engebretson, 2007). In this context, as in this research's participant responses, shared participation at Eucharist as a faith community remains a complex and vexed element of interpreting and defining Catholic identity. Indeed, deeper understanding of shared Catholic parish and school identity as a functioning faith community may be more evident through greater emphasis on the dialogical dimension than on traditional compliance.

2.3.1.2 A Dialogical Community.

A key element of the Catholic parish school as a "privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out" is dialogical participation in "the evangelising mission of the Church" (CCE, 1998, para. 11). This is understood to be grounded in "the Trinitarian dynamics of dialogue" (CCE, 2022, para. 30) whereby the dialogue between God and humanity and dialogue among human beings forms a constitutive element of the Catholic school's identity. The Catholic school is required to reach out within its community and "practise the 'grammar of dialogue', not as a technical expedient, but as a profound way of relating to others" (CCE, 2013, para. 57). Thus, intrinsic within Catholic school identity is an awareness that many students and families who connect with the parish school may not necessarily be practicing representatives of the faith community, but rather

participants in an invitational dialogue of evangelisation. This dialogical element of school identity is pertinent to those with a strong practicing faith as well as to those who have little or no personal faith, because the nature of dialogue requires "an attitude of letting oneself be touched by the other, asking oneself questions about one's own ideas and actions" (Boeve, 2019, p. 47). The practice of dialogue develops understanding of one another and of Catholic identity.

This is a significantly different interpretation of Catholic school identity than the 19th - and early 20th - century origins of parish schools where full affiliation with formal Church teaching and Catholic practice was the norm (Collins, 2015; MacCormick, 2004). The current context of globalisation and rapid societal change has resulted in "different interpretations of the traditional concept of Catholic identity by educational institutions" (CCE, 2022, para. 1), so that both evangelisation of those with no Catholic affiliation, and the new evangelisation (John Paul II, 1990) of those with limited or drifting affiliation, are now recognised as forming significant parts of the identity and practice of the Catholic school (Gleeson et al., 2018; Rossiter, 2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019).

Within a context of religious pluralisation and secularisation there are warnings against the dialogical community creating its own disconnected identity, with emphasis that, especially for Catholic schools, Catholic identity must form the foundation for the dialogue: "We cannot create a culture of dialogue if we do not have identity" (CCE, 2022, para. 2; Francis, 2019b). There is danger in entering the dialogue without a firm sense of who we are. However, the constitutional Vatican II documents of *Gaudium et Spes* (Paul VI, 1965c) and *Dei Verbum* (Paul VI, 1965a), in particular, provide anchor points for Catholics to engage in necessary dialogue with those who hold other faith stances and perspectives, because Catholic identity is grounded in a God who is dialogical and "speaks to men [all people] as friends" (Paul VI, 1965a, para. 2). Rather than diminishing its Catholic ethos, a school which is a dialogical community can reflect an understanding of Catholic tradition as "dynamic and responsive… [seeking] new ways of teaching and learning about the tradition which empowers learners to interpret the tradition for their time and context" (Madden, 2020, p. 126).

Other significant research claims Catholic identity should not be established prior to dialogue and asserts that there is a major response needed in the face of diminishing Catholic connection and practice along with rising unease at what might be interpreted as "implicit or tacit indoctrination" (Whittle, 2022, p. 289). In this pluralist context, it is claimed that Catholic education has a duty to do more than just choose between continuing or discontinuing their traditional Catholic identity, rather "in a context of plurality and difference one is urged to constitute one's own identity from the

dialogue with the other" (Boeve, 2016, pp. 151-152). This concept of the school as a particular dialogical community is fully developed into a pedagogical approach referred to as the "Catholic dialogue school" (CDS) which has emerged from "Enhancing Catholic School Identity" research carried out at the Faculty of Theology Centre for Academic Teacher Training at Leuven University in Belgium, in collaboration with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Australia (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). These researchers claim to offer a context for providing quality Catholic education to young people through neither "giving in to secularisation nor to neo-traditionalism… [and] actively engaging religious pluralisation" (Boeve, 2019, p. 37). It is seen as an "opportunity to recontextualise the Catholic identity of schools in a way that is both theologically legitimate (in continuity with the richness of the faith tradition) and contextually plausible (viable and effective in a context of religious and philosophical pluralisation)" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 77). The research incorporates data from more than "479 schools… 95,000 students, 25,000 staff and 15,000 parents" (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017, p. 25).

2.3.1.2.1 The Catholic Dialogue School (CDS).

The underlying premise of the claim that the CDS is an ideal identity model for authentic Catholic education is that traditional Catholic identity, referred to as confessional identity, is incompatible with contemporary society and only exists as leftover elements of cultural Christianity which are "simply continued out of habit, from the desire to remain recognisably 'Catholic', as an expression of a passive, awaiting attitude, or also just to not to have to deal with it" (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 200). From the perspective of their research, 'dealing with it' requires an awakening to: 1) a new, post-critical approach to understanding faith and belief; 2) a recontextualising of Catholic faith tradition in terms of contemporary cultural context; and 3) a recognition of dialogue as a religiously diverse and philosophically pluralist pedagogical space where God and 'others' may be encountered, and the Catholic faith tradition reconsidered in multiple ways (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 77).

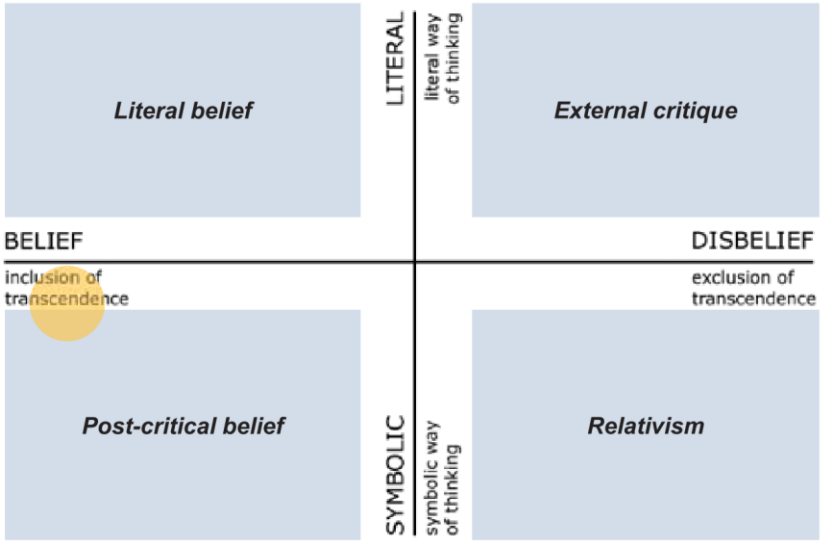
While much of the wider literature does not hold the view that the demise of traditional Catholic school identity is immanent and inevitable, and the CDS model does not specifically consider the Catholic school's relationship with parish, it is useful to outline the three primary scales of CDS as they provide robust insight into the nature and complexity of Catholic school identity. Each scale suggests elements which individually and communally resonate with the school and parish relationship.

1. The Post Critical Belief Scale

Recognising that individuals hold a range of beliefs and diversely apply symbolic or literal interpretation regarding religious understandings, Dirk Hutsebaut (1996), based on David Wulff's (1991) engagement typology, developed the Post Critical Belief (PCB) scale to describe four different ways that people deal with the contents of belief (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). The emphasis is not on what one believes, or what one does because of those beliefs, but rather on "the way in which one receives, critiques and reflects upon the content of his or her faith and religious beliefs" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 78). The representation of this PCB identity is outlined in Figure 2.2 and includes marking the position considered as theologically optimal for a Catholic dialogical school.

Figure 2.2

Diagram of the Post Critical Belief Scale with theologically optimal position (round marker) (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 78)



The scale establishes a typology of four quadrants formed by the intersection of an x-axis which marks an individual's affirmation or disaffirmation of belief in God and a y-axis which concerns "the degree to which one interprets the content of faith and belief in a literal or symbolic way" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 79). Those with a literal belief hold that God is personal and immutable, that religious truths are fixed within the tradition of the Catholic Church, and that Scripture is mostly to be interpreted and accepted as literal. There is a deep desire for "stability, certainty, security, and familiarity" (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195) and a corresponding suspicion and fear of responses to new and complicated problems which are not able to claim absolute certainty in terms of adherence to ecclesiastical authority and orthodox Catholic teaching. Those with a literal belief often

have a deep personal faith and an extensive knowledge of formal Catholic teaching. When challenged they can present as religious fanatics with fundamentalism-motivated intolerance (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017).

Those within the external critique quadrant effectively hold a stance of "literal disbelief" (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195) usually grounded in a personal, conscious rejection of religious beliefs in the face of modern scientific rationality. Individuals understand religious content in a literal way and interpret it as nonsense to be discarded. Those operating from external critique tend to have a dualistic perspective of religion and science, with little imagination for and intrinsic fear of religious understandings blurring lines between free personal autonomy and faith. When challenged they can present as anti-religious fundamentalists who are verbally and physically intolerant of the beliefs of others (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020).

The relativism quadrant reflects the stance of those who understand that religious belief is reflected through symbolic language, metaphors and actions that operate well beyond the literal level of interpretation, but they hold no personal belief in God, or in any other transcendent being. They may see a purpose in varied religious beliefs for their respective communities "since all religions are equally untrue" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 82). Those operating within the relativism quadrant tend to have an openness and positivity towards religious beliefs without committing themselves to, or particularly affirming, any religious stance.

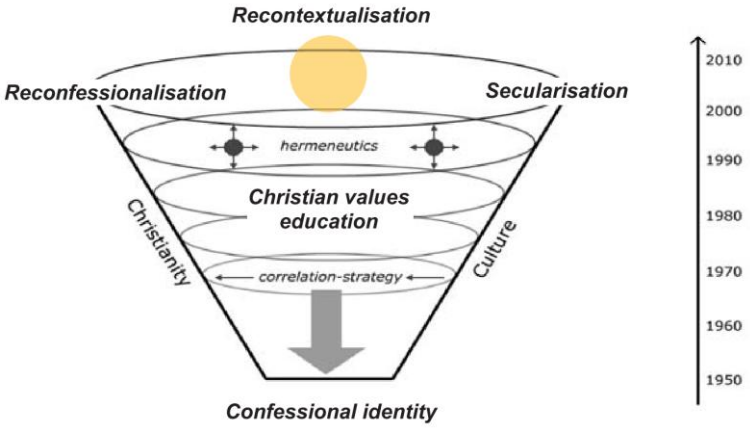
The post-critical belief quadrant is presented as the ideal stance for faith-filled individuals and for the Catholic dialogue school. Those within this typology have a strong belief in the transcendence of God as experienced and revealed through an ongoing process of reflecting on a range of religious perspectives, including critiquing long-held traditional beliefs, and engaging in "deeper, symbolic (re)interpretations of the content of that faith and religion" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 83). In this way meaning can be developed that is both rationally reasonable and evocative of a lifelong, dynamic relationship with the transcendent God. The ideal position (orange dot in Figure 2.2) for faith formation within Catholic schools is then determined as strong awareness of and belief in God and close proximity to elements of literal belief without being immersed in them. While not easily lived, it is believed that this approach supports a lifelong relationship with the living God in our modern, pluralist world through providing tools of mediation, interpretation, translation, and self-reflection to better respond to the challenges and complexities of developing and living personal faith in today's world.

2. School Missiological Identity: The Melbourne Scale

With data increasingly revealing a gap between Catholic schools' faith tradition and societal culture, CDS researchers posed themselves the task of understanding what should be the theological mission of Catholic schools in contemporary culture. The resulting scale (Figure 2.3), called the Melbourne Scale, represents the dynamics occurring as Christianity (left side) and Culture (right side) move further apart over time with the rise of pluralisation and secularisation and the decline of Catholic faith practice. Beginning with confessional identity, which is the traditional catechetical approach of Catholics teaching Catholics, the scale reflects the limited impact of strategies, including Christian values education and increased focus on hermeneutics in schools, in retaining traditional Catholic school identity (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020).

Figure 2.3

Diagram of the Melbourne Scale with theologically optimal position (round marker) (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 88)



Data reveals that Catholic schools are drawn to developing one of five main identity traits (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020): 1) Confessional identity – A traditional Catholic school, by Catholics for Catholics, where Catholic symbols and practices are explicitly present, understood, and valued by teachers, students and families; 2) Christian values education – Aiming to bridge the gap between Christian and secular positions by emphasising shared values in order to be a more welcoming and inclusive school community; 3) Reconfessionalisation – Increasing endeavours to overtly claim and strengthen association with the lived tradition of the Catholic Church, thereby, 're-confessionalising' their identity; 4) Secularisation (or Deconfessionalisation) – Letting go of Catholic identity, intentionally or unintentionally over time, in a process of institutional secularisation which adopts and emphasises elements of non-religious education with a corelating gradual decrease in Catholic faith practice, usually in an attempt to become more relevant and appealing; or 5) Recontextualisation –

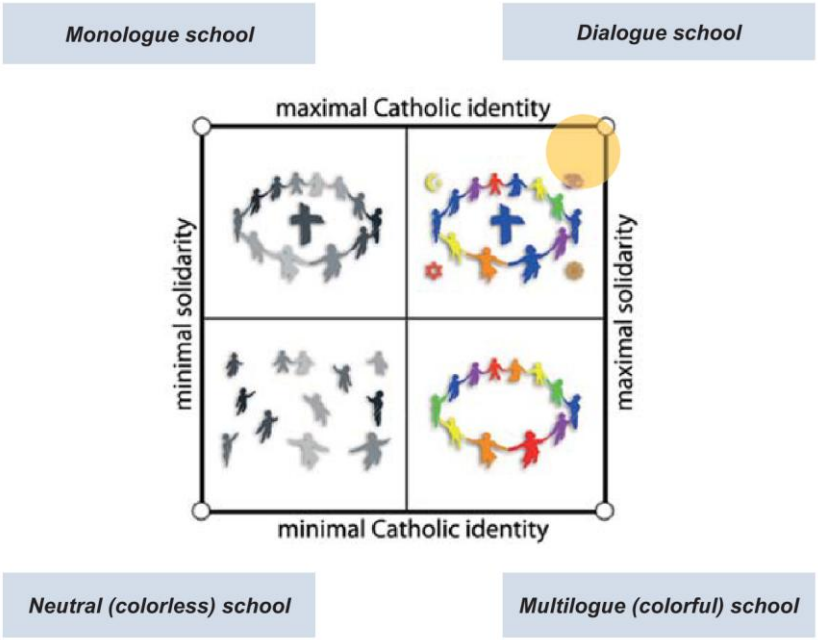
Considered the ideal, where the Catholic school deliberately aims to recreate its identity by overtly recognising, valuing and dialoguing with plurality in modern culture, and adjusting to reflect this reality, while also maintaining and reinterpreting its Catholic identity. In summary, "one distances oneself from the 'old style' Catholic identity, but still wields a preferential option for the Catholic narrative" (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 204). Thus, the mission of the Catholic dialogue school becomes not maintenance of or re-establishing of its Catholic tradition for Catholic families, but of orienting its mission to one of inclusiveness, welcome, and engagement where all who come to a Catholic school, with all their diverse religious and ideological world views, participate in a dialogue which will redefine the nature of the Catholic school to be arguably fit for today's world and for today's Catholic Church (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017).

3. School Religious and Cultural Identity: The Victoria Scale

The final element of the CDS model represents the "ways in which religious and cultural identities interact (or do not) at Catholic schools in contemporary contexts of religious and philosophical pluralisation" (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 101). The established theme of Catholic schools needing to limit the traditional Catholicity of their identity in favour of inclusive dialogical processes, incorporating diverse religious and cultural elements of pluralist culture, is again reinforced. However, as the y-axis of Figure 2.4 indicates, there is a renewed emphasis on the value of elements of traditional Catholic identity along with the x-axis highlighting the advantages of school-wide solidarity with "people from sub-cultures other than the Catholic one" (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 205). The Victoria scale ideal calls for the maximal presence of both.

Figure 2.4

Diagram of the Victoria Scale with theologically optimal position (round marker) (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020, p. 102)



The typology of this scale positions the cultural and religious identity of Catholic schools in one of four distinct quadrants (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020): 1) Monologue school – A traditional Catholic school where Catholic identity includes attending Mass, approved religious education, a majority of Catholic teachers, and a targeted audience of Catholic students. This is the model most aligned with New Zealand Catholic schools (NZCBC, 2014); 2) Multilogue (colourful) school – Low traditional Catholic identity while open and welcoming of diverse cultures and religious affiliation. Schools in this quadrant may have little justification for calling themselves Catholic; 3) Neutral (colourless) school – Lacking not only in clarity of religious identity but also disengaged in cultural identity, with both actively seen as unimportant, or even disruptive, in the educational endeavour; 4) The Dialogue school – The optimal typological position, where the lived Catholic faith tradition of the school is central to its identity and – in dialogue – religious, philosophical and cultural diversity form its Catholic and educational identity rather than threaten or undermine it.

In summary, the extensive CDS research and resulting typological scales give clear guidelines for a particular form of Catholic identity by outlining challenges and opportunities existing in modern society. However, while all elements resonate with this research, it is still too early to ascertain the effectiveness or limitations of their ideal approaches in terms of community, mission, and leadership, particularly regarding the relationship between the Catholic parish and parish school.

While suggesting a dynamic, intentional approach to engaging with a pluralist, secular society, the CDS model may also be underplaying the power and potential of other alternatives which claim an overt living and invitational Catholic identity, with Christ at the centre, with quality Catholic religious education, with effective faith-filled leadership, and with inclusive Catholic special character as necessary points of difference (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Groome & Horell, 2018; NZCBC, 2014; Rossiter, 2018).

2.3.2 School and Mission

Resonating particularly with dialogue and diversity elements of the CDS, Catholic schools are required to function within secular and religious frameworks and expectations. In terms of mission, they have secular goals required by educational legislation (Government of New Zealand, 2020) and state curricula (Ministry of Education, 2015), and they participate in the mission of the Church (CCE, 1977). Unlike most parishes, it is common internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand for today's Catholic schools to have mission statements capturing something of their identity and purpose (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Sultmann & Brown, 2019) and a formal part of articulating and planning their active school mission is writing and utilising a strategic plan or charter to which they are held accountable at government and diocesan levels (ERO, 2019; NZCEO, 2018a). As this research is investigating the relationship between parishes and parish schools, the following section primarily addresses the distinctive understanding of and participation in the Church's mission by Catholic schools.

At its core, the Catholic school's "primary responsibility is one of witness" (CCE, 2007, para. 38) with its pedagogy being "inspired by the Gospel" (CCE, 2013, para. 56). In practice, in today's climate of waning Catholic commitment and increasing numbers of students and families claiming little or no personal faith, this mission is reflected in a sliding scale of varied school commitment to "evangelisation through which the Gospel message is carried to believers and to non-believers" (Hawley, 2015, p. 24).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Catholic schools have a preferential enrolment system that claims to establish an environment where 95% of all students have a connection to the Catholic faith (NZCEO, 2020b). As such, the context for mission is invariably one of new evangelisation because students and families, and often school staff, have little understanding of what Catholic mission means (Duthie-Jung, 2012; Owen, 2018; Wanden & Birch, 2007). Synodal documents reinforce this awareness with dioceses drawing attention to an "overarching theme of lack of mission" (NZCBC,

2022c, p. 4). Associated submissions to the synod claim faith formation is "inadequate in enabling our people to engage in mission" (NZCBC, 2022d, p. 7) and while some acknowledge the commitment of individuals to the Church's mission there is uncertainty about how to focus on mission collectively (NZCBC, 2022b, para. 46).

However, in the light of local, national, and global social and environmental crises, Catholic schools reflect greater clarity and confidence in recognising their Catholic mission as associated with social justice. This is claimed in the context of *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis, 2020), *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2013), and *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015a), and includes familiarisation with the wider body of Catholic Social Teaching (USCCB, 2004), with the support of national agencies such as Caritas (Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, 2022) and religious education programmes such as *Tō Tātou Whakapono Our Faith* (National Centre for Religious Studies, 2012, 2021).

2.3.2.1 New Evangelisation.

In terms of opportunity for reengagement of those who have stopped practicing, or who are on the periphery of sacramental participation or parish affiliation, the school is increasingly seen as having replaced the parish "as the point of contact with the Church for most Catholic youth" (Engebretson, 2008, p. 151). It is in this context, as the primary active witness within the new evangelisation, that the school is called to be creative and dynamic in responding to the faith needs of its community through its formal religious education curricula and through "the more subtle religious education curriculum experienced in the culture/ethos of the school" (Sultmann & Brown, 2014, p. 4). Sultmann and Brown (2014) also reiterate that key to success of this mission is an established and overt Catholic identity which is recognised as foundational to the school.

The importance of the school in this new evangelisation, however, is not to establish itself as a replacement for wider Church connection but rather to take on the task of being a conduit for improved, dynamic reconnection. As challenging as this might be, this perspective posits that young Catholics need to know that the Church is more than their school, more than an isolated entity where their association ends with their graduation. It is essential that young people, and their families, should

> know and have opportunities to relate with their local priests (or other parish personnel). They should know the opportunities that are available to them through their local parish,

> understand what contribution they may make to their local church and in time, hopefully, develop a sense of belonging to that local community. (Engebretson, 2014, p. 174)

In this way, the mission of the Catholic school is to develop a community which shares the principles of the Gospel in a way which becomes the educational norm for the school "as its internal motivation and final goal" (CCE, 1977, para. 34). Thus, as part of the wider Church, the Catholic school is called to "live in fidelity to their educational mission, which has Christ as its foundation" (CCE, 2013, para. 63). This awareness and intent are reinforced by some guidance for improved relationship between school and parish within Aotearoa NZ (NZCEO, 2007, 2009), however, the material is not prominent and was not mentioned by any participants within this research.

Resonating with elements of the Catholic dialogue school approach (Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020), the Church is also clear that a Christ-centred identity does not mean putting pressure on or excluding those who hold different faith perspectives but, rather, seeing multireligious society as a pedagogical opportunity for learning about different beliefs and entering into "dialogue both with those beliefs and with non-believers" (CCE, 2013, para. 55). At the same time, the Catholic school celebrates its identity and actively "pursues… evangelisation and care for the growth of those who are already walking towards the fullness of Christ's life" (CCE, 2022, para. 13). The flame of faith deserves the opportunity to be fanned into life with authentic Catholic pedagogy so that, at the same time, the school comes to participate in the "evangelizing mission of the Church and create the environment in which Christian education is fulfilled" (McNamara, 2017, p. 40).

It is a significant responsibility, then, for the school to bear witness to the Christian message in the face of advancing pluralisation and secularisation where "Catholic schools find themselves in a missionary situation, even in countries with an ancient Christian tradition" (CCE, 2013, introduction). This is particularly complex when the school community itself struggles to understand its mission as it becomes more secular and encounters growing "disillusionment with clergy and Church leaders and widespread religious illiteracy" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 12).

A recurring call is for the Church to enter into a new Vatican II-style rediscovery of itself by recovering a sense of "unique mission, identity and values in response to the needs of the 21st century" (LaBelle & Kendall, 2016, p. 284). It could be argued that the synodal process is a beginning in this direction (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2022; Francis, 2021; NZCBC, 2022b). Another approach is to recognise that for some time significant elements of the Church's

evangelising mission have been evident in young people's awareness of the increasing need for social justice, and their growing realisation that this is intrinsically linked to their Catholic identity (Gleeson, 2020; Groome, 1996; Hawley, 2015).

The Church clearly teaches that evangelisation and integral human development are interwoven in the mission of the Catholic school (CCE, 1977, 2013; 2022). Responding to Jesus' call to share the Gospel necessarily includes a commitment to the "complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human" (Paul VI, 1965d, para. 3). In essence, only a strong and united action by the Church in the field of education in an increasingly fragmented and conflict-ridden world can contribute both to the evangelising mission entrusted to her by Jesus and to the construction of a world in which human persons feel they are brothers and sisters (CCE, 2022, para. 7).

2.3.2.2 Social Justice.

The understanding that social justice is a constitutive dimension of being Catholic (Synod of Bishops, 1971) resonates strongly with Catholic schools and their staff and students' innate desire to care for the world and help those less fortunate than themselves (Francis, 2015a, 2020, 2023b). At the same time, a commitment to social justice can create a confusion with Catholic identity and mission because learning about the principles, and responding to issues, can be disconnected from Catholic social teaching. It is common for teachers in Catholic schools to have difficulty in identifying and negotiating "the boundaries between social justice, human rights, and faith-based aspects of Catholic social teaching principles" (Gleeson, 2020, p. 281). Furthermore, Engebretson (2014) highlights that an eagerness to instil social justice principles, and provide opportunities for living these out, often appears "to exist in a vacuum" (p. 46) in Catholic schools rather than being explicitly linked to Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. Thus, there is a continual risk that social justice educational action is claimed as Catholic outreach but "reduced to mere philanthropic work aimed at responding to a social need [rather than being] an essential part of her [the Catholic Church's] identity and mission" (CCE, 2022, para. 10).

It can be seen, then, that social justice in and of itself does not necessarily reflect Catholic school identity, and this can be reinforced through its presence in teaching and action in non-religious state schools. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2015) connects it with the critical area of health education in highlighting that "social justice principles of fairness, equity, and inclusivity

are central to hauora[7]" (Ministry of Education, 2022). It is also seen as a broadly applicable pedagogical approach which can address "the impact of power relations at both societal and individual levels" by recognising inequities and developing effective decision-making processes (Hargraves, 2021). In addition, all New Zealand schools have strategic mission statements which usually include comparable values to those in Catholic school mission statements regarding a commitment to social justice elements such as participation, responsibility, service, and care (ERO, 2022). However, the point of difference is that Catholic schools are called to ground their social justice education and action in the person of Jesus Christ and in his Church (CCE, 2017; Groome, 1996; Rossiter, 2018; USCCB, 2004). Indeed, the duties of "proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia)... presuppose each other and are inseparable" (Benedict XVI, 2005, para. 17).

When integration of Catholic social teaching and social justice education occurs across the curriculum, and not only in religious education, with involvement of staff and students, clarity of Catholic identity and mission can emerge as "a faith that does justice" (Barry, 2008, p. 12). It becomes an experience of actively engaging in an "essential part" of the evangelising mission of the Church (John Paul II, 1991, para. 5), and an opportunity to "re-examine commitment to the Church's mission" as a Catholic school faith community (Devitt, 2017, p. 166). Because "all of the social justice activities in which teachers and students engage are directly related to and flow from the Eucharist" (Engebretson, 2014, p. 45) as "source and summit of Christian life" (Paul VI, 1964a, para. 11), there is a direct but rarely referenced link between parish school and parish through a shared eucharistic table and opportunity for shared commitment to social justice.

2.3.3 Parish School Leadership

A plethora of literature exists to highlight the variety and importance of school leadership in secular education (Fullan, 2015; McGinity et al., 2022; Modeste et al., 2022), and a comparable bank of material addresses the diverse and vital need for quality Catholic educational leadership (Australian Catholic University [ACU], 2022; Branson & Marra, 2021; Sultmann et al., 2022). The purpose of the following discussion is not to summarise the literature in this regard, but to highlight factors where leadership pertains to Catholic identity in terms of the relationship between parish and parish school. Thus, attention is placed on the leadership context of parish priests, principals, and teachers and other school staff.

[7] A te reo Māori term used commonly in New Zealand education to mean wholistic (physical, mental/emotional, social and spiritual) wellbeing.

2.3.3.1 Priests.

The direct leadership role of the parish priest having canonical authority regarding worship, education, and governance of the parish school, has already been established (CLS, 1983c. 519). With reference to schools, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2022) emphasizes the importance of the parish priest's role, in association with the authority of the diocese, through which "the hierarchy of the Church not only exercises its duty of vigilance over Catholic schools, but can also be directly involved in their establishment and direction" (para. 60). There is a clear expectation that the priest exercises leadership within the school yet "little research has been conducted regarding the importance of the pastor's role in maintaining Catholic identity in a parish school" (Hawley, 2015, p. 49).

Amidst historical accounts of hierarchical dominance by parish priests over principals (Collins, 2014, 2015), and other experiences associated with clericalism sidelining professional expertise and experience of teachers (McDonough, 2011; Plekon, 2021), research also highlights contemporary awareness by priests of the practical need to support schools through working with the principal. A survey of over 1000 priests in the United States revealed they recognised that "a lack of Catholic identity and concern over finances were the two most important needs facing Catholic schools" (Hawley, 2015, p. 50). Their reasons are founded on a belief that Catholic identity is the "primary mechanism for transmission of Catholic faith" (Nuzzi et al., 2009, p. 34), and finances are recognised as critical to the physical survival of the school (Killeen, 2017), and are often an area where priest and principal must work together (Harris, 2012). The study further highlights their awareness that principals require support to strengthen the school's Catholic identity through greater connection with parish life, and that there is benefit in richer engagement of the clergy in supporting Catholic education in words, presence, and deeds (Hawley, 2015).

A key element of priests' capacity to provide this level of support is their formation and training to do so. Arbuckle (2013) highlights a dearth of practice in this regard and comments that "the first challenge, and possibly the most difficult, is the need to train clergy to recognize the ministries of lay people and to work closely with them" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 104). The observation is made that as seminarians increasingly "lack the desire to lead a parish school" (Simonds et al., 2021, p. 125), it is even more important that they receive formation in "what Catholic schools are all about" (Calkins & Convey, 2019, p. 131). However, a significant mixed-methods study across the United States reveals that little training is given to seminarians to better understand their relationship with the parish school, or how to work with principals who have the primary responsibility for its day to day running

(Boyle & Dosen, 2017). The national Seminary of Aotearoa New Zealand mirrors this lack of priestly formation for the parish/school relationship. The following was received in response to requesting the number of hours allocated by Holy Cross for training seminarians in this area:

> Feedback from the Formators here at Holy Cross Seminary is that any specific training regarding RE and Catholic Special Character in schools is not a topic focused on for the seminarians. It may be briefly touched on during formation talks and in courses but is not a targeted area of study. (R. Pinto, personal communication, November 17, 2023)

The need for priests to understand their school leadership role is deemed particularly important for modelling what the Church should look like to the whole parish community and beyond. In 1982, at a time when 'teaching religious', were leaving Catholic education in great numbers and laity were emerging as the primary leaders and teaching body in Catholic schools, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) drew attention to the presence of clergy, those religious still in schools, and lay men and women, together, as representing "a better understanding of the reality of the Church" (para. 43). Forty years on, with virtually no clergy or religious in schools, the associated call for "dialogue and walking together" (CCE, 2022, para. 82), as pastors and school leaders, is reiterated with no less urgency and in arguably even more complex times for the Church and for Catholic education (Cook, 2008). Furthermore, the claim is made that the success of Catholic primary schools today often relies on the relationship between pastor and principal (Baxter, 2011). Hawley (2015) cites evidence of a strong correlation between the health of this relationship and "healthy enrolments and stronger parishes" to the point where "those schools who maintain strong leadership in the form of pastor and principal collaboration survive, and those without, eventually close" (p. 42). No contemporary evidence is available as to whether this is the case in Aotearoa NZ.

Research, at the turn of the millennium, addresses "the gradual breaking down of the management-powers of the parish priest in the domain of education" (Waters, 1999, p. 235) with the introduction of the New Zealand 1975 Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (Government of New Zealand, 1975). However, Waters (1999) also highlights the potential of priests acting as chaplains to primary schools and also supporting the parish relationship with the school in other ways because, "Ideally, the aims of both ought to converge" (p. 247). In this regard, previous NZ Catholic bishops have provided some brief but clear post-integration guidance regarding the role of the parish priest in relation to their schools (NZCEO, 2007, 2009), however, with no research participants mentioning these documents, it is unknown how or if they are used in contemporary parish/school relationships.

2.3.3.2 Principals.

In contrast to the parish priest holding a clear ecclesial leadership mandate regarding parish schools, albeit complex in praxis, the leadership role of the principal in a Catholic school is less well defined, complicated, and highly challenging. With significant secular and religious responsibilities, "Catholic school leadership requires additional skill sets, such as monitoring religious education and formation, promoting Catholic identity, serving as the faith leader, leading under unique governance models, and ensuring operational vitality" (Sullivan & Peña, 2019, p. 188). Also, while leadership is often shared in a variety of ways among teachers and others within the Catholic school community (Branson et al., 2019; Gleeson, 2020), including the priest, the principal is consistently recognised as holding the key role and set of responsibilities, across secular and religious dimensions, as the formal leader of the school (Bernardo et al., 2019; Swen, 2020).

A critical area of leadership for the principal, in the context of this research, is to model and "grow the Catholic identity of the school community" (Branson et al., 2019, p. 226). Elaborating, Branson et al. describe this as a requirement for the principal, and all who hold leadership roles, to be committed to evangelisation in a context of understanding and embracing the Catholic mission of the school as linked to the mission of the Church through living, proclaiming, and spreading the Gospel of Jesus. This expectation for school leaders to model and develop Catholic identity and mission is consistently reiterated in the literature (CCE, 2022; NZCBC, 2014; Owen, 2018; Spesia, 2016; Sullivan & Peña, 2019).

The Church overtly charges school leadership with the responsibility for promoting and protecting Catholic identity, and connections with the Catholic community, "grounded in the principles of the Catholic faith and imparted by teachers of right doctrine and probity of life" (CCE, 2022, para. 50). However, there is a growing absence of support for the principal through practicing Catholic teachers becoming increasingly rare (Arbuckle, 2013) and those with appropriate qualifications and a commitment to faith formation even rarer (Bernardo et al., 2019; Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Gleeson, 2020). The lack of faith-practicing Mass-attending teachers also has implications for the parish and parish school relationship in terms of both their own participation and their modelling for young people and their families (CCE, 1982).

Challenges also exist in the principal's role itself. A recognised barrier to quality Catholic leadership being realised in all Catholic schools is a growing lack of appropriate principal qualifications and/or faith formation (Gleeson et al., 2020; Owen, 2018). A recent survey in Aotearoa New Zealand found

that less than 20% of Catholic school principals had qualifications in Religious Education or Catholic character[8] and fewer than 10% were studying towards such qualifications (The Catholic Institute of Aotearoa NZ, 2019). While international and local expectations remain high – for example, it is a condition of employment that New Zealand Catholic school principals are Catholic (Government of New Zealand, 1975) and that they have a commitment to leading the maintenance and development of the Catholic character of the school (NZCEO, 2020b) – in practice the support and capacity for them to do so is becoming increasingly varied and uncertain (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Grace, 1996; Morten & Lawler, 2016; Owen, 2018). Certainly, these are challenging times for school leadership.

2.3.3.3 Teachers and Other School Staff.

While this research considers the relationship between parish and parish school through the lens of priest and principal, as primary leaders of these entities, it is noted that leadership regarding Catholic identity has many facets and is regularly evident in the work and example of other teachers and school staff working alongside the principal (Convey, 2012).

Research highlights the role that teachers play in linking Catholic identity to relationships centred in faith, community, and life (Gleeson et al., 2018): "Faith relationships connect students to Church and to the world; community nurtures relationships between teachers and students; and life relationships foster the integrated formation of the whole person – socially, academically and religiously" (Sultmann & Brown, 2019, p. 154). The development of such relationships is necessarily dynamic because while there is often consistency in teachers' commitment to their Catholic school, there is also considerable variance in what they believe is expected of them given the "many different theological and sociological understandings of Catholic identities" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 67).

Attention is drawn to a growing decline in leadership capacity evident in decreasing numbers of teachers who are committed, practicing Catholics (Rymarz, 2010). An additional nuance is that many teachers are graduates of Catholic schooling themselves but "while generally supportive of the Catholic identity of the school, [they] are unprepared or unwilling to assume responsibility for the school's religious culture" (Shields, 2018, p. 91). Shields (2018) proposes that, rather than being despondent about the lack of traditional commitment to Church practice, schools might embrace the enthusiasm and authenticity of young teachers choosing to return to Catholic schools as

[8] Catholic character is a term used in Aotearoa New Zealand to encapsulate the diverse dimensions of Catholic identity, mission and praxis expected in Catholic Schools. (NZCEO, 2020b).

teachers. The suggestion is that they bring an energy and imagination connected to their own memories of Catholic schooling which is an asset. However, the situation also highlights a growing need for quality professional development and formation for teacher level leadership which includes "self-awareness and ongoing identity formation; openness to faith perspectives; and courageous communication skills" (Madden, 2020, p. 126).

Further to activating motivation, Cook (2008) claims the evangelising mission of the church will only be fulfilled through deep understanding and active participation of school personnel. This requires planned and deliberate recruiting, forming, and evaluating of all levels of school staff in terms of the school's Catholic mission and identity to recapture the best of what our religious forebears experienced as formation. The challenge of this sentiment is underscored in the realisation that "ironically, Disney provides more specialized formation for their cast members than we provide for Catholic school personnel" (Cook, 2008, p. 4).

In summary, there is universal acknowledgement that finding, having and forming effective leaders is essential for claiming and developing the identity and mission of Catholic schools. While holding linked but distinct roles, this is as important for priests as it is for principals and other school staff. Quality, effective leadership has direct implications for the relationship between parish and parish school.

2.4 Theoretical Insight

Application of the principles of classic grounded theory involves reading widely after the research interview and categorisation phases to discover resonance or contrast with initial findings (Glaser, 1998). Within the categories of identity, community/connection, mission/evangelisation and leadership, the interview process revealed a range of disparate theoretical themes regarding parishes and parish schools as distinct but connected entities: The Church is perceived as an organisation with history, structure and agency, while over time understandings of just what the Church is have changed. Additionally, groups and individuals within parishes and schools hold a range of similar and divergent understandings regarding the importance and function of each entity within the Church itself. Also, individual and collective human agency is recognised as present and complex, producing behaviours which are representative of historical and present realities and which are functional in effecting change. To better understand causes and meaning within these themes, the researcher sought a theoretical tool which would resonate with the data, and

appropriated sociologist Margaret Archer's (Archer, 1995) Morphogenetic Approach (MA) as an effective theoretical model for providing such additional insight.

Sociologists have long recognised that social change is rapidly accelerating within the postmodern context of questioning, deconstructing, and transforming established social foundations and behaviours (Archer, 2003, 2021; Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022; MacKinnon & Heise, 2010). Parishes and schools cannot avoid being caught up in what Maccarini (2014) describes as:

> the endemic 'crisis' of most institutions, identities, habitus, and forms of individual and collective action in their 'modern' configuration. Social forms and relationships are continually created and destroyed, and a 'logic of opportunity' is triggered. In this societal context, both structural and cultural conditioning tend to produce ever new possibilities of action and experience for persons and groups. (p. 49)

2.4.1 The Morphogenetic Approach

Margaret Archer is credited as a founding social theorist in the development of critical realism (CR) (Archer & Morgan, 2020; Newman, 2020). It is in the CR context that she conceptualised the relationship between social structure, agency, and culture (SAC) which is referred to as the Morphogenetic Approach (MA) (Archer, 1995, 2021). The underlying concept is that structure and culture motivate human agency, over time, towards stasis or change.

The Morphogenetic Approach provides strong conceptual elements for recognising sociological theory resonating with the relativist constructivist stance of this study, even though it was developed within a critical realist context (Archer, 1995). Utilising realist research aligns with a known potential for new understandings to arise from "blurred boundaries between ontologically differing paradigms" (Peters et al., 2013, p. 337). Rather than avoiding critical realist theoretical concepts for this study, Gioia and Pitre (1990) suggest that robust consideration of such alternative perspectives:

> offers the possibility of creating fresh insights because they start from different ontological and epistemological assumptions and, therefore, can tap different facets of organisational phenomena and can produce markedly different and uniquely informative theoretical views of events under study. (p. 591)

A more nuanced interpretation of key elements of MA are recognised, from the relativist, constructivist perspective of this research, as providing sociological insight outside of a strictly realist stance (Hardy, 2019; King, 1999; Newman, 2019). This multi-faceted theoretical approach has significant resonance with an investigation into the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools, and the perspective of parish priests and school principals. Mutch (2020) describes MA as a tool capable of providing "analytical purchase to both macro and micro topics" (p. 4). In the context of structure being associated with social positions or roles, and culture referring to motivating commitment to values and ultimate concerns (Porpora, 2013), MA can offer insight into what is happening in relationships between established formal Church organisational structure and changing individual or group behaviour and understandings at the local parish and parish school levels.

2.4.1.1 Using Critical Realist Elements within Relativist Research.

The relativist ontological stance of this research, including constructivist, interpretivist, and symbolic interactionism perspectives of the parish/school relationship, frames an understanding that the relationship can only be understood through human experience and reflexivity. While MA claims a critical realist concept of social structure as "an ontologically prior or autonomous realm, independent at some point from individual knowledge or activity" (King, 1999, p. 200), epistemological elements of the approach are open to, and actually require, an epistemological relativism because understanding "particular aspects of the world depends on our understanding of its nature" and as such "recognises the inescapable role of interpretation in seeking to understand the world" (Mutch, 2020, p. 2). In terms of critical realism, Mutch (2020) goes so far as to say that giving any substantive theory a critical realist label is misleading because the underlying tenets of it can be utilised within an array of different substantive theories. In essence, critical realist concepts may readily be applied outside their claimed domain.

A key point of contention for Archer is postmodernist thought and associated poststructuralism (Newman, 2020). She decries what she sees as a limiting of humanity within postmodernist social theory through "a virulent rejection of 'Modernity's Man', which is then spilt over into the dissolution of the human subject and a corresponding inflation of the importance of society" (Archer, 2013b, p. 66). Archer's criticism is levelled at the postmodernist reduction of structure and culture to aggregate properties, rather than emergent ones with their own causal powers" (Archer, 2000, pp. 21-22). From this position, postmodernism and poststructuralism are viewed by Archer (2013b) as having significantly reinforced an idealistic anti-realist stance in favour of social

constructionism, and at the cost of objective power through human agency. She believes the resulting implication becomes a complete undermining of agency so that the postmodernist claims a stance where “there are no emergent properties and powers pertaining to human agents” (Archer, 2013b, p. 66). The real human person is effectively lost; Archer quotes Foucault: “Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Archer, 2013a, p. 66; Foucault, 1970).

However, others argue that the agency of individuals and groups, in structural or cultural stasis or change over time, is not undermined by constructivist reasoning being associated with MA (Armet, 2017; King, 1999; Newman, 2019). Constructivist research can connect through an ontological dualism which Archer (1995) proposes operates as “an emergent form of realism in which emergent properties at both the collective and the individual level are distinct from each other and irreducible to one another” (Armet, 2017, p. 319). Similarly, MA’s realist-only stance becomes less exclusive through the recognition of “interaction over time of objective structure and individual, subjective agency” (King, 1999, p. 199). Furthermore, the claim that MA’s temporal dimension must be linked to critical realism (Archer, 2014), to avoid social theory only reflecting currently living persons, also fails the ontological exclusivity test because constructivist interpretation necessarily references the past as “meaningfully produced social relations between (now dead) individuals which have an impact on the present through the actions and interpretations of living individuals” (King, 1999, p. 205). It is in this context that there is significant capacity for, and practice of, utilising elements of MA to effectively describe sociological factors in relativist research such as this study.

2.4.1.2 Identity and Change or Stasis.

The Morphogenetic Approach is a theory which explains the processes of macro and micro elements of society changing or remaining the same. Congruent with constructivist research, MA has a foundational understanding that there is no pre-determined or knowable goal or endpoint because people create this through a living process. This is made clear in Archer’s explanation of the term morphogenetic:

> The ‘morpho’ element is an acknowledgment that society has no pre-set form or preferred state: the ‘genetic’ part is a recognition that it takes its shape from, and is formed by, agents, originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities. (Archer, 1995, para. 5)

Archer describes two processes of social structuring behind MA: 1) Morphogenesis, which refers to "those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, state or structure"; and 2) Morphostasis, referring to those processes "which tend to preserve or maintain a system's given form, organisation, or state" (Archer, 1995, para. 166). At the core of MA is an understanding that these processes always involve people acting "out of structural and cultural circumstances, which their very actions then proceed to modify or sustain" (Porpora, 2013, p. 28). Archer contends that the common occurrence of social systems and actions reproducing and confirming "existing social arrangements" (Mutch, 2020, p. 3) is being "outstripped" (Archer, 2015, p. vi), over time, by morphogenesis. It is this context, of explaining changing social relationships, that particularly reflects meaningful resonance between MA's theoretical approach and what is being described by interview participants regarding the relationship between parishes and Catholic schools.

The concept of emerging and varied identity, central to this research, is developed within MA in terms of interplay between primary and corporate agency in what Archer presents as three simultaneously experienced orders of reality: 1) *natural* – body/environment interaction, involving the physical and biological world, such as gravity, hunger and sleep; 2) *practical* – subject/object interaction, involving routines, practices and use of resources, such as building, cooking or fixing things; and 3) *social* – subject/subject interaction, involving ideas, language and beliefs, such as religious beliefs, cultural traditions and philosophies (Archer, 2013b). This interplay develops social, professional, and personal identity (Archer, 2000). Within MA, agency is always in the plural because it refers to relations regarding structural resources rather than isolated individual identity (Archer, 1995). Primary agency refers to those who do not influence structures in a coordinated or explicit way: they "neither express interests nor organise for their strategic pursuit" (Archer, 2017, p. 25). Alternatively, for Archer, corporate agents are "organised interest groups" (Karlsson, 2020, p. 47) who have aims which they have articulated to themselves and others, and they have organisation to achieve these goals.

MA posits that people are born into structural and socio-cultural pre-existing realities which immediately and continuously influence social, professional, and collective identity. Primary agents are born into "collectivities sharing the same life chances" (Archer, 2000, p. 263) based on structural resources, where they "become enmeshed in society's structural and cultural properties" (Archer, 2000, p. 261). Personal identity, and associated collective desire to make changes within society, develops through reflexivity over time, in terms of the three orders of reality, and through people's experience of having their desires, concerns or intentions met or not met. Resulting, intentional,

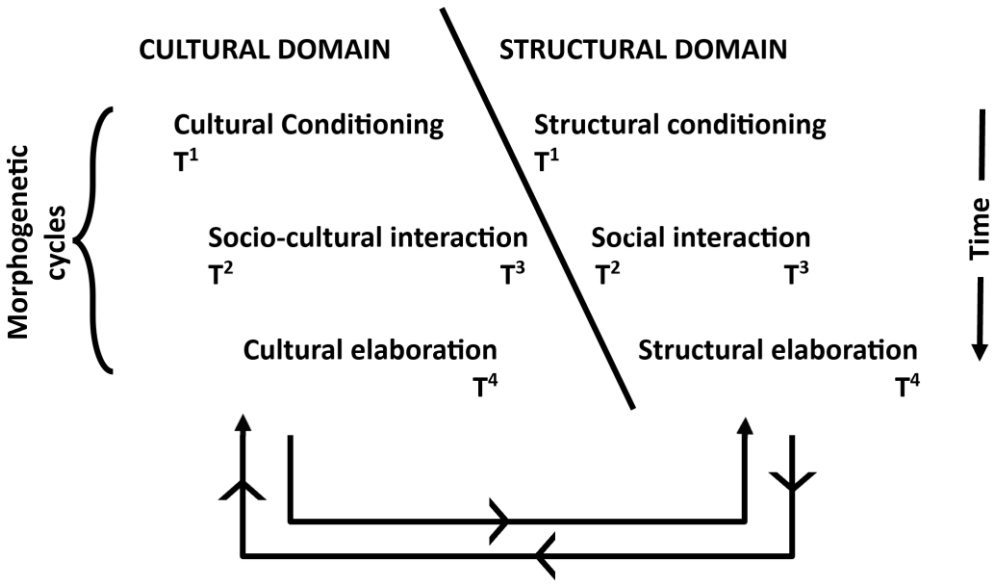
corporate agency entities then emerge to influence transformation or maintenance of societal structures (Archer, 1995). Thus, over time, the stage becomes set for the process to begin again from a new elaborated starting point.

A critical dimension of this understanding of people as primary or corporate agents, is a recognition that these identities are not fixed. People may readily move between one group or the other depending on the social context (Archer, 2015). In addition, those who are acting within the social order, in gaining or developing particular social roles (such as priest or principal), not only express corporate agency through engagement with transformation of cultural and social systems but are themselves necessarily transformed in a process of elaboration. As the institutional role structure changes, "new roles are created, and these constitute new positions in which more people can willingly invest themselves" (Archer, 2000, p. 11). Turner (1997) summarises that this potential of social change comes "from the dynamic interplay of corporate agents pursuing their interests and the reaction of primary agents who, if mobilized, are transformed into corporate agents" (p. 336).

The Morphogenetic Approach diagram (Figure 2.5) representing this cycle of stasis or change is described by the author as "extremely simple" and also "very precise" (Archer, 2015, p. 137). In this figure, 'T' refers to time, with numbers one to four denoting subsequent phases of time. Structural and/or cultural factors (conditioning) are recognised as historically in place at T^1 as "dual sources of motivation" (Porpora, 2013, p. 28) for action. In effect, the current cultural and structural conditions "are a result of past social interaction between agents, which condition the current context within which social agents operate" (Seal, 2016, p. 271). This contextualises 'reasons' as the motivation, rather than a more external law or force, in the sense that agents "enjoy interpretative freedom" (Horrocks, 2009, p. 41) in terms of agency and action. The actions (interaction) of people over time, from T^2 to T^3, within their structural or cultural circumstances, maintain or effect change on those circumstances. During this phase individuals "go about their lives exploring inherited powers and boundaries" (Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022, p. 83) which they "adhere to, deconstruct, or play with in the interaction stage" (Seal, 2016, p. 217). This process of maintenance or transformation leads to what Archer refers to as structural or cultural 'elaboration' which "necessarily post-dates the action sequences which gave rise to it" (Archer, 1995, para. 15), so that T^4 becomes "the new elaborated configuration" (Donati, 2013, p. 215) from which a new process may be considered, and a new cycle begun.

Figure 2.5

Diagram of Structural and Cultural Morphogenetic Cycles (Archer, 1995, para. 309)



2.4.1.3 Structure, Culture and Agency.

As has been described, the Morphogenetic Approach is based on the conceptual triad of structure, culture, and agency. It is important to recognise that structure (involving social positions, organisations, and bureaucracies) and culture (involving ideas, beliefs, and understandings) are recognised as distinct from, but in relationship with, one another, and impact on, and are impacted by, human agency (Archer, 1995, 2016, 2021). Throughout continuous morphogenetic cycles over time, through processes of conditioning, interaction and elaboration, agents develop capacity to reflect on their structural and cultural circumstances and thereby "make value judgments, and act according to particular motives, concerns, and projects" thus exercising "varying powers to transform or reproduce aspects of the social world" (Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022, pp. 81-82). Structures are described by Archer (2016) as "relational, interest-based and, crucially, they not only constrain and enable but also motivate people's intentionality and action" (p. 428). In this context, structure is more than an established, pre-existing, physical entity and is better understood as "material relations among social positions" (Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022, p. 82).

In terms of MA, culture is understood as produced by and existing within collective ideas, opinions and beliefs, and relies on shared understandings (Case, 2015). Archer (2016) describes these elements within culture as the "sum total of 'intelligibilia' (all elements with the dispositional capacity to be understood)" (p. 430). In this context, a valuable concept within MA for this research is a recognition that culture is also more than a set of individual or group understandings. It is

considered an “existing repository of recorded myths, artefacts, documents, and so on, that are the objects upon which the various ‘logics’ are constructed, and which result in the variations of interpretation and disagreement found in social interaction” (Hardy, 2019, p. 3). From this understanding, the articulation of school or Catholic culture by participants in this research may be recognised as evidencing established culture, often predating priests’ and principals’ understandings of it, yet the primary focus – on the relationship between school and parish – may be constructed through an interpretivist approach (O'Connor et al., 2018). School and parish culture are real and the relationship between them is influenced by socio-cultural interaction of individuals and groups, and cultural elaboration occurs through that lived reality.

In postmodern society especially, cultural and structural elaboration is understood as happening virtually simultaneously such that “cultural elaboration has an almost instantaneous impact on structural elaboration and vice versa” (Wight, 2016, p. 70). Both elements emerge from human activity responding to situations and ideas not in any “deterministic way but by shaping the universe of possibilities” (Mutch, 2020, p. 3), which becomes powerfully suggestive regarding possible actions and responses in terms of individuals’ projects and goals. The strategic intent and actions of people are therefore derived from individuals being “involuntarily or voluntarily in situations conditioned by cultural and social structures, giving them varying interests and leading them to calculate costs and benefits of actions” (Turner, 1997, p. 336) resulting in social stasis or change. In essence, structure is related to governance, making demands, and dominating, as motivated by material resources, organisations, and social positions, whereas culture is related to people’s ability to coerce, persuade and influence based on ultimate concerns or commitment to values (Archer, 2013b; Case, 2015; Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022).

As already intimated, agency plays an equally critical part in the Morphogenetic Approach. Structures are understood to “pre-date any particular cohort of occupants/incumbents” (Archer, 1995, p. 168) but were formed, maintained, or changed through general agency over time. Structures are considered “firstly as the condition in which agents find themselves, and secondly as the consequence of the practical actions of agents” (Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022, p. 81). Therefore, as distinct but interwoven elements, structure and agency are considered to “have always existed together … as different causal forces, one of which logically precedes the other” (Newman, 2019, p. 111). In this context, Archer (2003) sees each as “bearers of quite different properties and powers” (p. 2): while agents can think, deliberate, believe, intend, and love, structure can do none of these things, but it can limit and/or enable in ways individuals cannot (Archer, 2003). The key element

being, especially when considering multiple morphogenetic cycles, “there is never a moment at which both structure and agency are not jointly in play” (Archer, 2000, p. 465). Social structures cannot exist without people, or without having an influence on people.

There is evident relevance of this triad of elements within MA supporting uncovering relational perceptions, regarding parish and parish school, through the perspective of priests and principals. Culture, structure and agency, and the interrelationship between all three, clearly resonate with this research. The process of “uncovering our ultimate concerns, from what we care about most, together with our other concerns” (Archer, 2013a, p. 74) suggests insight into identities, mission and associated leadership choices which lie at the core of parish/school relationships.

2.4.1.4 Reflexivity.

At the core of the Morphogenetic Approach is an awareness that social stasis or change is fundamentally influenced by human reflexivity, which concurrently empowers individual and collective agency and transforms identity (Archer, 2000). Reflexivity is understood as an internal conversation reflecting on and weighing up available options in the light of personal intentions, concerns and projects (Archer, 2003). It is reflexivity, to the extent of being understood as “a defining characteristic of what it is to be human” (Mutch, 2020, p. 4), that is the key element linking structure and agency within MA (Archer, 2003, 2007). Although reflexivity is part of the human condition, Archer (2003) clarifies that not all reflexive activity is at the same level. She outlines three distinct reflexive modes and adds a fourth, failing mode, for reference.

The first mode, *Conversational reflexivity,* involves actors reflecting, processing and completing their reflection though shared conversations with others, usually involving shared assumptions which frame the conversation. Archer (2007) recognises this as predominantly evident in settings which are more traditional and have a high degree of temporal and situational continuity. This mode is the closest to traditional ‘community studies’ and is beginning to wane under pressure from the next reflexivity mode. The second mode, *Autonomous reflexivity,* involves “techniques of ‘rational’ decision making in conditions of contextual discontinuity” (Mutch, 2020, p. 4). It usually comprises shared assumptions which frame the conversation. Archer (2007) recognises this mode as having been dominant since the 1960s through persistent globalisation and evident in the model of the multi-national corporation. However, this mode is also coming under pressure. The third mode, *Meta reflexivity,* involves not only reflection on success or failure but also on the styles and patterns of reflexivity used to make and challenge such determinations. Archer (2007) sees this mode of

social critical reflection as being on the rise, particularly with the postmodern questioning of old certainties and the emergence of endless alternatives, such as situational competition being replaced by pluralism. The fourth and final mode, *Fractured reflexivity,* is the concept Archer (2007) ascribes to those who fail to effectively plan and monitor projects attending to their values or ultimate concerns: "These are society's victims, doomed to be shaped by forces external to them" (Mutch, 2020, p. 4).

Each mode of reflexivity, including the fourth, promises resonance with the lived experience of principals and priests in reflecting on the relationship between parish and parish school. This is particularly so with the understanding that each mode is a relatively broad concept where individuals are not bound to a single mode but may range between each as they utilise different combinations (Archer, 2007). It is also true that often one mode will be more dominant based on particularly influential structural and cultural conditions.

In conclusion, the Morphogenetic Approach offers significant theoretical insight for this research into the relationship between parish and parish school because the key elements of culture, structure, agency, reflexivity, and the passage of time, are all evident to some extent in the interview data. While the intent is not to directly apply MA as a critical realist theoretical tool there is ample justification in the literature to utilise elements of this approach in developing substantive theory pertaining to this relativist, constructionist research into the relationship between parish and parish school.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature, while rarely specifically addressing the relationship between parish and parish school, provides significant data, from the perspective of either the Catholic Church (including parish) or the parish school, on key categories of Catholic identity, community/connection, mission, and leadership. The interplay between these complex categories, especially the clarification of the central element of Catholic identity, highlights resonance with the interview data gained in the process of applying the principles of classic grounded theory. In addition, the theoretical lens of the Morphogenetic Approach emerges from the data as providing useful insight into stasis or change regarding the studied relationship. The rarity in the literature of Aotearoa NZ contexts and the absence of local or international theory specifically addressing the parish/school relationship highlight the significance of this research addressing elements of that knowledge gap.

Chapter 3 Research Design

This chapter explains and justifies the research design adopted in this study. It provides a rationale for the chosen approach and outlines the process by which data was gained and analysed. The trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations are also addressed. Supported by the research question, "What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand?", this research draws on insights from interviews with Catholic parish priests, and principals of Catholic parish primary schools, to explain this specific relationship. Data from the interviews also highlights the participants' personal experiences and perceptions as priests and principals regarding aspects which enhance or limit the parish/school relationship.

The dearth of existing literature in this area, and the researcher's belief that priests and principals hold the knowledge and experience to demonstrate the relationship between parishes and parish schools, set the context from which decisions were made regarding theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches within this study. An overview of the research design is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Overview of Research Design Elements

Ontological and Epistemological Understanding	**Theoretical Perspective**	**Methodology**	**Method**
Relativism – There are no absolute truths, but a range of equally important truths relative to the individual. **Constructivism –** Meaning is not objective or externally acquired but constructed by individuals as they experience, process and make sense of relationships with the world, including with each other.	**Interpretivism –** Meanings are not necessarily shared but emerge through robust processes of interpreting data gathered from participants' own understandings, beliefs, attitudes, and values. **Symbolic Interactionism –** Meaning making is a dynamic process of social interaction where phenomena have symbolic meaning salient to the individual's experience.	**Principles of classic grounded theory** – The principles of classic grounded theory (CGT) established by Glaser and Strauss (1967) were drawn upon to conceptualise the emerging categories of data by utilising the systematic process of constant comparison.	**Unstructured in-depth interviews –** The data collection process involved in-depth unstructured interviews. This data collection instrument enables the participant to prioritise the meaning they have constructed pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation.

Note. The above elements are summarised from the respective components within this chapter. References are included with those fuller descriptions.

The interrelationship between the ontological and epistemological framework, theoretical perspective, methodology, and method are integral to this research (Crotty, 1998). They drove the intention to gather data and construct new understandings grounded in the meanings the leaders of parishes and parish schools formed from their experiences as leaders of these entities. This chapter explains that context in five major sections: epistemological foundations, theoretical perspective, methodology, method, and trustworthiness of the process including ethical considerations.

3.1 Epistemological Foundations

Epistemological assumptions frame the exploration of "origin, nature, and methods of knowing and the limits of human knowledge" (O'Connor et al., 2018, p. 91). Clarity of epistemology within research design is critical as it impacts on all areas of the study including the researcher's role, how data is collected, and what techniques are used for analysis (Walsh et al., 2015).

The researcher of this study holds a relativist rather than realist ontological stance. A realist ontology would seek to discover and compare universal truths based on assumptions that knowledge is knowable from an external reality and empirically measurable (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2012). Such a stance would lead a researcher to a quantitative study in order to impartially gather, quantify and analyse statistical trends and variables associated with a known phenomenon to explain why something occurs, and to predict outcomes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Silverman, 2017). However, there is virtually no material in the literature relating to parish and parish school relationships in Aotearoa NZ, and furthermore established hypotheses or theories and data to measure are non-existent. Thus, quantitative research was inappropriate for this research.

A relativist position, associated with the limited literature regarding parish and parish school relationships, assumes that the knowledge sought in this study is not a single known phenomenon to be discovered; rather, there are sets of subjective experiences with multiple meanings to be uncovered and explored through the representations of the meanings formed by participants (Levers, 2013). This relativist perspective incorporates understandings that knowledge does not come from external sources but is generated by human minds: "truths are not absolute but are relative to the individual, and all truths are equal and important" (Boynton, 2011, p. 112).

The underlying premise is that knowledge does not exist externally, like metaphorical gold nuggets waiting to be discovered, but rather that the participants, facilitated by the researcher's questioning and analysis, "create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come into contact" (Ultanir, 2012, p. 195). In the context of this research, recognised features "may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). The aim, therefore, is to uncover and build understanding of the features of the relationship between parish and parish school through qualitative research, and to construct meaning associated with these features.

The epistemological stance which underpins this approach is constructivism. “Constructivism describes the relationship between us as human beings and our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). Such description perceives a relationship where human beings continuously engage with objects, including one another, in a dynamic and ongoing endeavour to make sense of them. Therefore, there is no objective meaning to be discovered, but rather a range of meanings to be constructed based on individuals’ previous experiences and background knowledge (Ultanir, 2012). Furthermore, there is no hierarchy of meanings; “for the constructivist, each person’s subjective experience is just as valid as anyone else’s” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 714).

While straightforward in essence – the constructing of hitherto unknown knowledge from the experiences and associated understandings of individuals – the realm of constructivism within research is not without complexity. Joldersma (2011) draws attention to four self-identified types as examples: (i) Cognitive constructivism, having its origins with Piaget and the ways in which individuals, especially children, learn and apply knowledge (McPhail, 2016); (ii) Critical constructivism, incorporating an understanding that “technologies incorporate non-technical, i.e., social values, but for the most part these get embedded in a form that appears as purely technical” (Van Den Eede, 2020, p. 118); (iii) Radical constructivism, asserting that there is no way of knowing if another person’s experience is the same because all knowledge is in the “heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience” (von Glasersfeld, 2013, p. 1); and (iv) Social constructivism, acknowledging that no person exists in isolation, with individuals developing in relationship, as “our social context informs identity and action, or who we are and what we do” (Srivastava, 2020, p. 325).

Furthermore, there is also a distinction between constructivism and constructionism which can be lost in the literature when discussing constructivist epistemology. The terms are often loosely associated with each other and used interchangeably in research. Elaboration is provided by Crotty (1998) that constructivism describes individual people as human-beings-in-the-world engaging with objects and making sense of them. In essence this is “the relationship between us as human beings and our world” (p. 79), while constructionism denies this in favour of a perception that we are provided with meaning by the cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born. The former is a process of developing individual understandings from personal relational experience, the latter is a life journey of acquiring and applying already established collective understandings and meanings within cultures.

In focusing on developing new understanding of the relationships between parishes and parish schools from the perspective of the leaders of each entity, parish priests and school principals, this study is clearly placed within the broad constructivist camp and includes an awareness of the social context in which people live, work and are formed. A constructivist awareness presupposes that participants have influence on the entities which they lead, that they have personal, meaning-full experiences associated with this role, and that they have been influenced throughout their lives by myriad experiences as beings-in-the-world, including those of education and Church. The approach, using the principles of classic grounded theory (Glaser & Holton, 2007), was not to predetermine or seek causes for or origins of these experiences but rather to allow all data to emerge and inform the study with as limited bias as possible on the part of the researcher (Glaser, 2002b).

The participants involved in this study had significant experience of working in and with parishes and parish schools. Through prior personal reflection, conversation with others, and action in their communities, particularly in their roles as priests and principals, they are, and have been, engaged in the human process of constructing meaning associated with these experiences. Research interviews facilitated articulation of these existing understandings but also supported further construction of meaning as the reflective process continued in the actual research conversation.

There was no presumption that individuals would have common understandings with one another or that any perspective was more accurate than another. The research started with the data and through a method of constant comparison, categories, meanings and theory were constructed through a process grounded in a relativist ontology and fully epistemologically congruent with a constructivist stance (Tarozzi & Glaser, 2007).

3.2 Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective through which data was viewed and justified is the focus of this section. The respective paradigms of symbolic interactionism within interpretivism, and their appropriateness in terms of the researcher's ontological stance, along with application of the principles of classic grounded theory, are outlined in this study.

3.2.1 Interpretivism

Interpretivism places the focus of the research on developing understanding of data generated from the participants interview texts. Rather than attempting to explain objective elements of the parish and parish school relationship, this theoretical perspective facilitated rich interpretation of the lived

experiences of the participants; understandings which were gathered and analysed by the researcher.

Interpretative research pursues exploration of the understandings, beliefs, attitudes, and values that influence what people do (Andrews, 2012; Chowdhury, 2014; Oliver, 2012). It acknowledges that individuals may interpret the same data in different ways, and the researcher, using robust empirical processes, is able to bring his own perspective to the interpretation without devaluing the validity or quality of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Interpretivist inquiry aims to "embrace the complex and dynamic quality of the social world and allows the researcher to view a social research problem holistically, get close to participants, enter their realities, and interpret their perceptions as appropriate" (Leitch et al., 2010, p. 70).

Interpretivism is generally considered from three distinct approaches: (i) hermeneutics, where human meaning is not directly expressed but is read and interpreted through human phenomena such as writings, practices, events, and situations; (ii) phenomenology, where preconceived understandings of phenomena are set aside in favour of an immediate experience of them with the aim of gaining a less biased, and potentially more meaningful and objectively authentic, perception of the things themselves; and (iii) symbolic interactionism, where meaning is derived from a dynamic and ongoing process of social interaction between persons and phenomena (Crotty, 1998; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015).

In seeking subjective individual and experiential data directly from interviews with parish priests and principals rather than, for example, from writings or in-situ observations, the hermeneutic approach had little application to this research. Similarly, an objective understanding of the parish and parish school relationship was not being sought, so attempts to extricate the personal experiences and associated individual perspectives of participants regarding set understandings of this relationship was considered counterproductive. Rather, this research was aligned with social interactionism as it aimed to gather and interpret rich data gained from individuals engaged in an ongoing process of social interaction with people and other phenomena associated with parish and parish school life. The choice of symbolic interactionism as the interpretive approach for this study is further justified and described in the following section.

3.2.2 Symbolic Interactionism

The specific theoretical perspective which flows from a relativist, constructivist, and interpretivist stance in the context of this research is that of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism arose from American pragmatism within the field of sociology (Mead, 1934), and was the context within which grounded theory was 'discovered' and introduced to qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although the popularising of symbolic interactionism occurred a few years after grounded theory appeared (Blumer, 1969), the two often form a rich partnership in academic constructivist research (Handberg et al., 2015).

Symbolic interactionism emerged as a counterpoint to the prevailing attitudes of pragmatic functionalism of the day and associated "notions of society as an ordered, unified and naturally evolving whole" (Bowers, 1989, p. 35). Within functionalism, individual actions were subsumed by theoretical beliefs that individuals could only be understood in terms of their role functions. In contrast, Mead (1934), while developing the origins of social interactionism, "viewed human beings as taking actions that are based on meanings shaped through social interactions" (Oktay, 2012, p. 10) rather than on their functional position, or purpose, within society.

The understanding that meaning is constructed and articulated through a dynamic process of social interaction, rather than discovered and quantified through analysis of observable behaviours, supports the epistemological and theoretical stance of this research. The potential synergy of developing understanding of the parish and parish school relationship by grounding data provided by participants, using the principles of classic grounded theory, and incorporating theory of context and social interaction, is supported in Blumer's (1969) outline of the three premises of symbolic interactionism:

> (1) That human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) That the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and (3) that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. (p. 2)

Mead (1934) believed that although there is a reality beyond our thoughts of it, our awareness of reality is actively constructed. "Meaning does not inhere in 'things' but comes through engagement

between subject and object" (Oliver, 2012, p. 411). Implications of the 'object world' as a core aspect of symbolic interactionism are captured succinctly by Bowers (1989):

> For the symbolic interactionist, numerous objects comprise the world we live in. It is the cumulative nature of these objects that defines our social object world. However, each individual's object world is different than the object worlds of other individuals. This means that reality must be different for each of us. Defining an object world requires discovering what objects are salient to the individual's experience as well as understanding the nature of meaning of the object for that person. (p. 40)

Thus, a central feature of symbolic interactionism is "the inseparability of the individual and the context within which the individual exists" (Handberg et al., 2015, p. 1023). In terms of this research, the desire to understand the unknown relationship of parish and parish school was grounded in the perspective of the leaders of each entity. These individuals provided data from their own social context as they perceived it, not primarily in terms of what society may state is expected of them in that role – although this may have formed aspects of their own understanding. This approach is fully aligned with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism where the researcher is "primarily concerned with discovering the realities of the subjects, the nature of the objects in their world, how they define and experience their world" (Bowers, 1989, p. 39). It is the participants who named, described, and contextualised the objects, and their meanings, within the parish and parish school relationship.

Symbolic interactionism also holds that individuals have different understandings and perceptions of the 'object world' in which they live, and that they attempt to make sense of different situations by putting themselves in the position of others in that situation. Mead (1934) refers to an inner voice called the "me" which develops throughout a person's life and is often considered as distinct voices representing significant groups to which people belong, and roles associated with their place within those groups. In effect, individuals consist of multiple 'me's – such as mother, parishioner and principal – and these perceptions of self exist simultaneously or consecutively and also change over time (Bowers, 1989). More succinctly, in terms of this research, the 'me' provides individuals with "an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at and tries to understand reality" (Charon, 2007, p. 3).

Thus, symbolic interactionism offers parameters for this research where the parish priest was interviewed as 'parish priest', and the primary school principal as 'principal'. Through careful invitation and explanation, the interview participants were encouraged to speak into the space of parish and parish school relationship directly from their most salient 'me' positions – i.e., that of their specific roles as leaders of each entity. At the same time the 'me' of the researcher was established as that of interviewer during the data gathering process, and less salient positions were consciously put to the side during the interview process. Other 'me's were appropriately brought to the fore in the data analysis phase where the researcher's national experience in the realm of Catholic education and diocesan parish support became relevant to interpretation of data.

In summary, symbolic interactionism establishes a theoretical perspective whereby the individual is inseparable from the context within which they exist. In terms of studying the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools from the perspective of parish priests and school principals, no attempt needed to be made to extricate the individual and context from each other. Rather, the opportunity was presented and tapped where the richness of individual experience within the specific context was gathered and categorised, as their most salient 'me', using the principles of CGT, to provide richer understandings than might otherwise have been possible. Therefore, this theoretical framework helped "guide the research process, maintain focus, and enhance quality during all phases of the study" (Handberg et al., 2015, p. 1023).

3.3 Methodology

The principles of grounded theory were selected as the methodology for systematically gathering and processing data regarding the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in this research. There is a rich synergy in this qualitative study between grounded theory and the researcher's chosen ontological, epistemological, and theoretical stance. While grounded theory has grown to include a range of associated but distinct approaches, this research drew upon classic grounded theory (CGT) as "a highly structured but eminently flexible methodology" (Glaser & Holton, 2007, p. 48) through which substantive categories of data emerge that "fit and work to explain a process, and is understandable to those involved in the process" (Levers, 2013, p. 1).

3.3.1 Classic Grounded Theory

Since its emergence, grounded theory has evolved into a range of distinct but interrelated iterations, each of which have current standing with different cohorts of researchers who hold various epistemological approaches to research (Charmaz, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1998;

Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is useful to have some understanding of the most prominent three in order to understand the choice of methodology for this research.

The original version has come to be known as classic grounded theory (Glaser, 2012; Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Rakhmawati, 2019). While often linked with an objective epistemology (Coşkun, 2020; Levers, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2018), CGT is also understood to be "not philosophically biased and fully epistemologically and ontologically neutral" (Konecki, 2018, p. 548). It is within this original version that key principles of systematic constant comparison, categorisation, developing theory, limiting researcher bias, and not forcing the data are established[9] (Glaser, 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, the researcher is removed as much as possible, which includes literature not being consulted until after the participant data has been gathered and processed, and categories emerge directly from the constant comparison coding and categorising process, without any predetermination (Glaser, 2002a). This research is fully congruent with these principles.

The first major offshoot from the original theory was initiated by one of the cofounders of original grounded theory, and usually bears his name: Straussian grounded theory (Holton & Walsh, 2017). Current understandings of this approach are significantly influenced by Strauss' later work with Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). While still employing a process of constant comparison of emerging data, the primary divergence from the original theory is that Straussian grounded theory places itself firmly in a relativist ontological and subjectivist epistemological stance (Charmaz, 2014; Levers, 2013). While such a position may seem to fit with this research, the conscious, controlling and manipulative aspects of a meticulous and specified coding practice, including forcing dimensional ranges on categories and the application of a paradigm model to demarcate five pre-determined sub-categories within each emergent category (Kenny & Fourie, 2015), make Straussian grounded theory less appropriate for this research. Using the principles of classic grounded theory, this study had no predetermined concepts or hypotheses and required the data alone to fully inform categories and emerging theory (Glaser, 2002a; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The third significant iteration is that of constructivist grounded theory, attributed to and championed by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006; Simmons, 2010). While again retaining a process of constant comparison of emerging data in developing substantive theory, constructivist grounded theory plants its feet firmly in the constructivist camp. The claim is made that researcher objectivity

[9] As stated in Chapter 1 (p. 15), the term "the principles of classic grounded theory" refers to these five principles, in a more flexible approach than complete adherence to the fullness of original CGT.

is completely implausible; therefore the researcher, and his or her prior experiences and perceptions, is expected to be fully immersed as a participant in the research process (Charmaz, 2014). Researcher bias is considered an attribute of constructivist grounded theory to the level that it is impossible to delineate data provided by the participants from data influenced by the researcher. This would have been an unacceptable approach for this research which aims to demonstrate the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools from the perspective of parish priests and school principals – two groups of which the researcher is neither.

When asked, Glaser himself consistently states that grounded theory is a deceptively simple method that can be used in range of ways, but that the original principles of CGT without external overlays and nuance make for the most effective form (Glaser, 1992, 1998, 2012). "You get concepts out of indicators and the interchangeability of indicators, and you get a theory. That's it" (Tarozzi & Glaser, 2007, p. 27). At its core, qualitative research using grounded theory starts with the data. It is an inductive process where ongoing gathering, analysis and constant comparison of data generates understanding, often in the form of substantive theory, regarding the topic or setting being studied. The benefit of constructing understanding in this way, as opposed to applying pre-existing theory, is evident in the research focusing solely on the conveyed reality of that which is being studied. Rather than seeking to fit descriptions, experiences, and understandings from participants into an external, predetermined framework, in this case regarding the relationship between parish and parish school, grounded theory seeks to generate substantive theory which is fully applicable to the situation being researched because it is generated within that context. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) concisely state:

> Because a theory is "grounded" in the data, it provides a better explanation than a theory borrowed "off the shelf" because it fits the situation, actually works in practice, is sensitive to individuals in a setting, and may represent all the complexities actually found in the process. (p. 434)

Therefore, grounded theory starts with regular "data collecting, coding and analysis" (Glaser & Holton, 2007, p. 57). In the context of this study, the researcher gathered rich data from interviews with parish priests and school principals. The interviews were audio recorded and detailed notes (memos) were made during and immediately after each interview. While Glaser (1998) warns against making full recordings, claiming there is a risk of being overwhelmed by the quantity of data provided through such a method, this researcher believed the gains in terms of the ongoing

availability of authentic first-hand data in supporting the analysis and trustworthiness of the research outweighed these concerns. Recordings, and subsequent transcripts of them, also helped limit researcher bias which may more easily have encroached on the study if he were to rely only on notes made during the interviews. As a method of internal verification, transcripts also allowed for participants to check, correct and/or add to their data if they chose.

The collection of data and their analysis necessarily formed a symbiotic relationship within the principles of CGT. It is this robust collection and interpretation of empirical data provided by individuals immersed in the context of the research which enabled construction of categories and concepts to explain the unknown relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools within the participant group in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following sections explore the emergence of categories process and the role of the literature review within the study.

3.3.1.1 Emergence of Categories.

During and immediately after each interview the researcher memoed notes, ideas, and links that had been prompted by each participant's data. This memoing was a systematic process of making notes about the data to develop theoretical conceptual connections between categories as they emerged. Memos were written so they could be easily consulted, as an ongoing physical record, with theory gradually developing within the research. This process is a critical dimension of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Glaser warns that eliminating this aspect is equivalent to departing from the principles of CGT altogether (Glaser & Holton, 2007).

Memos are more than just notes which reflect development of and changes in tentative hypotheses. They tell the story of the research. Bowers (1989) supports this understanding by highlighting three particular functions in which memos are critical to grounded theory research: to record important decisions regarding selective and theoretical sampling; to support shifts or narrowing in the focus of interview questions; and to record categories, dimensions, relationships and other lines of thinking that seem unconnected, and which may or may not be pursued later in the research.

Categories and sub-categories emerge through a dynamic interplay between the capturing of immediate theoretical concepts within memos and intensive line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts. This in-depth analysis, often referred to as open coding (Bowers, 1989; Holton, 2010), forms the foundation for a process which Oktay (2012) describes as "both inductive and deductive logic in a back-and-forth process of theory generation (inductive) and theory testing (deductive)"

(p. 18). It involves the researcher "coding the data in every way possible" (Glaser & Holton, 2007, p. 59), and asking broad-ranging questions, to uncover patterns within the data that provide codes which conceptually rise above detailed description of objects or events.

Just as categories emerge from data and are reinforced by subsequent reiteration or development by interviewees, they are just as readily obliterated, radically altered, or replaced when new data challenges them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Holton and Walsh (2027) succinctly capture this dynamic nature of constant comparison within CGT: "If conceptual ideas suggested in initial data do not pattern out with further data collection, then the theorist must decide whether the initial ideas have earned relevance in the emerging theory and decide what prominence, if any, they hold as the theory continues to develop" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 36).

Eventually, core categories are distilled from the process of coding, grouping, and refining, and theoretical saturation of data is reached (Saunders et al., 2018). This is "the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. There are mounting instances of the same codes, but no new ones" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 194). In terms of this study, saturation was the point where no new salient information regarding the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools was forthcoming from participants.

Purposefully avoiding published research supported limiting researcher bias when categorising data from participants (Glaser, 2012). However, with data categorisation complete, it then became appropriate to access the literature in detail.

3.3.1.2 Place of the Literature Review.

The principles of classic grounded theory require that data gained from literature not be included before or during data collection lest the power of previous quality academic research influence the researcher and "restrict the freedom needed to discover a theory" (Rakhmawati, 2019, p. 113). However, from the perspective that "all is data" (Glaser, 2002b, p. 1), Glaser (1998) recommends reading widely after the interview and categorisation phase to seek resonance and contrast to further inform the findings of the study.

In this study, to limit researcher bias and to support suspension of preconceived knowledge in order to allow categories to emerge from the interview data themselves, the literature did not inform the data gathering and analysis phases. The approach taken was to access academic research after the

categorisation phase to ascertain what findings and approaches exist in comparable areas to this study. This further supports aspects of credibility and confirmability regarding the researcher's analysis of data, identification of categories and formation of substantive theory in this research.

3.4 Method

The data collection method informing this study was in-depth unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews aim to leave the direction of the data gathered with the person being interviewed rather than with the researcher. This method compliments a CGT approach dedicated to gathering emerging perspectives, and developing theory, from the data themselves.

3.4.1 In-depth Unstructured Interviews

Within qualitative research the interview is deemed a powerful tool for eliciting complex, meaningful and open data pertinent to the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews are much more appropriate than surveys or other quantitative data gathering tools because first hand articulation of experiences and perceptions mean that "interviews are not one monolithic, predictable type of encounter that is equally familiar to everyone everywhere" (Roulston & Choi, 2018, p. 235). Indeed, rather than gathering ordered, factual data to be quantified and analysed later by a researcher, a qualitative research interview seeks to understand data at the meaning level as well as the factual. Kvale (2009) states:

> The qualitative interview seeks qualitative knowledge as expressed in normal language; it does not aim at quantification. The interview aims at nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee's lifeworld; it works with words and not with numbers. The precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation in qualitative interviews correspond to the exactness in quantitative measurements. (p. 30)

Interviews go deeper than ordinary conversations as they intentionally draw out and examine experiences, feelings and events which can be captured by the interviewer as insightful and meaningful research data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kruger, 2018; Lee, 2018). This depth and range of data collection aligns well with the principles of grounded theory and allows the researcher to:

> go beneath the surface of the described experience(s); stop to explore a statement or topic; request more detail or explanation; ask about the participant's thoughts, feelings,

> and actions; keep the participant on the subject; come back to an earlier point; restate the participant's point to check for accuracy; slow or quicken the pace; shift the immediate topic; validate the participant's humanity, perspective, or action; and, use observational and social skills to further the discussion. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 26)

Notwithstanding the value of interviews to gather rich data, it is also understood that interviews are not without limitation. For example, Foddy (1993) outlines a range of situations which can negatively impact the validity and usefulness of interview data: there is often discrepancy between what people say and do; subtle changes in the wording of questions can produce major changes in responses; questions are often misinterpreted; previous questions can affect responses to later questions; participants will often give answers even when they seem to know little about the topic; and "Respondents' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, habits, interests often seem to be extraordinarily unstable" (pp. 2-9). Nevertheless, careful and skilled unstructured interviewing, utilising robust qualitative procedures such as meticulous transcripts and member checking can mitigate the potential for errors, and capture rich, accurate and meaningful data (O'Connor et al., 2018). Such processes are integral to the principles of classic grounded theory used in this research as data is progressively gathered and interrogated.

The use of CGT principles also mitigate preconceived concepts and categories as these are dangerous to the researcher because they can corral the information in ways which skew the interviewee's intended meaning within the study (Glaser, 1992). Care was also taken to ensure the data was allowed to consistently inform the research not just at the beginning but also throughout the process (Glaser, 1998). Thus, initial and subsequent interviews provided information that was continuously used to test, confirm or challenge categories and concepts arising from the data.

There are a range of ways to conduct an interview. However, researchers tend to consider them in terms of three broad categories: structured; semi-structured; and unstructured (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). *Structured interviews* use an interview guide where each participant receives the same set of questions. They suit a positivist epistemology where the researcher is seeking to uncover knowledge which they believe exists and needs to be 'discovered'. From a constructivist perspective one of the major limitations with this level of structure is the lack of "ability to make adjustments during data collection based on analysis of previous interviews" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 39). *Semi-structured interviews* include some predetermined beginning topics, usually derived from the literature, which are covered with each interviewee before opening

the interview to allow other contributions. While this type of interview is relatively open, it directs the conversation in a way which might not otherwise arise from the participant, and it prioritises content to the possible detriment of new, even more important, information being introduced by the interviewee. *Unstructured interviews* begin with the main topic but allow the participant to control the parameters, pace and depth of the conversation. It is particularly suited to a constructivist epistemology and CGT principles because within the broad area of the research problem "participants are able to talk more freely about those issues and problems pertinent to them" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 38). The interviewer is also able to follow up, if necessary, with subsequent interviews of the same or different people as emerging categories develop.

The principles of CGT oppose the use of detailed interview guides which Charmaz (2014) recommends, within a constructivist grounded theory approach, to avoid what she suggests might be "awkward, poorly judged questions potentially based on unexamined preconceptions" (p. 63). Glaser (2012), conversely, strongly argues against this perspective in favour of the open and dynamic nature of unstructured interviews which do not "force or lead the interviewee in certain directions and impose interview bias on data" (O'Connor et al., 2018, p. 96). However, unstructured interviews do not mean that the research conversation is completely free-ranging. The researcher has responsibility to ensure the focus remains within the research area and does not drift into less pertinent aspects of the participant's life experience, while at the same time encouraging him or her to control the introduction and direction of relevant data. As a strategy, in support of consistency and focus, an interview prompts list was drafted as a useful tool in supporting the researcher to draw the participants' attention back to the research question (see Appendix C). In short, these could be called upon to help refocus participants should they stray from the focus of the research, such as "Where do you see evidence of the parish/school relationship?" or "How would you describe the importance of the parish/school relationship?"

Thus, incorporating the principles of CGT, unstructured interviews guided by the research question, "What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand?", were used in this study to provide opportunity for priests and principals to articulate their own viewpoints. Data gained from these rich perspectives supported shared construction of understanding regarding the parish/school relationship.

3.4.2 How the Research Was Conducted

This qualitative research applied a robust approach to utilise interviews as the primary data source for the study. Data from key stakeholders in the relationship between parishes and schools was sought, gathered, protected and analysed.

3.4.3 Determining the Participants

The principles of CGT indicate "the basic criterion governing the selection of comparison groups for generating theory is their theoretical relevance for furthering the development of emerging categories, properties, hypotheses, and integration of the theory" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 40). This purposive theoretical sampling of the leaders of each entity ideally suited this study because the participants were chosen with specific experience and capacity to inform concepts and categories within the area being researched (Glaser, 1992). Parish priests and parish school principals have direct experience of leading and managing their respective entities which are expected to be in relationship with each other (CLS, 1983). They develop institutional identity and purpose, solve problems, make decisions, work with people, and usually lead the direction and mission of the parish or school (Green, 2018; Harris, 2012). They necessarily fit the interpretivist paradigm of the researcher, within a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemological stance, by providing a range of perspectives, relative to their own circumstances, experiences, and understandings, from which to interpret and construct substantive theory regarding the relationship between parish and parish school. This choice of data source supports "well-defined and epistemologically congruent research outcomes" (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 587).

The pool of participants was chosen from a metropolitan area within a single diocese in Aotearoa New Zealand. Those interviewed included six parish priests and eight parish school principals. The size of the data pool was appropriate within the principles of CGT as the research was not seeking to define a general theory but rather a substantive understanding of what is taking place within the context of the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; O'Connor et al., 2018). The initial purposive sampling met time, subject availability, and relevance to research criteria, and emerging theory through data analysis determined subsequent theoretical sampling (Bowers, 1989).

Supported by the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, priests and principals interacted with the research primarily as priests and as principals, and the researcher as researcher (Bowers, 1989). From the position of their particular roles, and associated experiences and beliefs, distinct voices emerged which represented the specific context of this research. Priests and

principals could “temporarily adopt the perspective that fits best with how we define ourselves in any given situation” (Oliver, 2012, p. 411), thereby providing “an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at and tries to understand reality” (Charon, 2007, p. 3). In this case, the reality the researcher sought to understand was the relationship between Catholic parish and parish school.

The foundational methodology for this research, that concepts and categories are to be constructed through gathering, analysing and constantly comparing interview data, is congruent with the research question: “What are the key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand?” The additional open guiding questions of “What features do parish priests and parish school principals perceive as enhancing the relationship between parish and parish school?”, and “What features do parish priests and parish school principals perceive as limiting the relationship between parish and parish school?”, were intentional aspects of ensuring the interview data appropriately and effectively informed the process.

3.4.4 Seeking Permission to Interview the Participants

Written permission was gained directly from the participants themselves. The leadership roles of principals and priests necessarily involves their public representation of school and parish, so permission to speak in this context was inherent in their formal positions. In terms of principals, New Zealand law, particularly the Education and Training Act (2020), also establishes the right of the school principal to act as they see fit with regard to school life and practice: The principal has “complete discretion to manage the school’s day-to-day administration as they think fit” (Government of New Zealand, 2020, section 130). This includes their right to participate in professional interviews as part of a research project. Canon law grants a comparable level of autonomy to parish priests to act and speak regarding their own parish and parish school (CLS, 1983). The diocesan bishop of those priests and principals concerned was informed of the study prior to any interviews taking place; he indicated his support for the research and interest in potential findings.

3.4.5 Conducting the Interviews

Participants in this study were contacted by telephone, informed of the research topic, and informally invited to take part in the research (see Appendix A). This initial contact provided an opportunity to ask questions about procedure or other aspects of the research. Each potential interviewee was informed that taking part was voluntary and that participation required formal

approval. Upon indicating acceptance, participants were sent letters providing information, seeking their signed authority to be interviewed, and requesting permission to conduct the interviews on site at the parish or school (see Appendix A). All individuals who were contacted chose to participate.

Participants had the opportunity to suggest an alternative venue to that nominated. However, interviewing them as priest and principal in their own environs was most aligned with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and was encouraged by the researcher. Their own offices were the places in which the voice of their most salient 'me' for this research, that of parish or parish school leader, was able to come to the fore (Bowers, 1989; Handberg et al., 2015). Such locations resonated with their immediate experiences of leading each entity. Similarly, the researcher as visitor to their locale was placed in a more submissive context of seeking information, rather than starting from a position of power which might be associated with a venue of his own choosing (Charon, 2007).

The participant information included an invitation for individuals to bring a symbol, story or other metaphor, either physically or verbally, which they believed reflected something of the relationship between the parish and school in their context. The intent behind this request was to further encourage participants to creatively reflect on their own perceptions, prior to any direct questioning by the researcher. This supported them in coming prepared to articulate clearly, and capture in their own way, a particular area of the parish/school relationship pertinent to the research.

Each unstructured interview was allocated one hour. There was some flexibility should the interviewee request more time. In order to establish a level of consistency, a standardised introduction and final statement was used for each interview (see Appendix B). All interviews were digitally recorded on two devices and transcribed. Copies were stored as per National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia [NHMRC], 2007). Once completed, transcripts were shared with the participants to allow opportunity for the participant to make amendments if necessary and to support the trustworthiness of the research. Participants had the right to withdraw their contributions if they wished. Follow-up interviews could take place if deemed necessary by the emerging data and/or participants.

3.4.6 After Each Interview

Immediately after each interview the researcher made further field notes to capture detail, nuance and context. This is referred to as memoing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and includes writing down ongoing thoughts, ideas and observations prompted by the data and process. The interview data was transcribed and analysed to generate tentative concepts and hypotheses, which were continuously checked and challenged by emerging data through further memoing and coding by the researcher. The purpose of this process is to ascertain "the best fit of many choices of concepts to a set of indicators, the conceptual levels between the concepts that refer to the same set of indicators and the integration into hypotheses between the concepts, which becomes the theory" (Glaser & Holton, 2007, p. 60).

Coding and categorising involved line-by-line analysis of each interview. Working through each transcript, the researcher summarised and/or quoted each new contribution in developing tentative codes which aimed to capture the primary meaning behind each phrase or comment. These were recorded in NVivo, with initial codes which often changed as new data emerged, and were re-grouped as connected concepts and hypotheses began to emerge. Thus, the data become sorted into sections relevant to each emerging category under headings which captured wording and intent of the participants themselves. The headings remained dynamic until the coding phase was complete as these tentative codes were developed and refined by ongoing analysis of other contributions within the interview, of subsequent interviews and of memos in a process of constant comparison. Eventually, core categories emerged and were named, and the sub-categories on which these are founded were grouped and linked directly to specific comments/places in interview transcripts or memos to support research findings (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The interview process continued until no new categories were emerging from the selected group (Oktay, 2012). This point is referred to within grounded theory as saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher also recognised that this coincided with the sample group being exhausted as there were no other priests and principals within the defined cohort.

3.4.7 Data Storage and Security

All audio recordings, memos and interview transcripts were securely stored in digital format in a password-protected network folder. Audio recordings were deleted from the original device/s after upload. Participant identity was protected by names being removed from transcripts and an alpha-numeric coding system was used to delineate individuals and place-names in the written text. In

interview order, priests were designated F1-F6; principals P1-P8; Parishes or pastoral areas PA-PM; and schools SA-SH. Hard copies of memos, other notes and printed material were stored in a locked cabinet.

3.4.8 The Voice of the Researcher

The researcher is a leader in Catholic education, serving as the director of the National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS), responsible for the Religious Education curriculum in all Catholic schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this role, the researcher works regularly with schools and bishops where the relationship between parishes and parish schools is referenced but not fully understood. In terms of the interview process, a significant aspect of effective interviewing is that the researcher is understood as a participant in the process of interviewing and collecting data, not just an external functionary: "In a qualitative research interview, knowledge is produced socially in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee" (Kvale, 2009, p. 82). Within grounded theory, this interaction, appropriately acknowledged and articulated, is understood to be a positive contributing factor in the "process of co-constructing the final research product with participants" (O'Connor et al., 2018, p. 94).

The researcher's role within NCRS in Aotearoa NZ means there is frequent personal contact with priests and principals through facilitating workshops and delivering presentations throughout the country. This national position is not one of influential power but rather of providing support, resources and advice to schools. It means that the researcher is familiar to potential participants in this study to some degree. This personal knowledge introduced some challenges, requiring the need to maintain a high level of skill as an interviewer, in order to draw out participants' own thoughts and perspectives rather than what they thought he might wish to hear. However, being familiar with participants also offered opportunities for rich data gathering, as interviewees more readily brought a relaxed and open attitude to the process.

The establishment of rapport with interviewees is a critical aspect of effective research interviewing. Making the effort to develop a positive personal connection, and setting up a conducive environment for the interview, is in the interests of obtaining quality, meaningful data, and without it the gaining of any data at all can be at risk (Hannabuss, 1996). Similarly, it is necessary to show appropriate respect and care for those with whom we are engaged in professional conversation. The interviewee is a person with human feelings and concerns (Foddy, 1993). They may feel vulnerable

or at risk in being interviewed, and there is generosity present in terms of their time and sharing of experience. The whole person needs to be recognised, acknowledged and valued.

As previously stated, once emerging categories had been identified within the interview data, further analysis was undertaken drawing on the existing body of literature. As part of this subsequent research phase, in analysing the interview and literature data together, the researcher's own expertise and experience within the field of Catholic education was drawn upon to add to the data and development of theory. This is consistent with the principles of CGT.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the study

The plausibility of quantitative research is determined by the trustworthiness of the study (Maher et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four key criteria for qualitative research in response to established quantitative factors for ensuring validity. These quantitative criteria are reinterpreted into a qualitative context: (i) internal validity is redefined as *credibility*; (ii) external validity as *transferability*; (iii) reliability becomes more appropriately nuanced as *dependability*; and (iv) bias becomes less rigidly demanding of researcher distancing within the concept of *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These terms have become common over the last few decades within grounded theory research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Holton & Walsh, 2017), and served as useful criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy of data and its interpretation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Within grounded theory this incorporates a complex dimension of not necessarily ensuring the perceptions of participants are completely physically and historically accurate, but more importantly, that they are authentic contributions within the context of the research which are correctly recorded by the researcher. In this qualitative, grounded theory study the goal was not to seek absolutely accurate data. Indeed, an overemphasis on this would limit the constructivist goal of the research by restricting participant responses to fully verifiable contributions. Rather, Glaser and Strauss (2012) state that even if some of the evidence is "not entirely accurate this will not be too troublesome; for in generating theory, it is not the fact upon which we stand, but the *conceptual category* (or a *conceptual property* of the category) that was generated from it" (p. 23). Glaser returns often to this critical point (Glaser, 1992, 1998, 2012), warning that an overly zealous quest for objective facts is counter to the principles of CGT which seeks more constructive, dynamic understandings of social and symbolic interaction than may be captured by mere facts.

Concurrent with this stance is the reality that grounded theory has an inherent, well-established, credibility-checking mechanism in the form of systematic, constant comparison of data (Boeije, 2002). Such a process effects *triangulation* which refers to internally verifying data by checking if the same, similar or different understandings arise from a variety of sources (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). By interviewing parish priests and principals from a variety of different parishes and schools, and constantly comparing emerging information during the formulation and development of categories and sub-categories, this research was continuously triangulating data.

Credibility of this research is further enhanced through careful interview practices which help to ensure participants give full and honest contributions. Shenton (2004) gives a range of examples including encouraging frankness and reminding participants that there are no right or wrong answers. This study into the relationship between parish and parish school also utilised what he refers to as "iterative questioning" strategies, within the unstructured interview process, which include the "use of probes to elicit detailed data and iterative questioning, in which the researcher returns to matters previously raised by an informant and extracts related data through rephrased questions" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Following the interviews, some member checking for accuracy and researcher interpretation of interview transcripts formed part of the research process. Participants were invited to receive a copy of the transcript of their own interview and were given the opportunity to add, delete or further comment. If some points were unclear the researcher was able to seek clarification at this time. Participants were able to receive the copy immediately upon completion of the transcription and had one week to respond. Glaser (1998) is critical of recording interview transcripts and checking for accuracy; however, his concern is based on the potential for researchers to be misled by the level of detail so that they may neglect other immediate, meaningful data presented in the actual interview at the time. However, while serving credibility purposes, the opportunity and short turn-around time for member checking of the transcripts was deemed necessary in this study as it not only supported accuracy but also allowed for potential development of ideas and concepts as part of the process of constant comparison. (N.B. Use of such recordings and transcripts is an example of the flexibility applied through application of 'the principles of CGT' as outlined in this thesis rather than complete adherence to original CGT.)

While credibility is inherent within CGT, and a valid qualitative reinterpretation of the quantitative concept of validity, Glaser (1978) uses the term 'fit' in a similar context. He is more concerned with "how adequately the concept expresses the pattern in the data" (Konecki, 2018). In other words, it is critical that the findings of this research – the categories, sub-categories and substantive theory – are authentic expressions of the data themselves. From his perspective, it is this that most forcefully justifies the credibility of the research within the principles of CGT. This researcher believes the formal understandings of credibility and fit are harmonious with this study, and both are necessary in supporting its trustworthiness.

3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability reflects the capacity for findings to resonate with, or be applicable to, other contexts, situations or groups (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Its quantitative counterpart is referred to as external validity. However, while quantitative studies often seek to develop general, widely applicable theory, this qualitative research aims to develop substantive theory regarding the relationship between parish and parish school in a particular area, with a particular sample of participants. Given the particular social and symbolic interactions framing the experiences and perceptions of the two specific groups of interview participants, it was not appropriate to claim that findings would represent other parish/parish school relationships. The trustworthiness of the theory is justified by its application to the sample itself: "Ultimately, the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation or organisations and, perhaps, the geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out" (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

A comparable though less rigorously nuanced term often used in contemporary research is that of generalisability (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Generalisability describes the desire to make claims regarding how research findings may be applicable to other generally similar contexts or sample groups. Some argue that the tendency for qualitative research to completely defer to quantitative data analysis in the area of transferability can be a significant missed opportunity, and that with "in-depth focus and description, there is an erroneous view that research findings cannot also apply to a broader population or setting" (Hays & McKibben, 2021, p. 178). This stance introduces an openness to wider application without making the error of assuming relevance beyond the sample group.
The term used by Glaser (1998) to additionally nuance transferability within the principles of CGT is relevance. This term captures an understanding that research needs to be meaningful, recognisable, directly relatable, and overtly grounded in the context of the participants. While the research,

incorporating categories and theory, must be relevant to the main concerns of the participants, there is also an openness to findings not being 'set in stone' as they may be further developed by subsequent research (Holton & Walsh, 2017). In this way, relevance is seen as part of a dynamic process rather than an end point.

In the context of this study, findings are substantially linked to experiences and perceptions of the relationship between parishes and parish schools. A number of general characteristics are commonly known to exist within and between each entity. To name a few, these include male priesthood; parents and children; diocesan and Ministry of Education expectations; and being a Catholic organisation. It is likely that parishes and schools outside the study will recognise, through the constructive, iterative process with particular interviewees, generalised relevance of findings within this research. However, it is also understood that the range of permutations within such characteristics outside of this particular study is prohibitive of this research making such a claim itself (Shenton, 2004). Other individuals or groups are thus encouraged to delve into their own understandings in the light of this process and associated findings and theory.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability, as the counterpart to the quantitative term 'reliability', refers to the study being able to be replicated in another setting. A critical dimension of this aspect of trustworthiness is the provision of detailed notes and descriptions of procedures, processes and findings. Thus, the research design may be viewed as a "prototype model" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71) which can be used in other situations and groups to further extend research in the general field.

Inherent in robust documentation is evidence that the research methods are appropriate for the study itself. Availability of such information supports the reader in understanding that proper research practices have been followed, and that the process is trustworthy in itself (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

This study meets the criteria of dependability through utilising the principles of CGT and robust systematic, constant comparison of emerging data and conceptualisation of findings: interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed and member checked; memos were made, sorted and stored; categories and sub-categories were directly linked with transcript text, ordered and re-ordered in NVivo with current and previous versions saved; findings were compared and contrasted

with extant literature. This was done to provide opportunity for reference and confirmation at each stage of the research project, and dependability overall.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability acknowledges what quantitative research would refer to as "bias" – the notion that qualitative researchers are likely to perceive as important those personal characteristics and assumptions which they themselves bring to the study (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). The principles of CGT require that the researcher remains distant within the process of data gathering and coding. Where constructivist grounded theory purports that the researcher should be fully engaged as a fellow participant as well as researcher in all phases of the study (Charmaz, 2014), Glaser & Strauss (1967) from the outset warn that, unless checked, researcher bias can dangerously skew information in favour of the researcher's pre-determined understandings.

While it is necessary for the researcher to be as distant as possible during the interviewing and coding phases of a grounded theory study, the experience and personal perceptions of the interviewer are valued and welcome when making sense of the coding once complete. This is a necessary aspect of interpretivist research and adds value within a constructivist paradigm.

This research used the principles of CGT to minimise researcher bias and establish neutrality during the data processing phases through: 1) unstructured interviews where the participants had control of the direction and content of interviews and the researcher only sought clarification and elaboration; 2) fastidious attention to participant data being the source of emerging categories; 3) retention of all memos, transcripts and other notes to support external review of findings should they be challenged.

3.5.5 Additional Quality Factors

In addition to the above criteria for quality, this research has been formally audited throughout the process. As part of the doctoral programme, research supervisors have provided ongoing overview and critique, as have the formal processes of candidature milestones. Drafts of chapters were also shared with participants seeking their feedback on credibility prior to submission and publication.

3.5.6 Ethical Considerations

All stages of this study, from initial design through to final publication, involve recognising and mitigating ethical issues (NHMRC, 2018). This is a critical aspect of research because participating

persons, including the researcher, have rights and dignity. It requires reflecting deeply and planning carefully throughout the research process because participants, and potentially others affected by the research, deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. “Ethical conduct is more than simply doing the right thing. It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one’s fellow creatures” (NHMRC, 2007, p. 3).

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC, 2018), in synergy with their ethical guidelines (NHMRC, 2007), further supports researchers in ethical decision-making and planning by emphasising the need for honesty, rigour, transparency, cultural sensitivity, accountability and promotion of responsible research practices – all of which are evident in this research into the relationship between parish and parish school. In this study these guidelines and codes were met by providing detailed written information to participants including the purpose and aims of the study, selection criteria, permission forms, timeframes, managing of confidentiality, security for data, procedures for checking information, and advice on how to seek support if needed (see Appendix A).

Appropriate ethical choices are not only necessary in terms of participants but also with regard to the researcher. Issues such as workload, travel distances, financial implications and employment pressures can impact on the health and wellbeing of participants and research alike. “Morally responsible research behaviour is more than abstract ethical knowledge and cognitive choices; it involves the moral integrity of the researcher, his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action” (Kvale, 2009, p. 74). Throughout this research ethical considerations were carefully and authentically managed out of genuine care for all involved.

3.5.7 Limitations

The study was limited to the relationship between parishes and parish primary schools within the context of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa NZ. While other faith-based schools, such as Anglican, Presbyterian and Muslim, may have comparable relationships with their own faith communities, the generalisability of this research was limited by the particularly Catholic context of data and findings.

The term ‘relationship’ is purposely undefined as the research process itself will give meaning to the expression. However, the area being researched is not the relationship between priest and principal, though that may play a part, but rather the relationship between parish and parish school from the ‘perspective’ of the leaders of each entity.

It is also noted that the selection of key leaders rather than a broader range of participants such as parents, students, teachers and parishioners, limits the perspectives reflected in this research. While the intentional focus of this study precluded such a broad approach, and priests and principals interviewed did consistently refer to comments and attitudes they have experienced from other groups and individuals, additional research is needed to gather diverse voices directly to enrich the findings of this study.

3.5.8 Delimitations

The focus of this research is on Catholic parishes and Catholic parish primary schools within one diocese. Catholic secondary schools were not included in the research because most secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand draw students from three or more parishes and from a range of primary schools. The number of parish affiliations is also an anecdotal reason why many secondary schools have little to do with individual parishes (New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, 2014). It can simply be too time-consuming for secondary schools to connect with all contributing parishes. This additional complexity of relationship was deemed inappropriate for this study as it would be difficult for participants, especially principals, to delineate attitudes and perceptions regarding their relationship with each parish, especially if such a relationship was non-existent from their perspective.

Some parishes have two primary schools and some only one, meaning that some parish priests interviewed are reflecting on the parish's relationship with two different schools. No parish within the research sample has more than two parish primary schools. While it would be possible within this research to limit the sample to only parishes with a single school this was deemed inappropriate as the growing trend, associated with declining numbers of priests, is for parishes to combine so that multiple Catholic primary schools within a single parish is becoming more common (New Zealand Catholic Education Office, 2018b). Thus, the research supports potential for increased relevance and generalisability in terms of acknowledging this contemporary context.

Data was gathered only from interviews with parish priests and principals. While several other groups of individuals may have contributed to demonstrating the relationship between the two entities, the decision was made to limit participants to those who have the primary leadership role within each, and who can therefore speak strongly from experience and formal positions of responsibility. Subsequent studies may add to the richness of findings by focusing on children,

families, secretaries, groundskeepers, grandparents, etc. This researcher would encourage such research.

The study was limited to a metropolitan area within a single diocese. The area chosen includes semi-rural suburban parishes and schools, but not those which are significantly isolated from one another. Because it is a relatively small geographical area, it is likely that principals and priests involved in the study may speak with each other prior to subsequent interviews. As this would be instigated by participants within the context of the study, it will simply merge into the data as part of the constructivist process and will not be considered as bias.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that have underpinned this qualitative research investigation which sought to understand the relationship between parish and parish school from the perspective of parish priests and parish school principals. The methodological framework drew on the principles of classic grounded theory to conceptualise emerging categories of data pertaining to a phenomenon where little is known. Unstructured in-depth interviews were employed to gain insights into the meanings the participants had constructed. The following chapters document the emerging findings and proceed to subject them to further analysis, including presentation of unrefined features in Chapter 4 before drawing on the existing body of literature, placed as Chapter 2 in this thesis, which informs Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Presentation of Interview Data

The data presented in this chapter describe unrefined features as they emerged from interviews through the application of classic grounded theory (CGT) principles (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They are termed 'unrefined' because they lack a detailed analysis in terms of distillation into key features and associated resonance with the literature which occurs in Chapter 5. As outlined in the previous chapter, the principles of CGT include constant comparison of data and, to limit researcher bias, access to the literature occurs only after the categorisation phase of the interviews is complete.

The unrefined features that follow were categorised as they emerged from the CGT process. They are presented in this chapter as a landscape of features where each may be understood as a distinct feature, with occasional commonality. Constant comparison of all interview transcripts resolved each unrefined feature simultaneously, with none overtly emerging earlier or having priority over another. However, for accessibility, this chapter begins by presenting the emergent features considered particular to interview participants themselves, and then proceeds to present community, functional, sacramental participation, symbolic, and unresolved features as distinct data. Each of these features gives insight into the parish/school relationship and provides intermediary contexts which are later developed in Chapter 5 as key features.

Interviewees were coded as F1 to F6 for parish priests (Father), and P1 to P8 (Principal). The associated number indicates the order in which the person was interviewed as a priest or principal (e.g., F5 denotes an individual who was the 5th parish priest to be interviewed). Places are similarly coded in order of when they were first introduced in the interviews: parishes are coded PA to PJ; schools are coded SA to SI. Functional and relational positioning of these participants and entities is shown in Table 4.1. For example, within the first parish, PA, there was one Priest (F1), two schools (SA and SB), and two principals (P1 and P2). It should also be noted, in terms of supporting anonymity, that in between interviews taking place and this thesis being completed, several principals and priests have moved on from the schools or parishes indicated.

Table 4.1

Codes Grouped to Indicate Participant Parish/School Relationships

Parish	Priest/s	School/s	Principals/s
PA	F1	SA, SB	P1, P2
PB	F5	SC	P3
PC	F4	SD	P4
PD	F6	SH	P8
PE	F2	N/A*	N/A*
PF	F3	SJ	N/A**
PG	F4	SF	P6
PH	F5	SG	P7
PJ^	F2	SE	P5

Note. The following points clarify outlying factors:

* *No school is formally attached to this parish, so there is no principal, but many teachers, families and students attend Eucharist here as is mentioned several times in interviews.*

** *Principal was on sick leave and didn't respond to later requests to participate in the research.*

^ *PI was not used as a code for a parish as it could too easily be confused with principal P1.*

4.1 Research Participant Features

This research investigates the relationship between parish and parish school from the perspectives of priests and principals. It is not an investigation into the roles of priests and principals. However, individuals consistently commented on their own roles and that of their counterparts within their own parish and across other parishes. The researcher initially sought to group together principals' or priests' reflections on their counterpart's role, but the varied overlap of self-reflection and observation of the other indicated that a forced construct would be distracting to the research. Significant to the data analysis is the consistent awareness of expectations and responsibilities of priests and principals in roles which feature as notably influencing the parish/school relationship. As with the exploratory nature of the research, no assumptions as to the role of the principal or priest were forecasted ahead of the interviews.

4.1.1 Role of the Priest

Participants recognise the parish priest as a leader who provides a range of advice and guidance which schools perceive as needed. Presence and visibility within the school community and positivity from the priest are valued. One principal summarised appreciation of the parish priest regularly

visiting the school saying, “He just walks around the school, you know, and the kids if they want to speak to him, they can” (P2).

The priest is also recognised in the data as being in relationship with the school, the school principal, and the whole wider parish community. In this context, personality is viewed as important, and past priests with positive relationships regarding parish and school were regularly commented on by principals and remembered fondly. One principal enthusiastically reflected on how the parish and school “had a nickname for the priest because he was such a bloke… he connected with the community” (P5), while another spoke of both school and parish communities as being “blessed for the last 20 odd years with who we’ve had as parish priests” (P6).

Some commentary indicated a level of disquiet in terms of the priest’s leadership role because of a decline in their numbers, primarily meaning fewer Masses being said due to a limited “supply of priests” (P5). A recognised flow-on from this was a decline in personal connection through sharing priests between parishes instead of the parish priest being “just at your parish” (P8) where “you had the parish priest turning up for tea… and [now] they just don’t have time for those connections” (P8). Linked with the issue of supply, while carefully worded towards acceptance, respect, and goodwill, principals commented that priests from overseas bring additional challenges. When priests have limited cultural understanding of Aotearoa, and struggle with English as a second language, the impact on the parish/school relationship can be significant:

> I know that we are able to get a few [priests] from overseas and you know, while Father F5 is great and he’s a good Priest…The language barrier between him and the parishioners and even adults, I’m going to speak on behalf of all adults or on behalf of myself and the other teachers here because we do talk about it, is that you really have to concentrate to find the message that he’s giving us…Because it’s hidden by the language…It’s hidden by the accent which is [long pause] hard. (P7)

Overall, the priest is recognised as holding a position of power. This power is evidenced particularly in terms of his encouraging and/or allowing families to enrol their children in Catholic parish schools. Several principals commented on the need for the priest to be flexible, with this desire for flexibility regularly referring to the giving of preference to potential children who would attend the school. One principal encompassed the general attitude of schools by declaring having “been able to

convince Father to slip one through[10]" (P7). However, frustration linked to a lack of priest flexibility in the exercising of his power also included perceived poor decisions around liturgy which "switches people off" (P3), and limited availability of his time due to being "spread so thinly" (P2).

Most principals recognised the priest as being very busy and consistently justified his not being as present in the school as much as they would like by acknowledging his other commitments rather than assuming an intentional disengagement with the school. One priest was described as "pretty overwhelmed" (P3), and another as inclined to avoid tasks in order to "protect himself" (P6) in terms of health and wellbeing, while another more elderly priest was recognised with concern as being under significant pressure so that the principal stated, "When I'm 75 I don't want to be doing all that" (P8). In this context of increasing pressure of declining numbers of parish priests, and their responsibility for signing preference forms, one principal indicated that they "don't know if it's a sustainable model" (P2). An elaboration on the feature of preference is included in section 4.3.3.

All priests in the study acknowledge they hold an important pastoral leadership position in terms of the school and parish relationship, and they expressed a shared co-responsibility perspective. One priest captured the overall nuance of being, "less inclined to think it all rests on me now than I might have two years ago, but I certainly think that as the parish priest that it should be something that I help facilitate or encourage" (F1).

Linking with principal comments above, the parish priests shared that they feel anxious about how little time they have to give to building relationships with children and families in schools. At the same time, there was also recognition that they continuously represent the parish, even when encountered in other contexts such as shopping at a supermarket because, for many children and families, the priest is the only experience of parish of which they are aware. In one case where a pastor recalls a young child declaring "God's hurt" (F3) on seeing the priest in town wearing a bandage, the priest became conscious of even representing the divine for children.

In summary, priests understand themselves to be, and are seen as, prayer leaders, Mass celebrants, spiritual fathers, participants in important faith conversations, and a primary connection between school and parish. Most priests have responsibility for more than one parish and associated school, and they are continually conscious of the variety of demands and associated decision-making these

[10] Indicating a child received preference even though he or she may not have technically met the criteria.

require of them. While aspects may be shared with others, such as with the school principal as a faith community leader, being a parish priest with associated school/s is a profound vocation, and also a demanding and complex leadership role.

4.1.2 Role of the Principal

The research data presents the role of the principal as complex. Principals are recognised as faith leaders and primary points of contact with the parish. Their life and faith experience are considered important for the leadership role, with one priest stating that "it starts with their own faith, and experience, and suffering" (F4). At the same time, it is suggested the demands on Catholic principals can effect their own spiritual suffering where "you can actually burn out and lose your spirituality because you're not there for your own spirituality but for everyone else's" (P5).

Several principals referred to past and present experiences of faith formation, and being part of parish councils or pastoral teams, as means by which they felt connected with the wider Church context. Participation in the formal organisation of the parish was acknowledged as a way by which the parish and school relationship can be strengthened because "we need to have someone in education in there because how do we keep that connect going with our tamariki[11] and our children coming through?" (P4).

The personal responsibility of the principal to grow the relationship between the parish and school is recognised as significant and challenging, with one principal summarising, "I think that it matters, and I think we're not doing it well" (P1), while another describes it as feeling,

> pretty big really. Because I know that it is our responsibility but I'm also responsible for our lot here, and what's going on here, and building the community here. So, I don't know if I can build the community here and build the community there. (P8)

While recognising this responsibility there are also voices of frustration from principals indicating little effort by the parish to support them in their role of building the parish/school relationship. An example is given of a school needing to prepare and run the entire sacramental programme for children because "we've tried and we've tried but we just can't get the buy-in [from the parish] which is frustrating… you feel like it's one-way traffic" (P3). The lack of support from parish is

[11] A te reo Māori word meaning children.

reflected in principals' shared sense that an effective parish and parish school relationship is necessarily practical not just theoretical. This was clearly expressed in an inquisitive dialogue:

> It can't just be a one-way street. You know, what else have the parish done to engage people or the church? What is the church doing to engage families into welcoming us? Do you want to do hospitality? Would you like to help with picking up the cup of tea? (P4)

In terms of faith leadership, most principals stated that their regular presence at Mass is an important part of their role. This was seen as personally nourishing, with one principal self-describing as "a regular", leading Children's Liturgy and being a Eucharistic Minister, and their children being altar servers, because "I need to make sure I'm connected to that parish, as well as for the school, because how can I make good connections if I'm not?" (P8). Another perspective saw Mass attendance as primarily strategic in terms of being seen to model the parish/school relationship so, "parents and the community and the board can see that I really am committed to supporting that connection" (P4), with another principal commenting, "if you present a reasonably good role model to what your parish community think is the way to conduct yourself… I think that is a good thing" (P6). However, opinion was divided as to whether it should be "put on people as part of the job or role" (P4). This sense of responsibility to be at Mass with the parish school community can also be a challenge to the personal faith practice of principals with one commenting, "it would actually be really nice to go to [N] parish [which is not connected to the school] every now and again and just sit and do Mass for me" (P4).

The importance of the principal being at regular Sunday Mass was also recognised by parish priests, with one appreciatively remarking that the principal belongs to a different parish but "makes the effort" to come to the school's parish Mass and "meets the parents and parishioners afterwards – stopping for a cup of tea" (F3).

It was also noted that there is benefit to the priest and principal liking each other. This is recognised as a healthy sign of the relationship when good communication and rapport develops into friendship, "because friendship is very important" (F5). A shared respect and awareness of each other's strengths, such as "[P8] feeds off me and I feed off [P8]" (F6), also leads to positive synergy in terms of the priest and principal's respective leadership roles.

The role of the principal as a model of someone who lives the faith is evidenced not only in formal religious contexts but also in establishing the school's culture and structure, including running meetings and setting up reading programmes: "They're not that obvious-looking examples of living the faith but they are important… their witness and example is a big one" (F4). Another principal further elaborates on the breadth of faith leadership as existing in a myriad of conscious and unconscious decisions and actions: "It's about every interaction that we have is based around the fact that we are living those values, yeah, based on the person of Jesus" (P1). Another celebrates the distinction of Catholic schools from non-Catholic schools regarding the ability to live out their faith as an educational leader, "Well that's what I loved when I came here because actually you could be – Catholic" (P3).

4.2 Community Features

Constant comparison of interview data indicated a range of features particularly associated with the experience of being, or building, community: "Church is community. But I think going to Mass is community…. And school is community. So, it's kind of bridging the communities together" (P4). Interview participants were conscious that they were not the only people working on the relationship between school and parish and consistently commented on individuals or groups whom they perceived as key influencers within the communal relationship. One priest summarised that when connecting at Sunday Mass there is "a real mixed bag of community" (F1). Participants also noted the significance of ethnic and Catholic culture, and a spectrum of experiences regarding the presence or absence of a sense of welcome for individuals and families as important aspects of being community.

4.2.1 Significant Individuals and Groups

Many individuals were identified as being significant supporters of the school and parish relationship. Most were established parishioners who also built community by being on the school board or who helped with sacramental programmes, or who held less formal roles but were noticeably welcoming and affirming of children and families. Some were religious sisters who had taught in Catholic schools; most were lay people. During interviews, both priests and principals regularly named such individuals and acknowledged them as examples of those who would "know parents… come to the prayer assemblies… bring parents up… be there at all our special occasions… come into the school and talk" (P1).

Directors of Religious Studies[12] (DRSs) were another significant group of individuals who are seen to support the parish/school link. They were mentioned specifically by all but one participant as people who create connections through planning liturgies, leading religious education, running sacramental programmes, coordinating social justice initiatives, and fostering spiritual growth.

4.2.2 Culture

The concept of culture as a community feature was raised by participants in two ways: 1) as awareness of specifically Catholic behaviours, language, and understandings; and 2) as recognition of a growing variety of ethnic cultures which now make up school and parish communities. While each has a distinctive dimension, participants also referred to the way in which Catholic and ethnic cultural elements were frequently bound together.

4.2.2.1 Catholic Culture.

Catholic culture is represented in interviews as knowing about, being connected to, and participating in Catholic behaviours and understandings including elements such as the liturgy and the liturgical year. When describing the parish Catholic culture, principals included the significance of hospitality and creating a sense of positivity so that the local church becomes "a place that people want to come 'to be'" (P4). They also acknowledge that they play a part in achieving this. However, one stark comment encapsulated many parents' and children's lack of connection with the heart of Catholic culture, indicating their perception that the negative components of participation with parish is "generally the church stuff. It turns them off" (P2).

There was a recurring belief that elderly, regular parishioners had a set of expectations about Catholic behaviour and understanding that was inflexible, "They're showing their Catholicity in the way they know best, [but] when it's not conducive to the school vision, or they're putting ideas onto a table that the school can't deliver, then it can cause friction" (P5). Similarly, another principal reflected on how introducing more child-centred elements to the parish Mass to draw in families who may not have "actually been to church more than once or twice a year" (P8), was not well received by regular parishioners. The same principal mentioned how Catholic prayer in different languages could be used in class, but was not welcome at the parish Mass. This sense of a Catholic culture where "people are kind of stuck in the mud" (P8) was deemed to be a reason why parents

[12] All Catholic schools in Aotearoa NZ have a DRS as lead teacher of Religious Education with responsibilities for broader Catholic special character including school liturgies.

and families would choose not to come back to Mass, let alone choose to belong to the parish community.

The critical element of belonging was raised by several priests and principals as something experienced, yet at the same time missing and still aspirational. Parents and children can have a sense of belonging to the Catholic Church through prayer, religious education, and the pastoral care they experience at school because "in the school community that actually allows for a very accepting vision of life, you know, and a sense that we all belong to one another" (F2). However, the limited attendance of school families at Sunday Eucharist also means that they rarely develop a sense of what it means to belong to the Catholic community beyond school, "because they forget or they don't understand that they are part of the parish automatically when you come to the school" (P4); or parents do what's expected by the school for shared school/parish Masses but "they've never been to Mass with their parents. They only go because of the school" (P7). In essence, they participate in elements of the school's Catholic culture, but do not connect with Catholic culture as a whole.

4.2.2.2 Ethnic Culture.

Most participants commented on increasing cultural diversity within schools, and were aware of families within some cultural communities more overtly practicing their faith at home including regularly attending Sunday Mass. This was seen as "really, really important" (P4) in terms of modelling practice and inclusion for people who belong to cultures such as "Pasifika, Filipino, Māori" (P4). At the same time, it was noted that particular cultural groups might attend Mass but "have a stronger connection to their [own] faith community" (F1) rather than to parish life. One principal's perception of this is that they come to Mass "then it's, 'see you later, Father'. There's no sense of connection afterwards" (P7).

One priest in the participant group had come to New Zealand as a priest from another country, and with English as a second language. He contrasted the difference between people who think of Sunday Mass as a burden because it is an obligation, with those who understand it as a thanksgiving, and an opportunity to pray and express their personal faith. He sees the former as the cultural attitude in New Zealand and the latter as the experience within his own country: "Within our country, the religious is part of the culture… in my home parish we have ten Masses on Sunday. When I came here it's different" (F5). This same priest went further and spoke about church and parish closures in New Zealand as "quite sad for me" (F5) because his experience is that "at home

we build. We build parishes. We create parishes. And then when I come here, we close parishes" (F5). He also recognised that migrant families who come from other countries where their Catholic faith is embedded in their whole way of life "are helping the Church" with one example being the Tongan group singing at Mass which he describes as "very beautiful. It's more than entertaining, it is uplifting" (F5).

4.2.3 Understandings of Parish and School

Participants also recognised parishes and schools as having communities of their own which intersect with each other, and which exist within a wider community. However, the nuance of what they understood parish and school to be in the context of this research varied widely.

One principal described an awareness of simultaneously belonging to three different parish communities: the one where they live and regularly participate in Sunday Eucharist; the parish of their previous school; and the parish of the school of which they are principal, "It's being part of a faith community. But this is the community [current school context] in which is the physical parish" (P1). That principals often belong to an amalgam of parishes is shared as an everyday reality.

For some, the Catholicity of the school is subsumed into a shared response to human experience so that prayer and contact with the Church, supported by the modelling and practise of teachers, responds to "the struggles we go into with one another, through the experience of being, belonging" (F2). This understanding of school as a place where people can be and belong, flows into that of parish where the emphasis is placed on the importance of gathering with others in a space intended to draw one another into community:

> What parishes do is they provide the space, sometimes the physical space, but sometimes it's more the psychological space that says to people, "Hey this is the place where you can be still." You can be listened to, and you can smile and reach out to another person. (F2)

Awareness that parish is necessary, and intended to be the primary expression of the local Catholic faith community, was reinterpreted for some into the school becoming the parish "over time" (P7), because "at the moment that's it. We are, we are their faith, the only connection that they have with the faith for a lot of families" (P8). This was recognised as both "sad" (P8), and as adding a lot of pressure onto schools to get the messages right and ensure the faith is not watered down. One priest also stated, "The parish now would be the school" (F3) but followed up immediately with

recognising “this is where the evangelisation’s got to take place” (F3) through improved actions of those who regularly come to Mass and who have “always known they should be doing [evangelisation]” (F3) but who are not effectively doing so.

A few priests commented that an awareness and understanding of parish is reflected in the priest himself. One priest, when asked if he felt he actually represented the whole parish replied, “yeah that’s right, I think that’s true” (F5) because he recognised in conversation with teachers that “they say sometimes the priest is key” (F5), and he “taught them [the children] how to love Jesus” (F5). Another priest reinforced this understanding through recognising himself as the “spiritual father” (F6) of the parish community, drawing on the importance of being present to others and experiences of funerals, weddings, baptisms, and everyday faith leadership in parish and school life, because “you do relate with families when there’s sadness and that going on and you rejoice when there’s happy times” (F6). Also in this context, from principals, there was the recurring comment that a relocation of parish priest meant a significant change within the parish, because of the leadership implications of him being the primary parish leader and the “law keeper” (P7).

A final significant nuance, regarding the understanding of parish and school within community, was the awareness that most people within the school community or parish community saw themselves as respectively ‘other’. When the parish is looking at development or activities, they usually do not think of the school, and the same can be said of the school’s approach to including the parish. Except for a few people, they usually “don’t think about it” (F6), meaning involvement of each other. The impetus for improving the relationship usually comes from the school: “If the school is not part of it there would be no relationship between the children [and the parish]” (P7). The alternative to this is voiced as those parishioners who are “deliberately going out of their way to talk to the [school] families, then there’s a sense of, yeah, this is our place” (F1) growing in the hearts of school families.

4.2.4 Experience of Welcome

Participants consistently reflected on the parish needing to be more welcoming of the school community. Exceptions involved comments where the schools were trying to be more welcoming to parishioners by having weekday Masses. However, in both cases while the parishioners were welcome to come and participate, few did.

One parish had recently completed a discernment process where “welcome and hospitality” (F4) had emerged as a critical value to be developed. The parish priest reflected on implementation of this in

“the quality of ceremonies. The kind of content of what [and] how we pray. There’s a real sense of welcome. You know, I really encourage that sense of welcome at the door.” (F4)

A principal shared that their school, in liaison with the parish priest, had purposely set up welcoming opportunities at Sunday Eucharist for school children and families to (re)connect with the parish, and for parish to connect with them. Activities included new students being welcomed twice a year at a cloak ceremony followed by a school/parish barbeque, and children receiving achievement awards during the liturgy. These were presented as very positive examples; however, the same principal also commented that she had received complaints from parishioners about the quality of children’s reading of Scripture, and about the children’s choir standing in front of the tabernacle when singing at Mass, and reflected, “so they haven’t been particularly welcoming of us” (P3).

Another principal reflected on being personally received into the Church as a new Catholic, while teaching at a Catholic school, and feeling very welcomed, but then moving to another parish, “that’s [pause] different. And not as welcoming… despite some of them being very welcoming” (P7). As someone who also attends other Christian worship services, the suggestion was made that other Christian communities welcome people more effectively and genuinely, and “Catholics don’t seem to do it very well… it’s not just like, ‘Oh, welcome to today’s Mass. There’s a chair’” (P7).

The desire for children and parents of the school community to “feel really comfortable and welcome” (P4) in the church building was the catalyst for another principal to “use the church for everything we can” (P4), including liturgies and assemblies. From the parish side, the same person commented on the parish representative on the school board making a special effort to notice new families and greet them, and the parish as a whole has introduced regular tea and biscuits after Mass as an attempt to make everyone feel more welcome. This type of welcoming effort was a common development among several parishes in this research.

Principals and priests alike recognised moments and habits of welcome and absence of welcome, commenting on parishioners that deliberately “go out of their way to talk to the families… [and also] not everyone does that” (F1). There was awareness that many families have become disengaged with church practice, and often have a lot of ‘baggage’ and “this is where we’ve got to be welcoming and open to them coming along” (F6).

A range of comments were made around small instances of welcome or criticism which children received, either directly or indirectly, when participating at Sunday Eucharist. The account of a parish priest personally holding the microphone up to children when they are reading at Mass, so the parishioners who had complained could hear more clearly, is an example of attempts to find a balance. It can be as straightforward as "simply smiling at the kids" (P1).

Capturing the critical need for participation at Eucharist to be focused on welcome rather than expectation, one priest noted:

> I think that's the aspiration that people, even if they're not connecting at that Eucharist level, they know that actually this is my parish as a family… It's like I think there's a sense of people being allowed to be part of it and welcome to be part of it and not feeling that there's certain expectations. I think people would be hesitant if there's all these expectations placed on them that this is what you need to do. (F1)

4.3 Functional Features

A range of interview data indicated elements of the parish/school relationship which were more physical and structural than interpersonal. These functional features included: physical proximity of school and parish church, need for effective communication, application of preference, involvement of the school board or parish council, and participation in social justice outreach.

4.3.1 Location and Buildings

Six of the nine parish schools in this study are physically close to their parish church. The others range from 230 meters to 2.3 kilometres from their church building. Four schools have the parish priest living in a presbytery nearby. When first built, all schools in the research had a local parish church and presbytery next door to the school, with a resident parish priest. However, within the sample area, diocesan restructuring into pastoral areas served by fewer priests has meant the direct proximity of a church and priest to the school is no longer a given. For one pastoral area, three churches have been demolished in the last 10 years, two of which were attached to parish schools, with the parish eucharistic communities combining to worship at a central church which has no neighbouring schools.

Priests and principals equally acknowledged a benefit from having proximity to the local parish church. If the church is close and therefore frequently used by the school, it is believed children

develop a greater sense of familiarity with 'their church', rather than being "disconnected from the church" (P8), which is linked to feelings of belonging, comfort, and participation. The ease associated with a priest being able to walk from his home to visit the school was also mentioned as a factor in supporting this happening more frequently: "By living next door to the school I can, spur of the moment, wander up and it might be for four minutes; just wander up and walk through and be visibly seen" (F1), whereas "at the other school [5km away] I've got to much more consciously do it" (F1). At the same time, priest proximity can be a particular cause of frustration if the priest lives close but rarely visits the school because the perception is "he just lives there [pointing across the school grounds], there's no excuse not to [visit]" (P7).

4.3.2 Communication

Interviewees recognised effective communication, including the impact of personality and individual styles, as a functional feature: "Talking and encounter is good, and listening" (F4), "the more contact we have with each other the better" (F2).

The need for formal occasions when the parish/school relationship is strategically discussed is seen as a desirable element of effective communication because "we don't sit down and talk about it. Like, we've got the strategic goal but we're not actually sitting down with parishioners and thinking 'How could we do that better?'" (P1). In other situations, the communication has actually happened with formal surveys of the school and parish community having "helped us figure out values that were most important for the faith community" (F4) including "teaching, learning, outreach with the youth" (F4). Similarly, contrasting their own situation, the forming of a different pastoral area into a single parish with two schools was perceived by a principal as "that great consultation" (P4) over time, which led to the new entity "working really well" (P4).

Sharing the school newsletter with the parish and putting the parish newsletter on-line for parents was acknowledged as a "really good" (P1) practice. The sharing of newsletters was also acknowledged by a priest as an effective way "of trying to keep the conversation real" (F1).

The data also uncovered examples of poor communication. One principal referenced a "particularly uncomfortable situation" (P3) when, without warning, the parish finance person gave a hard-sell talk on parish planned-giving at the parish/school Mass because he may have thought, "I've got a bit of an audience here" (P3). In a complex communication context, from both sides, another principal uttered an expletive regarding a priest disclosing to a parishioner after Mass that the school was

going to close “because we’d kept it from the community because it wasn’t official. It wasn’t. Until it’s official it’s not happening” (P5). Yet another communication example, involving complaints about school participation at Sunday Eucharist, was viewed as unconstructive, prompting the school to “just do our thing anyway” (P3). The critical point being that failure to communicate functionally has interpersonal and strategic implications for the parish/school relationship because, as one principal succinctly stated, it leads to a “breakdown in communication and actually [in] some vision” (P8).

4.3.3 Preference

The legal requirement of preference[13] for school enrolment, most commonly assigned by the parish priest, has synergy with a range of features throughout this chapter. However, interview data particularly highlights preference as a functional feature involving contention, perception, and opportunity within the parish/school relationship. This impact is due to the significance of roll sizes for schools, and priests’ interpretation of criteria being “real liberal or real conservative” (P4). In this research, all participants align with the sentiment that preference is “very tricky” (F5).

As a point of contention, some data reveals a negative perception of the parish priest as an enforcer of dubious legal guidelines which give him the right to accept or turn away children from a Catholic parish primary school. One principal quotes another priest as saying preference is “a load of rubbish” (P2) and that any baptised person, Catholic or not, “should be allowed to come to a Catholic school” (P2). They later state the belief that individual priests “can turn a blind eye, or they can be over-zealous” (P2). Another principal describes one priest as being “very liberal” (P5) regarding preference when others expect families to be at Mass “every weekend for the liturgy” (P5).

Frustration is expressed at the negative impact of a parish priest making it “tough for the parents” (P3) by requiring the Catholic sponsor of a prospective student to travel over four hours by car to be interviewed by him. Alternatively, a principal sympathises with the challenge of the priest trying to discern a family’s authentic intent because “people will tell you whatever you want to hear, you know” (P6).

In terms of opportunity, the preference conversation can be seen as “an opportunity to evangelise” (F6) because often these families have not come near a representative of the Church for years. Many children gain preference not by being baptised but by having Catholic parents, but “sometimes even the parents’ experience of being part of an active faith community is almost non-existent” (F1). One

[13] See section 5.1.2.2 for elaboration beyond the glossary term.

priest interviews prospective families in the presbytery "TV room, to make them comfortable" (F5) for the faith conversation, another has set up the sacristy of the church with two sofas and insists the preference conversation actually happens in the parish church, the place with which they will be connecting through joining the Catholic school community, "so they have some sense that they too belong here" (F2).

The responsibility of determining enrolment preference weighs heavily on parish priests with individuals holding a range of stances. One priest's approach "is simply – Catholics get in… you've [the family] got to take part in the full Catholic practices" (F3). Another prefers the parents to "go to him. Do his paperwork and then come down and see if they like the school" (P7), which is perceived as "old-fashiony thinking" (P7) by the principal who recognises that the faith dimension is unlikely to be as high a priority as other educational and social factors for parents today. Another priest comments that the "guidelines are pretty black and white" (F4) but "we'd love everyone to come in because we want them to know God" (F4), so if they have a conversation around baptism and "we discussed the process and they are keen" (F4) then that is considered reason enough for granting preference. This same priest is also very clear that the driving voice in the decision must be faith and not the declining state of the school roll. In one instance, a local Anglican minister sought preference from the priest for his children, with a support letter from a Catholic priest outside of New Zealand, and the response was, "my goodness yes, yes. He's more Catholic than half the other people" (F3). In a final example of preference complexity, a priest found himself realising a child didn't meet the formal criteria, but he kept listening to the parents in the interview and "kept hearing Jesus say, 'give preference.' And I did" (F2).

For some schools the school roll is oversubscribed and so the issue of preference is "not so big" (P8). Even so, "there are some cases where the difference in process is bloody annoying… because mine [parish priest] is absolutely to the book, so I can't squeeze anything by him, ever" (P8).

4.3.4 School Board/Parish Pastoral Council

All schools in Aotearoa are governed by a local School Board (formerly called a Board of Trustees) with governance occasionally shared between two or more schools. In Catholic schools, board members are a mix of elected parent representatives from the school community, who often "haven't any background about Catholicism" (F5), and appointed proprietor's representatives with a particular responsibility to represent the Catholic special character of the school, who may or may not have direct links to children in the school or to the local parish. By law, proprietor's appointees

must number less than elected members (Government of New Zealand, 2020), and they are consistently acknowledged by participants as helping make the board connection to Catholic life "really positive" (P4), especially if "they're diligent" (F4). All schools in the study have their own school board.

While the role of the board in the parish/school relationship emerged as minimal, this significant body was regularly mentioned in the data because individuals on the board often had strong connections with the parish or alternatively had little interest in the faith dimension of the school. This is summarised as the usual situation being that "only half of them would be classed as Catholic, and the other half are either religious or roped in and happy to be there because they like to be involved in their kid's learning" (P5).

The significance of the board is acknowledged in establishing and monitoring "strategic goals" (P4) around Catholic character and pastoral support in terms of school and parish. A principal "deliberately put into our strategic plan" (P3) the "relationship with our parish" (P3) and acknowledged considerable effort in trying to achieve that goal. A proprietor's representative is quoted as seeking more support in connecting families to parish by asking an evaluator during a tri-annual Catholic school review[14], "What is the church doing to bring our families in?" (P4). School boards are also responsible for the appointment of the principal and teaching staff which can have a significant impact on Catholic character and pastoral support relationships. One principal describes the influence of one family on his own position in the school where a husband and wife had each served as board chair: "Her husband employed me as the teacher and then she employed me as the principal" (P5).

Data reveals great diversity in personality, skill, and experience of board members including proprietor's representatives. Participants consistently comment that a positive school relationship with the parish arises when there is a "family link" (F3) such as an established parishioner, with several children at the school, being the chairperson of the school board, or when others who are "Catholic to the core" (F3) but don't have children at the school are appointed to the board as proprietor's representatives. Such people include a parishioner with inter-generational experience of "100 years this month" (F3) being in the parish/school community; or the parish worker who is a

[14] There is an established NZCEO process of regular reviewing of the special character of Catholic schools, where a small team of evaluators visit the school and dialogue with members of the school community to support them in effectively living and developing their mission.

religious sister, and part of the wider parish family (F3); or another parishioner on the board who helps the school with “sporting things” (P6). Physical presence of Catholics on the board matters.

On most school boards, the priest himself is a proprietor’s appointee, except for two school boards where their shared priest had delegated this responsibility to lay people. The priest’s role on the board is seen as an important link to the parish and the global Catholic Church, and as a support for non-Catholic members where he is able to “keep them informed” (P6) regarding the faith dimension and Catholic educational processes of the school. He can also be someone who proactively creates connection between the school and wider parish community such as when a board suggested needing a representative from a particular ethnic community to which many new families in the school belonged:

> Anyway, we had a board meeting there and we threw these couple of names around. Then we arrived at the next meeting and Father says, “Oh, no I’ve had a talk to [N] and he’s all jacked up. He’ll be a proprietor’s rep [principal chuckles affirmingly].” (P6)

All but one parish in the study had a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), including a combination of two parishes with two schools who have something “like a parish council, but we’re called a parish team rather than being a parish council… [but] there’s not a lot of definite anything” (P4). While not canonically required, PPC’s are seen to support parish leadership and organisation which includes being involved in “pastoral outreach of the parish” (F6). Though rarely seen as instrumental in the parish/school relationship, the PPC is understood to be an important element of communication otherwise, “the only communication really I have with the parish is through my parish priest” (P8).

In one instance, a significant connection is described through a board member being on both the school board and the PPC, with shared participation at that level considered “more as her role than my role. I’m too busy to do everything” (P7). However, there was also a feeling that it was unnecessary, and potentially disruptive, to have someone on the parish council who represented the school because there is a risk of getting “people who want to represent the school and are only there for the school. Instead of doing the pastoral thinking” (F6). In this study, participants expressed the PPC was primarily involved in parish life with little interest in parish schools, and school boards were primarily involved in school life with limited reference to the parish.

4.3.5 Social Justice

Social Justice emerges as a functional feature in the parish/school relationship due to both entities having a commitment to caring for others as a response to the call of the Gospel. There are occasional instances of both entities working together in this area, but usually participants articulate shared values with separate responses. The following are examples of functional connections through social justice.

Both parishes and schools engage with material produced by Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand[15]. This includes parishes and schools praying prayers with a "Caritas connection" (F1). The school community is also drawn into an awareness of belonging to the wider world and Church by learning about how "Caritas has been part of that bigger world-wide parish" (P1). On one occasion, "parishioners who are quite a bit older" (P4) brought over Caritas information and asked the principal to share it with children at the school asking, "Would you like to do this [activity] at the school?" (P4). Which they did.

Young Vinnies, the youth arm of the St Vincent De Paul Society in Aotearoa NZ, also plays an active role in connecting schools to the mission of the wider Church. As well as raising money for causes, schools organise for children to "go to the St Vincent de Paul shop and help stack cans" (F1). Another principal describes how the children source food and then take it to the Vinnie's baskets in the parish church where they know parishioners will take it to the needy. "They're not [just] organising the food but actually physically carrying the food down to the church" (P7). Another school Vinnie's group offered to help "parishioners if they need help" (P8) and in response have made truffles at school for sharing with the wider community and have also been involved in gardening around the parish.

One parish/school community, coordinated by a particular parishioner, regularly engaged in their own social actions for the community. Two examples are: 1) helping provide soup and buns in the parish church during winter for anyone who might need a meal; and 2) helping out the local school Parent/Teacher Association with serving morning tea in the parish after funerals. School children are "making the soup" (F1) for people in need, they're engaged with "outreach into the community… to be part of the parish" (P1). The conclusion is drawn that they develop a sense of active service between school and parish for vulnerable people, "they feel as though they're doing something. This is our parish" (F1).

[15] www.caritas.org.nz

Finally, a parish/school experience involving a homeless person was presented as a profound social outreach. The woman, who had been welcomed by the parish, died and:

> who were the ones that kind of made sure the funeral was OK, and lit the incense and did all the stuff? It was the school! It's like they knew the parish was suffering because this woman who doesn't have children and yet she was a parishioner. And somehow, we want to honour her mana, her sacredness… that's real, Colin. (F2)

4.4 Sacramental Participation Features

When considering the relationship between parish and parish school, the most common context emerging from interview data involved participation, or lack thereof, at Mass. Principals and priests all gravitated to the community gathered for the Sacrament of the Eucharist as the most overt experience of parish and school coming together. While elements of participation at Sunday Eucharist resonate with other features in this chapter, features of regular and shared Sunday Mass, and associated sacramental preparation, emerge for independent consideration.

4.4.1 Parish Sunday Mass

All participants acknowledge that attendance of school children and their families at Sunday Eucharist is low: "Five percent of the [school] kids turn up at Mass on Sundays" (P2); "not too many of the parents and kids actually appear in church" (F3); "there might be, if we're lucky, four families" (P4) participating on a regular Sunday. There is also awareness that cultural trends play a part and regular Mass attendance from school families is higher if "they've got a high percentage of Pacific Islander kids" (P2).

Changing attitudes towards faith in an increasingly secular world, and the associated decline in parents supporting their own and their children's faith practice, are seen by participants as contributing factors to poor Mass attendance. As a result, it is accepted that Sunday participation is meaningful for increasingly ageing groups of parishioners but not so for younger parents and children who "don't understand how it works for them" (P4). The "effect of the scandals" (F5) associated with abuse within the Church is recognised as having a negative impact, but also that people are mostly interested in an "easy life" (F5) rather than participating in the ideal of parish as "the community of faith… a prayerful community and lively, vibrant, faithful community" (F5). Awareness of the importance of a Mass-attending faith community is largely recognised as existing

only with grandparents, or great-grandparents, and current parents who have "lapsed" (P6) are "a bit like they're an anti-vaxxer. It's pretty hard to move them" (P6).

Another perspective is that priests' and parishioners' unwillingness to be flexible and creative with Sunday Eucharistic worship is a cause of lack of engagement for younger families. The desire is present, they "want the young ones in, but the old ones are there, and they don't want what the young ones want" (P7). For many, church is considered "stodgy" (P7); when questioned, children remark on "the boringness, its songs and the length and the repetition" (P7). Another principal believes people are put off because "they sing every blimmin' verse of every single song… they're very stuck in their traditions" (P8).

4.4.2 Parish/School Shared Sunday Mass

An established practice to support linking the school and parish in Aotearoa is for the school to take leadership once or twice a term in a parish Sunday Eucharist. They plan for the liturgy, provide readers, choose songs, lead the music, often write prayers, and sometimes dramatise the Gospel. This is recognised as an overt expression of the parish/school relationship and prompts multiple observations from participants in this study.

Most of the interview participants comment on how parishioners are "delighted" (F3) and "love to see children involved" (F1), and often after Mass there are "lots of lovely comments" (P1). There is a sense that the "older folk" (P6) particularly like seeing the young ones, and that parish worshipping communities are "generally really supportive" (P4) and it "gives people encouragement" (F1).

At the same time, there is a perception of negativity from some parishioners, such as "the odd one that would be a bit put out because their seat's taken this time" (P4). One school "had complaints about the church being too full" (P3) which the principal considered counterintuitive to the parish's own desire for improved Mass attendance. Some parishioners "just go to other Masses" (P5) in the city; if they know it is going to be a parish/school Mass, "they escape from it" (P5). One priest described this behaviour as "old flight" (F6) because "they don't like the kids' music" (F6). He then described placing the challenge back on the parishioners, "I say to them, well look, you know, they put up with your music" (F6). There can also be "too much expectation on the capabilities of the children for reading" (P7) so that when children "stumble on a word you can see them [parishioners] rolling their eyes" (P7). Parishioners can also seem "a bit grumpy" (P3) about children being noisy at the start of the Mass, even though "they settle and behave beautifully" (P3).

In the background there can be a "struggle sometimes to get the students to come for [shared] Sunday Mass" (P1). Reasons given include "that kids get bored" (P1); that they've rarely "been to church" (P2) as a family; that "the new parents come along and then they learn that no one else comes and then they 'peter off' as well" (P8); that the priest gives "the sermon and it's not at the children and it's just so far above their heads… it switches people off" (P3). However, it is also positively acknowledged that the parish/school Masses are generally "well supported" (P5), "you might get 60% of the kids" from school attending, and one priest wishes "I could have that every Sunday" (P5).

A stated major factor in children and families feeling they belong at the parish/school Mass is children having something to do, other than just sitting in the pews, so they feel more connected to what is happening. The belief is that if "children are doing things or taking part" (P4) they are more connected to faith and to one another. As a result, children often create appropriate art at school which is displayed in the church on Sunday; they sing songs they know from school; they have tasks to complete themselves; or they know those who are reading, serving, or doing the offertory; they sit together; and the priest's homily is usually oriented to include young people. All of which is described as helping create a sense of inclusion and welcome.

The concept of people feeling more included if they have jobs can also feed back into regular Mass attendance and feelings of belonging for parents of children at the school. Getting "school families involved in the different ministries on a normal Sunday, whether it's cups of tea or the children's liturgy, is critical too, because then the other parents see parents are doing stuff" (F1) and are more likely to choose to participate themselves.

4.4.3 Sacramental Preparation

Sacramental programmes for children can create a "sense of working on this together" (F1), especially when parents are included in education sessions with their children after Sunday Mass. There can be a "certain sense of going through the motions" (F1) as they "work through each Sacrament… although the parents do enjoy it" (F1). This experience is described as "creating community among themselves as much as anything, within a church context" (F1). It is about gathering with the faith dimension as the purpose rather than on the periphery. Receiving the sacraments is acknowledged as "really special times in people's lives" (P1) and presents "a clear purpose for getting them [parents] in" (P1).

There can be angst associated with children actually receiving the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation at Sunday Mass. This is partly because the liturgy "takes more than an hour or one and a half hours" (F5), and also because whole pews are committed to families of those receiving the Sacrament "so the parishioner will be pushed out" of their regular spot (F5). The frustration for regular parishioners is exacerbated with the knowledge that next week it will be "back to normal" (F5) with most young people not coming to Sunday Eucharist.

However, primarily, principals and priests speak with joy about their children being prepared for the Sacraments: "last year we had 17 children baptised, I think as a school we do a fantastic job" (P3); and "the greatest thing is we've got people coming to us and saying they want it" (F4). There are a variety of approaches in terms of whether it is the school, the parish, or a combination of both that does the preparation, but for all schools the common practice is for children to receive the Sacraments in their parish church to bring the school and parish together.

4.5 Symbolic Features

A range of data emerged as images, symbols or metaphors. While most elements of these features overtly resonate with other features in this chapter, they also suggest a complexity and nuance beyond the physical words captured in an interview. Thus, they are included here as insights into participant perspectives regarding the parish/school relationship landscape.

4.5.1 Images/Symbols

Principals and priests were asked to bring a symbol, story, or other metaphor, either physically or verbally, which they believed reflected something of the relationship between the parish and school in their context. All interviews began with a request for the participant to tell the researcher about the image or symbol they had chosen. While most moved quickly on to school or parish specifics it is important to acknowledge the symbolic features that were chosen and offered as the participant's prepared beginning of a conversation on the relationship between parish and parish school. Images have been grouped in order of priests then principals.

1. *Cotton Thread* (F1) – The interviewee produced a reel of white cotton and shared a verbal image of a web of connection between himself and 200-300 school children and 500 parents, and imagined what it would be like including other parishioners who were engaged with the school. A thread of cotton represents a very thin, small connection which "varies

from family to family, but it's actually quite strong" (F1). He further described how the parish priest has a connection between people in the school community and parishioners, which creates one connection between parish and school. The thread gets picked up by many others: in relationships as primary school students, secondary students, young adults, and other parishioners. Sacramental programmes create another little thread: children might write a card asking a parishioner to pray for them preparing to receive first Communion – another thread. Mass attendance might be minimal but it's another thread, as can be the conversation with a prospective family seeking preference to come to the Catholic school, and/or with a family who have become disconnected from Church practice, but the thread is perceived as "still being there" (F1).

2. *Listening* (F2) – This priest said he had forgotten to bring an image and immediately began to provide a verbal symbol of the importance of listening in his role as pastor. He believes God is addressing people continually and the role of parish and school "is to realise that we're one and to realise that what we provide is a space for people to be listened to" (F2), and to experience God. He gave an example of listening to a parent coming to Mass with children and recounting an experience of their connection to a Catholic school 20 years ago and a desire to recapture that feeling. Not by asking theological questions, but by sharing their worries about life – finances, children's future, illness – he believes the parish and school facilitate an experience of God.

3. *The Good Shepherd* (F3) – This priest had gone over to the church foyer and taken off the wall a printed picture of himself and a sheep in a suburban paddock so that he could present it to the researcher as his symbol of parish and school. With a great smile on his face, he proffered it before the interview began, and said, "that was taken by a parent at the school" (F3). He then never mentioned it again. However, there was consistent mention of the role of the priest as central in connecting school to parish, including several humorous accounts of encounters with students and/or parishioners. Throughout the interview there was an overt sense that a key aspect of the symbol was conveying the importance of the priest having a sense of joy and fun.

4. *St Joseph the Carpenter* (F6) – The symbol was described as having two elements: 1) The physical aspect of the carpenter working with wood, "creating and moulding and working together and joining" (F6), and 2) the skill and aptitude of the person, in this case the priest,

as the metaphorical craftsman engaged in the project of joining parish and parish school.

5. *A Seed Bed* (F5) – For this interviewee the symbol was a rather complex mixed metaphor with the school considered a seed bed for the planting of faith, and the Catholic Church, including the parish, being the sower. Children, but also staff, are planted in the seed beds and grow in faith there. The emphasis is on small beginnings from which the new plants will be transferred into the wider garden, which is recognised as secular society. In this way, "the school is the agent of evangelisation… so when they grow they go in the garden [into society] and at least we have something" (F5).

6. *Companions on the Journey* (F4) – This priest was the only person to have prepared two symbols. This and the following symbol have some interconnection. A detailed description of companions on a journey was presented in the context of two quite distinct parties: 1) the parish, which has most of the power and status and claims the direction things should be going because they have been around longer in terms of age and experience; and 2) the school, which is younger in faith and does not really understand the way, so it is suggested some might erroneously say "they've got to come and surrender and bow to what we're [the parish] doing" (F4). An analogy is made between the "early Jewish followers" (F4) of Jesus' way and the arrival of new gentile Christians. The point being that "companions are equals… we don't communicate the same [but] companions need to listen to each other" (F4).

7. *Local Hill* (F4 and P6) – This was the only symbol to be used by both a priest and a principal who independently chose the same local geographical site. For the priest, linking to the concept of companions on a journey, the two peaks were a key element in representing the parish and the school working together, while working out who they are and where they are going. The hill "was the symbol of everyone being together although separate identities like two different parts" (F4). He also commented without elaboration that important local Māori histories include a spiritual story of the mountain being a 'taniwha'[16] and the two peaks are part of that creature.

   The principal referred to the hill as an element of the school branding. Brief comment was made on the history of the land and connection to the indigenous Māori people and their

[16] Powerful, local mythical creature with spiritual qualities – part of Māori mythology linking spirituality, people and land.

spirituality. Allusion was also made to a significant practical and emotional division between the two parish communities in the pastoral area, including the schools attached to each parish, saying, “that hill might as well just about be the alps” (P6).

8. *Church Windows Looking Out* (P1) – As introduction to the symbol, this principal expressed grappling with the challenges of being a principal and feeling part of the same parish where they work, as opposed to their previous principalship which was overtly part of a different parish than the school. The very large, wide windows of the current parish church are chosen as a symbol of the parish and parish school relationship because it is a large parish, and the feeling when inside the church is that one is not separate from what is outside. “We are actually part of the environment in which we live”, which is “one of the good things and one of the difficult things” (P1).

9. *Collaborating for Mission* (P2) – When first shown the image the researcher thought it might be eucharistic in nature, but this was not the intention. The principal had not prepared an image for the interview but afterwards e-mailed a graphic and commented on how the parish and parish school need to collaborate to function well. The words “collaborating for mission” were nuanced towards helping each other out, and lifting the school roll, rather than structured shared action and visioning of a more Catholic understanding of mission.

10. *Kete and Greenstone* (P3) – A kete is a woven basket of varying sizes, usually with handles, and greenstone represents qualities such as love, welcome, strength, and harmony. The principal described a cloak ceremony which takes place in the parish church next to the school, where new students to the school receive a cloak to wear at the occasion (which they return), and “someone from the parish gives them a kete with a candle and a little greenstone” (P3) which they can keep. This is regularly talked about by teachers with the children as a symbol of the link between school and parish.

11. *Homing Doves* (P4) – A member of the school community keeps homing doves and they were described as regularly being used for school or parish events. The principal described the symbol as reflecting a sense of floating between parish and school, with the doves “flying home and coming back and flying home” (P4). This represents the disconnect believed to be felt by families in the school community who often don’t see “that the church

and school are part of the parish" but rather see the school as a completely different entity: "the parish and us" (P4).

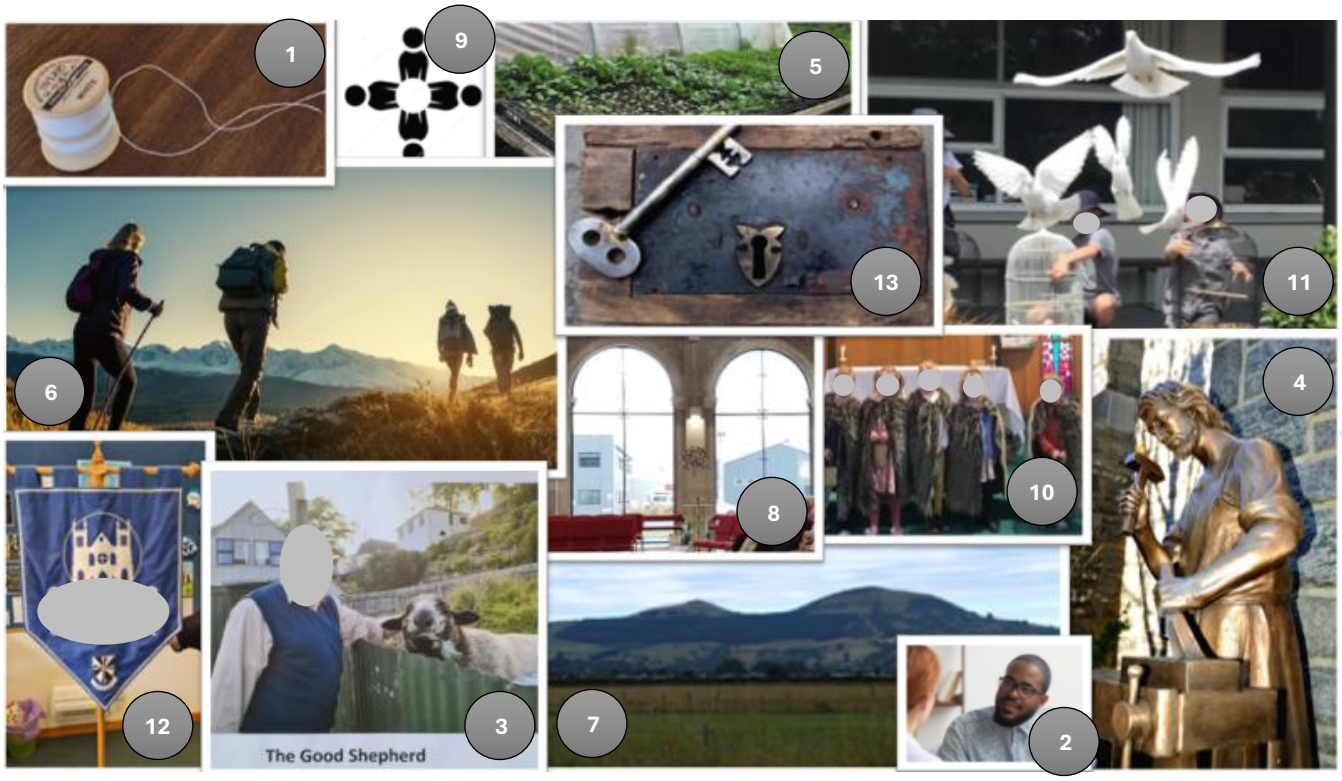
12. *School Logo* (P5 and P8) – Two principals presented their school logos as symbols of the parish and parish school relationship. The first had printed an image they had made by combining photos of the church, the school, and the patron saint. This had been used throughout the school for about eight years, "so that's what the kids saw every time they turned their computer on" (P5). The second produced the school banner and commented on the shared parish name and school name, and on the stylised image of the parish church alongside the charism icon of the school and the shared patron saint, simply stating, "so, we're right connected" (P8).

13. *Key and Lock* (P6) – The final symbol represented the principal's frustration that there was a disconnect between parish and school, reflecting a lack of flexibility from the parish side. The school is perceived as a key, which potentially opens children's minds and hearts to Catholic faith and associated participation in parish and wider Church life, and the formal Church, including the parish priest, can be the lock or barrier. "Often the key isn't always matched to the lock that you're going to" (P6).

Images or symbols described above are depicted in Figure 4.1, with numbers corresponding to the participant's described or provided image.

Figure 4.1

Images or Symbols from Participant Interviews



Note. Images 2, 5, 6 and 13 were chosen by the researcher to represent oral-only descriptions, all other images are directly those of participants (with minor alterations to protect identities).

4.5.2 Metaphors and Similes

During the process of constant comparison, after several interviews, it became apparent to the researcher that participants were often presenting metaphors or similes to support what they were saying. Searching previous transcripts for all such occurrences, and purposefully gathering data from subsequent interviews, produced a plethora of symbolic features regarding the relationship between parish and school.

A range of verbal imagery described a sense of outreach: One priest commented that community is created by “soup and buns” (F1), based on children from the local parish school being involved in helping a small group of parishioners prepare and serve a simple meal to people in need within the wider local community. Another referred to “opening doors” (F4) and heading out of our “comfort zones” (F4) to better build community, and another suggested the need for “creating space” (F2) for people to engage in experiential dialogue.

The importance of parish individuals who had a personal and practical connection to the school were described on one occasion as “the glue” (P1) which helped bind others to parish and school. The implication being that when these people moved on, the bond was no longer present and the connection quickly dissipated. Such people are considered difficult to replace. Linked to this was an image regarding families simply not seeing a reason to belong to the parish despite quality religious education taking place in schools. “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” (P2).

While principals consistently oriented their comments towards positive possibilities, the imagery within comments also revealed a lived reality of ongoing frustration regarding the parish’s lack of commitment to – or even interest in – the school. This disconnection existed within the context of a Church that was perceived as resistant to change. One example of principals’ optimistic merging of frustration and hope is captured in the comment, “it might look like we’re ‘banging our head against a brick wall’ but what’s happening or may happen in the future is that that’s faith. That’s what we’ve got to have… faith to, we’ve got to be the best ourselves we can be” (p1). In a similar context another principal used the term “flogging a dead horse” (P2) in terms of continually trying to effect growth in the parish/school relationship, with a different principal naming the struggle with intransigence of older parishioners refusing to change how things are done at their Sunday worship as “a battle” (P8). At the same time, another principal who was actively engaged in parish life described the expectations on him to regularly support the parish Sunday Mass as “an albatross round my neck” (P5). Yet another referred to the parish as largely unnecessary, like *a pair of old boots* in a cupboard that someone refuses to throw out, “You’re gonna keep them but you don’t use them very often” (P7). Furthermore, the school’s relationship with the formal Church as represented by the parish and parish priest, was described as “a game” (P7) with rules set by a “law keeper” (P7*)*.

Despite these significant challenges principals retained an understanding that for many families the school serves as “a bridge” (P1): an important, and often the only, connection to the parish. One priest described the principal as the **“**captain of the boat” (F5), indicating it is clear that the task of supporting this connection is taken seriously, even though the personal responsibility to “‘build’ the community here and ‘build’ the community there” (P8) feels overwhelming, especially when only one side of the relationship seems to be “looking outside the box” (P2).

Associated challenges regarding families of prospective enrolments meeting the parish priest to gain preference entry were referred to in a number of symbolic ways. One priest expressed empathy with those who might feel some trepidation about having to officially connect with a Church

representative, believing that many come to the interview "expecting to be given a barrel" (F1), meaning they think they will be criticised for their lack of engagement with Church life. The same priest also said that for others it can feel like people are seeking their "Warrant of Fitness" (F1), which introduces a comparison between the legal requirement for vehicles in New Zealand to be inspected and decreed 'road-worthy' and people seeking preference for their child's entry to a Catholic school by answering questions in a way that they hope portrays their family as 'Church-worthy'.

An historical-scriptural metaphor for the relationship between parish and school communities was offered by one priest through a comparison between the "first Jewish Christians and the early Gentiles" (F4) who became followers of Jesus' way. He described how the parish is like the Jews who were given the faith first as an inheritance linked to their own tradition, and the school community is like those gentiles who were younger in their faith who "for some reason didn't get it given the way that this lot did, therefore, in some people's eyes [parishioners'], you know, they've got to come and 'surrender and bow' to what we're doing" (F4). But, he believes, the younger ones realise they do not actually have to bow to the old traditions: like those who said no to circumcision as a requirement for belonging to the emerging Christian community, younger school families are saying no to many of the traditions that they do not deem an important element of contemporary Catholic school life. He sees this simply as a "two-tier system" (F4) reflecting its context rather than a question of right or wrong.

Additional symbols of welcome and invitation were also offered in the interviews. One of the priests spoke of the monthly school/parish Sunday Mass as the school's presence coming into "the church space" (F1). Additionally, active participation in evangelisation and invitation to belong to the Sunday Eucharistic community was portrayed by one priest as the need to constantly have our "tentacles out" (F4) to try and notice adults participating in school Catholic character events and connect them to wider parish life. He provided a vivid image of a traditional Sunday roast meal as reflecting the importance of Sunday Mass as nourishment and encounter:

> I suppose the Sunday Mass is like the Sunday roast. You know it's food for the soul which is important, and it helps feed someone's faith. So, the longer you don't go, um, where do you go? You're not going to die overnight but you're going to slowly starve and so it's food for the soul but it's also an encounter with your companions on the journey because it's, it's a social thing. (F4)

4.6 Unresolved Features

A range of data presented as unresolved hopes for the future, recognised barriers, or questions which were representative of significant challenges. While they are addressed in three main areas it is also recognised that these areas resonate with each other. These features indicate participant awareness that there are next steps to be taken to improve the parish and parish school relationship, but that achieving them is challenging and complex. As one principal stated, "We're all grappling as individual schools with the relationship with our parishes. And we know that we want it to grow, and we don't know what to do. It's too big an issue" (P1). In terms of this study, unresolved features are included in the analysis and recommendations within subsequent chapters.

4.6.1 Unresolved Aspirations

A number of participants expressed hope that young people will have better opportunities to be more engaged with the liturgy. One comment emerged from a belief that the Liturgy of the Word at Eucharist is 20 minutes where children are "just listening" rather than participating: "I think we've got to engage them more. They've got to feel like they're part and parcel" (P1). Similarly, another stated that young people today will decide whether they remain with the Church and that parish and school share a collective responsibility for making church something that young people really wish to connect with: "a happy place to be in, [somewhere] current … innovative, and exciting" (P4). Principals also see the schools as helping lead the way in this regard if there could be "a little bit more accommodation of the school side of things" (P8), such as using vibrant songs and music with which the children are already familiar and engaged, and which they believe would add life to parish eucharistic celebrations. There is a hope that, through better links between parish and school, instead of one Mass per month being a parish/school Mass it could be that "actually, the kids are part of it all the time" (P1).

One priest mused, "If I had a magic wand, I'd wave it so that Jesus could come down and that all would follow him into church." Behind the comment is personal experience that sacramental programmes do not usually lead children and their families to regularly practice through church attendance, despite initial enthusiasm from parents and some positive results, and that high-level divine intervention seems necessary "because [otherwise] they're not going to come again" (F3). From a more optimistic stance, another priest believed that even if children and parents did not attend Mass, recognition of the parish as family was something to be valued: "that's the aspiration, that people, even if they're not connecting at that Eucharist level, they know that actually this is my parish as a family" (F1). This approach resonates with the aspiration that people from school and

parish "understand each other and accept them for what they are" (F6), rather than placing unrealistic expectations that "they should do what the other ones are doing" (F6). When asked if this comment referred to both parish and school communities, the respondent answered, "both sides, yes. [But] I think it's more so from those who are the church-goers" (F6).

In highlighting the need for "those key people who can actually build and grow a relationship that actually becomes stronger" (P1), an awareness is raised that leaders also need a clear idea of what such a relationship might "look like if it is strong" (P1) and aspire to achieving that. There is an associated recognition that the Catholic community needs to "go out your doors, don't wait. Go out and listen… start here" (F4). It could be as straightforward as "a bit more outreach… from the church to the school, and just seeing if there's other things, how they can support what we are already doing" (P4); or it may be that after Mass, "magically somebody would be able to prepare all the kai [food] and there'd be a celebration around food" (p7), as happens in other communities such as Pasifika Catholics or Seventh Day Adventists.

Ecumenical aspiration also came from a priest sharing an account of a young minister from another Christian tradition who was in awe of the evangelising opportunities of Catholic schools and their associated parishes, because "you've got so many adults at your fingertips" (F4). Yet, this is not how it usually feels for Catholic communities. He believes Catholics could learn much from other denominations through a "massive overhaul" (F4) of Catholic leadership in evangelising. At the same time, there is a belief that the focus should not be on the dropping numbers of Mass attendance, but on seeing the possibility and wonder of "who is still coming… It's opened my eyes to the smallest opportunity" (F4). The example is given of taking half an hour to respond immediately to a principal's request to come over to the school and bless the parents: "I'm thinking, 'Shit, they need more than that, [but] we'll just give half an hour. Go over and do the half hour'" (F4). This example also resonates with several principals and priests commenting on an aspiration for the priest to connect with the school community more regularly, with an awareness on both sides that this is unlikely to eventuate in contemporary times.

4.6.2 Unresolved Barriers

Many obstacles in the parish/school relationship were identified as unresolved barriers by participants. The majority of these unresolved features emerged from data pertaining to busyness or change. Other named barriers that do not fall within the two groups below include: *Blame*, when both sides believe the other to be responsible for a lack of connection or growth, as in "there's been

a lot of 'this isn't happening' blame'" (P1); *Lack of Commitment*, when parents "will not support the children" (F5), or when aging parishioners are not being replaced by younger Catholics "who are prepared to commit themselves" (F6); *Perception*, such as being Catholic is abnormal because others may, "think that I'm weird… that I've got brainwashed" (P7); or, *Physical Distance*, when the school and church are literally outside walking distance from each other.

4.6.2.1 Busyness.

In the very first interview of this research the priest reflected that, in terms of the parish/school relationship, "I think one of the barriers is the busyness" (F1) of schools and parents supporting children seven days a week in education, pastoral care, sport, and other extra-curricular activities. He is clear that these things are important, but also that they represent a difficulty in parents prioritising the faith dimension of the school and family.

A result of the busyness feature is that principals in the study routinely accept it as the reason for a declining presence of the priest in the life of the school: a principal decides it would be important to talk with the priest about improving the relationship, "but he's really busy" (P1). Sometimes the communication is lacking, around class Masses for example, and the "relationship is not always fluid" (P2), but the principal is "not blaming [N] at all because I know he's got a massive job… he is a very busy man" (P2). The promise to complete a task which both sides deem important, such as training new altar servers, is left undone because Father "was going to do it and then, you know, busy" (P3). In the past the same priest would visit the school often and "do that really well. This is the hard thing, he's getting too busy" (P4). Sadness is expressed about the priest not connecting with the children in the school, but accompanied with recognition that "He's a very busy man – we know that" (P5). A principal acknowledges that caring for a number of parishes and schools means, "the poor blighter is… always in a state of flux" (P6) as he sees his job getting bigger and bigger. Additionally, while positively commenting on the engagement of their elderly priest, there's an awareness that the situation will not improve because in "our diocese, and our priests here, they're getting spread and spread and spread so they haven't got the same time that they used to" (P8).

Priests comment on their own busyness too, but from a pragmatic stance that time is limited and there are necessarily other priorities: "The time I devote to building connections and bonds with parishioners full stop is limited, and with school families even less so" (F1), meaning even less time is available for fostering the school family connection.

Principals often reference the busyness associated with all the other demands on their time and skill, when acknowledging the important part they personally play in the parish/school relationship. For example, one person in a smaller school described specifically choosing not to go on the parish pastoral council because, "I'm doing my principal role, my teaching role, the DRS role, and the parish role… I'm just too busy to do everything" (P7). Also, with increasing demands from the Ministry of Education being loaded onto principals, genuine fear is expressed regarding "the typical principal's burning out" (P5).

4.6.2.2 Change.

The challenge of change emerged from the interviews within a range of observations and expectations regarding experience of, need for, and/or resistance to, change. While principals consistently reference frustration at church practice which seems too rigid, they are also conscious of not fully understanding the "bigger picture" (P1) and "not actually finding out what it is that needs to be changed" (P1). Similarly, a priest speaks of necessary discernment and action through opening his eyes to opportunities and little changes that are happening every day, and so developing a process of embracing change through a "different mindset… we have to adapt" (F4).

Change in demography is seen as having a significant impact on parishes and schools. Where once many Catholic families were based around the parish and school, now "the committed Catholics are not around" (F3). In places, "younger families aren't around either because… first-time houses are now flats for students" (F3), so some Catholic schools are struggling to survive. In terms of aging Mass attendance, one person deplores the loss of vitality and practicality of "older people who are very much hands-on with sleeves rolled up" (F6) who are "in the past now" (F6), with no one coming to replace them. In the same context of change, another principal sees as problematic the "old people that have always done the same thing" (P8) and refuse to change. One priest reflects on the freedom children and families now seem to have to "blow in and blow out" (F4) of coming to church and believes there may be jealousy and "a wee bit of anger in the older generations" (F4) in seeing younger families engage in this different way.

Schools and parishes are becoming more diverse with regard to cultural demographics and there is an awareness by principals of the need to "promote inclusion" (P8), particularly through Māori language, but also with language of other cultures, yet many parishes are reluctant to engage. It is also recognised that Catholics in some cultures are reluctant to take on leadership roles because there is a "barrier about language" (F5) and they are "very shy to express" (F5) their own desire for

inclusive change. As has been mentioned, the change in numbers of parish priests who come from different cultures brings its own gifts and challenges in this regard.

Resistance to change is particularly felt when schools attempt changes they perceive will help children and families feel more included in the parish and end up "trying to get it all done and actually getting nowhere" (P3). Innovation is seen by schools as a necessary way forward, and there is optimism in recognising that parishioners need time "to get their head around a wee bit of change" (P4). However, there is also feeling that it's easier to disengage and not upset people by pushing change, because it can "cause friction. And parishes fall to bits when there's a bit of conflict" (P5).

4.6.3 Unresolved Questions

Significant nuance regarding the relationship between parish and parish school was reflected through the feature of participants' unresolved questions. These 11 insightful queries are contextualised within the data as follows:

1) Student engagement: "Now I sometimes walk away thinking, how could we enable that to occur in a parish context and in a Sunday gathering? I don't know?" (F1). This follows a positive reflection on children's leadership and participation in non-Eucharist liturgies and assemblies at school, where significantly more student voice is present in what is done, and by whom, than occurs even at shared parish/school Sunday Masses. There is a desire for this level of engagement and participation to be part of parish life and regular Eucharist.

2) Removing barriers: "It's how to break down those barriers really, isn't it?" (P8). The barriers referred to in this instance are the desire for parish and family to better engage in Sunday Eucharist together, with school families who are un-churched and groups of parishioners who are intransigent and unwelcoming. P8 partly answers the question immediately afterwards, but also gets lost in the challenge, "when you keep getting the push-back you just have to try different things. But it's coming up with those different solutions, isn't it? (P8).

3) Actively connecting: "You're always thinking how, how can we better make the connection? How can we support our families in that way?... What's going on here and building the community here?" (P8). This arises again some 30 minutes later in the interview with P8, in reflecting on principals having a responsibility to be thinking strategically and practically about connecting children and

families to parish. The question is described as “always sitting there” (P8), with solutions difficult to find and sometimes meeting with resistance. Despite the challenges, “you don’t want to give up on things” (P8).

4) Creatively connecting: “I suppose if I was a bit more creative to think how do we do more of that? How do we build those connections?” (F1). This question emerged from reflecting on how sacramental programmes are an opportunity for regular parishioners to engage with the children on their spiritual journey through such things as setting up prayer buddies where the children make “a little card saying, ‘I’m making my Confirmation or first Communion. Please, pray for me’” (F1).

5) Community building: “I don’t know. How do you get people to want to be together?” (P7). A comment encapsulating what this principal thought might enhance the relationship between parish and school, and also summarising an element understood to be at the core of this relationship – people wanting to be together.

6) Continuity of practice: “What else could we do to get more families to Mass? I often say, ‘What do you think? What can we do?’” (P4). In a similar context to the previous point, this principal is reflecting on strategic dialogue with the School Board where, aware of the personal responsibility to facilitate better engagement with parish in the form of school participation in Sunday Eucharist, she turns the question back to the board. The frustration emerges from a reality that “as a school we can do all these wonderful things and we can put on these whānau Masses and we can encourage our children but we can’t guarantee or tell them that they’re going to be back the next weekend” (P4).

7) Understanding parish: “They don’t know what the parish is supposed to do, and I must admit I’m unclear as well?” (P2). This questioning statement devolves from an awareness that parents don’t know what the parish community does (neither does the principal), and that parishioners are “all old” (P2). The comment is followed by a positive statement regarding parish engagement which is “the social justice thing” (P2), referring to some shared activities which involved staff, children, and parishioners.

8) Cultural complexity: “Where are our New Zealand priests?” (P7). This concern was centred less on a call for new vocations than on a frustration that importing priests from other countries and cultures can pose problems for developing more active engagement with the parish. There was a sense that people who had grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand would be more attuned to, and

reflective of, the language, history, culture, and nuance of New Zealand Catholics.

9) Formation: “When do we build our leaders? When do we get onto that pathway?” (P4). With the realisation of ever-increasing demands on the limited number of priests comes an awareness that lay people can and should be more involved in areas of Catholic ministry which have traditionally been the sole domain of the priest. However, these lay leaders need to be formed and trained, and the question concerns evidence of this happening or even beginning.

10) Transparent resourcing: “Where does the money go?” This question was implied but not directly asked by three principals. It highlights the existence of hitherto unmentioned economic elements within the parish/school relationship. One principal is conscious of a parish house being rented adjacent to the school grounds, and of various parish or diocesan fundraising activities, but that none of the money seems to come to the school, which is financially struggling. “I don’t know where the money goes. I know they have golf tournaments... they rent that house… they must collect rent from it?” (P2). When asked if any of the money comes to the school he replied, “No, not at all. It would be great if it did” (P2). Another commented that he was asked how the diocese could support the school, which had a declining roll. The principal replied that an improvement in the advertising budget would help, “can we top it up a wee bit?” (P5). But no money was forthcoming. The final situation referred to a long-established arrangement where the funds from the school/parish fair was divided 50/50 between parish and school even though the school parents did nearly all the work. Parents would say, “it’s not fair. We’re raising the money for the school, for the kids, why are we giving it away?” (P4). A memorandum of understanding is being developed indicating that the parish might not get 50% of the funds in the future, depending on what is raised, and also requesting that the parish be more transparent about where it spends its money so “parents can actually see something evidential” (P4), and know the money is being put to good use for the whole community.

11) Addressing Change: “What is going to happen to the Church in the future?” (P4). This question is specifically posed by one principal, but the sentiment is present in all interviews. Not only do priests and principals wonder what the future holds, but evidenced in all the questions above, and throughout the interview data, there is a concern about change in the religious landscape and whether the Catholic Church, particularly as seen in parish life and Catholic schools, has a future at all in Aotearoa or as a global entity: “I’m really concerned about the future of the Catholic Church” (P7); “I worry… there’s not a lot of families” (P8). At the same time, there is a firm awareness that decisions made now will impact on a reality that is immanent but unknown.

4.7 Conclusion

The interview data presents a diverse landscape of insight regarding the research question: “What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand?” Application of constant comparison indicates copious, often disparate, but meaningful groupings of participant, community, functional, sacramental participation, symbolic, and unresolved features. However, the process of CGT further distils these unrefined features into major categories – key features – within the data, and these are presented with support from the literature in Chapter 5, with particular inclusion of the above unresolved questions.

Chapter 5 "They too belong here" (F2)

This chapter presents the major findings of the research question, "What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand". The findings reflect interpretivist and symbolic interactionism perspectives through detailed constant comparison of data including insight from the literature review, which is considered data within the principles of classic grounded theory (Glaser, 2002b). The chapter draws together and poses implications from the unrefined features outlined in Chapter 4, including addressing participants' unresolved questions. The initial categories of identity, community/connection, mission, and leadership of Chapter 2 are developed and explained as key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools. These key features are: 1) the centrality of identity; 2) evangelisation and mission; 3) being community; and 4) leadership; with the final feature emphasising that all other features necessarily exist within a context of 5) recognising and participating in change.

The thread which connects the key features in the relationship between the school and the parish is that of belonging. The relationship is not primarily reflected in buildings, objects, processes, or Church teaching, though these are identified within the research. Rather, it is evident in the ways people experience and believe they are in relationship with one another and thus have a personal sense of belonging.

The chapter presents this thread as linked with each of the key features: Catholic *evangelisation and mission* involves a sense of belonging to the Church – to the body of Christ/the people of God (Francis, 2013, 2019a; Paul VI, 1964a) – and of wanting others to belong. However, understandings of this concept are variably present in the studied parish/school relationship. *Communities* exist as groups of individuals who claim and live a spectrum of belonging, and many in parishes or schools have tenuous or oblique understandings of belonging to their parish school community. *Leadership* is practiced by people who belong to and work with and within communities who share a sense of belonging, and priests and principals in this research are aware of their responsibility and opportunity to build that sense of belonging within their parishes and schools. All of which is taking place in a context of *change* over time. The central element of *identity*, which resonates with each of these features, is also integrally bound to belonging.

Pope Francis succinctly introduces this connection between identity and belonging:

> every person must be acknowledged in their identity. But identity does not exist without belonging. Try to offer a sense of belonging…. A person without an identity has no future. It is therefore urgent to offer this belonging of any type, but which lets someone feel they belong to a group, a family, an organization, something, and this can give them an identity. Identity and belonging. (2016)

5.1 Who Am I? Who Are We? – The Centrality of Identity

"We're looking to be, what is our identity? Who are we?" (F4)

Identity is central to the parish/school relationship because clarity around 'who we are' informs the direction and purpose of the relationship. Research resonates with the view that a Catholic school's purpose and function within its parish context is strengthened by a well-developed Catholic identity (Nuzzi et al., 2009). However, the task of achieving this well-developed identity is complex because there is lack of clarity about just what Catholic identity is. The complexity arises not from a lack of statements or examples, but from the plethora of elements which Catholic schools and parishes, and the individuals within them, may encounter and claim. Varied understandings can result in cohesion, confusion or insular stances where parishes and schools see themselves as connected or disconnected from each other in important areas of Catholic life.

A summary of interview participants' reflection on being Catholic includes: being part of the global Catholic Church, and following the teaching of the magisterium; modelling charisms and founding orders; social justice as living out faith; being like Jesus; acting on conscience; different for young families today from what was expected of earlier generations; varied expectations of participation in Sunday Mass; varied other experiences of praying or worshipping; and disconnected from the authority of the Church because of a lack of confidence or trust in the magisterium. Being Catholic also involves managing and responding to a spectrum of expectations of parishes on schools, and of schools on parishes. All of which in part or together might be claimed as the basis for a well-developed Catholic identity.

In practice, schools consistently strategically grapple with naming and living their Catholic identity, which is monitored as part of a regular Catholic school review cycle (NZCEO, 2018b). Principals in this research recognise a need to intentionally state and develop their Catholic identity and practices within their communities, particularly in the face of Aotearoa becoming increasingly secular.

However, while conscious of secular pressures and declining participation, no national or diocesan parish review process was indicated in this research, and intentional reflection on, or development of, parish Catholic identity was sporadic in the participant group. Parishes in this study see themselves as Catholic through being historically and currently set up as 'Catholic parishes' with a geographical area, a parish priest (albeit often shared with another parish), a church building, and provision of regular Eucharist.

This context of diverse understandings, expectations, and practices, within parishes and schools, particularly regarding mission and evangelisation, community building, practicing leadership, or responding to change, persistently emphasises the significance of personal and communal identity: I am (we are/they are), so I (we/they) do. Reciprocally, who they are and what they do as a parish or school can actually be supported by the parish/school relationship itself: "If you're not going to have a relationship between parish and school then you don't know who you are" (P1); "I believe that relationship [between parish and school] should be strong so that the children are seeing that it's just part of who we are and what we do" (P3); "I was so proud about … how lovingly they spoke about the school and the parish. It was lovely just to listen to them... they were actually speaking about what we're about" (F2).

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of identity is influenced by perspectives of what symbolic interactionism refers to as the most salient self in a given context or moment (Blumer, 1980). For example, an individual in a parish or school context may rightly identify themselves as a parishioner, a member of the choir, a principal, a reader, part of St Vincent de Paul, and a parent. Each perspective can bring supporting or competing understandings of parish or school. Indeed, this research was intentional in seeking to interview participants in their roles as priests and principals to gather salient data from these particular leadership perspectives (Handberg et al., 2015; Snow, 2001). Nevertheless, several data include contributions from the perspectives of participants as parents, friends, or parishioners. All of which, in the context of this research, highlights the reality of myriad identity perspectives being present in understanding and participating in the parish/school relationship.

Levels of complexity within the parish/school relationship require identity to be considered not in the singular but in the plural. Thus, the following examines Catholic identities as providing multiple challenges, many of which are revealed through symbol and metaphor, and which are recognised distinctly within parishes and schools. With each entity necessarily consisting of individuals,

individual identity is addressed, particularly from the cultural perspective. It is also in this context of identity that the recurring element of preference in school enrolment for those who have an association with the Catholic Church is considered.

5.1.1 Catholic Identities

It is not clear to parishes and schools just what it means to be Catholic. Multiple terms are used to describe Catholic stances throughout the literature and interview data, some interchangeably, such as: traditional, conservative, lapsed, cultural, militant, drifting, liberal, clerical, flexible, angry, and modern. Each of these lenses, and others, reflect personally claimed or externally attributed identities of what it means to be Catholic, and therefore impact the Catholic parish and school in terms of their unique memories of the past and visions for the future (Leming, 2007). Indeed, even foundational Church documents such as the Code of Canon Law (CLS, 1983) and the Catechism (Catholic Church, 1994), with their great breadth of statements, directions, and expectations, fail to establish clarity of identity in themselves (Branson et al., 2019; Green, 2018; O'Loughlin, 2019). In this context, a new iteration of a synodal process has emerged to support people in expressing what they believe the Church to be, and to hear what others believe it to be, and thus give impetus and vision to the Church's shared present and future (Arbuckle, 2024; Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania [FCBCO], 2023; Francis, 2021; NZCBC, 2022a). As one principal remarked, "We need to have more people thinking about what it [the Church] is, because… any change in the Church is really tricky" (P1).

It can be a challenging concept to grasp, but commentary poses that the Church is authentically many things at the one time (Arbuckle, 2013). However, reflection on the range of identities present within the Church is required if communities are to strengthen their Catholic identity and move beyond exclusive, static, or mono-dimensional thinking and practice to build more dynamic and effective relationships with one another as Church (Dulles, 2002; Francis & Campbell, 2017; Raith, 2021). F4 captures the pastoral need for encouraging such reflection as, "helping them believe that what they see is possible, and helping them believe, to have confidence, in what they see [as] different ways of being Church".

5.1.1.1 The Challenge of Multiple Identities.

Data reveals multiple identities which must be navigated by schools and parishes (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2023). Principals and priests in particular are faced with regular

practical challenges which cannot be ignored and require a stance to be taken and decisions to be made. Four examples of group identities help illustrate this point:

Ecumenical identities: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (Paul VI, 1964a), establishes and elaborates on the terms 'people of God' and 'body of Christ' as central to Catholic identity. However, principals who wish to enrol Christian children from deeply committed non-Catholic Christian families, indicate they struggle to understand why such children are turned down for preference because they are not Catholic. This frustration is exacerbated when such children are often perceived as bringing much deeper faith to practice and discussion at school than children who come from families with little connection to their faith. P4 summarises the challenge and vexation of turning away other Christians: "For us as Principals… [they] become our best supporters once they come to the school. And they become non-preference!? That's quite challenging, and I know I'm not the only person that thinks that." Similarly, non-Catholic Christian families may see themselves as people of God and part of the body of Christ through their ecumenical commitment to Jesus as central to their lives (George, 2016; Paul VI, 1964b), and principals interviewed suggest many struggle to understand why they are not welcome in a Catholic school.

Universal and local identities: Data findings reveal participants are conscious that they are part of local schools and parishes within a diocese, within a national Catholic framework, within the universal Church. They refer to a hierarchy of priests, local bishops, Vatican, and Pope, along with 2000 years of Church Tradition and traditions, and an associated expectation of adherence to Church teaching. At the same time there is a sense of relative autonomy in practice, consistent with international experience (Sultmann & Brown, 2011), so that principals in particular, responding to local context and experience, aim to hold on to elements that they personally perceive as fundamental to universal Catholic identity while avoiding or reinterpreting those they deem are not. This is reflected in principals often perceiving the school Catholic community to have more impact on the faith of children and their families than the parish, and consistently seeking the parish to be more flexible and welcoming of school families lest the parish actually "put them off" (P8), and undo the school's good work in faith formation.

Also at the functional level, each diocese in Aotearoa NZ has a similar but unique set up, and although there are a number of national documents outlining expectations of Catholic schools, and contextualising universal Church teaching (National Centre for Religious Studies, 2021; NZCBC, 2014; NZCEO, 2018a, 2020d), local principals, parish priests, managers for education, and bishops have

differing expectations and responses to inconsistencies in practice. These include how a school 'evaluation for development' is followed up to check on progress towards recommendations; or, how a diocese responds to complaints regarding a dysfunctional working relationship between parish priest and parish school principal.[17] The associated need to connect with the range of universal to local Church identities poses an ongoing challenge for principals and priests alike.

From another perspective, belonging to the local parish and parish school is made increasingly complex due to some Catholic primary schools being connected to more than one parish, and some parishes contributing to more than one school.[18] In addition, some parents enrol their children in Catholic schools that are part of different parishes from where they live and/or worship. This reality of multiple connections has implications for pastoral care and understandings of parish and belonging. For instance, children and families may participate at Sunday Mass in their local parish, and not go to the parish school but be enrolled at a Catholic school in a different parish, so, "you've got a number of children who are part of the parish but aren't part of our parish school… they're often very committed to the Sunday Eucharist – you want them to not feel as though they're second-class" (F1). A practical response meant that the Sunday Eucharist Prayer of the Faithful which would often name their parish school and pray for its staff and children at the start of each school term ceased naming the local school and began praying for all children and staff returning to schools. This is intended to be a more inclusive pastoral response, but is also a small step away from emphasising the local parish/school identity.

Religious and secular identities: The Western trend of declining religious involvement (Manouchehrifar & Forester, 2021) is present in Aotearoa New Zealand (Wilberforce Foundation, 2023). Catholic parishes and schools have at the core of their identities a faith in Jesus Christ which is increasingly being challenged by a rise in secularisation. Practising parishioners connect overtly with the faith dimension of the Church, by choosing to participate in Eucharist or in associated parish programmes such as social justice outreach, because they desire at some level to follow Jesus. However, parental choices to intentionally connect with the Catholicity of the school are more complex in the data. While many seek a faith dimension, most see faith practice as an optional or tolerated adjunct to quality values-based secular education. Those interviewed consistently recognised this challenge, and the need for an intentional response, as indicated in the statement:

[17] Examples drawn from professional dialogue as part of the researcher's national work with schools and parishes.
[18] See Table 4.1.

> we've become a more secular society that people bring their students here to school and they're not quite sure why they're bringing them here. Their children are getting all this faith development and our parents are getting limited. And they don't engage probably with what we're offering so we need to actually think of different ways of doing it. (P1)

Parish and school identities: Parishes and parish schools are linked and distinct from one another within the parish/school relationship. Each entity has different priorities, different leadership structures, different funding models, and different though overlapping communities. Yet, they canonically and practically exist as parish entities: "two parts of the same identity – one needs the other… there's all sorts of connections" (F4), "they are one" (F5). To better understand this complex relationship it is necessary, then, to consider separately the identity of the Catholic parish, and the parish school.

5.1.1.2 What Is the Catholic Parish?

"They don't know what the parish is supposed to do, and I must admit I'm unclear as well?" (P2).

An established canonical definition of parish is introduced in the research context (Chapter 1) as a particular community of faith under the authority of a bishop, with geographical boundaries, within a global Catholic network, led by a priest who has spiritual, educational and governance responsibilities. This initial contextualisation is extended by referencing central elements of parish as: the presence of Jesus, celebration of the Sacraments, witness, mission, and evangelisation which support and reflect being a faith community of families as well as individuals. However, it was unknown whether these traditional definitions meaningfully reflected the lived reality of participants in this research. Indeed, the data supports and challenges elements of traditional understandings with a diverse range of nuance in perception of just what is a parish.

One principal confidently declares traditional universal and local elements, with a nuance of independence, "It's a Greek word and it's a word that says community. … We are a stand-alone community, and we are a parish so the Catholics within that community are our parish" (P5). Similarly, a priest offered a succinct definition with a list of traditional spiritual and social elements, "The parish is the community of faith. It's supporting one another, believing in the Gospel of Jesus, no discrimination. It's a prayerful community and a lively vibrant faithful community" (F5). However, he immediately adds with a chuckle, "maybe not 100 percent", and comments that although "those

from school" are technically part of the parish he holds up a few fingers of one hand indicating not many of them come to Mass on Sundays.

Understanding why regular claims are made in the data that the parish is something that is not lived out in reality is supported by elements of Archer's Morphogenetic Approach (Archer, 1995). While this approach will receive further elaboration at the end of the chapter, it is useful to recognise its claim that without reflection and intentional response it's common for those within social structures, such as a parish, to believe and claim that the structure continues to be what it was historically set up to be. However, over time with myriad intentional or unintentional social and cultural influences and responses, the reality can become different from what is claimed. Such as, believing an historical ideal that a school is part of a parish which is a 'lively vibrant faith community' can disguise a need to recognise and respond to a parish community that is mostly old and tired, and the youthful vibrancy sought exists primarily in a Catholic school community which, while technically part of the parish, is significantly disconnected from it in practice. In this research it is useful, then, for formal definitions of parish to provide some context, but it is the data themselves which better convey what a parish is or is not for participants.

Parish is thus revealed as a complex blend of aspirational and/or experienced elements. The first points are akin to John Paul II's (1988) understanding of parish as the family of God and the community of the faithful, however, comments are more from a perspective of hope or desire than a lived reality. The parish is:

A communal commitment to gather. More than individual reverence, "It's a communal commitment to gather with each other, I think and, and to grow in our faith together to support each other in a faithful way" (F4).

Disciples of Christ. Followers of Jesus who "should be living the Gospel at the heart of everything they do. And this gives nourishment from gathering together as a community for Mass, Sacraments. It gives a vibrancy for going out and um involvement in Christ to the world." (F6)

At the experiential level, including some practical drive to effect elements of the above, interviewees presented a range of identities, more aligned to Plekton's (2021) recognition of fragility and defensiveness, in referring to parish as:

Unknown/irrelevant. As reflected in the rhetorical question which serves as the sub-heading for this section, some principals and many school families have little to no connection with parish life and are unclear what a parish is or does. Participants also reflected that most Catholic school families do not seek or value belonging to the parish.

A faith community within communities. Local, diocesan, national, and universal Church, in a secular world. "We're actually in the big world-wide community… but this is the community in which is the physical parish" (P1).

Trying to be genuinely prayerful and caring. Authentically working to be prayerful, caring of each other, and caring of others. "Now if people can detect those three things then I think they're more likely to think that resonates with who I am… somehow God is part of my life" (F1).

The elderly. When invited to share a description of parishioners, participants said: "They're all old" (P2); "There's not that many parishioners and they're all fairly elderly" (P3); "well and truly past 50-60 age group" (F5); "They're pretty old" (P7); "Our parish is old… we haven't got a lot of families… I would like to see a little bit more how we can build that" (P8).

Those who come to Mass. The sense for many is that parish does not include school children and their families, who are seen as welcome though peripheral. Parish is, "the people who normally come, to Mass here. And they're delighted to see the kids because there haven't been too many of them" (F3). This works both ways in the data – families with children in the parish school tend not to consider themselves part of the parish because they rarely go to Mass, and most parishioners have the same attitude regarding occasional attendance by school families.

Represented in the priest. The authority and practice of the priest is a critical element of the parish, with potential for positive and negative impact. One priest understood that for some he personally represented the parish, adding "teachers say sometimes the priest is key because I taught them how to love Jesus" (F5). The principal of the school in his parish alluded more to the difficulties he posed, "He's just part of it [the parish] really, not the law maker but the law keeper" (P7). Several participants spoke to a change in priest resulting in a change in parish.

Insular. Parishes have unique identities which can be exclusive. When two parishes and two schools within this study were combined as a pastoral area under one parish priest, many parishioners

would not identify with the other parish or school. “I was astounded with the parochialism between the two groups,” P6 commented in describing response to “the idea of pastoral areas” and associated changes in Mass times and reluctance to participate in shared Masses with the neighbouring parish community including their school. Ten years on, these attitudes remain in the pastoral area, even though they are only a five-minute drive from one another.

Open. At the same time, in other instances boundaries are dissolved as in the example of a parish and school community rallying around a grieving family connected to the school, “[people] looked out for one another and in the weeks and months ahead, it’s like the church hasn’t a boundary. It’s not an entity, but it is to go to that term, it is the people of God…” (F2) when questioned further about seeing the parish and school boundaries as “very spiritual and open” F2 commented – “well, they are porous, you know” (F2).

Understanding of the term parish can thus be constructed from aspirational and experiential perspectives. Developing a shared understanding of what participants consider parish to be for them, and of what they hope it might become, is critical for understanding, utilising, and even growing, the relationship between school and parish. The same is true of the term Catholic school.

5.1.1.3 What Is the Catholic School?

In contrast to many school families having little to no experience of parish, all parishioners understand what a school is, and most have an understanding of Catholic schools, albeit often historical or by proxy, being based on their own experience as a child or of their children and grand-children. Indeed, many parishioners are “loyal and proud of the school because most of them have either been there, or their grandparents or great grandparents were part of it” (F2). While Catholic schools have changed over time and the quality of faith formation, practice, and religious education (RE) is called into question by some parishioners, they and the families associated with the school are aware that the school is expected to live Catholic values and that RE is taught. There is also a universal awareness that a necessary function of the Catholic school is to provide quality secular education aligned with government expectations and curricula.

Parishes in Aotearoa New Zealand also recognise themselves as generally free from financial responsibility for the school as the land and buildings are owned by the proprietor, usually the bishop, but most maintenance is funded by the government who also cover most day-to-day costs including staff salaries (Government of New Zealand, 2020; NZCEO, 2020b). Thus, the local Catholic

school is rarely seen by parishioners as a responsibility of and financial burden to the parish, as is often the case internationally (Killeen, 2017), but rather as a popular but largely failing evangelising arm of the parish, unable to live up to its potential of filling the pews on Sunday (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019).

Originally, while always intended to provide quality general education to children, Catholic schools supported the local parish in imparting Catholic faith and knowledge, as expressed in the parish and practiced at home by families (Grocholewski, 2008; Groome, 2014; MacCormick, 2004). However, Catholic schools today have significantly less Mass-attending families and must navigate two driving forces which are increasingly perceived as diametrically opposed within Aotearoa New Zealand. First, at the core of the Catholic school remains a faith in Jesus Christ, and a commitment to live and share the teaching of the Catholic Church, and for this to be managed, planned and evaluated in accordance with the requirements of the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCEO, 2020b). Second, there is at the same time a commitment to provide quality education aligned with and evaluated by the Ministry of Education (ERO, 2019). Walking this dual tightrope, participants in this research recognised that the Catholic parish school is:

A community of learning with Catholic special character. A central expression in the data referring to the identity of the school was 'special character', which is a term in New Zealand legislation (Government of New Zealand, 2020) enshrining the right for Catholic schools to teach the Catholic faith. It is a phrase which encapsulates the significance of Catholicity, and associated faith in Jesus, as being at the very heart of the school, and as something to be revisited and developed: "One of our goals is just to understand and live out our special character more" (P4).

A place where RE is taught. Making a distinction between state schools and a Catholic school, one principal comments on invitation rather than indoctrination when speaking with parents seeking to enrol their child: "I always explain that we have another curriculum area where we have religious education. I say, 'So what we're trying to do is to make them Catholics but in the modern world. We're not trying to brain wash anyone'" (P6).

A place/community with a shared history. Several participants mention the significance of the historical connection between parish and school. One talks about guiding school children through this story so they "know they're part of the school and the parish community and our RE programme… [it's] where the children learn about who is part of the parish" (P1).

'Other' than the parish. A recurring comment was that while interview participants know the school is part of the parish, parents do not grasp this as pertinent to them: "Families still see it often as the parish and us. You know, we are a different entity to the parish" (P4).

A community sharing in the work and life of the parish. Participants consistently recognise that, while distinct, the school is deliberately teaching and sharing with children "an awareness that God is with them. Now in terms of the wider parish, that's exactly what we want to achieve too… It's very much shared – we're on the same wavelength" (F1).

A bridge between parish and school communities. All participants talk of the school and parish as individual communities, and when effort is made to reach out to the other to create stronger connections it is usually the school that reaches out to the parish. "As a school we feel like we're the bridge… trying to create that connectedness" (P1). Another comments that the parish has not tried to build a relationship with the school, "I feel like we have been the stronger component out of the parish-school connection" (P5), reiterated and challenged by another, "we can't be expected to do everything if we're not getting that supported buy-in [from the parish]" (P4).

Becoming the parish. Note that none of those interviewed said the school was the parish, rather they intimated that this is emerging "over time" (P7) with declining Mass attendance. This unsavoury concept for most participants was usually couched in a context that it was an unavoidable reality rather than an intentional goal because children are present in the school community and most choose not to participate in the wider parish: "We [the school] are their faith. The only connection that they have with the faith for a lot of families" (P8).

Evident through omission in the above statements on school identity, and throughout the research, is the rarity in the data of participants referring to formal Church teaching in describing their school or parish identities. A critical element to emerge from the research is that most people connected with Catholic schools do not read Church documents or seek to apply formal definitions to their contexts. There is an inherent recognition of the importance of teaching the faith within all participants, certainly supported by oral and written shared understandings within the Church and the Catholic educational community, but responses are consistently personal and experiential rather than formal or theoretical, including from priests. Such personal reflection is particularly evident in the expressions of parish and school identity as symbols and metaphors.

5.1.1.4 Identity Revealed through Symbol and Metaphor.

In an intentionally non-specific request, participants were asked to "please bring a symbol, story or other metaphor, either physically or verbally, which you believe reflects something of the relationship between the parish and school in your context".[19] Subsequently, it was recognised that metaphors used in interviews also gave additional symbolic insight. Symbols and metaphors of the parish/school relationship were presented without analysis as symbolic features in Chapter 4. However, in addition to readily grasped synergy with this research, deeper consideration reveals a range of collective identity themes.

Principals and priests integrally identify with school and parish. The imagery from interviews consistently merged the identity of the parish or parish school with participants' own roles within these entities. Where the parish relationship is described as a thread, for example, F1 speaks of threads existing between a large number of individuals but also of him needing to be a thread that makes those connections. Similarly, the school 'being a bridge' indicates the potential of the communities to connect with one another, but also a need for the principal to implement strategies for that to happen – to personally be the bridge.

All priests and principals indicated *being Catholic* is central to the identity of parishes and parish schools. Whether positive, neutral, or negative, all symbols and metaphors addressed reflecting on or responding to this reality.

These leaders recognise themselves as *creators and developers of interpersonal connections,* as revealed through images of cotton thread, listening, and being companions on a journey. The symbol of homing doves presents a sense of young people and their families being supported in 'going out' but knowing the Church will always be a home, and the concept of 'church windows' looking in and out similarly reflects that the faith dimension within parishes and schools is more than a personal practice but is intimately connected to community. Supporting interpersonal connections is also reflected in metaphors of creating space, being a bridge, building community, looking outside the box, and even proactively having one's tentacles out in invitation to belong.

Several leaders identify as *workers within the Church as referenced in Scripture.* While rarely drawing on formal Church documents, references to Gospel imagery was common, particularly from priests who variously referred to their roles as emulating the Good Shepherd or St Joseph the Carpenter, or

[19] Research Participant Information Letter (see Appendix A.)

as a sower of seeds into a seedbed. An additionally striking metaphor was a reflection on the parish community being like the "the Jews [who] got given the faith first" (F4), who had all the "inheritance" (F4) information and knew all the rules, and the school community being like the early gentiles who had the capacity to come seeking God and to breathe new life into the emerging Church.

There was reflection on identification as *people of this land,* with resonance to indigenous Māori understandings of taonga[20] and whenua.[21] Woven baskets, precious greenstone, and special cloaks symbolically gifted to new children at the school by parishioners, along with naming mountains/hills and recognising their place and spirit, has deep resonance with ancient spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Finally, all participants identified themselves as *experiencers of challenge.* Each symbol and metaphor represents opportunities and/or obstacles. Arguably the most striking being that of the key and lock where parish is considered an obstacle to the positive potential of 'the school as the key' by refusing to allow itself to open. Additionally, a range of metaphors represented difficulties and seemingly insurmountable barriers with connecting young people and families in schools with the parish: you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink; banging your head against a brick wall; flogging a dead horse; a battle; an albatross round my neck; and the priest as law keeper. However, amidst the challenging images is a consistent, though often weary, personal positivity and desire to improve the parish/school relationship.

5.1.2 Personal Identities

Interview participants indicate that members of their associated communities have a range of personal identification with faith and community, and that this influences what they understand the parish school to be. For some parents the school is often "much more to do with being Christian" but they claim a Catholic link through having been to a Catholic school as a child, occasionally reading the Bible and being open to Baptism (F3), rather than making a personal commitment to practice what the Church teaches. Similarly, it was recognised that many families "live out their church faith in a different way but every now and then come to Mass" (P4). That is, faith is practiced at some level, but not in a traditionally Catholic way. Others identify with non-Catholic churches "but they want a faith-based education for their children" (P1). It is through the lenses of these varied

[20] A te reo Māori term meaning treasure.
[21] A te reo Māori term meaning land.

personal identities, and personal understandings of what school and parish are, that school families recognise or are oblivious to their relationship with parish: “They forget, or they don’t understand that they are part of the parish automatically when [they] come to the school” (P4).

Ethnicity and determination of preference emerged as two distinct but significant areas of personal identity and connection to parish life.

5.1.2.1 Ethnicity.

Pasifika,[22] Filipino, and Indian Catholic families were consistently compared to Pakeha[23] families as examples of cultural groups with greater commitment to Catholic life. One principal acknowledged that through keeping a “closed connection” with one another as cultural groups they retain identities as “communities of faith” (P1). Another commented on a different Catholic school saying more Catholic engagement is expected there, “because they’ve got a high percentage of Pacific Islander kids. So, you’d probably see more kids going to Mass” (P2). The intrinsic cultural modelling of people connected to parish and school is seen as “huge and important” (P4) for ethnic groups because through their “cultural identity they do really feel connected” (P4) especially through celebration of Sunday Eucharist. Furthermore, a range of cultures coming to New Zealand from all over the world were listed by a priest and described as “helping the Church” through their “very strong family ties” and encouragement of children to practice their “culture and religiosity” (F5). The sense within participants was that the future of the church in Aotearoa New Zealand largely lies with immigrants and their familial strength of faith.

However, while cultural belief and practice is seen to impact Mass attendance numbers, that does not necessarily translate to a shared sense of belonging and participation as parish. Participants believe language and diverse cultural understandings can be a barrier for many of those groups who may prioritise Sunday Eucharist in their own language over Mass in English, and who often feel reluctant to join in parish activities outside of their own culture. Simply described, “some of them will be shy and not feeling confident” (F5) when it comes to general participation and expressing their thoughts and desires for parish life.

[22] A term used by Aotearoa New Zealand government agencies to describe both migrants from the Pacific regions and their descendants, as in www.pasifika.tki.org.nz
[23] A te reo Māori term commonly used to refer to all New Zealanders of European descent.

A contributing factor is that established mono-cultural attitudes and practice in parishioners can prove resistant to more culturally inclusive expressions of the liturgical life of the parish, particularly at Sunday Mass. Often at a school/parish Sunday Eucharist when Catholic schools introduce songs, prayers, or responses in other languages to reflect their community's cultural diversity, they receive pushback from parishioners. One principal expressed with disappointment, "We're very multi-cultural and we've tried to feed in a few different things there [into the parish] that's, kind of, just not gone down so well" (P8). An additional element of difficulty associated with language is a rising number of priests who have English as their second language and little experience of New Zealand Catholic culture. While recognising the parish priest as "a good priest" (P7) a principal described "the language barrier between him and the parishioners", in terms of communicating with adults and children, as requiring significant concentration "to find the message that he's giving us, because it's hidden by the language".

An unmistakable reality is that rising numbers of Asian and Pasifika people are practicing their beliefs in this land (Government of New Zealand, 2024; Wilberforce Foundation, 2023), including living and expressing their faith as Catholics in schools and parishes. Associated challenges and opportunities are emerging and require responses from each entity as to how they more effectively embrace Catholic cultural diversity and foster a shared sense of participation and belonging. This research indicates that schools are more creative and active than many parishes in this regard and could provide support to parishes if such help was sought or permitted.

5.1.2.2 Determining and Applying 'Preference'.

The preference system for enrolment in Catholic schools in Aotearoa New Zealand is often mentioned throughout the research. Preference may be summarised as, "those who are entitled to be enrolled before any non-preference students are enrolled" (NZCEO, 2020b, p. 42). This system is best considered in terms of personal identity because at its core it determines the catholicity of a child, or their parents or legal guardians, to be enrolled. Preference criteria are set by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference to be used by school proprietors (usually bishops), and their authorised agents (usually parish priests), to ascertain whether or not a prospective child's parents meet the governmental requirement of having a "particular or general religious connection with the special character of the school" (Government of New Zealand, 2020, Cl. 26). The individual 'integration agreements' between the proprietor and the government of New Zealand require most schools to ensure the 'non-preference' enrolment figure does not exceed 5% of the maximum school

roll (Ministry of Education, 2024). Once granted, preference is not reviewed or withdrawn unless the child changes schools. The preference criteria, including the formal numbering, are:

> 5.1 The child has been baptised or is being prepared for baptism in the Catholic Church.
> 5.2 The child's parents/guardians have already allowed one or more of its siblings to be baptised in the Catholic faith.
> 5.3 At least one parent/guardian is a Catholic, and although their child has not yet been baptised, the child's participation in the life of the school could lead to the parents having the child baptised.
> 5.4 With the agreement of the child's parent/legal guardian, a significant familial adult such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle who is actively involved in the child's upbringing undertakes to support the child's formation in the faith and practices of the Catholic Church.
> 5.5 One or both of a child's non-Catholic parents/guardians is preparing to become a Catholic. (NZCEO, 2020a, p. 2)

The practice of establishing 95% of a school's maximum roll as Catholic aims to assure its Catholic identity. However, interview participants, in line with limited research conducted in this area (Owen, 2018; Wanden & Birch, 2007), indicate a much more complex reality where most children and their families, despite meeting preference criteria, have limited or non-existent connection to parish life or personal faith practice in the home. For all Catholic schools in this research, as is the norm in this country, it is the priest who determines preference or non-preference. This practical priestly power, exercised with limited specific direction or oversight, has a range of implications for the parish/school relationship.

Research participants view the preference system as far from perfect for gauging catholicity. One priest describes it as a "wee bit of a scandal in the sense that priests through their interpretation can be real liberal or real conservative" (F4). Larger schools don't see preference as a problem because they are full and have waiting lists of preference students, but they still find differences in the process to be "a barrier" (P1) and "bloody annoying" (P8) if the priest is "to the book" (P8) and other schools "have gone way over their preference numbers because no one checks" (P8). Yet, even rigid 'to the book' approaches vary, with one priest saying, "simply, Catholics get in" (F3); preference is granted on the grounds of Baptism, but at the same time he elevates expectations beyond the 'simple' criteria saying that if families want to come to a Catholic school they've, "got to take part in

the full Catholic practices. [They] can't opt out" (F3). Yet, as is reflected throughout this research, many families certainly can and do opt out of traditional Catholic practice associated with parish life beyond school, including not participating in the Eucharist.

For schools in this study with small enrolment numbers, below 60, the priest's decision to give preference or not is perceived as making "a massive difference to staffing and to keeping people and to keeping it a really positive environment" (P4). In such schools one priest describes the challenge of being pulled in two ways as needing to balance the "grow in your faith… hat" with a seemingly more pressing "keep the school alive hat". From the school's perspective, it is often disappointing when families who want to enrol their child are not given preference. The same principal recognises the challenge and the intent: "That [preference] criteria is tough. But, then, it is really good too" (P4), because both roll numbers and Catholic identity are important. This principal acknowledges being "very, very lucky" because the parish priest is "very forward thinking and does a really good job" (P4), through being attuned to recognising that those parents wanting to bring their children to a Catholic school have "something in them… that spiritual hunger" (F4). Thus, the Catholic identity being defined in the preference dialogue can be more oriented to creating threads (F1) and establishing community and connection – mission and evangelisation – than managing a sorting-gate for who is Catholic enough to gain admission.

The process of assigning preference is not easy. It can weigh heavily on priests' shoulders and is made even more challenging through an awareness that many prospective parents "will tell you whatever you want to hear" (P6) to get into the school. Moreover, principals can judge as fickle or dogmatic the priest deciding "the fate of a child's education… he can turn a blind eye or can be over-zealous" (P2). In this context, approaches to preference often challenge the priest/principal relationship, and thus the parish/school relationship, especially if a school is struggling with its student numbers. Principals value opportunities to provide input and to talk with the priest about preference decisions rather than him solely having "in his mind what he deems is someone who meets the requirements" (P6). Dialogue between priest and principal regarding preference emerge as a critical element of building the parish/school relationship through developing and claiming a shared vision regarding participation in the mission of the Church.

A further consideration as to the application of preference criteria is that no criterion requires, or even overtly suggests, engagement with parish. However, the Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic bishops clearly have a sense of preference playing a part in developing the relationship between Catholic parishes and schools. At the end of their guidelines for those who grant preference they

state, “continued strengthening of the school-parish partnership for ongoing evangelisation and personal invitation for faith formation and sacraments is crucial. A united school-parish faith community, with a sense of collaboration and teamwork, is a hallmark of such a relationship” (NZCEO, 2020a, p. 5). However, a one-time preference interview between parents and the priest to determine their suitability for the parish school is recognised by participants in this research, principals and priests alike, as having little effect on what families choose to do in relation to parish participation. What can make the difference is shared understandings between parish and school that fanning those strong flames or tiny embers of faith by engaging in evangelisation and mission is a shared responsibility of and opportunity for each entity.

5.2 Where Are We Going? – Evangelisation and Mission

“Where are we going?” (F4)

Evangelisation and mission are at the same time distinct, interconnected, inseparable, and misunderstood in the data. The terms are commonly used in the literature and by interview participants and are associated with a range of Church, school, and personal identities. As such, understanding of what they mean varies from person to person with associated impact on the school and parish relationship.

Catholic school research points to the significance of evangelisation and mission while recognising inconsistency and vagueness in definitions (Sultmann & Brown, 2014). Commonality of understanding is evidenced in evangelisation generally meaning sharing and living the Gospel (mission), and encouraging collective and individual responses by others to do the same (evangelisation) (Benedict XVI, 2008b; Francis, 2013; Paul VI, 1964a, 1965c; XIIISB, 2011). However, the terms are used frequently and in so many contexts within Church writing (Arbuckle, 2013), and mission occurs also as a common theme in secular writing as focusing statements (*100 mission statement examples & templates*, 2024) or adventures (*Mission survival – 8 books by Bear Grylls*, 2024), that meaning is often obfuscated. In this context, it is not surprising that interview participants reflect that “we’re bereft of knowing what evangelising means” (F4), and that the school’s mission outreach is often “put in this and that, and mentioned at assemblies” (P2) but parents rarely understand or engage with it.

At the same time, fanned by engagement with the synodal process, participants are optimistic of greater clarity emerging. A priest asking parents “what their idea of the Church is” (F5) at a

preference interview, claims it as a start in hearing their ideas of mission; another, asking, "who needs to hear this or who aren't we hearing?" (F4) is seeking ways to better evangelise; and a principal realising "we need to do more… to help them even make connections with each other" (P8), are indicators of the centrality of mission to the life of the parish and the school. There is clearly a desire for mission and evangelisation to be present and meaningful in the parish/school relationship. Through the process of constant comparison, the data led the researcher to further consider these two critical and complex terms from participant perspectives of the significance of faith, expectations associated with Eucharist, and approaches to mission.

5.2.1 The Place of Faith

Parishes and schools are overtly centred in the person of Jesus and faith in him (NZCBC, 2014). This is evident through: parishioners and school communities gathering regularly, though usually separately, to pray; crucifixes, prayers and statues being common in both; weekly bulletins and newsletters referring to faith events and practices; and, preference interviews with the parish priest making clear to new parents that faith is central to belonging to the school community. Yet, despite 95% of enrolled students having a formally verified religious connection to the Catholic school, faith is consistently referred to in the data as present and valued in many, but aspirational and invitational in most. In the face of complex and erratic expressions of faith by parents and children, a response is, "You have to have faith that we don't know but God knows" (P1) how faith is present in hearts and minds.

The place of faith resonates most strongly in the literature and interview data in terms of the new evangelisation being critical in the mission of the Church (Francis, 2013; John Paul II, 1990). Parents of school children have often drifted from Church practice and while the parishes may struggle to reengage with them, the extended parish school community not only has opportunity but is actively involved in sharing faith with their children and to a lesser extent with them. Although admitting to often not knowing "what impact you're having" (P1), schools are responding to the Church's call for new, bold, sharing of faith and an openness to new models of being Church (XIIISB, 2011). In the face of "so much dysfunction" (F4) school families are experiencing "a lot more tolerance and empathy and compassion" (F4) because evangelisation, as potential for encounter and relationship with Christ, is implicitly recognised in a context of mission as invitation and care rather than seeking to convert (Groome & Horell, 2018). Furthermore, with increasing secularism in Aotearoa New Zealand, schools can respond to the mission with grounded theological awareness, such as showing children and families that belief in God "doesn't mean you're a weirdo, that you can actually be a normal

person and love God" (P7) in witnessing to the living Christ and forming hearts in faith within the school's culture and ethos (Sultmann & Brown, 2014).

Priests and principals are aware that faith, and faith formation, is vital to their communities, but "faith isn't compulsory" (P4) because, while deeply valued and actively nurtured, it can not be forced. At the same time there is a balance sought between it being "nice to sort of evangelise and try and get kids who aren't Catholic to be baptised, but they [parents] are not interested" (P2), and "taking steps in a tentative kind of way" (F4) to encourage and form faith. Schools particularly desire the parish to recognise that even if school families are not regularly participating in parish life outside of school "we are making a difference in the greater scheme of what it means to be a Christian and a Catholic, you know" (P6). This less directive but invitational approach certainly can result in baptisms: "one year, believe it or not, they did about 11 baptisms of kids in our school" (P6)[24]. Indeed, for drifting Catholics, a priority group in the new evangelisation, and those new to the Church, preparation for the sacraments themselves can be an important connection between faith, parish, and school.

5.2.1.1 Sacramental Preparation.

Sacramental preparation explicitly highlights the Catholic faith dimension and creates links to the sacramental life of the parish. Parish school primary children in this study consistently made their First Communion, Confirmation and First Reconciliation in the parish church. One parish with two schools set up "parent/children afternoons to work through each sacrament" (F1), including a shared lunch, and claimed the parents enjoyed participating in the activities and learning but also appreciated the opportunity of, "Creating community among themselves… within a church context" (F1).

For most participants the school and parish worked together to prepare children and consciously engaged their parents in aspects of the preparation programme. A shared approach was valued in terms of supporting a positive relationship with principals and staff through developing "a sense that, hey, we can work [together] in terms of the spiritual stuff" (F1). Committed and enthusiastic staff members who help children to "go through the sacraments" (P4) were also recognised as great supporters of "bringing the children in and bringing the families in – we're bringing the people, sort of, back" (P4). Creativity also plays a role in supporting the place of faith in the lives of children preparing to receive the sacraments. One principal cheerfully described the parish priest arranging

[24] The school had a roll of fewer than 60 students in total that year.

for an older child to receive the sacrament of baptism in the parish church with the child's family and "with their class" (P8). Another spoke of smiling as he noticed parishioners "having a read" of the photographs and statements placed on the parish church wall of children preparing to receive the sacraments.

Sacramental preparation presents as a significant opportunity for developing the parish/school relationship. Where the parish and school did not work together to prepare children to receive the sacraments, and the task lay only with the school, one school in this study directly aligned with the literature (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2017) in feeling their children were undervalued and the staff were somewhat 'used' as a workforce in the absence of parish capability or desire to participate. In further reflecting on knowledge that other schools work well with their parish, the principal stated, "But that doesn't happen here… it's actually done by us, and we've tried, and we've tried, but we just can't get the buy-in, which is frustrating" (P3). From a similar but more positive perspective, another principal stated personally leading the sacramental programme is a "big responsibility… but it's also a pleasure" (P7), but when asked if other parishioners were involved, replied, "Do I think they should be? Yeah [sighs]" (P7). An associated disappointment is the school community noticing that when children receive the sacraments at Sunday Eucharist, on those Sundays many parishioners "don't go" (P3). The recorded wry chuckle given at the end of the statement suggests a reality that such parishioner behaviour is discouraging and not surprising.

Along with many parishioners, principals and priests are also mindful of and disappointed by the international trend of declining continued sacramental participation (Gleeson et al., 2018; Treanor, 2017), particularly in terms of youth (Engebretson, 2014; McDonough, 2015). "You have 19 children there on Sunday and I wonder how many there will be the next Sunday" (P4). Despite initial enthusiasm from parents, they cannot be made to "bring their kids to church" (F3). However, care needs to be taken that preparation for the sacraments is not perceived as simply "going through the motions" (F1). The place of faith requires an attitude of hope that God is involved (P1), and as "the older generation have got a bit more distant from the school" (F3) it's the teachers who are bringing the children to the sacraments. There are grounds for hope, in this increasingly secular country, in parents choosing to go the "extra step" (F4) and have their children "do the sacraments" (F4); sometimes "the kids in the sacramental programme get their parents involved and get them baptised! So, you sign them up hoping, and lo and behold!" (F3). Participants in this research do not deny that regular participation in the sacraments is important, but they do consistently acknowledge that while there are problems with continued attendance and participation as "the system's

problem. The greatest thing is we've got people coming to us saying they want it [the sacraments]. That's awesome" (F4). And where this is so, it is also a significant opportunity for further developing the parish/school relationship.

5.2.2 Places of Faith

Catholic parishes and schools have infrastructure - grounds and buildings. They are intentional physical places where people gather and participate as people of God (CLS, 1983; CCE, 2022). And, although they bring a spectrum of Catholic beliefs, depth of practice, and questions, people choose to join the parish or school communities knowing they are places of faith. The physicality matters, including gathering and teaching spaces, symbols, statues, art, prayers, notices, and so on, because without faith at their heart neither entity would have a reason to exist (NZCBC, 2014; Paul VI, 1964a).

However, in terms of evangelisation and mission it is the school which receives the greatest attention in the literature and in interview data. Pope Francis (2013) acknowledges Catholic schools as critical places of evangelisation through explicitly proclaiming the Gospel as children are taught. Interview participants mirror a realisation that parishes are actually aware that it is in Catholic schools rather than in parishes that most young people encounter the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Church (CCE, 2014). The school is seen as "an environment of faith" (F1) in which children are taught. One principal highlights the need for finesse at school gatherings as they "try and build the faith but not be right in their [parents'] face" (P8) because "those first steps" (P8) with parents are so important in supporting them on a new or recovering faith journey. Another refers to experience beyond words as the "impact… of special Catholic character – that people go away and they say you know we love coming here and they won't be able to articulate why" (P1).

Priests in this research acknowledge that, sadly, most regular parishioners have little engagement with evangelisation. A tenuous link is made that regular practicing Catholics have little motivation to evangelise others because "those who already come to Mass are evangelised, so don't need to be the agents themselves – the school is the agent of evangelisation" (F5). Indeed, frustratingly for many participants, the wider parish is often recognised as shirking its evangelising responsibility to reach out to those disconnected or never-connected with the Church through a logic that "you don't get them in the pews… the school is part of the parish, and for the parish the school is the evangelisation outreach" (F6). Though in line with the canon law's affirmation that the school serves the parish, and supports the parish priest in exercising his responsibility for teaching the faith (CLS,

1983), and though consistently recognised in the literature as a responsibility of the Catholic school (CCE, 1977, 1982, 2007; Engebretson, 2014; Gleeson, 2020), a greater reality also exists: that the wider parish community must also take up its responsibility and participate fully in evangelisation as it relates to "every aspect of the Church's activity" (XIIISB, 2011, Preface). Thus, evangelisation cannot be the singular responsibility of the school.

Effective evangelisation, including the new evangelisation outlined in the literature, needs to be in partnership between the parishes and schools as places of faith. This is important because each place necessarily shares this responsibility, but also because if the wider parish does not play its part in the evangelising relationship, and families who choose to belong "identify the church with the school" (F6) alone and not the parish, then when the children leave the school they also lose their place of faith, and can feel that their connection to Church has been severed. "This is our chance, it's a gift to give the children, a gift that will, we hope, actually sustain them in their later lives. So, it's quite a huge job… [and we need] to have more support in the parish in engaging our parents" (P1).

5.2.2.1 Liturgy at School.

Established familiarity of school buildings and practices is acknowledged as a catalyst for engaging parents and children in liturgy. Seeing children participate and lead prayer or other Catholic special character activities "engages and connects parents" (F1), and many participants reflect good attendance at prayer assemblies over shared school/parish Sunday Eucharist. This sense of connection is particularly positive regarding the parish/school relationship when special character activities happen in the neighbouring parish church, making the church building a familiar place for children and families.

While greater participation in school liturgy is desirable, concerns are also raised regarding the impact of schools being too insular and intentionally or unintentionally disconnecting from parish liturgical life: "When the school puts together its liturgies… they're not looking for stuff outside of the school" (F1); or, at the end of year farewell Mass and celebration it is "taken over by the PFA,[25] and there's a very strong PFA but that doesn't link the parish as such" (F3). Dialogue, not necessarily priestly direction, is critical in achieving a welcoming and appropriate liturgical balance. As one principal suggests, "We've got to make sure they get the right messages, and that it's the Catholic faith and not just the watered-down version as well. But it's kind of, finding that way to give it to people" (P8). At the same time, when the liturgical life of the school is strong and vibrant, schools

[25] The school's Parents and Friends Association.

pose a positive challenge to parishes prompting one priest to muse, “Now I sometimes walk away thinking, ‘How could we enable that to occur in a parish context and in a Sunday gathering?’ I don’t know?” (F1).

Formal and unstructured prayer in Catholic schools clearly supports children in learning to pray as well as providing them with opportunities to pray. The experience of prayer being modelled and encouraged by teachers as significant adults and by their own peers help children develop practices of prayer in terms of developing their own personal relationship with God (National Centre for Religious Studies, 2021). Such modelling and practice aim to also resonate with the deepest expression of faith within the Catholic Church – the Eucharist.

5.2.3 The Significance and Challenge of Eucharist

“What else could we do to get more families to Mass? I often say, ‘What do you think? What can we do?’” (P4).

Participation in the Eucharist is both a significant and challenging feature in terms of the parish/school relationship. Prior to beginning this study, the researcher believed Mass attendance might be avoided as a key aspect of research because failing numbers of school families attending Mass seemed a potential distraction from encountering important but less obvious elements of the relationship. In a similar vein, the Congregation for Catholic Education’s focus on education and mission has not imposed a link between Eucharist and education in any of its documents from 1977 to 2022. However, the principles of classic grounded theory rightly belied these initial cogitations as the academic nature of the research empowered participants to expose the Eucharist as a central relational feature of evangelisation and mission within parishes and schools. Every interview raised the issue of Eucharist, commonly referred to as Mass, with the number of mentions per interview ranging from 10 to 47 and averaging at 22. Participation in Eucharist was established as a significant element of the parish/school relationship.

Declining numbers of those participating in Sunday Mass has been well documented in this study. Nevertheless, those interviewed consistently refer to eucharistic participation within the school and parish in terms of Catholic authenticity, “it does ground us and give us life” (F2), and as opportunity, “some [parents] who are really probably uncomfortable going to church, but they’ll go there. They’ll make that effort” (P6). Though no participants used the term “source and summit” (Catholic Church, 1994; Paul VI, 1964a, para. 11) to describe the pre-eminence of the Mass in their communities, they

each align with sentiments in the literature that, as Catholic communities of faith, the Eucharist necessarily affirms their Catholic identity and the centrality of Christ. In association, eucharistic elements also resonate with all life's joys and challenges (Engebretson, 2014; John Paul II, 1988; Rahner, 1981; Treanor, 2017).

Participants in this research offer varied descriptions of the Mass. For one priest it is "food for the soul" like a "Sunday roast" (F4). For another, it should not be perceived as an obligation which "would be a burden" but "a thanksgiving" (F5). Moreover, the Mass is expressed as "the key moment where people hear the Word, receive the body and blood of Jesus. And in that stillness, that's the moment of thinking, well, life is not superficial" (F2). It is opportunity for celebration, such as when seeing a family connect through their children having started at the Catholic school and "coming along for one of the Masses it's like the parent has made that connection that this is my church" (F1). In one instance, with a grounded sense of hope, it is likened to sport (which often occurs on Sundays and is regularly prioritised over Mass), where one day families "will realise that church [Eucharist] is good for them, spiritually" (P1).

The unanimous agreement as to the key place of Mass is reinforced by all participants. However, priests recognise an imbalance in the challenge within their communities where there's often "more goodwill on the part of the school than there is in receptivity on the part of the parish" (F6). In this context, principals are franker in articulating the challenges associated with getting children and families to regularly participate in Mass, and they highlight three sets of issues.

1) *"Music is a big issue" (P8).* Participants comment on this not just in terms of improving children's engagement with the Eucharist but as an overt example of a recurring lack of acceptance by many regular parishioners. An authentic plea is made for "a little bit more accommodation of the school side of things" (P8). Issues raised include "angst between the [parish] music group" (P1) and the school's choice of songs, "complaints that we have a [school] choir" (P3), and not being "allowed to play CDs… because it all has to be done through the [parish] choir… who sing every blimmin verse of every single song" (P8). Priests can also find parishioners' attitudes challenging when there is "'old flight'… when they [older parishioners] know the school kids are coming in they'll disappear… I say to them, well look, they put up with your music, we need to be accommodating of theirs as well" (F6). But, in reality, neither group 'needs' to be accommodating – many can and do go to another Mass or choose not to go to Mass at all. Deeper dialogue to achieve this suggested accommodation would clearly be evidence of, and of benefit to, a healthy parish/school relationship.

2) *Just listening is not enough, children need to be engaged.* One principal states the Mass is “not a performance, but these kids are used to their own high stimulation, high engagement” (P1). She further describes the liturgy of the Word as “20 minutes of sitting listening” and believes “we’ve got to engage them more” (P1). Several participants refer to children feeling bored at Mass, and some comment positively on younger children being able to go out for a children’s Liturgy of the Word, structured to engage the younger age group, in some parishes. One commented on children finding experience of the Mass dull, “when I question them [children] on the boringness, it’s songs [too adult] and the length [of the Mass] and the repetition [same format every time]” (P7). To a degree this highlights a lack of children’s understanding regarding the depth and Tradition of the Mass (Engebretson, 2014; Groome, 2014), but it also indicates that they and their families are needing something different from past generations. Research participants rarely lament a time when “in the old days the Church was full” (F5); rather, aligning with a theme in the literature that trying to reestablish that which has been lost can be discouraging for those seeking to belong now (Leonard, 2019), they orient themselves towards the present and future where “these are the young people who one day will decide whether they’re going to stay part of the Church and so we need to do everything we can to make it be a happy place to be in” (P4).

3) *Change is challenging*. The awareness of being 'happy' as a desirable aspect of eucharistic participation is not only directed in the data towards school children and their families but also towards “the old people [who are] the staple of your church. You want them to be happy and comfortable [too]” (P8), but each of the groups “need different things” (P8). Accommodation of these different requirements implies change. And, as developed in Section 5.5, change is happening whether or not it is desirable or intentional (Archer, 2021). A recurring example of external change impacting on Mass participation is Sunday becoming busy with secular activities. Sport and associated tournaments are “encroaching into Sunday” (P4) and are becoming “competitive on the Sunday services”. Working parents, where for instance “Mum works” (P1) on Sunday, also means the children are not physically brought to Mass. At the same time, a shift has been emerging where Catholic schools are increasingly being recognised as more effectively connecting families with Church than are parishes’ formal structures, including participation in Eucharist (McGrail, 2007). Children of drifting Catholics are in Catholic schools in much greater numbers than they are at regular Sunday Eucharist. Another external example is the impact of Covid-19, where the hitherto unthinkable cancellation of Sunday Masses during extended lockdown periods encouraged a move to participate in Eucharist on-line (Lam, 2021; NZCBC, 2020). “Covid kind of made us do it [change]

anyway, you don't have to be a young person to do it" (F4). However, now, concern is raised at many regular parishioners who adapted to the change continuing to choose on-line Mass as a personally acceptable substitute to in-person participation ("Catholic bishops lift Covid-19 restrictions, urge all to return to Mass," 2022; McKeown, 2023). So, change is simultaneously required, fraught, and happening. The data indicates positive intentional change is possible regarding eucharistic participation, but the critical element is understanding that change, and in the parish/school context, entering into dialogue and intentionally choosing to authentically and creatively respond as a whole parish.

Principals and school staff in this study, with support of priests, are consistently taking the lead in being creative to encourage families in connecting with Eucharist. One described successfully working with the parish to provide a 'hook' to achieve more 'buy-in' with families coming to the parish Sunday Eucharist. They arrange twice a year to welcome new students with "a cloak ceremony" (P3) at the parish Mass, and at other times they award 'Young Vinnies'[26] badges or other Catholic character associated awards, or they have a barbeque for the whole community after Mass. While somewhat secular in approach, the hope is that, in becoming more familiar with the Eucharist, parents might recognise and come to better value and claim it within their own spirituality, particularly if met with warm reception and invitation by other parishioners. This external creativity also addresses experience that parents' Catholic history is diverse and "it's interesting what brings them back… for our families, I think it's the children that brings them back." (P4). It also links with a reality that children are actually considerably 'churched' while at school, but the connection can be passively undermined at home with parents who are otherwise largely or completely disconnected from church life, resulting in children's confidence in "being Catholic" (P7) being undermined outside of school. A living faith is "not going to happen with a 10-year-old whose parents dictate their lives" (P7) and who don't value Catholic belief or associated parish life such as taking their child to Mass.

Mass participation as a measure of effective evangelisation and mission is rarely endorsed within the literature. In seeing formal church worship numbers as "minimal and external markers of institutional affiliation" (p. 66), McDonough (2016a) highlights a need to look for deeper indicators of Catholic identity, especially as many people believe they can be good Catholics and not attend Sunday Eucharist (Engebretson, 2014). Most priests in this study tend to agree, with one describing Sunday Mass attendance numbers as limiting or misleading if used as "some kind of a measuring about whether our school is Catholic enough. I think it's such a superficial way to think" (F2).

[26] The youth branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another suggests that lack of human life experience and maturity are a reason for non-attendance, particularly regarding experience of suffering, because when younger “most wouldn’t see Mass as something that you go to” (F4), but “an older person, now when they’re suffering, it’s the first place they go because they can understand what it [Eucharist] does” (F4). In addition, even with positive school attendance numbers on some Sundays, there can often be no real engagement with the parish worshipping community as families “come in and do the church side of things, and then it’s ‘see you later Father’. There’s no sense of connection afterwards” (P7).

It is also recognised that, in line with the new evangelisation (Rymarz, 2011; Sultmann et al., 2022), development of eucharistic understanding is not only needed with rarely-attending school families, but regularly participating parishioners can also fail to recognise the call to connect Sunday Mass with their lives outside of church worship. One priest succinctly summarises, “we have people come to church on Sunday that don’t live their faith outside, and people who live their faith outside but don’t go to church on a Sunday. And the idea is to get both together” (F6). The data suggests schools and parishes could better support each other in this regard, and some evidence of this can be seen through weekday Masses held at school, and through shared Sunday Masses where the school takes particular responsibility for the liturgy.

5.2.3.1 Weekday Mass.

Weekday Mass is recognised as a special opportunity for evangelisation and connection to Eucharist. Most of the parish priests in the study arrange for one weekday Mass to be particularly accessible to the school, either in the school hall, or in the parish church if it is nearby. A range of evangelising benefits are perceived in this approach: 1) There are clear expectations around participation, where children might ‘play up’ when parents say they are going to the parish Sunday Mass, “here [at school] they’ve got no choice. Church is part of school, it’s an essential part” (P2); 2) Smaller numbers, with a special focus on the children, can help them become accustomed to the parish church being a place for them – “I have every Friday Mass for these kids” (F5); 3) There can be opportunity for greater creativity, such as one priest talking of Wednesday morning Mass being a time when everyone is invited to stand around the altar for Mass – “Children’s faces wide open. Eyes wide open… but the parishioners stand with them… not hanging back in the pews. They’re all part of it” (F2).

Disappointment is even expressed at the creation of a perceived “disconnect” (P4) between school and parish when, without consultation with the school, all weekday Masses were moved to the

parish church which was not located near the school site. When subsequently interviewing the parish priest of the same school, without prompting by the researcher, the parish priest indicated he had recognised this as a problem and had decided to re-establish "a Wednesday Mass just for them" (F4). He also commented on having shifted all weekday Masses from 9.00am to 9.15am to enable him to go to the school for morning prayers with individual classes, then go to the church to say Mass – a positive example of an aspect of the parish/school relationship.

Challenges associated with weekday Mass included parishioners preferring to go to the church rather than the school for Mass. Two schools, which through restructuring into a combined/larger parish had lost their local churches and are now some distance from their parish church, each had a regular weekday Mass in purpose-built 'sacred spaces' in their school halls. Classes were rostered to attend, one class-level each week. The priest "imagined that people [regular parishioners] would still come. The reality is that they don't" (F1). His disappointment is captured in reflecting that in the past, when each school had its own parish church, "the children were coming and the parishioners were there anyhow" (F1), but now the children are there but the parishioners are not "coming to join the Mass that the school [is] leading" (F1). This is an example of a disconnect in the parish/school relationship and an opportunity for shared dialogue and reflection. However, unless a conscious decision is made to enter into such dialogue the data indicates it rarely happens. Instead, parishioners can easily go to another church in the city where the Mass will be more what they are used to.

5.2.3.2 Shared Sunday Mass.

Most Catholic primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand have a regular parish/school Sunday Eucharist, designed to help strengthen the parish/school relationship and support re-evangelisation of those children and parents who do not otherwise regularly participate in Sunday Mass (NZCEO, 2009). Such occasions, consistently raised by interview participants, are referred to as a family/whānau[27] Mass, parish/school Mass, or shared Sunday Mass. Scheduling of these Masses ranges in the study from once a month during the school term, to once a term, depending on the school and parish. Unlike the smaller, more intimate weekday Masses, these are opportunities for the school to connect with a central celebration of the Mass in the parish. In a very real sense this is the parish and school coming together to celebrate Jesus and his Church being at the heart of their shared communities. They are formal occasions when the regular parish physically sees something of the school, and where the school sees something of the parish. Thus, shared Sunday Masses at the

[27] Whānau is a te reo Māori word for family.

same time represent great strengths and significant challenges regarding the parish/school relationship and their shared mission to evangelise.

Shared Sunday Masses are opportunities for children to more fully participate in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The evangelising drive for involvement is twofold: firstly, to support the children in encountering Christ in Eucharist (NZCBC, 2014) through personally participating as widely as possible in the various ministries, including introduction, reading, singing, altar serving, offertory, and even helping with the collection and handing out the parish bulletins in some parishes (F6); and, secondly, to have children "as involved as possible because that gets a few more families along" (F6) because they come to support their children. While several participants remark disappointingly that some parents are 'droppers' who "will just pull up, open up the door and 'I'll pick you up in an hour'" (P6), for most parents of children participating, "the kids draw them – Mum and Dad come to Sunday Mass with us" (P8).

Most school and parish leaders speak animatedly about positive dimensions of this eucharistic gathering, how the children "love it, and they're respectful" (P8), and how "I wish I could have that every Sunday" (F5). They value the wider sense of the school community children bring with them into the parish Mass because in reading and singing at the shared Sunday Mass children are with those "they are going to school with, and this is their friends that they're learning the faith with" (P4). One parish ensures "the principal and DRS are your eucharistic minister that day too" (F6), to emphasise that not only the children but the whole school community is participating and leading. Ideally, children, families, staff, and regular parishioners, all receive a sense that this is the wider parish community of faith to whom I also belong and with whom I share my faith.

Schools put a lot of work into preparing for the shared Masses and can experience considerable pressure to both support the Catholic character of the school and be successful in the eyes of the parish. Information is put into newsletters to encourage families to attend, children are encouraged to encourage their parents, prayers of the faithful are written, songs are learned, associated art is sometimes made and displayed in the church – especially when coinciding with liturgical times such as Easter or Pentecost – and time and energy is given to practicing everything with the children. Priests are consistently aware of this and are supportive of the intent. Certainly, from the school's perspective, these shared Masses do not happen without considerable effort.

However, physical attendance at the shared Sunday Mass is a challenge for most schools despite consistent encouragement for parents to come with their children. This erratic participation is a frustration for principals and parishioners alike. One principal commented on the impact of peer pressure where "new parents come along and then they learn that no one else comes and then they peter off as well" (P8) as evidence of a social rather than faith dimension being the primary driver to attend (Engebretson, 2014; Hall et al., 2019). Another describes similar frustration that even with consistent encouragement of families there are "sometimes… fantastic turnouts. And then in other weeks you sort of think, 'Oh my goodness, where is everybody?'" (P4). Another principal described making the shared Sunday Mass compulsory, even though there are no actual consequences for non-compliance: "If they couldn't attend then they had to let myself or the classroom teacher know" (P3). The result was a move from "maybe 20 children there, and now we've got about 75-80" (P3). However, despite positive intent, others in the research refrain from adopting that approach. Compulsory attendance at Mass, which is necessarily invitational and fundamentally a personal response to a call to participate in faith (Catholic Education South Australia, 2023; NZCBC, 2022a; Paul VI, 1964a), is incongruous with Catholic school life.

A potentially contributing social factor to poor attendance at shared Sunday Mass is that the negative reactions of individuals or small groups often colour other positive comments. Most participants refer to regular parishioners finding it "really nice to see the church alive" (P3) at a parish/school Mass, and "on the whole parishioners love to see children involved" (F1), with many responding warmly to children and school staff with "lots of lovely comments" (P1). However, it is also clear that a consistent element within the regular worshipping parish community does not really want the school community at Sunday Eucharist, unless they conform to their norm. Reinforcing the concept above that freedom must be at the core of eucharistic participation, one priest suggests the expectations of many older parishioners are grounded in "coercion and manipulation" (F4) which still influence their own ongoing decisions to comply with the Sunday obligation of going to Mass (CLS, 1983). F4 believes it is an absence of children's "feeling guilty or fear about not coming" to Mass that is projected as anger or even jealousy by some older parishioners. When they "start to think about it," he suggests, "it's about being free" (F4). This research is unable to say whether this statement is true for all, however, in the face of school children freely participating in Sunday Eucharist with their own songs, prayers, simplified readings, including mistakes and occasional misbehaviour (P7), priests and principals are consistently conscious that there is work to be done in terms of mitigating negative attitudes and better drawing the whole parish together for shared Sunday Masses which are inclusive of all.

Participants consistently drew attention to smaller interpersonal observations which they recognised as significant moments of connection with the wider faith community. One principal described noticing how a school family who had participated in the shared Mass a few times "put their name down to help on the roster" (P4) for regular Sunday Eucharist, and shared how touching it was to see that taking place, because "something small like that is quite big" (P4). A priest also commented on how positive it was to see families being drawn into "different ministries on a normal Sunday" (F1) such as making cups of tea or supporting children's liturgy. Acts of belonging, in small practical ways associated with the Gospel, can have important synergy with developing belonging to a faith community (Reinhart, 2021).

Finally, regarding shared Sunday Eucharist, principals have a sense that "we've educated them on what happens at Mass, we've done the parents' role for them" (P7), and priests are supportive of the intent and effort. However, the school community also needs support from the wider parish because re-engaging families is difficult and complex work – any perceived criticism regarding lack of Mass attendance sits with the parish as much as with the school (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). It is true that when the children are present at the shared Sunday Mass the school is particularly on show with a sense of Catholic accountability, but at the same time, even if unaware of it, the parish is on show to those families and is also accountable to their questions of what is the parish, what does it do, where is it going, and what does it mean to belong? With increasing secularisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, the invitation to shared Sunday Mass authentically seeks to invite children, parents, and parishioners to join the mission and vision at the eucharistic centre of the local parish, to draw them away from potentially saying, "no it's not for me" (P4), to recognising "you get a fantastic sense of community [here]" (P3), and grasping that thread of faith and making the connection "that this is my church" (F1) and we share together Jesus' "mission on earth" (P1). Thus, though challenging and complex, the shared Sunday Mass is rightly presented in the data as an opportunity for deepening communal experience, and as a catalyst for further engagement with the parish and the life of the Church, where all come to feel they belong.

5.2.4 Visioning the Missions

"We need to have it in our head. What does it look like if it is strong?" (P1)

It is not easy to envision "what our Church is going to look like in 10 years' time" (P8) because times are rapidly changing, and the mission is unclear. The core mission directive, that the Church "exists in order to evangelise" (Paul VI, 1975, para. 14), is enigmatic in its perceived simplicity and yet

profound in its complexity. Iterations, goals, stances, and responses regarding Church mission are diverse and erratic.

A single word can be a powerful driver for action, or a concept which becomes common but meaningless in practice (Arbuckle, 2013). From the breadth of the Gospels and Jesus' great commission (Matt. 8:19-20), throughout the Vatican II documents (Flannery, 1996), to contemporary academics (Groome, 1996; Groome & Horell, 2018; Sultmann et al., 2022) and the synodal process (FCBCO, 2023; NZCBC, 2022a; XVI ordinary general assembly of the synod of bishops, 2023) the word mission is used consistently to mean something concrete and vital in and for the Catholic Church. Yet, concurrently, through constant iteration and a myriad of specific contexts but vague articulation, parishes and schools struggle to know just what mission means in terms of their relationship and what vision they might have for their future.

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Paul VI, 1965c), exemplifies how formal Church teaching can incorporate multiple diverse concepts regarding mission in a single document. The Church's mission is: "received from God" (para. 89); shedding "on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and [unifying] under one Spirit all [people] of whatever nation, race or culture" (para. 92); "religious, and … supremely human" (para. 11); not primarily "political, economic or social" (para. 42); not the provision of immediate answers and solutions by clerics to laity (para. 43); parents "transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been given" (para. 50); an impetus for "use of temporal things" (para. 76); contributing to the "ensuring of peace everywhere on earth" by "imparting knowledge of the divine and natural law" (para. 89); and, fostering "mutual esteem, reverence and harmony" within the Church herself (para. 92). Though these statements mingle with each other, entwined with the mystery of Christ's call to build the kingdom of God, this one example from Paul VI serves to introduce the sheer complexity of the term mission. With countless other formal and informal writings referring to mission on the Catholic landscape, it is not surprising to the researcher that, with principals in the study not being adept at interpreting complex theological language, the concept of mission and contributing to the mission of the Church is vague or absent when expressed within interviews.

The Church's mission is functionally overwhelming because it encompasses everything to do with the Church. For example, Pope Benedict XVI (2008b) describes the primary mission of the Church as evangelisation, and evangelisation is subsequently referred to as "every aspect of the Church's activity" (XIII Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops, 2011, preface). Anything to do with God,

Church law, buildings, liturgies, personnel, school enrolments – anything and everything – is to do with mission. So, amidst the wealth of interpretations and elaborations of this all-encompassing mission, it is common for people to distil mission to a seemingly more accessible single goal of 'being Christ-like', as in "following Jesus and living according to God's commandments" (Olha, 2016, p. 47). However, this summarised view by lacking specificity can also mean vastly different things when filtered through diverse theological understandings, experiences, and hopes, including ecumenical and traditional to liberal Catholic stances.

In practice, within a diversity of mission attributes, schools can justifiably claim a raft of 'missions' as their mission, such as: increasing the Catholic school roll, teaching children to say sorry, raising Mass attendance, care for the environment, increasing the number of baptisms, and so on. Such goals emerge in the data and though well-intentioned as part of the parish or school's mission, core connections to the mission of the Church, such as encountering Christ, can become peripheral or even lost (NZCBC, 2014; Sultmann et al., 2024). In this context of intentional articulating of meaningful mission/s, schools and parishes need support from one another to establish an effective vision for serving and nurturing their communities. While parishes and parish schools will necessarily have different dimensions to the expression of their mission/s, deliberated, agreed common wording regarding their shared commitment to the mission of the Church cannot but impact on the parish/school relationship, especially if it is regularly evaluated.

For Catholic schools the Church's mission has the added dimension to "live in fidelity to their education mission" (CCE, 2013, para. 63), and this mission has multiple named facets of its own including evangelising, ecclesial, pastoral, and educational missions (CCE, 2022). In the light of this, the Church expects Catholic education communities to create and claim their own mission statements, as local summaries of their specific participation in the Church's mission, with the goal of providing direction and supporting quality assurance (CCE, 2022). A point of cohesion for all schools in this research is that such statements of mission are incorporated into school strategic plans and are regularly internally and externally evaluated (NZCEO, 2020c, 2022). Though data from such evaluations is not part of this research, and school understanding of mission is not without its limitations (Sultmann et al., 2024), it was apparent that the mission statements of all schools in this study differed from those of their parishes. Three schools were aware of a parish mission statement existing, but it wasn't used at school – "I can't remember what it is, it's too long" (P7) – and most parishes didn't have a current mission statement at all.

It was notable that many participants commented that their school mission statements incorporated parish and school charisms, creating links with founding orders or the life and faith of a shared saint. However, even this positive link between parish and school further highlights the complexity of mission. The parish/school charism can certainly help name and vision the mission, but the NZ Catholic bishops also recognise charisms as often problematic because the charism can dominate the "Catholic identity" and obscure "the primacy of the relationship with Jesus Christ" (NZCBC, 2014, para. 54). So, while charism can point to a bold vision of following Jesus, care needs to be taken that imitation of founders' lives do not effectively replace him (National Centre for Religious Studies, 2021).

In addition to the breadth of written material, concepts of mission necessarily also transcend human understanding when connecting to human activity (Benedict XVI, 2005; Francis, 2013, 2015a, 2020). Some participants in this research recognise a mystical freedom where the Church's mission "is a mission that we don't construct, God is missioning all the time, and all we do is at times we're in sync with that mission, and at other times we're not" (F2). From this spiritual perspective, intent can be seen as more important than results. Particularly when the task seems overwhelming, there can be a sense of freedom in individuals participating in mission primarily by choosing to model on Jesus and "whether we make a difference or not… [we] do our best job" (P1), but it is God who is in charge and God who bears the bulk of responsibility for results.

It is with this diverse range of understandings that consistent calls arise for the Church to better articulate, understand, and claim its "unique mission" (LaBelle & Kendall, 2016; Lam, 2023) in response to the needs of the 21st century. And it is such recurring questions of mission, integrally bound to questions of identity, that the synodal process is attempting to address (Francis, 2021; Osheim, 2019; XVI ordinary general assembly of the synod of bishops, 2023). The hope for parishes and schools is that the voices being heard – "the listening thing from the synod" (F4) – will translate into meaningful, accessible, contemporary articulations of mission for today.

In the meantime, in making decisions on critical mission foci within the many facets in which the Church describes her mission, it is useful to consider interconnected missions rather than a single mission. It follows, too, that in developing the truth of Bevan's (2009) clarification – that it is not so much the Church that has a mission but that God's mission has a Church – that one comes to see and value, within that relationship between the triune God and the universal Church, that God's mission has parishes and schools. From this stance, parish and school efforts to authentically

participate together in that all-encompassing mission requires knowledge, open dialogue, and intentional visioning of just what aspects of mission are being embraced, who is involved, and for what purpose.

5.2.4.1 People of Justice.

Responding to those in need is a common element of both parishes and schools connecting with the Church's mission. One priest referred to his school supporting the missions by organising a "mission day" (F3) where school children collect money or sell goods "to go overseas to look after other children" (F3). With the day held during school time, retired parishioners and those school parents who are able to attend, participate in what is described as a very positive "aspect of community" (F3) in a parish/school event. Others in the research readily highlight social justice as an area of "outreach that kids really connect to, and our families probably do as well" (P4). School examples are given of children "helping serve out the morning teas" (P1) for funerals in the local parish, or "doing little things through Caritas" (P4), or collecting food and "actually physically carrying the food down" (P7) to the parish church to be part of the wider community's donation to those in need. Examples from the parish are also shared of parishioners helping pay school fees for a "particular family that are terribly in debt" (P2), or making meals and "bringing it to the school and we're giving it to our community" (P1) to families in need.

However, caring for others is not necessarily perceived by children and parents as a mission within the Church's mission, because it can be seen as a purely practical and emotional human response without any faith dimension. One principal reflects, "I would call that [social justice] Catholic character, but we need to build the spirituality side of things as well, the faith side of things, it's definitely missing in our parents" (P8). A deeper reality is that teachers in Catholic schools themselves commonly struggle to identify faith links around social justice, human rights, and Catholic social teaching (Gleeson, 2020). They can fail to emphasise the grounding of social action in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ (CCE, 2017; Francis, 2020, 2023b; Rossiter, 2018) and undermine the essential 'why' of Catholic social teaching with a superficial 'what' of humanist generosity. When such understanding is blurred, the foundational link between justice and the Church's identity and mission (CCE, 2022) is lost and can obscure the reality that Catholic social teaching is a constitutive dimension of living the Catholic faith (Synod of Bishops, 1971; USCCB, 2004), not an optional extra.

At the same time there are firm examples of schools and children making overt links between faith and Catholic social teaching action. One priest spoke of the school's Prayer of the Faithful being "always reflective of a concern for others" (F1), and another recognised the faith dimension "through their morning prayer… with the way the teachers are with each other, with the struggles we go into with one another" (F2). Another recognised that personal faith could lie behind how "schools can show us the way for social justice and social action… just because a person doesn't go to church on a Sunday [doesn't mean] they don't have faith" (F6).

It was common in this study for schools and parishes to engage in their own missions associated with social justice and have little or no connection to one another. An overt example is a group of 10 Catholic schools, including all schools within this research, organising "a big social justice project" together, but not including any of their parishes. When questioned by the researcher whether parishes might be included, the response indicated such a possibility as a novelty, "No, no, no we don't... Well, we could?" (P3). Interview data also affirmed findings in the literature that schools are more engaged in social justice learning and action as whole communities than are parishes (Baggett, 2006), though individuals and small groups with significant commitment to Catholic social teaching are certainly present within parishes. This too aligns with the literature which indicates a personal call to social action is more prevalent than such responses being an attribute of parish identity (Pierre, 2017; Zech et al., 2017). Just like many teachers, parishioners need support to understand and value social justice as being faith-full.

Opportunities exist for parishes and schools to claim already well-established, though erratically practiced and largely misunderstood, shared missions within the Church's mission as their own. Social justice action can draw people to faith, and faith should draw people to justice (USCCB, 2004). Planned, inclusive and authentically Catholic engagement in Catholic social teaching action is intrinsically engaging, and fundamentally oriented towards faith formation (Hall et al., 2019). Parishes and schools, and also those they aim to serve in society, would benefit if such shared action were consistently an intentional element of their relationship.

5.2.4.2 People in Dialogue.

A critical mechanism for establishing shared vision for mission is dialogue. By virtue of being Catholic both parish and school communities are integrally grounded in a dialogical relationship with the Triune God and with God's creation (CCE, 2022; Francis, 2015a; Paul VI, 1964a). As a constitutive element of their Catholic identity the school shares with the parish a "grammar of dialogue" (CCE,

2013, para. 57) between God, humanity, and each other which, although aspirational, is not merely theoretical but is a profound necessity in relating to one another. Communities in dialogue, even with differences, can recognise the dynamic and responsive nature of Catholic tradition and effect responses and interpretations which address contemporary challenges (Madden, 2020) within the local Church.

The data on challenges cover a spectrum of concerns: falling Mass attendance (Gleeson et al., 2018; Treanor, 2017), falling sense of religious belonging (Conway & Spruyt, 2018; Rymarz, 2019), falling numbers of faith-filled students in Catholic schools (Croke, 2007; D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Owen, 2018; Shields, 2018), falling vocations to the priesthood (Arbuckle, 2019; Zech et al., 2017), and falling trust in Church authority, significantly impacted by sexual abuse (Arbuckle, 2019; Lam, 2021). In many ways, the Church is rightly described as being in crisis (Cashen, 2010; Gaillardetz, 2015; Rossiter, 2018). However, for schools and parishes, these are realities to be owned: this is their context for evangelisation and mission as communities bound to the life, death and rising of Jesus Christ (Francis, 2013). As established communities of witness to the Gospel, evangelising through ordinary day-to-day life experiences (Sultmann & Brown, 2014) can be more strategic if each entity actively engages in dialogue with the other.

Participants speak of the negative impact of an absence of dialogue. One principal considers the parish representatives on the school board "don't do anything with the parish" (P8) in terms of connecting with parishioners to enhance the relationship with the school. The lack of dialogue is seen as contributing to "a big breakdown in communication and actually some vision" (P8). The same principal, when asked if the parish and school shared a mission statement, animatedly exclaimed, "No, and no one's ever asked me that, and I wouldn't be against it at all" (P8). This was immediately followed by musing with the researcher that "they could come share ours" (P8) involving animated recitation of elements of the school's mission statement which would have synergy with parish. This was a principal evidently enthusiastic about dialogue in this area and needing the other partner to engage.

The absence of rich communication is also linked with "not moving forward… sort of treading water… it's always the same sort of relationship" (P2). There is also a belief that the faith formation taking place in schools would gain more traction in the wider community if "parishes and the diocese" (P1) realised that schools "are becoming more and more the vehicle" (P1) for evangelisation. "Having this dialogue at a bigger level" (P1), is necessary to collectively generate

different but still authentic ways of engaging school children and their families in parish life. Such dialogue requires a deepening of the level of trust and honesty which currently exists erratically within the parish/school relationships within this study. The necessity of permitting one's hearts and minds to be "touched by the other" and of actively questioning "one's own ideas and actions" (Boeve, 2019) requires an attitude of openness and vulnerability as much as enthusiasm.

Three different participants connected with the idea of a 'magic wand' being needed. One priest would like one so "Jesus could come down and all would follow him in church" (F3). A principal would use one so "magically, somebody would prepare all the kai[28]" (P7) so that food could be a regular feature of school and parish coming together. The final principal to use the term, after a long pause reflecting on what would enhance the parish/school relationship, said their wish with a magic wand would be, "a new priest" (P3). For each example, the context of the full interviews suggested to the researcher that the wand could be replaced by quality dialogue.

Dialogue was also mentioned as opportunity to bring to the fore the good things taking place. One priest reflected on a very challenging meeting where diocesan and Ministry of Education people gathered with representatives of the school and parish community to talk about the likely closing of the school. He was deeply moved by the way in which people spoke about "the school, and the parish. It was lovely just to listen to them… they were actually speaking about what we're about" (F2). The data suggests such occasions of sharing with one another 'what we're actually about' are rare occurrences outside of crisis contexts for parishes and schools.

In summary, communities are made up of individuals, so positive communication between parishes and schools requires individuals to be dialogical, not just with words but in their personal orientation towards authentic evangelisation as part of the mission of the Church. Through dialogue people can engage with one another knowing that many still retain elements of Catholic identity even though they are discontented (Nouwen & Lazarus, 2021). The dialogue requires recognition of a need for change or restructuring (Whittle, 2016; Zech et al., 2017), an orientation towards joy, compassion and forgiveness over blame and anger (Francis, 2013, 2015b); and, an intent to nurture Catholic hearts even if participation is erratic (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Engebretson, 2014). So that, as stated by one priest, "I keep looking at what's still possible and it's wonderful" (F2) not because it's easy but because it's possible to "encounter the faith of parents" (F2) in the smallest opportunities. But there is an urgency, "if I keep thinking ahead about what could be… I'm missing this right now" (F2).

[28] A te reo Māori word for food.

Not every person enters into dialogue in the same way or with the same people, but parishes and schools need to encourage and nurture "those key people who can actually build and grow a relationship that actually becomes stronger" (P1). Furthermore, the dialogue then helps develop a dynamic vision for mission which together "we need have in our head, [and know] what it looks like when it's strong" (P1). In this way, the Catholic school dialogically avoids becoming a closed community and embraces the challenge that it "can and must be open to an enriching exchange in a more extensive communion with the parish, the diocese, ecclesial movements and the universal Church" (CCE, 2007, para. 50; 2022, para. 26).

5.3 What Is Being Built Here? – Being Community

"What's going on here and building the community here?" (P8)

Community is a feature to which all interview participants are attuned. It is mentioned in every interview. Though a familiar term, the data indicates a range of challenges in understanding just what it means regarding parish and school. The literature highlights that, particularly through communications technology, people are connected more immediately and intensely than ever before (Putnam, 2015), and at the same time rising numbers of people are feeling disconnected or lonely as mechanisms for supporting and being community are breaking down, such as knowing one's neighbours, volunteering labour, being part of sports clubs, and so on (Arbuckle, 2013; Archer, 2015; Stern & Buchanan, 2020). The challenge of Plekon's (2021) realisation that community can be "everywhere and nowhere" (p. 13) resonates as much with Catholic parishes and schools as it does in secular society. One priest summarises a sentiment in the data that, while still a sought-after goal, for many the parish is not a central element of their community identity:

> Look, I think in an ideal, you sort of think of the parish as community and there's a certain apparent community. You get some that need that, but a lot of people are at a stage of life where they've got [other] networks of friends and social activities, so it's not that. (F1)

The ideal of the parish/school relationship supporting a living, meaningful community with a shared sense of belonging is recognised as something worthy of striving for: "Do we want a relationship [with the parish]? Do we want to do that? Yes, we do" (P1). But in practice, the disparate make-up, identities, and missions of both communities means it is difficult to achieve. The data indicates that progress can be made through a greater awareness of the significance of faith, and through actively

building better connections and intentionally striving to break down barriers, particularly through being welcoming and, critically, through engendering a shared sense of belonging.

5.3.1 Communion – Faith and community

Parishes and schools are consistently recognised in the literature and in interview data as faith communities (Convey, 2012; Gleeson, 2017; Zech et al., 2017). It is possible to build communities without faith, as evident throughout secular society, but it is not possible to build faith communities without faith. While secular demands and expectations form a significant part of each Catholic school community, it is the faith dimension that is their raison d'être from the Catholic Church's perspective (CCE, 1977, 1998, 2022), and even from the New Zealand government's perspective which, although disinterested in religious faith itself (ERO, 2022), requires the special character of the Catholic school to be taught and preserved (Government of New Zealand, 1975, 2020). The difficulty arises in parents with little personal connection to or interest in the faith dimension sending their children to the Catholic school for education.

At their core, the Catholic parish faith community and the Catholic school faith community within it are oriented towards communion. The term incorporates both the generic etymology of mutual sharing and fellowship, and the specific eucharistic understanding associated with *koinonia*, of being united through a shared faith: believing in, and receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, as members of the global Church community which is itself in communion with one another and with God (*On-line etymology dictionary*, 2024; Paul VI, 1964a; Treanor, 2017). It is clear that for regular Mass-attending parishioners, participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is an essential element of belonging to a parish community (Zech et al., 2017). However, with increasing numbers of parents and Catholic school graduates not connecting with formal faith practice, this critical dimension of communion within parish and school communities is revealed as at best aspirational: "relationships are where it starts… faith-based relationships… and we're not spending enough time talking about it" (P1). At worst, communion is revealed as incidental, with the faith dimension rendered down to some appealing principles: "they like the values. They like those Christian values. So, I think that's why they come [to school]" (P2).

The reality is that over 66,000 young people (NZCEO, 2024), and their families to varying degrees, are part of Catholic school communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Research participants recognise that, even with limited religious practice by most families, faith is important and a contemporary approach is needed because times have changed. For some, the aim now is for

children to be Christ-like within society, likely having little connection to parish, by “living our Catholic faith… going out of here [the school] like ‘we care like Christ’. We want them to be like this in the world” (P8). For others there is still hope that parish can be a place where they might authentically express, experience and normalise faith through parish providing “opportunity for children to see outside themselves and outside their families. And also, be an environment where they can actually be Catholic” (P7).

This research suggests that there is a need for the parish to be reaching out, not waiting for people to arrive at their door. Data calls for a greater emphasis on formation of parishes’ own established community, which is often flagging (FCBCO, 2023; Mallon, 2024; Wenger, 1998), and requires intentionally building community which is meaningful, purposeful, and inviting of others (Komonchak, 2008; Mallon, 2019). So, rather than looking back nostalgically to recreate something lost and grieved for (Boym, 2001; Horvath, 2018), participants focus firmly on the need for something new, to create new ways of being a faith community for today’s parishioners, children and families.

> The Church… didn’t need to go out and try and find people to listen to. People came to them and they told them. They dictated. It’s just the way it worked. It worked pretty well, but now we’re bereft of numbers so we’re learning how to open our doors to let in or even go further than opening a door. We have to go out of our own comfort zones to go and be the one on the road. (F4)

For research participants, it is the Catholic school which is most evidently ‘on the road’ in working to nurture faith and establish that sense of being a faith community with young people, many of whom would otherwise be completely disengaged and missing from Church life. The school is consistently the primary contact point with the Church for most Catholic young people (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012; Engebretson, 2014; Gleeson & Goldburg, 2020), and is perceived as the only opportunity the parish has to connect, evangelise, and mission to school families: “if the school is not part of it [the parish] there would be no relationship between the children who attend the school and the actual parish” (P7), “we are their faith. The only connection that they have with the faith for a lot of families” (P8).

5.3.1.1 More Than Just Mass Attendance.

A major challenge, then, sits with the parish recognising that the school is part of the parish faith community even if many school families choose not to regularly attend Sunday Eucharist. At a base level it is understood that "if you're in the parish even though you don't go every Sunday, you belong to the parish" (F5). And, in recognising this, "if you think of the school community as part of the parish community and not a separate community" (F1), then rather than frustration at poor Mass attendance the focus becomes "the aspiration that people, even if they're not connecting at that Eucharist level, they know that actually this is my parish as a family" (F1).

Such an approach aligns with broader invitational eucharistic understandings of belonging to Catholic faith communities as they grow as 'people of God' and 'the body of Christ' (Francis, 2019a; Paul VI, 1964a). Though far from theologically ideal in terms of recognising the centrality of the Eucharist to Catholic faith (Francis, 2023a; Treanor, 2017), any connection with parish can be seen as a beginning, or steps on a journey. A priest describes responding to parishioners bemoaning the number of children receiving the sacraments and then not being present the following Sunday, telling them, "It's more than Mass attendance… it's a work in process" (F6). Indeed, it is a process in which parishioners participate, even if they unaware they are doing so – these children are part of the parish.

There is also recognition of the importance of Catholic spirituality, nurtured within the school, even if it doesn't result in churches being full on a Sunday. Mass attendance is not seen as the only indicator of faith, and participants suggest factors such as the length of homilies (P2), or the lack of variety or absence of welcome in the liturgy (P3), or a choice to attend services of other Christian denominations (P7), are also reasons for people with faith choosing not to attend. One principal declares that even with few school pupils going to Mass, "We're still connected. We're still community. We still hold the same beliefs, you know, we're still connected by that faith" (P8). In a similar vein, a priest suggests that, more than numbers in pews, a concept of 'intunement' indicates a better understanding of "what the body of Christ is about" (F2) as a parish and school:

> It's about our intunement with this active God continually moving in this world all the time. So, it's about that sense of inner resonance and intunement with that, and so I think when people have that, even the need for that or the awareness of that, or just some sense of something going on, they are really part of a parish community. (F2)

5.3.1.2 Working Together.

Another positive element of an effective school and parish relationship is shared work as individuals within faith communities. Working together for events like school fairs, for instance, helps form bonds between faith communities. A principal described living in another parish but making a concerted effort to consistently attend Sunday Mass in the school's parish to be seen as part of that community. With confidence in better knowing parishioners, an invitation was then extended for "coming and helping out at school. And so, I have got four coming every week for reading… they come and they listen to children. And they've been coming for three years now" (P3). The parish priest of the school affirmed this in his own right, citing it as an example of "engagement with parishioners, parish and school" (F5). Two other schools also mentioned that parishioners supporting the reading programme was a positive connection between school and parish. However, it does require time, coordination and commitment to happen, for instance, "from a principal's point of view, it's hell having to police vet them all" (P6).

5.3.2 Building Connections

"How do we build those connections? (F1). "How can we better make the connection? How can we support our families in that way?" (P8).

Throughout the data the concept of community was interlinked with a desire to build connections. Participants' comments reflect agreement within the literature that strong, meaningful and regular connections between people shapes communities, because what people do is based on relationships (Branson & Marra, 2021; Catholic Education South Australia, 2023; CCE, 2022). Conscious of a mandate to serve and be part of the local and wider community (CCE, 1982; Ministry of Education, 2024; NZCBC, 2014), and in response to parental and governmental expectations, schools necessarily build relationships with children, families, local municipal agencies, and educational and pastoral support services – they are intrinsically communal (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). Parishes also have myriad connections to the wider local community, through diverse parishioner experiences and needs, along with formal associations with other ecumenical churches and agencies such as Catholic Social Services and rest homes. However, such connections do not arise spontaneously, but require intentional action, "You have to have those relationships… or we wouldn't be able to build those sort of relationships" (P2), and the claim is made that the ideal is to "grow a relationship that actually becomes stronger" (P1).

Specifically in terms of the parish/school relationship, there are not just a few but many threads (F1) of connection, and research participants highlight the importance of "key people who can actually build and grow" (P1) connections to create stronger relationships. All interviews, including those with priests, mention the significance of the parish priest. They recognise the establishment of connections through 'being present': "it's about just being part of their lives, like listen to them before school, and chat away and laugh but be that presence" (F2) so when times come such as grief or hardship there is a connection already there. Priests value the ability to naturally engage with the school community and be well received: "I am positive with the staff and students... I would have no hesitation walking onto any school [in my parish] at any stage" (F1). They appreciate the opportunity of making particular faith connections in the school context: "popping in for morning prayers and all that sort of stuff. So you get to know them [children and staff]" (F3). Principals also affirm and appreciate regular positive interactions with the priest: "He'll come in every morning tea, goes into the classes. The kids know him and love him. So that parish connection is huge" (P8).

However, even with many priests actively cultivating a connection to the school, there is an awareness that although priests have a significant role within the parish, they are not the parish itself. Frustration is expressed regarding the lack of other connections to parish when "the only communication, really, I have with the parish is through my parish priest" (P8). Priests recognise this challenge too, but "it's not as though the parish needs to create another committee… and the connection's going to be better" (F1). Parishioners need to want to connect with the school community. From the school's perspective, what creates better connections is knowing who else "works in the parish, what they do… and working to build connections with those people in the parish" (P1). This involves utilising the relationships of key people other than the principal, such as DRSs and teachers who have well-established connections to the parish, "those ones that have got the longer relationship than me" (P1).

Examples are also given of individual parishioners as key connection builders. A parishioner is mentioned by name as "one connection with the parish which is unique" (P5). Once a term this person makes pikelets with cream and jam for the staff and students, and it is greatly appreciated not just because "the kids love it" (F5) but as an overt action of "a parishioner going out of their way to recognise the school and the kids" (F5). Another principal acknowledged a parishioner who purposely ensured his local Lions Club[29] included the parish school in giving children dictionaries (P6) as part of their national project. Another parishioner arranged for children from the school to help

[29] International secular service organisation – www.lionsclubs.org.nz

make soup “for the soup and buns” (F1), the parish’s regular social outreach on Thursday evenings during winter months. In the same parish, the parish secretary “is getting us, our group [of children], to go in and do morning teas when there’s funerals” (P1). All of which are valued opportunities to help school children and their parents participate in the wider parish and begin to think, “Hey, this is my place” (F1), to recognise they belong.

5.3.2.1 Better Communication.

Parishes and schools each admit to “a lack of communication” (P2) being a major obstacle to building a richer shared sense of community. One principal describes how having a better relationship is actually a strategic goal of the school but the problem “is to do with the communication – we don’t sit down and talk about it… with parishioners” (P1). This comment is immediately followed by a statement acknowledging the challenge and quandary of more effective communication: “how could we do that better?” (P1). This is a key point – consistently, priests and principals, most with over 10 years of experience and in words of despair and frustration, express that they still don’t know how to communicate more effectively between parish and school communities.

One practical means of communication is through most schools in this research sharing their newsletter with the parish and vice versa. This is made easier with the documents being on-line and links easily able to be added to each document. Such sharing of material is seen as a way “of trying to keep the conversation real” (F2), especially when help is being asked for in terms of social justice or other community needs. However, while sharing each other’s newsletters is perceived as a positive connection, no one commented on whether they were being read, and a more aspirational suggestion was made of “talking about how we can do it together” (P1), with a single newsletter for both entities.

The most common factor behind the desire for better communication in the data is recognition that things improve if one is able to “just keep them talking… talking and encounter is good, and listening” (F4). A principal, struggling with frustration at the difficulty of developing their own school/parish relationship, reflected that a different parish and school “took a long time, and a lot of that great consultation… and now people wouldn’t think twice about it” (P4), meaning the major changes that took place in that pastoral area are now accepted and appreciated by the parish and school. After a lengthy, and valued, process of consultation, now “it’s working really well” (P4). Communication breakdowns such as weekday Masses being cancelled with little notice (P5), or

liturgy planning information not getting to the DRS or priest in the busyness of school and parish life (P2), are recognised as problematic. However, data indicates answers to better communication lie in developing intentional commitment to keeping dialogue open and honest, and actually creating regular opportunities to talk with one another, to build "a good rapport [and] reciprocity" (F5).

5.3.3 Breaking Down Barriers

"It's how to break down those barriers really, isn't it? (P8)

Communication is also recognised as needing to be productive if the aim is to overcome specific obstacles. Otherwise, even with an agreed plan, the talk becomes "just conversations" (P4) and nothing actually happens. The term 'barrier' is often presented in interviews, with associated examples describing obstacles to building a better sense of community between parish and school. The barriers are tangible, and many are perceived as insurmountable. A recurring context in the data is that of frustration that barriers are so difficult to break down. One priest acknowledges the reality of parish and school functioning as separate entities but that he doesn't like to think of them in that way: "There's also a sense that the school's getting on with their job, and again I don't want to use this [phrase], and the parish is getting on with its work" (F1). Similarly, a principal describes trying to "match those two [school and parish] together on a Sunday [as] kind of quite a battle" (P8) because "the school, and the faith of our families, are at a different place from the old people that have always done the same thing" (P8). The desire in the literature that school communities are called to constantly and creatively communicate their culture of faith, in relationship with the local Church community, in ways which are historical, dynamic, organic, critical and evaluative (CCE, 1982), encounters significant barriers when parishes have differing concepts of identity and mission, and differing levels of enthusiasm for each.

Approaches to breaking down barriers are also discussed in the interviews. Open communication and positive intent are presented by one principal as "kind of bridging the communities together" (P1) to help each recognise the potential reciprocity of each community within the wider Church. Another suggests language inclusive of both entities in formal communications can be an important step: "in my newsletter, I have to think twice too because I would often say our school community and I'm talking about… our church community" (P4). A priest encourages better "understanding of each other and accept them for what they are" (F6) along with both entities avoiding "unrealistic expectation that they should do what the other ones are doing" (F6), meaning diversity of practice and expression, rather than conformity, is a necessary element for lowering barriers. This stance is

supported by a principal who acknowledges that school parents are often open to faith but are "coming in more and more watered down" (P8) in terms of their beliefs and connection to Church, and re-engaging in parish life, such as taking part in a synodal discussion group, can be very intimidating. The suggestion is made that such parents need scaffolded support to (re)engage "something like a 'step before that' because I don't think they're ready to take those big steps" (P8).

Some barriers are seen as relatively easy to overcome. A priest describes a weekday Mass, where the teachers and parishioners sit together around a class of children sitting on the floor before the altar, as creating "a sense of being surrounded by people and parishioners" (F1) together as one community. A principal suggests they need only "a bit more outreach from the church to the school [to] support what we are already doing" (P4); with that outreach, parish and school may develop the capacity for breaking down the barriers which at present seem overwhelming.

5.3.4 Welcome and Belonging

The technical, canonical (CLS, 1983), reality for children at a Catholic parish school, and their families, is that "if you're part of the school you're part of the parish" (F1). However, it is clear in the data that parents don't always recognise, value, or feel this sense of belonging. Many "might have other issues" (F2) that they prioritise over the faith dimension of the school and parish, but it is also believed that the parish/school communities' sharing in each other's experiences, opportunities and struggles can support "being, belonging – they have a sense of something special here" (F2). That often embryonic sense of personal connection, particularly with the Catholic school, may be fanned into life by those teachers and parents who do feel a connection to the faith community, and who within school and outside of it, meaningfully participate "in the life of the local Church" (CCE, 2007, para. 50), showing what it is to integrate faith and culture (CCE, 1977). Established belonging to the secular dimensions of the school can thus develop into a deeper sense of belonging to the heart of the Catholic school as a faith community (CCE, 2022).

One pastoral area in the research, with one priest, two parishes and two schools, had gathered survey data to support their future planning and direction. The parish priest described the "values that came out" (F4) as "not surprising – they were welcome and hospitality" (F4), followed by prayer, celebration, teaching, learning, outreach to youth, and pastoral care. A principal in one of the surveyed parishes also acknowledged these local findings, recognising that F4's leadership is helping the parish with "looking more at the cultural side of it, hospitality, [and] creating a positive culture, and making it a place that people want to come and be" (P4).

An absence of welcoming is acknowledged by several participants as discouraging the desire for schools to connect with parish. One principal spoke of "complaints about our music" (P3) overriding any sense of warmth from parishioners at the shared parish/school Sunday Eucharist, and another admitted personally feeling unwelcomed by the parish community but not knowing why, other than "I know that they really loved the pervious principal" (P7).

The significance of children feeling a sense of belonging to the church building was also raised. One school had intentionally decided to hold regular assemblies in the church, as well as regular liturgical gatherings, to help children "think the church is their own" (P3). The children are described as being respectful, and knowing Jesus is there – "they have to genuflect, you know" (P3). The church has become a more familiar space for them. Another school similarly "use the church for everything that we can" (P4), to help "make people feel really comfortable and welcome in that space" (P4), and as "another way of bringing people into that church" (P4). It was also acknowledged that this wider usage of the church building poses challenges for some, with the parish council being unenthusiastic and the school being told that – despite the potential implication to children that Jesus needs to be protected or hidden from their non-liturgical celebrations – "Father would really like us to cover the tabernacle when we go in" (P3).

Expectations of welcoming behaviour are attainable from the data. Several priests highlight the significance of brief, warm encounters with parents as they drop off or pick up their children. An example is given of school board proprietor's appointees overtly reaching out at Sunday Mass, where "if they see a family there, they'll go up and welcome them, and say 'it's great to see you'" (P4). In terms of Eucharist, a priest believes the focus should be on invitation rather than expectation, so people know they are "allowed to be part of it and welcome to be part of it, and not feeling that there's certain expectations" (F1). This sense of welcome, as a necessary element of evangelising for deeper participation, is also supported by a principal who perceives the church community as "while it's evangelistic, it's actually not really, it's actually a little bit exclusive in its practices" (P7). However, while this principal perceives "the vibe" (P7) as excluding people, and the less expectational approach of F1 focuses on invitation, both highlight a reality that the Church does require people to choose to belong, and to connect with the faith and Tradition that is the Church (Catholic Church, 1994; Paul VI, 1964b; XIII Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops, 2012). The sacraments, adherence to Church teaching, and formation in the Catholic faith are important. At the same time, the data resonates with a spirit of welcome supporting a paradigm shift from the

traditional catechumenate approach (Hitchcock, 2012; John Paul II, 1979; McBrien, 1994) which may be summarised as 'behave first, and believe, then belong', to 'belong first, then believe, and behave', as embedded within programmes such as Alpha (2024) and Divine Renovation (Mallon, 2019, 2024). However, neither of these programmes places a specific focus on the parish/school relationship where the school community, already actively welcoming families to help them feel they belong, is connected with a parish community which may be at the very early stages of prioritising development of a sense of belonging for newcomers, or those participating on the periphery of the community – such as parents associated with the parish school. The data suggests that leadership within both Catholic communities is critical for addressing the goal of developing "a sense that we all belong to one another" (F2).

5.4 Who Is Leading? – Leadership

"I think that a lot of Catholics especially the leaders are really, really hoping to find something within." (F4)

The aim of this research is to explain the complexities of relationships that exist between Catholic parishes and parish schools from the perspective of parish priests and parish school principals. It is not an investigation into priest or principal leadership per se. However, the principles of classic grounded theory and the interpretivist theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, where priests and principals are purposefully interviewed in their salient leadership roles (Blumer, 1969), do highlight aspects of leadership as critical to the parish/school relationship. It is in the context, of explaining how this leadership feature is presented in the research, that this critical area is addressed in the following. Thus, leadership of priests, principals, and other laity is considered, along with associated critical elements of responsibility, workload, and formation.

5.4.1 Priests and Principals Leading

Quality leadership from the school principal is regarded as "essential, essential" (F3) in developing a rich connection between school and parish, and "that's why" (F3) there is a "rigorous" (F3) process regarding applications and interviews before a school board, with the subsequent approval of the bishop, that a principal appointment is made (NZCEO, 2020c). Alternatively, although their role is seen as "hugely" (P4) important, parish priests are appointed by their bishop, who has no secular or canonical requirement to consult with the local community, or even with the priest himself (CLS, 1983). Moreover, it is the bishop who determines when priests are moved and whether a new priest is the right fit for a parish. Once appointed, the priest alone, under the bishop, holds the power for

leadership and decision-making regarding the parish, with no formal review process. This hierarchical structure is known and accepted by participants in the research as inherently Catholic, and part of the "chain of command" (P2). At the same time, in practice the sharing of power between principal and priest within the parish/school relationship is diverse and complex and not necessarily played out in accordance with prescription.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, parish priests historically had authority over principals in all areas of parish school life, largely because such schools were funded through the parish community to primarily support faith formation of parish families (Collins, 2014, 2015; Wanden & Birch, 2007). The establishment of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (Government of New Zealand, 1975), meant that across the nation all Catholic school teachers' salaries and most school maintenance costs were picked up by the government, effectively removing the fiscal responsibility, still experienced by many parishes internationally (Ferrari & Dosen, 2016; Killeen, 2017), for the day-to-day running of the parish school. This agreement also increased expectation that, while retaining their 'Catholic character', Catholic schools would also align with government curricula and associated secular educational expectations. Subsequent education acts (Government of New Zealand, 1989, 2020) retained this agreement (NZCEO, 2020b), and as declining religious congregations extricated themselves from teaching in Catholic schools, lay teachers, including lay principals, became the norm (Wanden & Birch, 2007; Waters, 1999). This happened alongside a climate of increasing secularisation and declining numbers of families with personal connections to faith practice, including parish life (Duthie-Jung, 2012; Owen, 2018; Wilberforce Foundation, 2018, 2023). Thus, as reflected in this research, over time the authority of the priest regarding the parish school has morphed into diverse sets of responsibilities and challenges, with the principal bearing the administrative load in balancing secular and religious expectations, and the parish priest supporting faith formation to varying degrees.

All principals interviewed acknowledge the importance of the parish priest's leadership in making the link between school and parish for children. Such links evidenced in the data are usually associated with connection to Sunday Eucharist. Participant comments range from the children knowing that it was the priest "who stood up every fourth Sunday and spoke to them" (P3) at the parish/school Shared Mass, to building a relationship with children and their families over time so that when "something happens in their life, we've got a context" (F2) for prayer, dialogue and other support. The type of leadership described in the interviews is consistently more pastoral than authoritarian, and is presented in terms of accompaniment, "I think that's my job, to accompany

them [the children]" (F5); prayer, "[my role is] prayer leader, specifically for the Mass, or for blessings… they like to know I'm there when they need me" (F4); and interest in the school, "I've got an interest in where they're at, and what they're doing, you're in them but not of them, and you're not imposing on them, but you try and make those connections" (F6). Such approaches are aligned with elements of the literature which reflect priestly identity growing beyond canonical autonomy, depending on experience and attitudes of individual priests and bishops (O'Loughlin, 2019; Pendergast, 2019; Zech et al., 2017), into awareness of opportunities to share leadership with others (Hawley, 2015; McGrail, 2007), and especially, in this research context, sharing leadership with principals. Mutual personal and professional growth is valued, as reflected in P8's comment describing how the parish priest has a reputation for being "by the book", yet, "to be frank, [F6] has grown, or shifted and grown, with me a lot" over the past several years. And, the parish priest equally values this growth, saying, "[P8] feeds off me and I feed off [P8]" (F6).

At the same time, it is recognised that the leadership relationship between priest and principal can be difficult. As one principal shared, "you can get really frustrated by it [a perceived lack of engagement by the priest], but the bishop just said if you're doing all you can you just have to park it… you can't force your relationship with your parish priest" (P3). Also, if the priest does not prioritise engaging with the school, principals can feel frustrated on behalf of themselves, other staff and the children, perceiving disengagement as conscious avoidance when "he lives just there [right next to the school grounds], there's no excuse not to [visit]" (P7). As discussed in 5.1.3.2, this sense of leadership powerlessness is particularly recognised in terms of preference enrolment forms when "you're at the mercy of the priest" (P5).

The associated spectre of clericalism, recognised in the literature as a common challenge related to priestly leadership (Arbuckle, 2019; Francis, 2019a; NZCBC, 2024; Plekon, 2021), though somewhat present around the issue of granting preference, is not otherwise dominant in participant comments. Principals recognise their responsibility to be faith leaders alongside the priest. And, in terms of developing schools as faith communities, all priests recognised principal leadership qualities and responsibilities as linked with their own responsibility to develop the parish faith community. However, as evidenced throughout this chapter, examples of sharing leadership are largely "one-way traffic" (P3) with priests and principals working closely to support some elements of the school side of the relationship, but participants not expressing examples of invitation for principals to lead development of parish aspects beyond the school, other than with regard to children receiving and experiencing the sacraments.

With declining numbers of priests, those pastors connected with parish schools are becoming increasingly busy and recognise themselves being “pulled in lots of directions” (F1). Correspondingly, principals believe the hoped-for but erratically-experienced regular participation of parish priests in the life of the school is unlikely to be “a sustainable model” (P4). There is a sense that even in the parish “the priest is not always going to be the one calling the shots and doing whatever it is" (P8), and that their faith leadership will need to be shared more broadly with “other layers underneath” (P8). Priests in the study are not averse to sharing the load, with one musing, “I’m not going to go round and visit all the first Communion people, but let’s say you had three or four people that took five each and did actually visit them?” (F1). The rhetorical invitation expresses possibilities of opportunity and a simmering hope that something new may be realised.

A priority for managing this leadership relationship is that there be “good communication between the principal and the parish priest” (F5). When the communication is present, surprising things can happen. One priest recounts that during the Covid-19 lockdown he was unable to say Mass and the sacramental preparation programme which happened as part of Mass was being put on hold. He describes phoning the school and saying, “why don’t we Zoom, and I’ll watch as well, so I can join in the programme?” (F4) and receiving a positive response. Then, when the sessions took place with “these 10 wee faces looking at me” (F4), towards the end he asked the children to “call out to Mum and Dad, because I knew that the parents were lingering, and then, all of a sudden, all these [adult] faces came up behind them” (F4). He then described inviting the children and parents to put their hands on each other’s shoulders and he led them in prayer. The engagement of all involved through this example of positive communication and authentic leadership highlights the significance of leading with heart and seeking not only to impart knowledge but also to create vibrant human connections (CCE, 2022; Diocese of Rockhampton, 2019; Francis, 2020).

The capacity for the parish priest’s “sincerity” (P6) to influence school staff is also raised in the recounting of another occasion when a priest visited the school for a shared morning tea, with teachers and the school board, and spontaneously addressed all those present. The principal describes how, “Three or four of the teachers, totally unsolicited afterwards said how lovely his speech was and how it touched them, because he was thanking them for what they’ve done” (P6). Appreciation from the parish priest is particularly valued by principals in the data because the leadership expectations placed on principals of Catholic schools can be isolating and overwhelming, and they need support (CCE, 2022; NZCBC, 2014; Owen, 2018; Spesia, 2016; Sullivan & Peña, 2019).

Principals are conscious that, along with all their other educational, pastoral, and administrative responsibilities, a significant part of their leadership role is modelling participation in Church life to ensure "at the forefront of what we're doing" (P4) is a connection to "that whole community being the parish community" (P4). Priests also recognise principalship as "a huge position" (F4) in terms of "witness and example" (F4) and as "the captain of the boat" (F5) who one should "always see, round the place, leading from the front" (F6).

One overt way most principals in this research see themselves as leading connection with parish is by being present at regular Sunday Eucharist. One priest describes the school principal who regularly attends as "a crackerjack [who] leads by example" (F6). Another acknowledges the principal meeting "the parents and parishioners afterwards, stopping for a cup of tea" (F3), and emphasises how previous leaders have not always done this. He also recognises that the principal comes from another parish but "makes the effort to be here" (F3). A principal self-describes as "a regular. I do Children's Liturgy and Eucharistic Minister. And my kids are altar servers" (P8), and emphasises that this is important from a personal and professional perspective because "I need to make sure I'm connected to that parish, as well as for the school, because how can I make good connections if I'm not?" (P8). Similarly, other principals describe their regular attendance at parish Mass as including being on the reading roster (P1), aiming to be "a reasonably good role model" (P6), especially because "the old 'do as I say, not as I do' job's probably long since passed" (P6), and it's important to model "that connection" so parents, parish and school board can "see that I really am committed to supporting that connection" (P4).

Modelling connection to parish through principals participating at regular Sunday Eucharist is said to be "quite tricky" (P1) because it can "feel a bit like work" (P8), particularly if principals are actually "not a parishioner of the [school's] parish" (P1) and feel they are required to worship with their 'work-based' faith community rather than their own established faith community. This was a common response by several principals who had changed jobs but remained living in their family homes, and therefore stayed part of their geographical/familial parishes. While most principals described achieving a balance that was acceptable to them, two particularly emphasised potential perils. P6 made the decision not to worship at the school parish because of "my own mental health… and having no privacy" (P6) in terms of separation of work life and personal (faith) life. P5 emphasised that the amount of work that went into supporting the regular Sunday Eucharist over time resulted in "I was getting nothing… I realised halfway through last year that I was not getting anything spiritual out of it [Mass]" (P5) and this realisation was perceived as "a sign of doing too

much" (P5). The leadership balance between personal faith and professional faith leadership can thus be complex, demanding, and vary from person to person. Such leadership also emerged in the data as not solely in the hands of principals and priests but often shared with other members of the communities.

5.4.2 Broader Lay Leadership

Research data affirms the literature conclusion that support from other teachers for the principal's faith leadership role is necessary but diminishing over time (Arbuckle, 2013; Convey, 2012). Fewer staff have theology or religious education qualifications or personal faith formation and practice (Bernardo et al., 2019; Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Gleeson, 2020). This context is reflected in one principal expressing that, "we want to be part of the parish, probably, more than what we are, [but] staff members have varying degrees of engagement in parishes" (P1). Others comment on staff who "haven't got the same backgrounds and the knowledge" (P8) to support children in better engaging with the parish, particularly when some "aren't Catholic" (P5). Notwithstanding this limitation, a priest conveys another dimension, observing teachers with faith and knowledge not necessarily being connected to parish, saying, "I think our school teachers are probably the best prominent leaders in our church community. But, I would say the majority see their ministry is the 'nine to three' ministry that happens in the school" (F1). He recognises the strength of those "older teachers who are very, very grounded in their faith" (F1) as bringing confidence and knowledge which isn't only "something they're taking from a book" but are living with the children. And because of this, as an example, when such faith-grounded teachers are "leading liturgy… they can put together with the children a liturgy that is very profound" (F1). He further expresses a longing for such individuals to share their creative leadership more in the parish.

Two broad groups, other than teachers, are recognised as providing, or having potential to provide, leadership in terms of the parish/school relationship. The first are members of school boards, especially proprietor's appointees who are specifically tasked by the bishop to "assist in preserving the Special [Catholic] Character" (NZCEO, 2020b, p. 24) of the school. While participants spoke positively about those members of the board appointed, usually from the parish, to help support the Catholic character of the school – "They're lovely, they're awesome" (P8) – it was also recognised that "they don't do anything with the parish [and school relationship]" (P8). One priest referred to the bishop's appointees as "parish representatives" (F5) but commented that they "haven't any background about Catholicism" (F5) other than their own personal experience. He also believes that because the main focus of the school board is on the non-religious dimensions of school life, "their

purpose is the school… it's tricky to get Boards to really understand what Catholic special character is" (P5). Because of this, when school boards discuss links to parish, their discussion is usually diminished to "that really little portion" (F5) such as sacramental programmes, or shared Masses, rather than deeper connections to parish life. Some participants did appreciate, and mention by name, proprietor's appointees with "strong connections" (P1) to parish and school as being "proactive" in trying to create a stronger parish/school relationship. However, this was usually in a context of "a one-way street" (P4) where certain school board members are striving for a better connection to parish, but the parish is perceived as not reciprocating. Thus, in terms of specific leadership, a need for more effective training and support for the school board, especially those members appointed to support Catholic character, is needed. The second broad group of recognised leaders are those parishioners with strong connections to the parish and school who quietly and without formal recognition give of their time, skills, and enthusiasm to build community. This is typically achieved through affirming and welcoming children and their families who come to shared Sunday Masses, or are involved with sacramental programmes, or with shared social justice initiatives. All participants in this research name such "key people" (P1), or refer to associated practical leadership characteristics, as significantly influencing the parish/school relationship. However, while recognising the importance of such individuals, and grieving there being "less of them around" (F4), little evidence emerged in the study of strategic, or even informal, efforts to affirm or grow such individuals to support or succeed those already engaged in the endeavour of better connecting parish and school.

5.4.2 Critical Leadership Elements

Within the context of leadership, three leadership characteristics emerged in the data as critical to the parish/school relationship. Each have been touched on in previous discussion but, due to their level of importance, require specific development and emphasis.

5.4.2.1 Responsibility.

Principals experience the weight of responsibility to ensure the Catholic special character is consistently "modelled throughout the school [community] whether we're at church or at school (P7)". In a context of declining engagement with parish life, they understand themselves to have "even more and more responsibility" (P1) to fill a recognised gap between parish and the lives of the families associated with the Catholic parish school. At the same time, in recognition of their roles as faith leaders, they perceive the school as doing far more to connect children and families to Church than the parish. As P1 claims, it's Catholic schools that are "more and more…[supporting] children,

students and families in their faith journey and being alongside them in their faith journey, and, actually, giving them a faith journey" (P1). In the context of a smaller school leading the organisation of a Shared Sunday Eucharist, this responsibility emerges as significantly personal, "When we say the school's running it, I'm running it, I am the school" (P5).

Pressure felt by principals to lead the school community's connection to parish as part of evangelising outreach and faith formation, albeit ideally with support from other teachers, is well represented in the literature, along with a reality that ultimate, strategic and evaluated (NZCEO, 2022) responsibility formally resides with the principal (Bernardo et al., 2019; Branson et al., 2019; Gleeson, 2020; NZCEO, 2020b; Swen, 2020). All priests interviewed in this research recognise principals' efforts in this regard, and their own place in "working together" (F1) to support and dialogue with them and help build the relationship. However, while consistently cognisant of the principal's challenges in connecting school families to parish life, and while personally seeking to support them, the priest's personal responsibility for engagement of the parish with the school is less strategic in the data and more readily delegated to the school community, and thus to the principal in the first instance. At the same time, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops (2024) affirm in their synodal documentation that "schools are already places where co-responsibility is exercised, involving lay people, priests and the bishop" (para. 27). The same document highlights difficulty expressed by priests in needing to feel more "supported and not alone in the journey" (para. 34), as they too bear significant responsibility for leading the parish and building better relationships and connections, including with the school. This isolation of priests and their need for support is also recognised by principals in this research: "I think he's lonely" (P3). Finally, regarding leadership responsibility, the synodal document hints at possible practical support through a more structured evaluation of successes and challenges as:

> Lay people brought their experience of appraisals and performance reviews into the context of clergy accountability and seek similar processes for their pastors. The bishops considered that "performance reviews could be useful as long as they help priests and bishops be better pastors." (NZCBC, 2024, para. 35)

5.4.2.2 Workload.

Prioritisation of multiple other demands over deepening the relationship between the parish and school is common in the data. Ever-increasing expectations on Catholic school principals requires them to find the time, and have the skills and aptitude, to promote Catholic identity, lead faith

formation and monitor religious education while also managing rising secular expectations regarding governance, pastoral care, financial management, and a plethora of educational leadership minutiae (Ministry of Education, 2023; NZCEO, 2020c; Sullivan & Peña, 2019). P5 highlights the perception of many principals burning out due to workload, and another principal lists five different time-consuming roles and states "I'm just too busy to do everything" (P7). Similarly, as outlined in Chapter 4, workload and time pressures are also increasing for pastors, with diminishing numbers of priests, and parish priests often connected to two or more parish schools. In this context, principals consistently allow for diminishing engagement with schools by the parish priest because "he's really busy" (P1).

With both sets of leaders recognising the impact of busyness in their own and each other's lives, there is recognition of the need to plan strategically rather than haphazardly to manage not just the workload but the impact of actions taken: "We need to have actions which we can enact, and we can say, hey that works really well and we need to embed it" (P1). Most principals in the research mention parish connection strategic goals which they summarise as "living and learning our Catholic faith" (P8), or "understand and live out our special character more" (P4). However, the important link of including the parish in the discussion is usually omitted "because we don't know who to go to to have those conversations" (P1). This last comment is immediately followed by a remark indicating the priest would like to be involved but is usually unavailable due to myriad tasks and responsibilities associated with the wider parish. With a need for more knowledgeable practicing Catholic teachers (Bernardo et al., 2019; Franchi & Rymarz, 2017), and a rising synodal call for priests to allow laity to support them more in their leadership roles (NZCBC, 2024), there is an active hope that with appropriate formation the load may be better shared. With priests' and principals' workload demands reduced, there can be greater scope for improved focus on building the parish/school relationship.

5.4.2.3 Formation.

"When do we build our leaders? When do we get onto that pathway? (P4).

Research identifies the necessity of principals being able to effectively lead faith formation, particularly Catholic identity and mission, as critical for effectively sharing the Catholic faith with others (BCECCP, 2014; Hawley, 2015; Nuzzi et al., 2009; Owen, 2018). However, while every principal of a Catholic school in Aotearoa New Zealand is required to be a "fully committed and active Catholic" (NZCEO, 2020b, p. 61) with appropriate leadership attributes, the most recent NZ study to

investigate principal qualifications found that less than one in five principals had a Catholic character or religious education qualification, and fewer than one in 10 were studying towards one (The Catholic Institute of Aotearoa NZ, 2019). This lack of formation is becoming increasingly common on the Catholic educational landscape, both locally and internationally (Boyle et al., 2016; Morten & Lawler, 2016; Owen, 2018). The growing number of principals who lack an informed perspective on evangelisation and the Church's mission, contextualised by their own living and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, has associated diminishing influence on establishing and growing Catholic identity within the school community (Branson et al., 2019). In this context the positive, nurturing presence of the parish priest can benefit not just engagement but understanding of what it means to be Catholic and part of parish life (Hawley, 2015).

With respect to priests, there is sound advice in the synodal observation that as "a Church in mission we need to start listening constructively to one another… [and avert] the reality for many that clerical egos are getting in the way of this" (NZCBC, 2024, para. 22). Indeed, the NZ bishops acknowledge the need for "seminary formation, including the ability to dialogue, especially listen… [to underpin] the leadership style of priests … as crucial in fostering synodality and co-responsibility" (NZCBC, 2024, para. 33). The added challenge of seminarians and priests being recruited from overseas, with significantly different cultural and theological expectations of parish life and lay leadership, only exacerbates the problem and highlights the need for timely and appropriate formation (Arbuckle, 2019).

It is understood that, unlike most principals, priests have significant Catholic theological and pastoral training. While all priests in the research express learning and growing in their roles through personal endeavours and experience, and two specifically mention engaging with the synodal process (F4, F5), particular intentional formation for them to better engage with schools is absent in the data. They have a sense that leadership starts "with me" (F4) … as principals' and others' "own faith and experience and suffering, and their passion" (F4) connects with the priest's. All pastors in this research had at least eight years' experience of working with parishes and parish schools, with some having several decades. However, mirroring the literature (Arbuckle, 2013; Boyle & Dosen, 2017), there is little evidence of formal training to better support priests working more effectively with schools. Indeed, the researcher was concerned to discover the national seminary of Aotearoa New Zealand provides seminarians with no structured formation for working with Catholic schools (see section 4.3.3.1).

This lack of seminarian formation and training presents as a major obstacle in supporting the parish/school relationship. It also seems to be an easily remedied barrier, where experienced principals, priests, and a qualified formator, could readily provide quality, meaningful, and current content for priestly formation which could also be utilised by parish priests and principals throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Succinctly, one principal comments on a perceived need to "build our leaders" and support priests through greater recognition and involvement of lay people because "otherwise these churches aren't going to survive. They're not going to stay there because our priests aren't growing" (P4).

As has been noted throughout this research, principals interviewed consistently speak positively about the authenticity and positive intent of their parish priests. At the same time, principals are reflective about their own leadership when considering why children and families are not engaging with parish life. One principal sees a need to rethink "what we're offering, so we need to actually think of different ways of doing it" (P1). And, thinking and implementing effective 'different ways' will be significantly supported by appropriate and contextual training and formation.

5.5 Recognising and Participating in Change

"What is going to happen to the Church in the future?" (P4)

Relationships between parishes and parish schools have changed over time and continue to change. The four features of centrality of identity, evangelisation and mission, being community, and leadership, discussed thus far in this research, emerged from the data as clear and coherent categories. However, the fifth feature of recognising and participating in change arose from the literature and more subtle interplay between interview data, providing significant additional perspective for further contextualising and understanding micro and macro aspects (Mutch, 2020) of the parish/school relationship.

Margaret Archer's (1995) Morphogenetic Approach (MA), as discussed in Chapter 2, is not formally applied in this research; rather, theoretical insight is taken from the approach to explain elements associated with change which may enhance or limit parishes and schools relating to one another.

5.5.1 A Morphogenetic Perspective

The literature asserts that Catholic parishes and schools represent small but integral parts of a significant international organisation. The Catholic Church has over one billion adherents, with a spectrum of personal and collective influential power, reflecting associated intentional and unintentional human agency, over nearly 2,000 years of global and parochial history, and formal and informal development of structure (CLS, 1983; Flannery, 1996; Francis, 2021; Hitchcock, 2012; McBrien, 1994). It is within this context of diversity and flux, albeit with dogmatic understandings of consistent apostolic tradition and theological stability (CLS, 1983; Flannery, 1996; Francis, 2023a), that participants in this research express concern and uncertainty regarding the future shape and direction of the Catholic Church. With church buildings being sold, parishes combining, and ever-diminishing Mass attendance there are latent fears that the Church may not survive in Aotearoa New Zealand in either parishes or schools. This challenge was expressed by Archbishop Mark Coleridge at the NZ 2023 National Assembly of Diocesan Priests:

> Parishes were built on the assumption that most Catholics would come to Mass. Now they don't. We still have structures based on those other times. What are the real facts on the ground now? We need to show a bit of apostolic integrity and take risks. (NZCBC, 2023)

In terms of the parish/school relationship, the Morphogenetic Approach provides a lens through which one may recognise important contextual elements for understanding and planning such risk-taking. Thus, within this specific relationship the following concisely considers: the motivation to change or preserve; the interconnectedness of organisation, beliefs, and influence; the impact of individuals and groups reflecting and making decisions; and the significance of time.

5.5.1.1 Stasis or Change.

The axiom that all things change is addressed through the MA lens as an impetus, at macro and micro levels within social systems, to reproduce or confirm established social arrangements or to elaborate or change them (Archer, 1995; Mutch, 2020; Porpora, 2013). Archer (1995) uses the term morphostasis to describe processes which maintain or preserve a social system's given state, form, or organisation, and the term morphogenesis to indicate processes which change or elaborate such states, forms, or organisation. When considering the relationship between parishes and parish schools, as social systems within social systems, each with diverse understandings of identity, mission, community, and leadership practice, the data resonates with the perspective that morphostasis and morphogenesis play significant roles. With no predetermined ideal preferred state

or pre-set form, diverse processes are formed by the intentional or unintentional consequences of people's activities (Archer, 1995, 2021). Recognition of such driving forces helps contextualise the reality and impact of change as a key element of parish and school life, and thus as an integral element of understanding their relationship with one another.

Morphogenesis is reflected throughout the data through consistent perceptions that society and parish life is changing. A principal reflects on fewer parents participating in community activities because "people don't want to connect" (P7) outside of tasks which represent their individual or familial needs and desires. "Older people who are very much hands-on with sleeves rolled up [are] in the past now… and there's not a group below who are prepared to commit themselves" (F6) to filling the vacuum. "Committed Catholics are not around" (F3) to model and lead parish life, and in some places the "demographic's changed" (F3), with younger families no longer living in the area because "first-time houses are now flats for students" (F3). In some cases, traditional parish/school behaviours such as running a community fair have become "totally flipped" (F4) where "it used to be all the church, and a few school helpers. Now it's the other way round" (F4), and where the funds were once shared 50/50 the school now doesn't "want to give half of it to the parish who don't help" (F4). In terms of parishes and schools themselves, with the decline of parish numbers Catholic schools have moved from primarily being perceived as part of the parish, supporting practicing Catholic parents in the faith formation of their children, to being potential, though largely failing, centres of evangelisation to get "bums on seats… to make it sustainable" (P4) for the parish to survive financially and as a faith community.

In terms of morphostasis, participants consistently refer to parishioner desires and efforts to maintain and preserve a perceived status quo which often struggles to exist or may have already dissipated. One principal summarised a parish as rejecting potential positive change because they have "no identity, no group going forward with anything, they're just doing the same old same old" (P8) with "no actual forward strategic" (P8) planning. Another described parishioners' struggle "to get their head around a wee bit of change" (P4) as based in their desire to show "their Catholicity in the way they know best" (P4), but that such perceived intransigence is ultimately futile because "innovation is another way that parish is going to have to be" (P4). Yet another expressed frustration that "people are resistant to change" (P3), with attempts at change described as challenging and time-consuming through "trying to get it all done and actually getting nowhere" (P3). In this context, obstinance in the face of change is seen as a barrier to the parish/school relationship because the school is prepared to grow to support its families, but the parish is not.

While motivation exists for change, there is awareness that there can be good reasons for people wanting to preserve what is currently valued. “At the heart of it people want people to experience what they experience, like to have that community experience and something that is faith-filled” (P4). The centrality of the Eucharist as “source and summit of Christian life” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1324; Paul VI, 1964, para. 11) for Catholic communities and individuals is a critical example of an element of the parish/school relationship reflecting influence from both morphogenesis and morphostasis processes. No participants suggested that the Eucharist was no longer important; however, priests and principals both consistently reflected that patterns of Mass engagement had changed, and that personal faith formation and evangelisation must be more than compliance with expected practice and rules (CLS, 1983). The Mass must, necessarily, retain its position, character and power (Francis, 2023a; Paul VI, 1963) and at the same time liturgy leaders must find new and appropriate ways to speak through the liturgy to families in Catholic school communities who struggle to see its relevance in their lives.

Overall, interview participants reflect awareness of the significance of pressure around change. However, MA posits that deeper understanding of what is actually taking place in myriad and often complex desires for change or preservation requires active consideration of structure, culture, and agency. In reality, entities such as parishes and Catholic schools do not exist or change by themselves but are intimately related with individuals and groups responding to what they care about when “uncovering our ultimate concerns” (Archer, 2013b, p. 74).

5.5.1.2 Structure, Culture, and Agency.

Parishes and schools have structure, culture, and agency. Structure and culture, though distinct, are inherently relational with one another, and each influences and is influenced by human agency (Archer, 1995, 2016, 2021). It is useful to identify the interplay of these elements within the parish/school relationship, as each brings identifiable nuances to support better understanding of how the relationship is being limited or enhanced.

Structures, through the MA lens, are relational, and interest-based, with the capacity to constrain, enable, and motivate people’s actions and the reasons behind them. They involve established relations among key stakeholders in terms of bureaucracy, organisations and social positions. In the context of this research, the structure of the global Catholic Church in terms of organisation and authority, as exercised at diocesan and local parish levels by bishops, priests, principals, and other individuals, significantly influences certain elements of parish identity and mission. Awareness of this

is expressed in a principal directly associating the decline of the school's roll with the lack of expected structural support from the diocese: "the diocese has given up on the parish, the diocese has given up on the school" (P5). Similarly, several symbolic representations offered by interview participants help highlight structural elements of parish/school relationships: First, 'the key and the lock' (P6), where the authority of the priest and an associated perception of a lack of flexibility in accommodating the school is seen as a structural barrier. Second, 'companions on the journey' (F4), where the age, power and status of the parish is placed alongside the relative youth and emerging faith of less 'churched' school families, with both having capacity to positively influence each other; and, finally, 'the seed bed' (F5), 'St Joseph the Carpenter' (F6), and 'the Good Shepherd' (F3), where three parish priests acknowledge their responsibility to model the Catholic faith in their communities. Structure is evident then as influential and identifiable: parishes and schools, through their people and organisation, individually and collectively, constrain, enable, and motivate people's actions and the reasons behind them.

Culture within MA represents collective ideas, opinions and beliefs based on shared understandings. While relational with structure, culture involves more than structural concepts and includes recorded myths and histories, documents, artefacts, traditions, buildings, and so on, around which people interact and interpret, agree and disagree, on who they are and what actions they should take (Hardy, 2019). In the context of this research, Catholic culture is evident in vast tracts of formal Church writing and tradition. It is also present in land and buildings as formal connections to the Catholic Church and as sacred spaces for faith formation and practice. Participants value such cultural connections, and also include aspects associated with charism, past priests, behavioural expectations by older parishioners, and knowledge and practice associated with liturgical celebration. However, with decreasing numbers of experienced, practicing Catholic principals and teachers there is also fear regarding retention, or appropriate elaboration, of Catholic culture in the parish/school relationship, particularly with numbers of older parishioners, as figures of wisdom and experience, also declining:

> We start looking at our natural family, you know, this one here has got all the wisdom but it's ageing, ailing, surrendering, depleting and you start looking at the school groups. You know there's energy and talent and new ideas and visions for the future but less of the tradition and the wisdom. It's a bit kind of who is steering us? (F4)

The MA lens of culture also helps those within the parish/school relationship to recognise that an absence of shared cultural understandings poses significant challenge. If Church teaching and practice is not known and/or valued, and if school families are not supported in engaging in learning and making such cultural connections, then what is shared at a cultural level will be disparate. In essence, if people don't believe in Jesus and have little interest in the Church, they're unlikely to want to connect with a community that does. This is particularly so when shared elements of secular culture become more and more dominant in the lives of families. However, conscious of this reality of conflicting cultures, participants indicate a consistent countercultural, invitational voice as they claim and reinterpret their Catholic identity, especially through religious education and Catholic school life (NCRS, 2021; NZCBC, 2014), and choose to actively accompany and support "the children, students and families in their faith journey" (P1) wherever that may lead.

In this context of living structure and culture, the critical facet of agency also emerges from MA. People are necessarily involved. They make choices and act within structural and cultural realities which have impact on social, collective and professional identity. Archer (2017) considers people as being within two groups of agents. First, primary agents, who have little intentional, coordinated influence on structures because they do not motivate or organise themselves to strategically do so; and second, corporate agents who actively and intentionally articulate and enact goals as "organised interest groups" (Karlsson, 2020, p. 47). In terms of this research, this may be seen in groups who choose only to sit in the pews or not turn up at all, or alternatively in those who actively and strategically lead and engage. People's intentions and choices matter.

A key insight from MA, in terms of the parish/school relationship, is that individuals are not solely or perpetually primary or corporate agents within groups. These roles change over time and depend on social context (Archer, 2015). For example, a formal designated leader, such as a priest or principal, may once have been a significant leader in terms of effecting change (morphogenesis) but may have drifted into primary agency over time, having little impact on the parish or school due to succumbing to barriers within Church or society's "structural and cultural properties" (Archer, 2000, p. 261) and developing low expectations and poor collective strategic direction. Similarly, people can emerge in certain areas as strong corporate agents even though they may hold no formal responsibility or title, such as those 'key people' mentioned throughout the research interviews.

Structure and culture are formed, interpreted and responded to by people, and within MA the term agency captures this understanding of human endeavour and participation. It is critical not to

disassociate the organisational structure and cultural sets of understandings from the choices and actions of individuals and groups. Also, in further articulating agency, the element of human reflexivity suggests potential additional insights into the parish/school relationship.

5.5.1.3 Reflexivity.

Reflexivity is the term which describes people's processes of weighing up and reflecting on possible options through an internal conversation as influenced by personal concerns, projects and intentions (Archer, 2003). Four types of reflexivity are suggested in MA literature (Archer, 2003; Mutch, 2020) and resonate with this research: 1) Conversational reflexivity, in which people reflect and process their thinking in conversation with like-minded others based on shared assumptions. In this context traditional understandings are often affirmed, such as parishioners with similar experiences holding agreed expectations on schools and families in terms of faith practice. It also resonates with groups of parents who have grown up Catholic but who now share understandings that faith in Jesus is peripheral rather than central to Catholic education – "they don't, then, have the same values" (P6). 2) Autonomous reflexivity, in which people make 'rational' decisions based on conversations involving particular shared assumptions. In the data this is evidenced by priests and principals acting from positions they perceive as correct within their own communities. Examples include F2 signing a preference form for a child's enrolment when the family technically did not meet the criteria, or P4 worshipping and being on the roster as a family for the school parish rather than their own geographical parish, or F4 encouraging appointment of a new principal with greater strengths in the faith dimension than the professional educational dimension of leadership – "that other stuff he'll pick up" (F4). Autonomous reflexivity also aligns with priests making rational decisions based on their own clerical authority within the Church (CLS, 1983) and associated positive and negative implications regarding clericalism (Darragh, 2019a; Lam, 2021). 3) Meta reflexivity, in which people reflect on patterns and styles of reflexivity, along with successes or failures, as they question old certainties and make decisions amidst myriad possibilities and alternatives. Considered to be on the rise in contemporary society (Archer, 2007; Mutch, 2020) this approach appears consistently in interview comments where participants are grappling with claiming and redefining elements of the parish/school relationship where traditional aspects are waning but the desire to create in new ways community, participation, and belonging remains strong. This is seen in an emphasis being placed on school families feeling a sense of "permission to have that connection" (F1), so that even though they might not go to Sunday Mass the hope is that they will feel they "belong to the parish" (F5). And, finally, 4) Fractured reflexivity, in which people disengage and fail to monitor or effectively plan to address their ultimate concerns. Such people may be considered as "society's victims" (Mutch,

2020, p. 4), impacted and shaped by external forces which they make no strategic plans to influence. In the parish/school relationship this type of reflexivity can result in people simply giving up and opting out with large or small attitudes of frustration or apathy towards the parish or school, but due to the lack of meaningful engagement they actually "don't know what they are missing" (P4), or indeed, what could be gained with more intentional and strategic reflexivity.

It is critical to remember that these four types of reflexivity do not summarise entire persons or groups. There is ongoing interplay between them and depending on contexts, time, and personal affiliations with ultimate concerns, people may find themselves in any of these types. The usefulness of such terms for this research is that they provide facets within the broader MA lens through which people may recognise reasons for particular stances regarding the parish/school relationship and thus prompt additional internal and external conversations to more deeply engage with one another.

Responding to change with intentional choices for stasis or elaboration (corporate agency) are a necessary element of developing and understanding the parish/school relationship. The challenge to address change is made:

> Those little bits are there every day. The opportunities are there. I've just got to open my eyes. So, it's a different mindset. And yes, I have to do that because it is hard staying in the other mindset, so we have to adapt. (P1)

5.5.1.4 The Significance of Time.

The final facet provided through the MA lens is the element of time. The focus here is not on the nature of time (Hartog, 2021; Hawking, 1988; Murchadha, 2013), but rather the experience and impact of time. As has been discussed, societal structures and cultures develop through reflexivity over time as people experience having their concerns, intentions, or desires met or not met. Corporate agency waxes and wanes as, over time, individuals and groups influence maintenance or transformation of societal structures (Archer, 1995) such as parishes and schools. MA posits the existence of morphogenetic cycles where established structural and cultural conditioning can be recognised as claimed starting points, being historically 'in place' and providing motivation for choices and actions from those associated with them. From these starting points, over time people make decisions and actions which effect preservation or change in structural and cultural circumstances. These mid-phases of people exploring opportunities, boundaries, and inherited

powers to influence stasis or change (Lindsey & Wiltshire, 2022) are referred to as socio-cultural interaction and social interaction. Subsequently, a third phase – a new 'elaboration' – becomes evident where the social system can no longer be recognised as its starting point and may be considered a "new elaborated configuration" (Donati, 2013, p. 215) from which the morphogenetic cycles may begin again.

The critical insight for this research is that parishes and schools must be understood as new elaborations of what they were when established. Indeed, through intentional and unintentional interaction of structure, culture, agency, reflexivity and time, parishes and schools are different from what they were when elderly parishioners may have attended as children. Associated attitudes and expectations of "generations of people who have got an interest" (F3) may be more applicable to what the entities were then than what they are now. Similarly, the Catholic Church itself has necessarily experienced elaboration through the interaction of people over time, as evidenced in pre-and post-Vatican II eras, through leadership transitions inclusive of Popes John XXIII to Francis, and through responses to the horror and shame of endemic sexual abuse and cover-ups by Church persons (Arbuckle, 2019). This is not to say that there is no value in understanding the original intent of the establishment, maintenance, and development of parishes and schools.

Church teaching, founding orders, charisms, associated historical narratives, and impact of past leaders and members all contribute to the structure, culture and agency of current parishes and schools. However, in highlighting the disparate understandings associated with identity, mission/evangelisation, community and leadership, the MA lens highlights as critical the determination of what and who parishes and schools are now, rather than what they were five, 10, 50 or 100 years ago. The consistent pressure of change requires recognition that change exists, and associated active intentional response regarding what parishes and schools are and what they may become. The alternative is to be adrift in a sea of fractured reflexivity and inert primary agency. In this context the research data resonates with the hope-filled process of synodality (FCBCO, 2023; Francis, 2021; NZCBC, 2024) and consistently highlights awareness that participants' expectations and experience of what it is to be Church has changed over time. These changes need to be brought to the fore and addressed, with the intention of discerning who the Church was, is, and is called to be in parishes and Catholic schools.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and contextualised the major findings of the research question, “What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand?” It has drawn together data and posed implications regarding identity as a central feature of the parish/school relationship, as intimately connected with key features of evangelisation and mission, being community, and leadership. The need to recognise and participate in change, as framed through the lens of the Morphogenetic Approach, has also been presented as the remaining key feature within the research.

Synthesis of these findings into a substantive theory demonstrating the resulting experience of participation and belonging in terms of faith mission/vision, community/connection, welcome and communion, is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 Theory and Implications

This final chapter presents the substantive Parish/School Relationship Theory (PSRT) developed through the research process to explain the complexities of the parish/school relationship within the participant group in this Aotearoa NZ study. The theory is aligned with the key features presented in Chapter 5, as sought through the research question, "What are key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand?" Implications of findings are related to mission and vision, leadership formation, and engagement with change over time. Limitations and delimitations are highlighted, as are recommendations for further research. The research context and purpose are summarised as a platform for contextualisation of the theory and findings.

6.1 Context and Purpose

The researcher's experience of working with Catholic school principals, and directors of religious studies, along with diocesan education managers, bishops, and parish priests, suggested both varied opportunity and wide-ranging concern regarding the parish/school relationship. The research was also prompted by a dearth of local or international literature which pointed to how this specific relationship might be enhanced.

Chapter 1 contextualises the study, stating that, over time, nationally and globally, the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools was strong and founded on shared understandings of Catholic identity and mission. However, contemporary Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa NZ present as having little connection outside of physical proximity, usually a shared name and independent understandings that they are each Catholic. Hence, the aim and purpose of this research was to investigate and explain the complexities of relationships that exist between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. The process of inquiry involved interviewing priests and principals within a diocesan metropolitan area, and, drawing on the principles of classic grounded theory (CGT), to conceptualise and categorise the data through a process of constant comparison.

6.2 Approach to Research Design

In the absence of both qualitative and quantitative data addressing the parish/school relationship, either in local or international literature, the researcher claimed a relativist ontological position. He determined that an objective known phenomenon was not waiting to be discovered but that sets of subjective experiences would arise and develop multiple meanings constructed by participants

themselves (Boynton, 2011; Levers, 2013). The associated constructivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998) of this qualitative research sought to build new understandings of features of the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools through interviewing priests and principals from whom meaning was collectively constructed and categorised through constant comparison of transcript data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Parish priests and associated parish school principals were chosen as research participants because of their roles as leaders of each entity. They brought personal, meaningful experience and knowledge, including myriad complex and informative connections to others within their communities. An interpretative theoretical perspective incorporated symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1980; Mead, 1934) to support the construction and articulation of meaning through a dynamic process of social interaction: principals and priests interacted with the research from their most salient positions as leaders within parishes and schools (Bowers, 1989; Handberg et al., 2015). Unstructured interviews were used to ensure the participants had full control of the direction of the research conversation supporting maximum potential to provide complex, meaningful, and open data pertaining to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kvale, 2009). The researcher only intervened to seek elaboration or to refocus the participant if they drifted to non-related conversation.

The principles of CGT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were utilised throughout the research as these have full synergy with the above stances and theoretical perspectives (Glaser, 2002a; Guerrero Puerta & Lorente García, 2024). Data from interview participants were categorised through the process of constant comparison, and guided in construction and interpretation by the previously stated research question and guiding sub-questions of “What features do parish priests and principals perceive as enhancing the relationship between parish and parish school?”, and “What features do parish priests and principals perceive as limiting the relationship?” The researcher limited personal bias during phases of coding by focusing only on the data themselves and by not consulting extant literature until after the categorisation of features was complete. This was followed by reading widely to seek synergy or contradiction with findings, as presented in Chapters 2 and 5.

The researcher presented intermediary findings from the process as unrefined features in Chapter 4. While linking to the key features of Chapter 5, it was considered that these characteristics, identified solely from participant interviews during the categorisation phases, were worthy of presentation as undeveloped insights into the parish/school relationship, and as emerging context for the key

features. More specifically, each unrefined feature brings its own insight and has potential for further research.

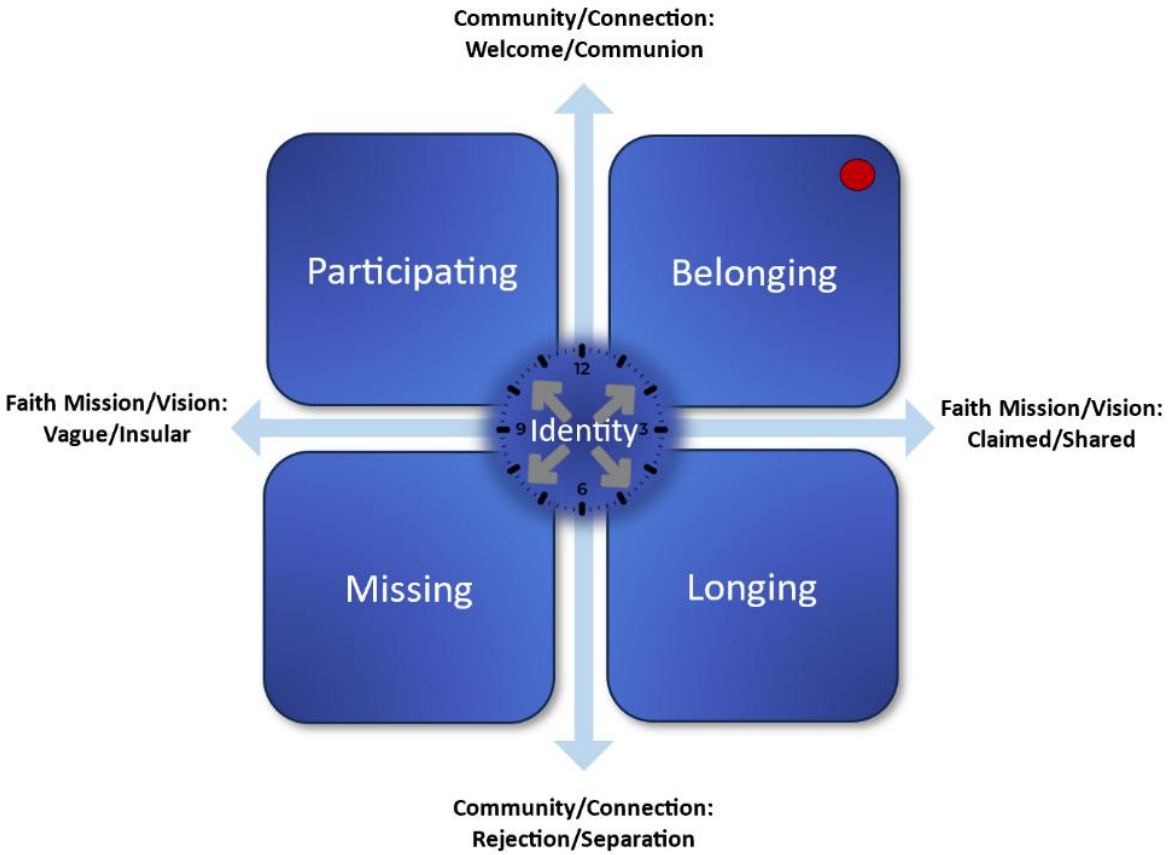
Detailed discussion and analysis of the five key features is presented in Chapter 5 and is contextualised within living parish/school relationships described by interview participants, and within associated extant literature. Having been identified as critical to the parish/school relationship, these key features are further developed into a substantive theory.

6.3 The Parish/School Relationship Theory

The substantive Parish/School Relationship Theory (PSRT) is the primary result of the research aim and methodological approach. The five key features to emerge from this research are: the centrality of identity; evangelisation and mission; being community; leadership; and recognising and participating in change. Constructed using these features, applying the principles of CGT, the emergent substantive PSRT model (see Figure 6.1) is described as follows, with each PSRT element presented and developed sequentially.

Figure 6.1

The *Parish/School Relationship Theory (PSRT) Model*



All key features play a significant role within the PSRT, however, not all are overtly labelled in the model. Table 6.1 offers a summary of how the features are integrated, with more detail provided in later description of each element.

Table 6.1

Relationship Between Research Key Features and Specific PSRT Elements and Contexts

Research Key Feature	Specific PSRT Element	Context within PSRT
The Centrality of Identity	Identity	The central concept, linked to all areas of the theory
Evangelisation and Mission	Faith Mission/Vision Axis	A conceptual spectrum from vague/insular to claimed/shared
Being Community	Community/Connection Axis	A conceptual spectrum from rejection/separation to welcome/communion
Leadership	*Not specifically labelled*	Conceptually integrated with identity and change
Recognising and Participating in Change	Clock face image representing Time and Change	Conceptually linked with identity and to all areas of the theory

6.3.1 Centrality of Identity

The concept of identity is placed at the centre of the PSRT model. The graphic has blurred edges and omnidirectional arrows indicating its dynamic presence and impact in all areas of the theory (see Figure 6.2). Personal and communal identity, and changing identities, influence not just who people and groups may perceive themselves to be, but also how they engage and respond within and between parishes and schools. Thus, personal and communal understandings of identity underpin not just in which quadrants individuals and groups may be represented, but why and how they may move within and between the quadrants in different circumstances and as varying salient selves emerge to interact with others.

The identities of parishes and parish schools, and the individuals and groups within them, are dynamic not static, and are multi-faceted rather than mono-dimensional. For instance, while the Church may rightly affirm the Nicene Creed's claim to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic (Paul VI, 1964a), with myriad supporting documents and commentaries articulating what this means, the reality in practice is that perceptions of 'what the Church is' vary among groups and from person to

person. Furthermore, associated understandings of a formal global Catholic identity can change from context to context, moment to moment. The same person may recognise through a lens of contemporary media that the Church is abusive, arrogant and un-Christlike, and through another lens of specific pastoral care of a child in a Catholic school, that the Church is loving, grounded, and Christ-centred. In addition, aspects of Church, or the Church as a whole, may be embraced or rejected because of people's experience with individual priests and Catholic school principals, or through diverse other circumstances, relationships, or experiences.

Similarly, the collective sense of what a Catholic parish or parish school is identified to be, or is perceived as, and what it identifies itself to be as reflected within sectors of each community, depends on circumstances, relationships and experiences. Within these diverse contexts, collective and individual senses of identity connect and disconnect over time as varying salient selves emerge to respond to structural or cultural influences. For instance, formal or informal changes in leadership can potentially affect someone identifying with either community or choosing to avoid one or the other altogether. Secular influences and a shared lack of prioritisation of the faith dimension of Catholic schools amongst parents can also create a climate of overt, intentional disconnection with parish. Alternatively, invitational conversations oriented towards welcoming and belonging can reinforce existing Catholic identity, and/or influence resting or drifting Catholics to identify again with elements of their faith they may previously have thought no longer relevant to their lives. Within such identity fluidity, positions are dynamic rather than static as people move rapidly or slowly over time between a range of associated stances.

Figure 6.2

Identity

6.3.2 Impact of Time and Change

Incorporating the key feature of recognising and participating in change, Time and Change are represented in the PSRT model as overlaying identity because of the shifting nature of identities over time. Time and change are depicted by the outlying markers of a clock face (see Figure 6.3) which is central because it impacts on all areas of parish and school life. It is critical that time is consciously considered, because parishes and schools necessarily change over time. Time is not accidental or avoidable, but implicitly incorporates intentional and unintentional structural and cultural influences and responses: buildings and boundaries change, parents age, children grow up, leaders are appointed and leave, school boards and parish councils wax and wane in terms of capacity and effectiveness, parishioners and parents engage and disengage, popes come and go, issues such as abuse, clericalism, and synodality affect behaviours and attitudes within and towards the Church, and so on. The impact of change over time is not aberrant but normal.

Foundational understandings for the original establishment and maintenance of parishes and schools may still be claimed in documentation and institutional memory, but over time communities and practice have likely, passively or intentionally, markedly moved away from those ideals in practice. For example, within the data, the centrality of Eucharist while still the source and summit of Christian identity for the Church, may now be perceived by many as a significant but optional element of Catholic identity and practice. Similarly, social justice outreach to the wider community once deeply connected to answering the Gospel call to serve the *anawim* (the poor), may have become disconnected from faith and aligned more with secular values of kindness and generosity than with Catholic social teaching. Also, 'preference' for entry into Catholic schools, initially established to serve committed practicing Catholic families and to ensure the Catholicity of the school community, may now function more as a mechanism aligned with opportunity for the new evangelisation than support of already faith-filled families.

The purpose of recognising the impact of time is not to grieve a lost past, but rather to help plan for the present and future. Revisioning past ideals and/or establishing new vision cannot occur without authentic recognition of who individuals and communities were and who they are now, including what they value, seek, and need. Similarly, letting go of elements of historic, inaccurate, or defunct missions and visions in favour of developing more authentic identities and communities is often an important step in recognising a truer sense of mission and belonging. Such recognition is as important for effective development of faith-filled parish communities as it is for evangelisation of those on the periphery of parish life. This research claims it is useful and necessary to recognise the

reality of change not as a problem to be mitigated but as an ever-present force which people cannot avoid because it is integral to living communities. The force of change is one with which people intentionally or unintentionally choose to participate through passive or active responses, and active participation is required to purposefully shape the direction of inexorable change within the parish/school relationship.

Figure 6.3

Time and Change

6.3.3 Integration of Leadership

The key feature of leadership is not specifically labelled within the PSRT model but is integral to supporting the establishment and naming of identities and managing and effecting intentional or unintentional change over time. Thus, leadership occurs in all areas of the model. Principals and priests, along with others who hold formal or informal leadership roles, bring diverse personal understandings of parish and school, of what it is to be Catholic, and of how the communities for whom they are responsible should work with and be in relationship with one another. Through corporate or primary agency (Archer, 1995, 2017), through intentionally and actively articulating and enacting goals, or through being passively disengaged and lacking strategic impetus, leaders have significant influence on what and how relational aspects are established and lived within and between parishes and schools.

6.3.4 PSRT Axes

The following describes how vertical and horizontal axes represent critical elements of the theory.

6.3.4.1 Faith Mission/Vision.

The Faith Mission/Vision axis (see Figure 6.4) incorporates the key feature of evangelisation and mission. Faith, as a cognitive, emotional, and spiritual relationship with God, is critical to the parish/school relationship, yet it is largely obscured in much of the rhetoric around falling Mass attendance, erratic shared participation, and limited success in building church communities. Parishes and Catholic schools are intentionally and necessarily Catholic faith communities, so the

relationship between them cannot be strong if belief in Jesus and affiliation with his Church is weak or absent. However, in this research, faith does not present as a readily visible or quantifiable attribute of individuals or groups but is rather varying, complex, and fragile in persons, families, and communities. Thus, in this substantive theory, faith is reflected across a dynamic spectrum where stances are not set but may move according to changes in understandings, environments, relationships, or stages of life.

This research asserts the importance of clarity of mission (what we are doing and why) and vision (where we are going, who we are becoming, and why). Where mission and vision are clear, evangelisation and the new evangelisation can emerge and connect within the wider parish/school relationship to invite and support a synergy where faith is nurtured and grown, claimed and shared. Understandings of mission and vision are otherwise diverse as much in those who are practicing 'cradle Catholics', as in those who have drifted from the faith, or in those who have never known Jesus. All need support to grow together. With this understanding, faith is perceived as a journey that requires direction and accompaniment. At the same time, the Faith Mission/Vision axis represents the possibility of people and communities eschewing or failing to recognise the significance of sharing mission and vision as a parish and school/s.

Data reflects that individuals or communities with only vague understandings of a shared mission and/or limited vision for the wider community can struggle to see a reason for developing a stronger relationship. This can occur both with those who hold little personal faith affiliation with the Catholic Church but also with those Catholics who may claim a deep faith and lifelong connection to the Church. Both groups may have vague understandings of shared mission and vision, and/or strong personal feelings and opinions of their own, which can insulate and isolate them from claiming and sharing purpose and direction as a community. These feelings and opinions do not necessarily need to be strongly held or expressed to become a barrier to the parish/school relationship, the vagueness of apathy can be as detrimental as active, intentional disengagement.

Additionally, in terms of this theoretical axis, there is need for intentional leadership in supporting the establishment of a shared mission and vision. A significant reason for people finding themselves grappling with a vague sense of purpose and direction as parish and school is that little may exist in this respect for them to develop and claim. Such leadership does not solely reside with the priest and principal, though these are significant roles and can have major positive or negative impact on establishing and living meaning-full shared mission and vision (as often reflected in comments

regarding changes of such personnel). Key people with enthusiasm, mana[30] and diverse gifts are also necessary as leaders in the journey. Supporting and enabling such people requires leadership that encourages others to rise to the challenge, or to be recognised and listened to as people already working in this area.

Intentional leadership, underpinned by collaborating in generating a shared mission, is needed if it is to resonate with all who are being invited to develop, claim, and share the mission and vision. A more synodal than hierarchical approach is also suggested within the data (Arbuckle, 2024; Francis, 2013; Lam, 2023). Once discerned, these vital shared elements of the parish and school communities become most effective when embedded – that is, written down, known, used, and evidently be breathing life into the communities. Support for this embedding process includes creating overt statements, reflecting shared understanding and direction in common language. It is important that such statements are dynamic and living, not static, and are grounded in the local community and the universal Church without being hidden or usurped by complex or generic theological language. There is also benefit in ensuring statements are cohesive (work well and fit together) and coherent (easily and meaningfully understood by all – adults, children, Catholics, and non-Catholics). Then, having established the understanding together, the parish and school can overtly and meaningfully share in the same mission and vision.

Diverse mission understandings and vision foci within the data suggest that disparate missions and visions create disparate communities. This research affirms that no matter how well intentioned or crafted, words on posters and letterheads that do not evidently *live* in the communities, being regularly revisited, grown, and embraced, are, or quickly become, meaning-less and worth-less. Developing a meaning-full mission understanding will likely take significant time, not weeks or months but years of active engagement. The axis line is represented by arrows rather than a closed line to indicate this reality of an ongoing process with no pre-determined endpoint.

Figure 6.4

Faith Mission/Vision Axis

[30] A te reo Māori term incorporating status, power, authority, control, influence, spiritual power, and charisma.

6.3.4.2 Community/Connection: Welcome/Communion.

The Community/Connection axis (see Figure 6.5) incorporates the key feature of being community. Data reveals that increasingly in contemporary Western society, traditional community groups including parishes are waning and, despite communities being electronically more connected than ever, isolation and self-interest is rising. Community does not just happen, it needs to be actively built, maintained, and developed, and the building blocks of community are relationships. Data reveals that threads of connection, formal and informal, are vital in establishing a sense of parish/school community. This research reveals a consistent desire on the part of all participants to create more connection between individuals and groups in order to build community. However, challenges lie in people not wanting to be part of a parish/school community and rather setting other priorities which they determine as having more resonance with their lives. For example, parishioners may have no sense of connection with the parish school and desire simply to come to Mass and experience what they expect and appreciate as regular, prayerful Eucharist; or parents of school children may resent funds from the 'community fair' going to a parish which they believe has nothing to do with them. Such stances have resonance with what PSRT presents as 'rejection/separation' at the lower end of the community/connection axis.

Rejection is a necessarily broad term referring to either individuals or communities feeling rejected by others, or to them rejecting others, or rejecting the concept that such a community is needed or wanted in their lives. Similarly, the associated but distinct concept of separation may reflect a sense of being isolated or set apart by others in the community, or of making choices to separate oneself as an individual or group. In many situations rejection and separation may overlap, blur or reinforce one another with resulting absence of welcome and communion best summarised as 'not belonging', as exemplified in parishioners going somewhere else if they know it's a shared parish/school Mass, or schools receiving complaints because music at such a Mass was inappropriate.

Alternatively, a critical recurring element of positive community building is that of welcome. People who experience others welcoming them, especially school families and school children coming to church on Sunday, are consistently referred to as feeling greater connection to the parish community. Priests, and especially principals and DRSs, regularly look for and create ways to help establish a sense of welcome so visitors or 'newer people' in the community will feel more comfortable in liturgies in the parish church or in the school. The linked but distinct element of communion, on this axis, reflects the deeper sense of mutual sharing and fellowship, with an

invitational orientation towards the eucharistic understanding of being in communion with one another and the Church, and sharing in Holy Communion. However, the nuance of this research is of welcome being associated with communion as invitation rather than expectation, as shared encounter with Christ rather than necessarily fully compliant with Church teaching and practice.

As with the faith mission/vision axis, this vertical scale represents a dynamic spectrum, with no pre-determined end points, where stances are not set but may move according to changes in understandings, environments, relationships, and other contexts such as stages in life. With the overlay of these two axes four quadrants emerge.

Figure 6.5

Community/Connection Axis

6.3.5 PSRT Quadrants

The four PSRT quadrants provide a dynamic lens through which the parish/school relationship may be considered. In this substantive theory, as gleaned from participant data, each quadrant represents relational positioning of diverse individuals or groups. It is important to recognise that people are not locked into individual areas but are likely to move between quadrants as their positions regarding the two axes change in various circumstances and contexts. Similarly, individuals and groups may position higher or lower, and more left or right, within quadrants based on resonance with the two axes. Each quadrant suggests a context for developing intentional responses to improve the parish/school relationship grounded in the key features of identity, evangelisation and mission, being community, leadership, and recognising and participating in change.

6.3.5.1 Missing.

This quadrant, Missing (see Figure 6.6), represents people who are simply not there, or are tenuously present, in the parish/school relationship, in mind, body or spirit. These may be parents of

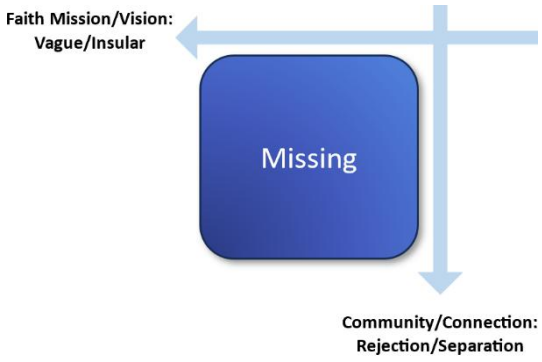
the school community who do not engage with parish, or parishioners who don't engage with school community, mission/vision. This element can also include priests who have little or no connection with the school life, or principals who have minimal connection to parish life. It was noted that schools retain formal data on leavers and anecdotal awareness of families who do not engage in the faith-life of the school. Alternatively, although parish Mass counts are taken annually no data was suggested in this research regarding clear numbers of those who had stopped coming to parish Eucharist or reasons why. Similarly, there was little awareness of reasons why local Catholics might choose not to connect with parish. All of whom are acknowledged in the Missing quadrant.

Markers for connection to this quadrant involve a vague or insular understanding of the faith mission and vision of the parish and school. This may be linked to poor articulation and/or little shared understanding of the mission and vision by school and parish, and/or a rejection of that understanding and an associated lack of desire to connect with it. It may also include individual or group beliefs that their own sense of mission and vision is not aligned with the parish and school. Additionally, absence from the community, and low sense of connection to it, may be based in limited experience of being welcomed, or lack of desire to welcome others. Such individuals and groups may have little or no sense of loss in being missing in the parish/school relationship; alternatively, they may feel rejected and hurt. Reflection on this quadrant may include the following responsive questions:

- Who is missing within the parish/school relationship?
- Why are they missing?
- What are they missing?
- What is the community missing through their absence?

Figure 6.6

The Missing Quadrant



6.3.5.2 Participating.

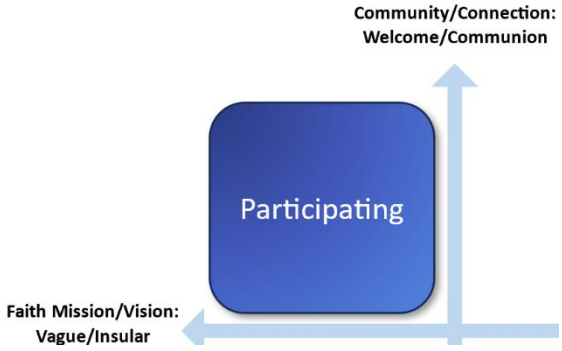
This quadrant, Participating (see Figure 6.7), represents individuals or groups who are participating within their communities and who have a sense of connection with one another, but do not share or claim the deeper faith mission or vision of the school and parish. It is possible to 'participate' in communal activities with little or no sense of shared faith mission/vision. There can be functional and often positive overlap between individuals and communities which effect physical engagement with each other, but the reasons and purpose for doing so can be vague or insular. For example, there may be a well-attended shared lunch after Mass, with people from school and parish enjoying food and drink, but even though they are together, parish and school groups cluster separately because they do not know each other and perceive they have little in common. Or, some parishioners might regularly attend a weekday Mass at the school but are disappointed in and critical of the school's ability to get children and their families to regular Mass on Sundays. Or, parents might come to watch their child read or sing at shared Sunday Mass, but have little sense of spiritual nourishment or belonging to the wider parish community who regularly gather each week.

Markers for connection to this quadrant involve conscious decisions for diverse reasons to be involved. This can include positive intentions of being part of the wider community but is largely motivated by connections to one's own school or parish community. Efforts may be made to help others feel welcome and comfortable, but there is little shared sense of parish/school faith mission and vision either because it is not known, or because it is not recognised or valued. Reflection on this quadrant may include the following responsive questions:

- Who is participating within the parish/school relationship?
- Why are they participating?
- In what are they participating?
- What do they understand the parish/school mission and vision to be?

Figure 6.7

The Participating Quadrant



6.3.5.3 Longing.

This quadrant, Longing (see Figure 6.8), represents individuals or groups who are longing for things to be different within the parish/school relationship, but who see little hope for positive change. It represents those who have largely given up on school families practicing their faith as in times past. Personal life experience is often drawn on as evidence of 'a better time' for Catholic schools and parishes, and there is often sadness at the decline in numbers attending Mass, and in their perception of a lack of faith in school children and their families. This quadrant can also represent those who yearn for the Church to become more inclusive of differences and nuances in contemporary times. Such people long for a shared mission of the Church to be realised as more open than closed, more inclusive than exclusive. Examples include: elderly parishioners who long for children to love Jesus and the Eucharist, but blame parents and the school in their belief this is not happening; principals and teachers who long for the parish to be more welcoming, and more appreciative of the learning and faith formation of children happening at school; and parents who have Catholic hearts but feel too removed from faith practice, or lacking in courage, to reconnect.

In many ways the synodal process involves articulation of and responses to this diverse sense of longing within a Church which many perceive as becoming more disconnected from communities, and less identifiable as a universal faith community (NZCBC, 2022a; 2022b, 2024).

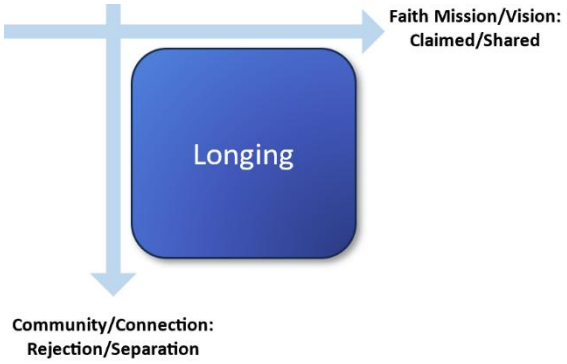
Markers for connection to this quadrant involve a strong sense of connection to the formal mission of the Church, and often to models of being Church that are perceived to have been better and more authentically Catholic in past years. Individuals and groups can, intentionally or unintentionally, develop a stance of separation from the Catholic school which does not live up to their faith-based expectations, and they may feel efforts to make liturgy more inclusive of young people's needs and expectations today are a rejection of their deeply-held beliefs and religious practice.

The data also suggests that it may be common for some individuals to transition diagonally back and forth between this quadrant and the Participating quadrant as well-intentioned efforts are made to meet this longing by attempting to better engage the school community in their personal idea of the faith mission of the Church. However, the hope of such participation from a stance of longing can be short-lived unless there is also a genuine desire for all parties to develop a shared understanding of faith mission and vision while authentically welcoming the other in building community. Reflection on this quadrant may include the following responsive questions:

- Who is longing within the parish/school relationship?
- For what are they longing?
- What do they understand the parish/school mission and vision to be?
- What do they understand the parish/school community to be?

Figure 6.8

The Longing Quadrant



6.3.5.1 Belonging.

This final quadrant, Belonging (See Figure 6.9), represents the greatest potential for dynamic synergy, as individuals or groups share a sense of belonging within the parish/school relationship. Such individuals and groups value what the wider community represents and offers, and they exhibit flexibility, and if not actual enthusiasm, then at least understanding in the face of new challenges and opportunities. There is a sense of good things happening, stress being under control, and outlook being positive. Those in this quadrant are not necessarily comfortable with all elements within the parish/school relationship, but there is recognition of a need for a communal rather than insular approach to building the wider faith community.

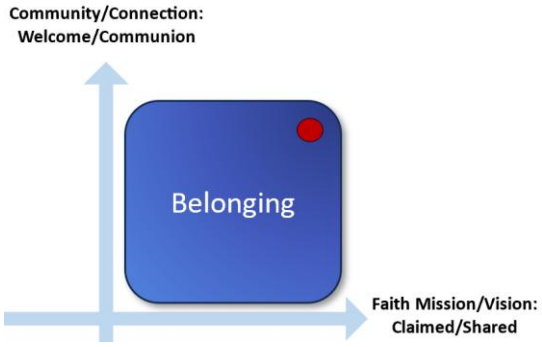
Markers for connection to this quadrant involve a conscious sense of personal connection to a shared mission and vision which parish and school can articulate, claim, and share. While often more strongly connected to either parish or school, community members are conscious of people within the other entity being an important part of their wider faith community. Those in this quadrant actively and meaningfully welcome others through establishing and sharing connections as they build community and help new people develop their own sense of belonging as they engage with and contribute to the shared faith mission and vision. In the PSRT model the ideal for this quadrant, represented by a red circle, involves a high level of community/connection where they feel welcomed and are welcoming of others, and a strong personal and communal claim to the shared

faith mission and vision of the parish and school. Those in this quadrant are also supported by regular active review and development of the living, shared faith mission and vision. Reflection on this quadrant may include the following responsive questions:

- Who has a sense of belonging within the parish/school relationship?
- To what do they belong?
- Why do they belong?
- In what ways do those who belong help others to belong?

Figure 6.8

The Belonging Quadrant



6.3.6 Summary of the Parish/School Relationship Theory

The PSRT draws together the key features demonstrating the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa New Zealand by developing them into four quadrants across two distinct mission/vision and community/connection axes. It integrates the centrality of identity, and the need for recognition and participation in change over time and contextualises the remaining key features of evangelisation and mission, being community, and leadership. The purpose of this substantive theory is to provide an effective tool for better understanding the parish/school relationship within the research parameters. It offers a theoretical lens through which behaviours, understandings, and positioning of individuals and groups within the parish/school relationship may be considered.

6.4 Implications of PSRT

The PSRT is the result of the research process which aimed to explain the complexities of relationships that exist between the studied Catholic parishes and parish schools. Along with incorporating and contextualising all five emergent key features from Chapter 5, the theory indicates four research implications regarding mission and vision, leadership formation, engagement with change, and

utilising the PSRT tool, as potentially supportive of enhancing wider parish/school relationships.

6.4.1 Implication 1. Parishes and Schools Naming, Living, and Reviewing Their Mission/Vision.

The process for parishes and schools necessarily identifying and claiming the general and specific elements of mission/vision needs to be inclusive, grounded, and comprehensive. Such an approach will purposefully reflect and support living individual, community, and Church identity in practical and meaningful ways. Associated regular structured reviews of parishes, in terms of their development, articulation, and living of mission and vision, are a necessary element of supporting parish life. In parallel, schools already have an established national review process which should remain distinct but could become linked to a formal parish review cycle.

6.4.2 Implication 2. Leaders Receiving Appropriate Formation.

Priests and principals have roles and responsibilities which are demanding and time-consuming within parishes or schools. With little formation existing to specifically prepare these leaders for working together to build the parish/school relationship, ongoing formation for priests and principals is needed. In particular, the national seminary of Aotearoa New Zealand needs to include formal education and training around Catholic schools as a significant part of their seminarian formation programme. In addition, targeted formation for leaders who have other formal or informal positions within parishes and schools would also help develop the parish/school relationship.

6.4.3 Implication 3. Community Members Intentionally Recognising and Engaging with Change.

All people involved with parishes and schools require support to recognise that change is not an erratic occasional occurrence but a constant social force. There is power in recognising that all things change, including the Church in subtle and major ways, as do individuals and communities over time. Bewailing change as a self-propelled anthropomorphic aberration undermines potential and opportunity for growth. People have capacity and opportunity to engage with change, with intentional and purposeful impetus for stasis or transformation, and this requires open and authentic dialogue to manage and plan effective, meaningful, and strategic responses.

6.4.4 Implication 4. Using the PSRT as an Evaluation Tool.

The PSRT provides a lens and impetus for parish and school self-reflection to support meaningful evaluation and development of parish/school relationships. As a tool, the PSRT helps identify limitations, successes and challenges regarding individuals' and groups' engagement within the shared parish community and the mission/s they claim.

6.5 Limitations and Delimitations

Interviews were restricted to Catholic parish priests and Catholic primary school principals in their current salient parish/school leadership roles. These individuals were able to offer insight into the research aim from their direct experience, hopes, and challenges regarding the parish/school relationship. While parishes and schools were the focus of this research, not priests and principals themselves, elements of the participants' roles do form part of the research findings. In addition, participants frequently indicated others whom they believed were critical to this relationship; however, to appropriately delimit the practicality of this research, no scope was given to interviewing other leaders, general parishioners, school staff, or school family members. However, inclusion of the direct voices of such individuals and groups in future research is encouraged.

The study was limited to a metropolitan area within a single diocese to gain an insight into parishes and schools which fall under the authority of the same bishop and associated clerical and educational support systems. Schools and parishes were within an eight-kilometre radius of each other. Despite their proximity, they represent parishes and schools which are: city and semi-rural, large and small, one and two-school parishes, and culturally and socio-economically diverse. Further application and associated research are needed to determine how and if the model may have wider implications and applications, and also to determine what resonance or dissonance the theory may have with other extant relational models.

The utilisation of the principles of CGT set the parameters for distillation of the key features including avoidance of bias by the researcher. One overt limitation association with this is the absence of inclusion of Māori voice and understandings around parish and school in terms of commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. While the researcher had expected to delve into this important area of Aotearoa NZ relationality, it was not raised by participants in any of the interviews.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations and delimitations of this study indicate scope for further research with a focus on:

1. Replicating the aim, research question, and methodology of this research in other areas and dioceses to support further development of the PSRT.
2. Investigating correlation or dissonance with extant relationship theory and the substantive PSRT.

3. Further investigating the parish/school relationship from different perspectives by interviewing other participant groups, such as children, parents, grandparents, general parishioners, and support staff.
4. Liaising and/or working with Māori to seek greater inclusion of their voice, and development of comparable theory from the perspective of mana whenua[31] and Katorika Māori[32].
5. Developing tools for gathering local data to further aid the effectiveness of the PSRT when used by schools and parishes.
6. Researching the potential of the PSRT to be developed, through slight modification of the axes terminology, as a model for relationships between and within any faith-based or secular community organisation.

6.7 Conclusion

This research has offered a substantive and original contribution to understanding the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools within the context of Aotearoa NZ. In a field where the importance of this relationship is frequently recognised but seldom investigated, this study addresses a notable gap. Drawing on qualitative data from priests and principals within one metropolitan diocese, the study has illuminated lived realities, tensions, and possibilities that shape this foundational but complex and often misunderstood relationship.

Through the application of the principles of classic grounded theory, this research has constructed a substantive theoretical model—the Parish/School Relationship Theory (PSRT)—which identifies and contextualises key features of parish-school relationality. The PSRT organises participants' perspectives around two intersecting axes: faith mission/vision and community/connection. This framework gives rise to four quadrants—missing, longing, participating, and belonging—each offering a conceptual lens through which individuals and communities can locate themselves and reflect on the quality and direction of their relationship. The model captures both the challenges and the potential of parish/school interactions and provides a practical resource for dialogue, discernment, and strategic renewal.

In articulating these findings, the thesis contributes a context-specific and theologically and ecclesially informed understanding of particular relationality on the Catholic landscape. It brings into

[31] A te reo Māori term for Māori indigenous rights.
[32] A te reo Māori term for Māori who also identify with the Catholic Church.

focus the interplay of key relational features as lived in a particular setting—while offering insights of potentially broader relevance to other contexts. The PSRT invites parishes and schools to move beyond assumptions of connectedness and to engage intentionally in the work of building shared understanding and belonging. In so doing, this study not only responds to an identified gap in the literature but also offers a hopeful and grounded way forward for communities navigating the complexity of Church life today.

Specifically, this research has investigated the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa NZ from the perspectives of a diocesan cohort of parish priests and parish primary school principals. Robust application of the principles of classic ground theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), including constant comparison, limiting of researcher bias, and detailed engagement with the literature after the data categorisation phases, has resulted in identifying five key features of the relationship: the centrality of identity; evangelisation and mission; being community; leadership; and recognising and participating in change. These key features are further contextualised within the Parish/School Relationship Theory, providing a model for recognising and better understanding the complexities within the relationships studied.

The increasing secularisation of Aotearoa New Zealand, and of global society, highlights a growing challenge to faith communities and a critical need and opportunity for parishes and schools to find alliances and relationships which are deeper, more effective, and sustainable. Rather than perceiving each other as problems to be solved, or as failing entities to be negatively critiqued, both parish and school need to recognise and draw on each other's strengths and potential in times of change to develop a greater shared sense of belonging among members of their communities.

Claiming to be a faith community through theological, canonical, or traditional rhetoric or authority is no longer enough to make it a living faith community. Similarly, justifications for rejection or separation of one entity from the other on grounds such as clericalism, general lack of understanding, or community-member incompatibility, may be overcome through active, intentional effort to build community that claims and shares a mission and vision, and that strives to welcome others and establish communion. Yes, times are changing, but change itself invites active responses to interpret, lead, and direct that change, so that rather than battling seemingly relentless external erosion, people become more attuned to flexibility, possibility, and opportunity within the challenges to better build a shared faith community.

The symbiotic relationship of parish and school, in terms of the traditional context in which most parish schools were founded, may have waned, but while less coherently lived and expressed each entity's need for support from the other remains. To achieve such contemporary development of the parish/school relationship, this research finds that people need to know who they are within it, which requires shared understandings of what it means to be Catholic today in these places. People need to be supported in knowing what a parish is, what a parish school is, and who they are within these communities as individuals and as groups. Such understandings are supported by, but not externally imposed from, historical stances, and they need to be revisited and developed through dialogue and encounter with one another now.

Quality leadership is required to facilitate and help direct such dialogue and encounter. Priests and principals may already be engaged in supporting this process, but they need quality formation to be effective. Many other people necessarily provide leadership in various roles within this relationship, and they too need to be recognised, formed, and otherwise supported as they emerge to play their parts.

Local churches are familiar with the universal Church's call to evangelise and mission, however, there is lack of clarity as to what this means and how individuals and groups are expected to respond. Parishes and parish schools are already critical centres for this work of evangelisation and mission. What is needed is a shared understanding of what the terms specifically mean for them, individually and collectively. Work needs to be undertaken to support and grow a shared mission and vision, which can be widely articulated and claimed, and that lives in the heart of a welcoming and connected shared community. Thus, in parish/school relationships where many are missing, where many are longing for deeper faith engagement, and where many are participating but are disconnected, more and more school and parish community members will look to one another and recognise not only that 'I belong' but that 'they too belong here'.

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Appendices

Appendix A Participant Letters

INFORMATION LETTER

TITLE OF PROJECT:	The relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
APPLICATION NUMBER:	2021-9E
SUPERVISOR:	Professor Chris Branson
STUDENT RESEARCHER:	Colin MacLeod
STUDENT'S DEGREE:	Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish primary schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand, through the lens of parish priests and school principals. The aim, in a dearth of national and international research in this area, is to explore and explain what is involved in this relationship, and provide Catholic leaders and educators with quality research to inform attitudes, behaviours and understandings which may hinder or support the ability of both entities to flourish.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Colin MacLeod and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education) at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Christopher Branson. Colin has a strong background in Catholic education and parish formation at local, diocesan and national levels, along with several years of experience as the Director for the National Centre for Religious Studies.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
Potential physical or emotional risks to yourself or the researcher are low. As leaders within your communities it is understood that your positions already include leadership in areas of faith, education and building community. In terms of this research, all data will be confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your parish or school will be identified in any report or presentation resulting from the research. Interview recordings, transcriptions, and handwritten interview notes will be taken by the researcher, but only the researcher will have access to this material and it will be securely stored. Any direct quotes in this research will be associated with pseudonyms rather than real names.

There is a risk that your own conversations with others about this research, or otherwise in the area of this topic, may be linked to comments quoted in the research. Every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure participants are unable to be identified.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to participate in an interview lasting no longer than one hour. This will take place at your school or parish office, or another mutually convenient location, where you feel most comfortable being interviewed as principal or priest, at a time agreeable to yourself and the researcher. The interview will consist of unstructured, open-ended questions. It will be digitally recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed text will be shared with you, within three weeks of the interview having taken place, to ensure accuracy, and you will have the opportunity to add, delete or further comment on the transcript.

You are also asked to please *bring a symbol, story or other metaphor*, either physically or verbally, which you believe reflects something of the relationship between the parish and school in your context.

What are the benefits of the research project?
This research aims to explain the complexities of relationships that exist between Catholic schools and parishes in a context of limited research and significant hear-say. You and your colleagues will have access to quality research, in a New Zealand context, which uncovers and articulates features which may hinder or support the ability of both entities to flourish. It is also possible that the conversations that take place within the interview process, and subsequent data checking, may bear immediate fruit in terms of your own reflection and/or practice.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?
This research will be written up as a doctoral thesis which will be publicly available. Aspects of the study may be shared in presentations and developed into academic journal articles. All public material will preserve the anonymity of participants and will not name individual schools or parishes.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?
You will be offered a summary of results and an e-copy of the final thesis should you wish to receive it.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
If you require more information about participating in this research at any stage of the process you can contact either:

Professor Chris Branson (doctoral supervisor)
Christopher.branson@acu.edu.au
+61 3861 6116 (Brisbane)
PO Box 456, Virginia, Queensland 4014, Australia

Colin MacLeod (researcher)
colin.macleod@myacu.edu.au
[redacted]
Private Bag 1941, Dunedin 9054

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2021-9E). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics and Integrity Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics and Integrity
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you are willing to participate in the interview, and to allow the researcher to use the interview transcript once it has been checked by you, then please complete and sign the attached consent form, keep a copy for yourself, and return the original to the researcher at colin.macleod@myacu.edu.au.

This information is for you to keep.

Ngā mihi nui

[redacted] [redacted]

Professor Chris Branson (Supervisor) Colin MacLeod (Researcher)

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please return a completed copy of this form to the researcher, Colin MacLeod, at colin.macleod@myacu.edu.au
Retain a copy for your own records.

TITLE OF PROJECT: The relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
APPLICATION NUMBER: 2021-9E
SUPERVISOR: Professor Chris Branson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Colin MacLeod
PROGRAMME: Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

I…… (the participant) have read and understand the information in the letter to participants. I know that:

- Participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent and leave the project at any stage without prejudice or penalty;
- I can choose not to answer any question and/or discuss any topic presented by the researcher;
- The interview will be digitally audio-recorded and handwritten interview notes taken by the researcher;
- I will have the opportunity to check the researcher's notes in terms of credibility, and to ensure that my identity remains confidential.
- Some of my conversation may be quoted in the report but my name and any identifying characteristics will not;
- The digital audio-recordings of the interview, their transcripts, and interview notes will be securely stored for at least five years;
- The results of the research may be published, and if so, every attempt will be made to ensure no names or identifiable characteristics will be published.

I consent to participating in an interview with the researcher for up to one hour.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT……

SIGNATURE…….. DATE……

Professor Chris Branson (Supervisor) … [redacted] …… DATE: 3/05/2021

Colin MacLeod (Researcher) …… [redacted] …… DATE: 3/05/2021
(Signature)

Appendix B Interview Protocol

Initial Phone Call Script

Hello, my name is Colin MacLeod.

I'm a doctoral student at the Australian Catholic University, and I am researching the relationship between Catholic parishes and parish primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. I'm seeking data on these relationships through the lenses of parish priests and parish primary school principals. The process involves interviewing priests and principals, individually, for no more than one hour, to get their perspectives, then I'll go away and analyse what comes out of that.

Anything I write-up will not mention your name, school or parish. You will be absolutely free to choose not to participate – seriously, no pressure – and even if you do want to be part of this you can withdraw at any time and anything said and/or recorded will not be used in the research.

The most important part, in terms of this phone call, is that you don't need to say anything now, this is really just to let you know that I'll be e-mailing you soon with an invitation to participate in this research. The e-mail will contain formal details, and a consent form which needs to be signed and returned to me before individuals can participate. It'll also include contact details if you have any further questions for me and/or my supervisor.

You are also welcome to ask me any questions now if you would like.

Thank you.

Statement at the Start of Each Interview

Thank you for taking part in this interview, I know your time is precious. The interview won't go for longer than an hour and you are welcome to withdraw at any point if you wish. You can also take a break if you want to.

The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed in full, and the transcription will be shared with you for comment. All data will be confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your [parish or school] will be identified in any report or presentation resulting from the research. Interview recordings, transcriptions, and handwritten interview notes will be taken by me as the researcher, but only I and my supervisors will have access to this material and it will be securely stored. Any direct quotes in this research will be associated with pseudonyms rather than real names.

As you are aware, the research is focused on explaining the relationship between the Catholic parish and the parish primary school, from the perspective of parish priests and school principals as their respective leaders. I'm particularly interested in hearing about key features which demonstrate this relationship, and what you perceive as enhancing or limiting the relationship between parish and parish school.

This interview is an unstructured interview which means you will provide the direction and detail of the conversation. There are no right or wrong answers in these interviews. My job is to help draw out your understandings and to keep us on track so the focus stays on the parish and parish school relationship.

Do you have any questions about the process?

Final Statements Following the Interview

Your participation in this research is invaluable in helping to identify key features of the relationship between parish and parish school.

I'll contact you within three weeks so you can look over the transcript and make any comments if you wish. I'll also let you know when the research is complete and make sure you receive a summary of the findings.

Do you have any questions at this point?

Thank you again for sharing your time and wisdom during this interview.

Appendix C Interview Prompts

Table 2.2

Interview Prompts – A list designed to ensure focus on research aim is maintained and thorough.

Initial question	Refocusing prompt
1. It was suggested that you bring a symbol, story or other metaphor, which you believe reflects something of the relationship between the parish and school in your context. Please, can you tell me about that?	1. (a) As a principal tell me about the relationship between your parish school and the parish? Or, (b) As a parish priest, tell me about the relationship between your parish and the parish school? 2. Where do you see evidence of the parish/school relationship? 3. In what ways does the parish/parish school relationship impact on your role as principal or priest? 4. How would you describe the importance of the parish/ school relationship? 5. What do you think might enhance this relationship? 6. What do you think might limit this relationship? 7. As parish priest [or principal] what ideas or suggestions do you have regarding this relationship?

Note. Refocusing prompts will only be used if the interview stalls, or if the participant strays from the research topic.

Appendix D Major Categories – Coding Indication

The following is an indicative but not exhaustive or final representation of the presence of the four major categories as they emerged from the data through the process of constant comparison utilising the principles of classic grounded theory. Each category is recognised as a feature, in terms of the research question, with the fifth feature of 'change' permeating all. Specific contributions from interviews were coded under headings which used participants' own words as much as possible. Data was grouped, re-grouped, and colour-coded to visually indicate dynamic primary (dominant colour) and secondary (additional colour) connections with the major categories.

Categories
Identity
Community/Connection
Mission/Evangelisation
Leadership

Aspirational – engaged, enthusiastic, current parents new to Catholic schools – reengaging
Aspirational – knowing this is my parish
Aspirational – outreach from parish
– Aspirational – acceptance for what they are
– Aspirational – family and kai
Aspirational – praying more
– children asking for prayers
Aspirational – priest visiting more
- Aspirational – priest presence and participation at school
Aspirational – we need each other
– Aspirational – shared ministry
– Aspirational – shared participation
– something for young and old
Barriers – blame
Barriers – boring
– kids can't have own music at Mass
Barriers – busyness
– busy families and kids
– fewer priests
– limited time
– parish loves a vacuum – burn out
– priest overwhelmed
– wellbeing
Barriers – change
– Barriers – change needed
– Barriers – changing demographic
– Barriers – depleting opportunities
– Barriers – different visions
– Barriers – kids embarrassed
– Barriers – language
– Barriers – resistance to change
– Barriers – the church building – gone
– Barriers – tuakana teina
Barriers – communication with diocese
Barriers – lack of commitment or support
– Barriers – lack of diocesan support
– Barriers – More good will on part of school than parish
Barriers – physical distance from church to school
Barriers – the priest
– inflexible
Barriers – too focused on Mass
Communication
– complaints
– informal
– listen
– need for dialogue
Community – a mixed bag
Community – big
Community – building
Community – in the everyday world
Community – parish not needed

Connection – 2 schools in same parish - each different
Connection – Baptism
Connection – being part of the parish
Connection – between priest and school
Connection – beyond school
Connection – BOT and parish
Connection – building relationship
Connection – children's art or photos in church
Connection – coming back into the system – to Mass
Connection – community engagement
Connection – funerals or other rituals
Connection – complex – 2 parishes one local school
Connection – cultural identity
Connection – family grandparents
Connection – floating
Connection – freedom
Connection – intunement
Connection – knowing who the priest is
Connection – loyalty
Connection – more engaged over time
Connection – more than faith
Connection – more than Mass attendance
Connection – more to area than church
Connection – multiple bonds
Connection – not having expectations
Connection – optimism
Connection – particular parishioner
Connection – priest positivity with school
Connection – priest visibility
– seminary connection
Connection – principal being a parishioner
– or not
Connection – really committed
Connection – showing interest
Connection – social gathering
Connection – the church building – belongs to all
Connection – thin, strong
Connection – through sacramental programme
– Family engagement–support
– family receive sacraments
– Led by parishoner
– prayer buddies
– run during parish Sunday Mass
– sacramental preparation – school only
Connection – through social justice
Connection – through Sunday Mass
Connection – to active faith community limited
Connection – two–tier system
Connection – we belong to one another
Engaging parents
Environment of Faith – teaching
Evangelising – supporting faith
– beyond school
– encounter
– evangelistic but not
– flogging a dead horse
– helping parents' first steps
– in terms of preference
– including supporting teachers' faith
– not interested
Faith – more than Mass
Faith-Based Education – not Church
– Getting buy-in
Families – non-Catholic
Families are different
Go to different Catholic schools
– Come from different parishes
Historical – school attending Mass in the church
Identity
Identity – empty conversation – doing my job
Identity – history
Identity – living faith differently
Identity – modelling
Identity – need for change
Identity – parish and school
– charism
– not separate entities
– not sure what it is
– school as bridge
– school becoming parish
– separate
Identity – preference – Christian but not Catholic
Identity – principal is the school
Identity – relationship-building
Identity – through faith formation
Identity – what is parish?
– different in my culture
– offers...
– parish – belonging
– the priest is the parish
Identity – who we are
Identity Symbols
– F1 cotton thread
– F2 none

– F3 Good Shepherd
– F4a local hill
– F4b companions on the journey
– F5 seed bed
– F6 St Joseph the Carpenter
– P1 church windows looking out
– P2 collaborating for mission
– P3 kete and greenstone
– P4 doves at church
– P5 parish and school logos – merged image
– P6 local hill
– P7 key and Lock
– P8 school banner
Imagery – metaphors and similes
Initial vision abandoned
Leadership – at school – connected to parish
Leadership – aware it's better elsewhere
Leadership – building relationship with parish
– parish and school – strategic goals
Leadership – chain of command
Leadership – challenge to church teaching
Leadership – doing what you think is right
Leadership – expectations to go to Sunday Mass
Leadership – friends
Leadership – frustration
Leadership – grounded in faith
Leadership – hospitality
Leadership – makes a difference
Leadership – ministry as teachers
Leadership – modelling, inspiring, participating
Leadership – needing guidance and support
Leadership – opportunities for children
Leadership – pastoral team-parish council
– future planning and uncertainty
– leadership – parish council (is there one)
– not useful
Leadership – priest not going into classrooms
Leadership – pulled in many directions
Leadership – responsibility as parish priest
Leadership – responsibility as principal
Leadership – role of the priest
– leadership – support of the priest
– negative side
– not following through
Leadership – school supporting parish
Leadership – social justice
Leadership – teamwork
Mission – shared
– companions on the journey
– lay ministry
– statement
– what it means to be Catholic
– with children
Parish – connection to diocese
Parish – elderly
Parish – threat of closing
Parish – unwelcoming
Parish and school – awareness God is with them
Parish and school – historical context
Parish and school – support in challenging times
Parish and school – survival
– parish size
– parish support of falling roll
– parish and school – treading water
Parish and school – working together
Parish independence in pastoral area
Part of the parish environment
Planning – worship space in schools
Pray and care
Preference – cultural connection
Preference – introduction to church space
Preference – minimal sense of being Catholic
Preference – priest and perception
Opportunity for evangelisation
Preference – setting a standard
Preference – trepidation
Preference – tricky
Preference – welcoming
Preference – who signs
Priest – visiting is very difficult
– uncomfortable
– visiting is easily ignored
Priest welcoming kids and families
Proximity – children knowing their distant church
Proximity – priest close to school
Questions asked
– Question – greater leadership by children
– Question – how to better make the connection
– Question – how do we do more
– Question – how do you get people to want to be together
– Question – how to break down the barriers
– Question – how to get more families to Mass
– Question – what does the parish do

– Question – where does the money go
– Question – Where's the money
Reality different from hopes and expectations
School liturgies – 2 schools – different prayer
School liturgies – are like Mass
School liturgies – children draw in parents
School Liturgies – Class Mass – gone
School Liturgies – Feast day Mass
School liturgies – greater leadership by children
School liturgies – grounded and profound
school liturgies – parishioner attendance
School liturgies – self contained
School liturgies – some more like assemblies
School roll numbers
– Catholic parents
– Challenge and proximity of state schools
School weekday Mass – parish participation
– school – liturgies – Mass
Schools need to be positive places
Secular world – outside influences
Shared Sunday Mass – family comes
Shared Sunday Mass – alive
Shared Sunday Mass – angst
Shared Sunday Mass – attendance
– appeal
– working parents
Shared Sunday Mass – compulsory
– freedom
Shared Sunday Mass – connected but not part
Shared Sunday Mass – homily over kids heads
Shared Sunday Mass – involvement in ministries
– Aspirational – accepting kids mistakes and encouragement
Shared Sunday Mass – old flight
Shared Sunday Mass – parishioners love to see the children
Shared Sunday Mass – parishioners see a negative side
– don't like kids' music
– negative attitude when kids get things wrong
– Sunday Mass – unwelcoming
Shared Sunday Mass – present but not part
Shared Sunday Mass – school and parish
Shared Sunday Mass – school participation
– awards and Food
– hospitality
Shared Sunday Mass – welcomed – welcoming
Shared weekday Mass – ease of access
Shared weekday Mass – regularity
Shared weekday Mass – surrounded by people and parishioners
Social Justice – Caritas
Social Justice – in liturgy
Social Justice – outreach
– in enrolment
– practical outreach
Young Vinnies
Social justice – pastoral care
Social Justice – prayer
Social Justice – supporting families
State and school – positive
Sunday Mass – attend different parish Mass
Sunday Mass – attendance
– don't despair
– sport commitments
– Youth Mass
Sunday Mass – modelling
– helping with children's liturgy
Sunday Mass – nourishment
– not nourishing
Sunday Mass – other options
– members of other worshiping communities
Synodal
Teachers – connection to parish and modelling
– or not
Teachers – mentoring
Teachers – significance

Appendix E Ethics Approval

[Received 5th March, 2021]

Dear Applicant,

Chief Investigator:	Professor Christopher Branson
Student researcher:	Colin Andrew MacLeod
Ethics Register Number:	2021-9E
Project Title:	The relationship between Catholic parishes and parish schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
Date Approved:	05/03/2021
End Date:	31/03/2022

This is to certify that the above human ethics application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU HREC). The application has been approved for the period given above.

Continued approval of this research project is contingent upon the submission of an annual progress report which is due on/before each anniversary of the project approval. A final report is due upon completion of the project. A report proforma can be downloaded from the ACU Research Ethics website.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to and that any modifications to the protocol, including changes to personnel, are approved prior to implementation. In addition, the ACU HREC must be notified of any reportable matters including, but not limited to, incidents, complaints and unexpected issues.

Researchers are also responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Research Code of Conduct.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Ethics Secretariat (res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Please quote your ethics approval number in all communications with us.

We wish you every success with your research.

Kind regards,

Evshen Okan
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Assoc Prof. Michael Baker

Research Ethics and Compliance Officer | Research Services | Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
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